



February 22, 2022

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Clay Samis, International Service
Rotary Club of Brighton

strength

partnership

commitment

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Charitable Registration #
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Dear Steve, Clay, and Rotarians,

We hope you and everyone at the **Rotary Club of Brighton** are continuing to keep well and safe. We are all well at Horizons.

We would like to thank you and the **Rotary Club of Brighton** for the generous support and partnership you have given to **Horizons of Friendship's** projects in Nicaragua.

At this time, we would like to present you and the **Rotary Club of Brighton** with our Final Report on Horizons' program "*Promotion and defense of human, labour and gender rights in Nicaragua.*" This work was implemented by our local partner, the **María Elena Cuadra Working and Unemployed Women's Movement (MEC)**, to support 13,750 people directly who work in the maquiladoras on the Pacific side of Nicaragua, victims and survivors of rights violations and gender-based violence, and 10,000 members of the public indirectly. Please accept our apologies for the delay in getting this report to you. The pandemic has meant that many of MEC's staff have become ill. This has caused delays and made it difficult for MEC to meet project reporting deadlines.

With your **generous grant of \$500**, this project was able to be completed successfully. It met or exceeded all of its goals and made important advances towards supporting the rights of marginalized and equity seeking groups in Nicaragua that are systematically unable or actively deterred from organizing to exercise their rights. These advances were made despite recent hurricanes (Iota and Eta) that caused flooding, displacement, and devastation for many communities, and ongoing political and social challenges. The latest of these challenges continues to be very difficult for MEC and many other NGOs in the country. A change in federal requirements around the registration of NGOs has caused lengthy delays in securing registration and has hampered the capacity of all NGOs in the country to operate and receive external funds while waiting for registration issues to be resolved. We are sad to report that after complying to the best of their ability with all requests for information issued by the government, MEC was informed just this week that it would be forcibly closed within 72 hours and that its assets would be seized by the federal government. It is unclear as yet whether this seizure will be done peacefully or not. We have been proud to partner with MEC over the years and hope to do so again in future.

Despite these challenges, our two-year project with MEC in Nicaragua was successfully completed, achieving the following results:



- 210 maquila workers were trained in the ABCs of labour rights.
- 240 maquila workers were trained to understand and respond to gender rights and violence.
- 510 women workers trained to recognize and defend their legal and human rights and understand gender-based violence, its impact, and its prevention.
- 300 new promoters were integrated into the MEC Voluntary Promoters Network to promote the defense of labour rights in their work environments.
- 3,037 people received legal support and advice over the project.
- 2 large legal cases were successfully resolved by MEC Legal Aid Clinic, affecting 3,285 workers.
- 832 project participants received individual psycho-therapy services.
- 99 self-help group therapy sessions were held with 312 participants and 13 self-help groups.
- 387 survivors were accompanied to public justice institutions to file complaints about rights violations, and an additional 89 were accompanied to make complaints to public and private authorities about compliance with labour rights under the laws of Nicaragua.
- 1,150 participants took part in the Colloquia of Maquiladoras, an annual event held in 2020 and 2021.
- Three key publications were produced.
- A media awareness campaign was launched on TV, radio, and social networks to draw attention to the situation of gender, labour, and human rights abuses in the maquiladoras.
- An event called “Misogyny and all forms of violence against women” was held in commemoration of International Women’s Day with the participation of leaders participating communities.

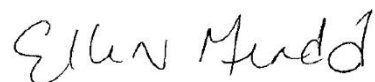
Thank you for partnering with us in the delivery of these important services. With your support, this program was able to address the critical needs of workers in precarious contexts, particularly during the pandemic when mass layoffs left workers without a means to feed their families, and support their capacity to demand their rights.

On behalf of Horizons, MEC, and the maquila workers in Nicaragua that were supported by this work, we thank you for your support. If you have any questions as you read the attached report, please feel free to reach out to Ellen Meadd, Resource Development Officer, at 905.372.5483 ext. 13 or e.meadd@horizons.ca.

In friendship and solidarity,



Patricia Rebolledo
Executive Director



Ellen Meadd
Resource Development Officer



Final Report:

Promotion and Defense of Human, Labour, and Gender Rights in Nicaragua



Final Report
Presented to the Rotary Club of Brighton
Horizons of Friendship
February 22, 2022

I. Organization Background

Name of Charitable Organization: Horizons of Friendship

Address of Charitable Organization: 50 Covert Street, P.O. Box 402, Cobourg, Ontario K9A 4L1

Charitable Registration Number: 11896 3461 RR0001

Executive Director: Patricia Rebolledo, 1.905.372.5483 ext. 11 or prebolledo@horizons.ca

Key Contact: Ellen Meadd, Resource Development Officer, 1.905.372.5483 Ext. 13 or e.meadd@horizons.ca

Horizons of Friendship (Horizons) is a non-profit international development organization founded in 1973 and based in the town of Cobourg, Ontario. With over 48 years of continuous operation, **Horizons** has evolved from providing humanitarian aid to long-term community-based development addressing the root causes of poverty in Mesoamerica (Central America and Mexico). Horizons' consistent presence has been made possible with strong and enduring local partnerships and has enabled sustained impacts at community, provincial, national, and regional levels.

Horizons works by developing medium- and long-term partnerships with Central American and Mexican partner organizations and providing education, training, and resources to support local initiatives that further this goal. In Canada, we raise awareness of global issues and work with Canadian organizations at the local and national levels to bring about positive and lasting change. To date, we have implemented 1,400 projects with more than 130 organizations in Mesoamerica, including several multi-year programs funded by Global Affairs Canada. Currently our international program supports the work of 11 partners focused on projects in Mesoamerica.

Horizons believes that true progress in eradicating poverty and fostering equitable development depends upon good governance, democratic process, and a strong and engaged civil society. Since the mid-1980s, Horizons has taken a systematic approach to building horizontal relationships with civil society organizations in Mesoamerica. Our frequent field visits to the region, and our convening of regional meetings, have built trust and mutual respect and expanded opportunities for ongoing dialogue and collaboration so that people can drive the development of their own communities.

Horizons works with partners who share the basic tenets of its development approach: that programs should empower communities and grassroots organizations to become agents of social change: in meeting concrete short-term needs, but also in articulating long-term aspirations. Horizons supports partner-defined strategies that include (1) an integral approach to development based on community organization and meeting basic needs in one or more of health, education, production and human rights; (2) production of knowledge, and (3) citizen participation in local, district and national processes.

II. Partner Organization

The María Elena Cuadra Working and Unemployed Women's Movement (MEC) supports unemployed, Indigenous women in vulnerable and low-income situations, including those working in free trade zones in eight departments (provinces) of Nicaragua. The organization was founded in 1994 and is an autonomous women's movement that aims for the inclusion and full participation of women in Nicaraguan society. To achieve these goals **MEC** works from a gender perspective to organize, educate, and train women workers. It seeks to improve the economic and social status of women by developing their skills in managing small businesses and working in non-traditional trades, increasing awareness of their rights and duties, raising their self-esteem, and helping them build a sense of empowerment. The organization addresses a wide set of issues affecting women such as domestic violence as well as social, labour, and economic rights. It also advocates to promote changes in public policy and legislation in order to improve the living standards of working and unemployed women.

III. Recap of Community Need

The last 70 years in Nicaragua were characterized by development policies that benefitted mostly the country's elite (until 1979), armed conflict, natural disasters, and economic mismanagement. Over this period, the country's GDP and capacity to produce were affected, physical infrastructure was destroyed, and many tens of thousands of people were killed. At the end of the 1980s, Nicaragua was one of the most highly indebted countries in the world and social conditions were very poor, with high levels of infant and maternal mortality and severe malnutrition that affected 13% of children under five (World Bank, 2017).

Today, Nicaragua is one of the poorest countries in Latin America and the Caribbean and is currently experiencing an ongoing human rights crisis, high rates of poverty and extreme poverty (30% and 8%, respectively in 2014), and poor access to services and education (Ibid.). Nicaraguan females carry the burden of this poverty. They often live in a constant situation of violence and discrimination (PAHO,¹ 2006). Gender violence and poverty are connected, bearing out in statistical evidence (La Prensa, 2018). For instance, the country has the second highest rate in Latin America of births to teenagers as a result of rape and a high and increasing level of all types of gender violence, including 400 femicides in the last five years (Ibid.).

Sexual violence and domestic abuse are even higher than the national average in some of the areas in which foreign-owned factories are established. These factories, called *maquiladoras*, are within Nicaragua's Free Trade Zone. They produce goods that are shipped back for consumption to the country of origin, operate tax-free as an incentive for foreign investment and investment in production for export and, before the pandemic, had experienced a boom, the result of Nicaragua having the lowest labour costs in the region. Before the pandemic, *maquiladoras* were estimated to employ more than 100,000 in the country, the

¹ PAHO stands for the Pan American Health Organization.

majority of whom are female between 16 and 20 years of age. Three-quarters of these women are the single parent to 4 to 5 children (MEC, 2011).

Physical, sexual, and emotional abuse by peers and employers is common in the maquiladoras. Many workers experience unfair treatment on the job and do not have the option of other employment. These positions are precarious, offer inadequate labour protections, and unequal treatment for women workers compared against their male colleagues. The work is difficult, requiring monotonous, repetitive tasks and movements. The adoption of forced positions and working with vibration and magnetic fields, manual handling of heavy loads, high production goals, and exposure to chemical compounds, along with strict supervision and long days add to the difficulty. Collectively, these circumstances trigger physiological and psychophysiological changes over time, such as incapacitating musculoskeletal problems that limit the productive age of female workers.

Although Nicaragua has a legal framework favourable to women's rights, there is a gap between what is established in law and what is enforced. Largely, women have been the recipients of the deterioration of human rights in the country, shouldering consequences that include family disintegration, the erosion of the quality of family life, political polarization, and daily challenges such as rampant inflation. This situation has driven young, impoverished women, the majority of whom have only a primary school education and require urgent employment to solve the needs of their families, to work in the maquiladoras where they have experienced inequitable economic and labour rights, and worse.

IV. Recent Political and Social Changes of Note

Nicaragua is currently struggling with difficult social and political challenges as well as the aftermath of two hurricanes that hit the country in 2020 and the continuing progression of COVID-19. Hurricanes Eta and Iota made landfall back-to-back in November and brought widespread flooding and damages estimated at \$740 million US. While the Atlantic Coast of the country was hit hardest, at least 30,000 people had to flee to shelters country-wide, where they still reside, and 30,000 homes were left with major structural damages. Experts agree that these damages to infrastructure, economy, and livelihoods will take years to repair.

The Nicaraguan Ministry of Health continues to report modest numbers of confirmed infections and deaths related to COVID-19, i.e., 17,895 and 223 respectively on February 16, 2022. Local newspapers have reported that the most predominant variant in Nicaragua is the Delta Variant. Official case counts have been challenged throughout the pandemic by the COVID-19 Citizen Observatory, a watchdog group of medical professionals and others in the country claiming that actual cases and deaths are much higher, i.e., 31,505 and 5,973 respectively on January 26, 2022, and 10,198 cases in the department of Managua alone as of November 24, 2021. Claims from Nicaraguan physicians on the dire conditions in the country's hospitals have been reported by media since early in the pandemic, i.e., no preventative, containment, or mitigative actions being used to stop the spread. More recently physicians have reported excessively harsh treatment for

speaking out about the conditions they face on the job with COVID-19 or even for comments that legitimize the existence of the disease which the federal government has long denied, e.g., imprisonment, fines, beatings. A vaccination campaign is well underway in the country, and 3.82M people had been fully vaccinated as of February 16, 2022, which is roughly equivalent to 57.7% of the population. There was no information available at the time of writing on the availability of boosters, however.

The effects of the pandemic on Nicaraguan women have been widely covered. According to UN Women², the pandemic has required many women to assume greater physical and emotional costs than in non-pandemic times, i.e., as a result of being the main caregivers in the home and/or in the health care sector. Women have also had to cope with the redirection of resources that would at other times have been dedicated to the provision of sexual and reproductive health services but are currently supporting the pandemic related health crisis. Further, the Delta variant has caused the temporary closure of many face-to-face mental health services, moving some but not all of these services online.

Maquila workers have had to shoulder a disproportionate amount of the burden caused by the pandemic. In 2020, mass layoffs left thousands of these workers without jobs or income to feed their families, as many maquiladoras shut down and prepared to move to Honduras where labour is cheaper. The situation of poverty for these women and their children intensified as a result and our partner, MEC, had to step in to distribute food so these women could continue to feed their families. There have also been reports from those who retained their positions that little to no precautions were being taken by employers to protect their staff from the spread of the virus while on the job, e.g., supplies such as PPE and social distancing. As a result, cases of COVID-19 within this sector massively increased.

Political changes in 2021 saw the closure of 55 NGOs that had been stationed in Nicaragua and dedicated to the defense of human rights (AP News, 2021). A change in federal requirements around the registration of this type of organization caused lengthy delays in securing registration and hampered the capacity of all NGOs in the country to operate and receive external funds while waiting for registration issues to be resolved. The closure of these 55 NGOs, many of which provided gender-based victim care services, has left survivors without access to institutional networks of support. At the time of writing, our partner, **The María Elena Cuadra Working and Unemployed Women's Movement (MEC)**, had just been informed that they too would face forced closure by the federal government and a seizure of their assets. We are unaware as yet as to whether this seizure will be done peacefully or not. Horizons stands in solidarity with MEC and with our other partner, AMICA, in Nicaragua, both of which face uncertain futures.

² The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

V. Review of Project Summary

Title:	<i>“Promotion and Defense of human, labour and gender rights in Nicaragua”</i>
Partner:	María Elena Cuadra Working and Unemployed Women’s Movement (MEC)
Location:	The project will be implemented in the municipalities of Managua, Tipitapa and Ciudad Sandino in Nicaragua
Beneficiaries:	<u>Direct:</u> 13,750 people, including: i) 360 workers from the free trade zone of the Municipalities of Managua, Ciudad Sandino, and Tipitapa; ii) 300 new promoters incorporated into the MEC Voluntary Promoters Network; iii) 1,400 Nicaraguan women; victims of rights violations; iv) 690 female victims and / or survivors of gender-based violence; v) 1,000 workers of the participating maquilas of Exchanges and Colloquiums; and, vi) 10,000 people reached with the messages of the Campaign “Employment yes... But with Dignity” <u>Indirect:</u> 10,000 people.
Project Duration:	December 2019 to November 2021
Project Budget:	\$86,019 over 2 years of which \$500 was received from the Rotary Club of Brighton

The *“Promotion and Defense of human, labour and gender rights in Nicaragua”* project was implemented by **Horizons of Friendship (Horizons)** in partnership with Nicaraguan executing agency **María Elena Cuadra Working and Unemployed Women’s Movement (MEC)** to strengthen the capacities of female workers in the free trade zone, contribute to their personal and collective empowerment, promote a culture of respect for rights and duties in the workplace, and support their right to expect employers to treat them with dignity. This project responded to the needs expressed in *The Labour Rights Agenda of Working Women in the Maquiladora Industry of Central America*, a document prepared from the voices of workers in the maquiladoras that described the problems encountered, problem-solving strategies, and a vision to transform the working conditions experienced in this industry.

This two-year project aimed to directly benefit 13,750 women, including those working in the maquiladoras, victims and survivors of rights violations and gender-based violence, and others in the public that would benefit from being empowered to recognize and defend their rights. Additionally, it benefitted 10,000 indirectly. It achieved its goal through training, education, and support to raise awareness and strengthen capacities at different levels of society to address this complex problem; that is, in the individual worker in the country’s maquiladoras and in the larger society, including cultural, ideological, and economic aspects.

One of the key goals of this project was to provide basic training to workers in the free trade zone of the Municipalities of Managua, Ciudad Sandino, and Tipitapa by way of workshops on human, labour, and gender rights. The workshops aimed to provide knowledge to female workers to build awareness on how to ensure and promote their rights. With this training, women would be prepared to assume leadership roles and better face the challenges of responding to situations and decisions in the workplace that limit their human rights.

Another was to size-up and strengthen the existing MEC volunteer promotor network. These volunteers work to defend their rights and the rights of other women in the workplace. Strengthening this network required developing the capacities of new volunteers, i.e., equipping them to guide other workers, solve a variety of workplace problems that might be encountered, and defend others with their knowledge of the law and capacity to influence change.

A third was to provide legal advice and support to victims of rights violations. To accomplish this, the services of specialized personnel in the field of rights were made available to accompany plaintiffs to court throughout the course of their legal proceedings, ensuring that proper access was provided to justice and restitution under Nicaraguan law. MEC was supported in this work by a law firm with which they have an established relationship and have partnered on labour and gender-based violence matters.

In order to build resilience, self-esteem, and self-assessment capacity amongst women, participants were provided access to individual and group psycho-social therapy sessions with a trained and qualified psychologist. The network of volunteer promoters played an important role in referring cases requiring professional follow-up.

A fifth goal was to establish, throughout the life of the project, self-help and self-care groups accessible in each of the three municipalities in which the project took place. These groups aimed to create community spaces for women where a climate of trust and mutual support could be built and where participants could share experiences to strengthen their resilience in personal and collective crisis contexts especially for women at risk, and victims and survivors of violence.

In addition, MEC was set to hold an annual meeting with workers from the free trade zone to maintain communication with them and keep abreast of the progress they are making and the setbacks they encounter in the exercise of their rights. This meeting would also allow an opportunity to discuss and reflect upon strategies for individuals and worker groups to defend rights. MEC had in the past carried out more than eleven of these annual meetings, which were successful in providing an opportunity for democratic participation, solidarity-building, the sharing of personal testimonies and experiences, and the generation of ideas and plans for moving forward.

A final goal of the project was for MEC to run a large-scale promotional campaign to build awareness within the broader Nicaraguan population of issues related to women's rights, the law, and the treatment that women experience in the workplace. This campaign with the slogan *Employment Yes... but with Dignity* was to be run on social media, television, and radio to make the situation of violence, discrimination and inequality that women face daily in different areas visible. This campaign was already ongoing in the country at the start of the project and had success in raising awareness about the rights of female workers. It was to be expanded for the purpose of this project, as contempt for women's rights is a daily element in Nicaragua's public and private spheres, and it was important to the success of this project to address it on

a large scale. The campaign was expected to generate recognition of workplace violence as well as sensitivity and openness to behavioural change.

VI. Summary of Interim Project Activities and Key Achievements (and in each key component of the project)

With the **Rotary Club of Brighton's** generous support, **MEC** was able to build upon past work supported by **Horizons**. The following summarizes the key achievements of the project.

Key Project Achievements

- 210 maquila workers were trained in the ABCs of labour rights, exceeding the project goal of 180.
- 240 maquila workers were trained to understand and respond to gender rights and violence, fully meeting the project goal.
- 510 women workers from the free trade zone in the Municipalities of Managua, Ciudad Sandino, and Tipitapa participated in training workshops with the Network of Volunteer Promoters aimed at developing the capacities necessary to allow them to recognize and defend their legal and human rights and understand gender-based violence, its impact, and its prevention, exceeding the project goal of 360.
- 300 new promoters were integrated into the MEC Voluntary Promoters Network to promote the defense of labour rights in their work environments, fully meeting the project goal.
- 3,037 people received legal support and advice over the project which exceeded the project goal of 2,800 (i.e., 1,400 annually for the duration of the project). Around 92% of these cases focused on claims of workplace violence and economic violence.
- 2 large legal cases brought by workers were successfully resolved by MEC Legal Aid Clinic, i.e., PROTSEVASA (151 workers) and Ben Watcher Associates/Holland Apparel (3,134 workers).
- 832 project participants received individual psycho-therapy services from the psychological care team, exceeding the project goal of 600 by 39%.
- 99 self-help group therapy sessions were also held with 312 participants and 13 self-help groups were established, exceeding the project goal of 9.
- 387 survivors were accompanied to public justice institutions to file complaints about rights violations, and an additional 89 were accompanied to make complaints to public and private authorities about compliance with labour rights under the laws of Nicaragua.

- 1,150 free trade zone workers from the municipalities of Managua, Ciudad Sandino, Tipitapa, and Estelí took part in the Colloquia of Maquiladoras, an annual event held in 2020 and 2021. This event provided a democratic discussion space in which the employment rights of women working in textile/clothing free trade zone enterprises and the impact of the current socio-political crisis in Nicaragua on the lives of women workers in this industry could be discussed. Participants also discussed short-, medium-, and long-term strategies for the effective fulfillment of their rights and the current socio-political situation in the country and its effect on the lives of women maquila workers.
- Three key publications were produced, i.e., detailing the situation of workers' labour rights in the textile/clothing factories within the free trade zone, the impact of the socio-political crisis in the country on the lives of women maquila workers, and the devastating effects of maquilas on women's health.
- A media awareness campaign was launched on TV, radio, and social networks to highlight and draw attention to the situation of gender, labour, and human rights abuses in the maquiladoras.
- An event called "Misogyny and all forms of violence against women" was held in commemoration of International Women's Day with the participation of leaders participating communities.

Specific progress against the expected project results (overall) is detailed below.

Result #1: Improve the knowledge of female workers in the maquilas about their rights and their ability to organize in networks

- This intended result was exceeded. At the end of the project,
 - 210 maquila workers (including 150 women) were trained in the ABCs of labour rights, exceeding the project goal of 180 workers.
 - 240 workers were trained to understand and respond to gender rights and violence, including 210 women, fully meeting the project goal.
- 510 women workers from the free trade zone in the Municipalities of Managua, Ciudad Sandino, and Tipitapa participated in training workshops with the Network of Volunteer Promoters.
- Workshops developed the capacities of participants necessary to allow them to recognize and defend their various legal rights and understand their work and personal lives within the context of gender-based violence, its impact, and its prevention. These workshops combined theory with practical work both individually with participants and in groups.
- At the end of the project, 300 new promoters were integrated into the MEC Voluntary Promoters Network to promote the defense of labour rights in their work environments. This action fully meets

the goal in our original proposal and will ensure that the defense of workers' rights is carried on beyond the end of the project.

Result #2: Direct intervention for victims whose rights have been violated through the advice and legal support of the MEC

- The MEC Legal Aid Clinic provided a range of legal attention, e.g., specializing in labour rights, family rights such as alimony, care and upbringing of minors, and the different expressions of gender-based violence.
- Legal support and advice were delivered to 3,037 people over the project, including 1,754 (58%) women workers and 1,283 male (42%), exceeding the goal of 1,400 people served per year for the duration of the project. Around 92% of these cases focused on claims of workplace violence and economic violence.
- 82.7% of the legal claims made were resolved in favour of the plaintiff, on average since the beginning of the project. This result exceeds the project goal of 70% success of cases made with the support of this project.



MEC Legal Aid Clinic Consultations with workers

- One of these successful claims was brought to the MEC Legal Aid Clinic in 2018 by 151 workers, mostly security guards, from PROTSERVASA, a company that provides security services for institutions and businesses. The company's management had dismissed the workers without paying the labour benefits required by law (e.g., vacation, bonus, and salary) and subsequently announced plans to close operations. MEC's Legal Aid Clinic provided comprehensive support, i.e., advice on their labour rights, calculation of benefits outstanding, and accompaniment to file a complaint with the Ministry of

Labour. Although a resolution was issued in favour of the plaintiffs by the Ministry quickly, it took until December 2021 (4 years) for MEC to achieve the resolution to this case. This delay was caused by court delays and countless actions and appeals from the defendant. At the end of this project, however, the rights of these workers had been restored.



**MEC Legal Aid Clinic Consultations with Some of the Plaintiffs
to the PROTSERVASA Case**

- A further 3,134 workers employed by Ben Watcher Associates Inc. and New Holland Apparel, clothing manufacturers, also received their settlements according to the law with the support of MEC Legal Aid Clinic. These workers faced unjustified dismissals and factory closures, which left them without their legal wages and benefits. The Network of Volunteer Promoters provided accompaniment to court for plaintiffs. Initially the companies had intended to pay the remaining wages owed with used and discarded clothing. The Maquila Solidarity Network (RSM) was called in to help influence these brands to comply with the law. In the end, the workers received what they were owed.

- Throughout 2021, there were effects within the legal area in Nicaragua due to the impact of COVID-19, i.e., an increase in claims of employer transgressions of the law, vulnerability of labour, economic, and social rights, and a closure of many maquiladora companies due to a lack of raw materials and a closure of international markets. These problems of violations to rights of workers occurred both in the maquiladora companies and in the informal employment sectors of the economy. For instance, there has been an increase in complaints from workers in the personal services industry, such as domestic assistants, i.e., that after they were sent home to quarantine, employers issued verbal dismissals and took away their pay and labour benefits.
- During the pandemic, the country has gone through political and social instability. MEC has reported that the lack of independence that has been seen in different branches of the State has been reflected in the decline of personal rights, the slowing of judicial procedures to resolve complaints, and conciliation hearings being either cancelled or rescheduled repeatedly which has resulted in delaying justice so much so that many complaints have been abandoned due to lack of resources to continue procedures. The widespread loss of jobs during this time has resulted in an increase in legal complaints dealing with parental responsibility and alimony. Nevertheless, uninterrupted legal support has been provided by this project throughout 2021, alternating between face-to-face and virtual services, as necessary.

Result #3: Strengthen resilience and solidarity capacity among women

- This project aimed to support women victims and survivors of gender violence by strengthening access to individual care, group therapies, and self-help groups in the neighbourhoods of the municipalities of Ciudad Sandino, Tipitapa, and Managua.
- Individual care focuses on providing practical strategies for survivors to achieve better knowledge of their emotions and develop decision-making capacity. These services were provided in person and via virtual platforms during the pandemic, e.g., WhatsApp, phone, and video. The pandemic brought with it new areas of concern for survivors, e.g., disinformation by government entities, limited internet access, layoffs, reduced income, and mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, fear, and so on. The biosecurity measures established by the World Health Organization were followed throughout to address the needs of these survivors during the pandemic.
- Psycho-social care and follow-up were delivered to 832 victims and survivors of rights violations (753 women and 79 men), exceeding the project goals by 39%. This care was mainly delivered as individual therapy sessions, a tool used by therapists to help to understand and resolve the emotional conflicts and disorders being experienced, thus helping survivors to regain inner freedom, achieve personal growth, and increase their sense of wellbeing, moving towards a better quality of life.
- 13 self-help groups were also formed. 99 sessions of self-help groups were held with a total of 312 participants (310 women and 2 men) during the project. The topics addressed in these sessions

included gender-based violence, access routes to seeking justice, self esteem, sexual and reproductive health, autonomy, and anxiety management.



Participants of Self-Help Groups

- 387 survivors were accompanied to public justice institutions to file complaints about rights violations with the appropriate state-level justice organizations, and 77% of these cases filed achieved a favourable response in court.
- An additional 89 plaintiffs were accompanied to make complaints to public or private authorities in order to ensure the proper compliance with rights under the laws of Nicaragua.
- Democratic discussion spaces were established and attended by 600 workers in maquiladoras located in the free trade zone. These participants came from a variety of municipalities including Managua, Ciudad Sandino, Tipitapa, and Estelí and took part in discussion and analysis of advances gained and setbacks experienced in human, labour, and gender rights.
- 1,150 free trade zone workers participated in the Colloquia of Maquiladoras, an annual event that was held on March 8, 2020 and March 14, 2021 to facilitate this discussion space and allow participants to engage in planning of short-, medium-, and long-term strategies for the effective fulfillment of their rights. Specific topics included the employment rights of women workers in textile/clothing free trade zone enterprises and the impact of the current socio-political crisis in Nicaragua on the lives of women maquila workers.



**Screen shots from
Online Self-Help
Groups**

- Three key publications were produced: (1) a document detailing the situation of workers' labour rights in the textile/clothing factories within the free trade zone; (2) a document detailing the impact of the socio-political crisis in the country on the lives of women maquila workers; and (3) a book titled "Surviving the Maquila," reflecting and compiling the devastating effects of maquilas on women's health.

Testimony 1

"I attended the María Elena Cuadra Working and Unemployed Women's Movement because of what I had seen on the organization's networks. I am a survivor of psychological violence. No one believed or understood my life. I reached the point of normalizing the situation in my day-to-day life with my ex-partner.

The therapies and work with the other women helped me a lot. I realized that others experienced the same thing as I did and had to overcome it. I learned not to be silent and to put an end to the cycle of violence in which I lived."

Today I can say that I am a woman survivor of abuse who is independent and enterprising with the will to get ahead."

-Veronica, 42 years old, Managua

Testimony 2

"I went to the María Elena Cuadra Working and Unemployed Women's Movement because I suffered physical violence. I knew that my children suffered too when they saw the situation but because of fear and economic dependence on my former partner, I was silent and chose to endure the situation. Then, one day, my friend took me to MEC.

Although I am still afraid that my ex-husband will hurt me when he gets out of jail, I feel that in my case justice was done with the advice and accompaniment provided by MEC. Before this my case was ignored by the justice institutions."

Thanks to MEC, I was able to achieve justice. Today I can say that the group and individual psychological counselling groups helped me to strengthen my self esteem and become resilient."

-Katy, 30 years old, Managua

Result #4: Increase critical awareness among decision makers and public opinion in general about the problem of violence and discrimination in the workplace

- Especially during the pandemic, opportunities to have access to journalists, decision-makers, and representatives of the various institutions of the state have been limited. This access is key to promoting critical awareness broadly amongst decision makers and journalists about the negative impacts on the lives of workers caused by non-compliance with workers' rights, particularly as they effect the conditions under which Nicaraguan workers perform their duties. Access also helps to build the strong, collaborative relationships necessary to support media coverage, policy development, and broad-based public education campaigns disseminated to the Nicaraguan public.
- Despite this reduced access, project resources were used to launch a media awareness campaign which included coverage on TV, radio, and social networks and focused on highlighting public complaints from workers to draw attention to the situation. Information was disseminated about the systemic violation of human and labour rights, and gender inequality faced by Nicaraguans and, in particular, workers at the maquilas. This campaign "Employment yes, but with dignity" was directed broadly as well as to key audiences, particularly rights holders and entrepreneurs, and has now been on the air since February 2021.
- In addition, an event called "Misogyny and all forms of violence against women" was held in commemoration of International Women's Day with the participation of 550 leaders from the municipalities of Managua, Ciudad Sandino, Tipitapa, Estelí, and Posoltega.

VII. Monitoring, Evaluating, and Reporting

Horizons has strong monitoring and evaluation practices and policies, regularly visiting partners and beneficiaries (where conditions allow, especially during the pandemic) to ensure accountability. Results Based Management (RBM) methodology and environmental and gender assessments are used to approve and oversee all projects. Independent external evaluations complement this process, as well as administrative and accounting reviews, and periodic external audits.

Quarterly financial and semi-annual narrative reports that track progress and achievements at various stages of the project, based on outcomes listed above, were submitted by our partner the **María Elena Cuadra Working and Unemployed Women's Movement (MEC)** and reviewed by our program team. Field trips are regularly conducted by our program team as well, when possible. These allow for direct contact with our partners in Nicaragua and provide opportunities to witness project successes and address challenges. Regular contact via email, phone, and Skype ensure that Horizons can respond rapidly to issues and needs as they arise. Our Program Financial Officer performed additional monitoring to ensure that project funds were used solely for stated purposes and that partners got the support they needed to maintain satisfactory financial

and administrative systems and procedures. This work usually entails annual visits to partners to conduct audits, reviews, and special training sessions (again, where possible during the pandemic).

Horizons' Executive Director has 35 years of experience overseeing development programs in Central America and Mexico and is well-versed in identifying and responding to programming opportunities and risks in the region. The Program Financial Officer is a trained accountant with 18 years of experience as an administrator in Costa Rica and 23 years with Horizons overseeing partner financial systems and reporting. Program staff members are trained and experienced in RBM. The Project Coordinator responsible for all Meso-American programming and many other staff at Horizons are fluent in Spanish and English, facilitating understanding with partners.

VIII. Challenges and Lessons Learned

MEC reported challenges during the pandemic months in establishing the strong relationships with the media that are necessary to effectively place on the public agenda proposals and calls for mobilization and other actions that are key to widely promoting with the public the defense and recognition of women's rights. They noted that these relationships must be built and continually strengthened with both male and female journalists. Decisions to socially distance and postpone some in-person events resulted in fewer spaces in which to meet and discuss key issues with media officials and decision-makers.

MEC responded to these challenges by continuing to work with independent journalists and digital media throughout the project, as possible, to ensure that workers' proposals and complaints could be placed on the public agenda and that a wider push could be consistently made to ensure that workers had access to better working conditions, that their rights were respected, and that their access to justice was available.

It has also been challenging during the pandemic to ensure that workers were accompanied when they desired, and that risks to health and safety were assessed and addressed as they arose. Accomplishing this task required considerable adaptation on the part of MEC. However, with the support of various community partners including those in MEC's social networks, sister organizations, alliances, and MEC's own technical teams, this was accomplished successfully.

IX. Financial Report

PROJECT EXPENSES - Two years (December 2019 to December 2021)	Budget*	Expenses at Dec 31, 2021	Variation
Project Coordination & Staff Costs	\$26,534	\$25,035	\$1,499
Project Officer	6,880	7,628	-748
Part-Time Manager	6,638	7,293	-655
Part-Time Psychologist	7,438	10,114	-2,676
Organizational Promoter	5,578	0	5,578
Workshops, Colloquia, and Materials	\$32,912	\$36,113	\$-3,201
Labour rights Workshop (1 day with 30 participants)	4,901	4,343	558
Right to live without violence Workshop (1 day with 30 participants)	4,901	5,847	-946
Promotional campaign to support Workshops (TV and Radio)	15,938	17,260	-1,322
Colloquia (2) of Women Workers of the Maquila	7,172	8663	-1,491
Transportation and Travel Expenses	\$9,776	\$8,013	\$1,763
Transportation to Workshops (2)	1,674	1,506	170
Transportation to Colloquia (250 participants x 2 colloquia)	3,320	1,594	1,726
Gas to provide legal assistance to maquila workers (24 months)	4,782	4,915	-133
Communications & Office Expenses	\$11,797	\$11,786	\$11
Utilities (e.g., water, electricity, internet, security)	7,812	7,492	320
Office equipment to support provision of legal assistance to maquila workers (Computers, software, printers)	3,985	4,294	-309
Monitoring and Evaluation	\$5,000	\$5,000	0
Monitoring and evaluation by Horizons of Friendship	5,000	5,000	0
TOTAL PROJECT EXPENSES	\$86,019	\$85,947	\$72

PROJECT REVENUES – Two years (December 2019 to December 2021)	Requested	Received	Variation
Horizons of Friendship**	\$2,000	\$2,000	0
Congrégation de Notre-Dame	\$30,000	\$30,000	-
Rotary Club of Kingston	\$500	\$500	-
Rotary Club of Brighton	\$500	\$500	-
Royal Bank of Canada	\$1,000	\$1,000	-
Horizons of Friendship and Institutional Donors (<i>pending to fundraise</i>)	\$29,022	\$28,950	\$72
OPSEU Social Justice Fund	\$20,000	\$20,000	-
Pindoff Family Charitable Foundation	\$2,997	\$2,997	-
Total Projects Revenue	\$86,019	\$85,947	\$72

*This budget is in CAD dollars, converted from US dollars at an exchange rate of 1.34 on Sept. 30, 2020. Expenses were converted to CAD dollars at a rate of 1.30. **This represents an in-kind contribution of Horizons staff time and other resources to monitor and support project implementation, build the institutional capacity of MEC, and ensure the sustainability of their work.