



**LATIN AMERICAN PARTNER PROFILE**

# Rural Women Stand Strong after Many Years

*The Movimiento de Mujeres Trabajadoras y Desempleadas Maria Elena Cuadra Sede Granada, or MEC Granada, has been a CoDev partner in Nicaragua since 2000. They work in the city of Granada, as well as on the island of Ometepe in Lake Nicaragua. Mabel Aguirre, the Director since the beginning, shares an overview of their work.*

“The Granada office of MEC started in 1995, after the national office in Managua was established. The idea for the work was the same: local activists had begun to understand the discrimination and inequality working-class women were experiencing, and we felt we had to fight to defend our economic, human and social rights.

It began with a small team of volunteers, whose objective at first was to bring more women into the move-

ment and ensure that we were protagonists of our own stories. We needed to create a safe emotional and physical space to identify and reflect on our social reality, and then use training, social programs and holistic services to move forward.

Everything we have done has been hard, like fighting against discrimination, family, sexual and institutional violence, and developing economic and social progress for women. We started as a completely new organiza-

tion, with few resources. Most of the founders were unemployed at the time, and we had to fight so hard against the deeply-rooted machismo in our society. We are still fighting for the dignity of women, so that we can defend our rights as social beings, workers, and mothers.

The greatest challenge we’re facing right now is the high demand for our services. We don’t have the resources to provide the holistic service we’d like to, such as going into isolated neighbourhoods, mobilizing, technical equipment for training, etc. For now we are concentrating on helping women improve their living conditions, since the cost of living has risen so much and there is high unemployment.

We dream of having our own transportation to be able to be independent in our work in the outlying neighbourhoods. We are also working very hard on a project that would see more than 200 women with their own land and homes in the next two years.

I think one of our greatest accomplishments is gaining acceptance, credibility and respect from the women of Granada, to promote and develop their participation in the different social and economic areas. We have made a significant contribution to helping vulnerable women defend their human rights and develop the ability to face their problems themselves. We have also encouraged new practises that lead to the eradication

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**MEC Granada gender rights workshop, Ometepe Island**



Photo: CoDev

## Rural

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of violence in the workplace, in families and in society. Things like breaking the silence, not feeling afraid, not feeling guilty, being proactive and bringing respect to your family and social context.

CoDev and the Ometepe Gulf Islands Friendship Association (OGIFA), have accompanied us in getting women to participate in the training processes, provide legal accompaniment and psychological assistance. Without this help, we would not have been able to help the women in the rural communities of Ometepe, from the free trade zones, domestic workers, or any of the women who suffer from different kinds of violence. We are very grateful for your consistent, ongoing support!" ■

### Give the Gift of Global Justice!

Need a gift that says solidarity? Consider making a donation to CoDev in the name of a family member, friend, or co-worker. The recipient will receive a beautiful, hand-written card informing them that you have made a donation in their name supporting global justice. You will receive a charitable tax receipt. **There are three ways to donate:**

- 1 call our office at 604.708.1495 to make a donation by VISA
- 2 complete the donor form on [www.codev.org](http://www.codev.org) and return it to the CoDev office with your payment
- 3 fill out the secure on-line donation form through [www.canadahelps.org](http://www.canadahelps.org)

Please mark "gift donation" in the subject line of your cheque and include the full name and mailing address of the recipient of your gift.



## CODEV AT WORK

# Occupational Health and Safety Complaints Stalled in Honduras



Over the course of several years, CoDev partner CODEMUH has gathered stories of workers in factories owned by Gildan

Activewear, a company based in Montréal. In essence, the company has production measures in place that favour a high product output while putting the workers' health at risk. In April 2011, when we took a group of OH&S activists to Honduras, CODEMUH asked us to write directly to Gildan, hoping that pressure from their home country would help improve workers' conditions.

The first complaint is around the "4x4" work shift, where workers are obliged to work four 12-hour days in a row, before having four days off, and starting over again. This shift schedule wreaks havoc on joints, tendons and muscles during the repetitive work, and finding childcare for alternating four-day blocks is very difficult.

In addition, Gildan has entrenched high production quotas, where each worker has to produce 500 dozen pieces per day to receive a production bonus above the minimum wage. With inadequate back support, poor ventilation and often high heat, the injuries suffered by workers are insidious. These include musculoskeletal injuries, herniated discs, carpal tunnel syndrome, and many types of tendonitis. These injuries often mean women can't perform the basic household tasks their families expect of them once



they return home.

When we came back to Canada from our trip to Honduras, the participants drafted a letter to Gildan, detailing the complaints we had heard and passing on CODEMUH's requests for the elimination of the "4x4" shift and production quotas. The letter was sent to Gildan's head office in Montréal, and the Vice President called CoDev to start a dialogue. We are awaiting a package of information that was to be provided by them, explaining the corporate social responsibility strategies of the company.

In Honduras, CODEMUH lodged a complaint with the Fair Labor Association (FLA), who has delayed carrying out an independent investigation for over a year. CODEMUH has also been in touch with the FLA Executive and is awaiting an update.

While we are not ready yet to launch an urgent action in support of workers in the Gildan factories in Honduras, we urge our supporters to be ready to act if the process of dialogue does not provide solutions. ■

# Taking Responsibility at Home

**P**art of our belief in solidarity involves taking responsibility for our actions and making changes here in Canada to facilitate global justice. One way CoDev works to create change in Canada is through engaging with our government on issues that impact our partners in Latin America. Government engagement enables us to bring the voices and aspirations of our partners to bear on specific foreign policy issues like development aid or trade agreements. It also helps us to define our own voice and discuss policy proposals that reflect our values of equality and justice.

For this reason, CoDev is an active member of the Americas Policy Group (APG) of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC). The APG brings together 40 international development and humanitarian NGOs, human rights groups, labour unions, research institutions, church and solidarity groups to work to promote a human rights-based approach to Canadian foreign policy towards the Americas.

By working together, the groups that form the APG have been able to have an impact on Canadian foreign policy. Two important recent examples illustrate this:

## *The Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement*

The APG worked with Latin American partners, opposition MPs and other civil society groups to raise concerns about entering into a trade agreement with a country infamous for human rights violations. APG developed a brief analyzing the impact of such a trade agreement on Colombians, made formal submissions to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on International Trade (SCFAIT), brought Colombian partners to share their analysis and concerns, and encouraged Canadians to make their voices heard on this critical issue. Though the trade deal did pass in June 2010, the APG and others helped to open and deepen the debate and highlight concerns about Canada's trade policies. Now that the trade deal is in place, the APG is actively collaborating with Colombian



**Maria Luisa Regalado, CODEMUH**

Photo: Sarah Race

counterparts to develop human rights impact assessment reports that are required by the deal.

## *The Honduran Coup and Canada-Honduras Free Trade Agreement*

The coup d'état in Honduras on June 28, 2009 represented an extremely grave crisis for democratic governance in the hemisphere. In response, the APG published a backgrounder for MPs and others on key issues of the coup and Canada's role. The APG was successful in convincing the SCFAIT to hold hearings to examine Canada's role during the crisis which they did by receiving Deputy Minister Peter Kent in June 2010.

When Honduran human rights groups formed a Commission to investigate human rights abuses after the coup, the APG arranged for Canadian international human rights expert Scott Craig to sit as a commissioner.

Following the announcement of the proposed trade agreement between Canada and Honduras, APG organized a session at the Parliamentary Trade Committee on the human rights situation in Honduras with witnesses from Canada and Honduras, including Maria Luisa Regalado, from CoDev's partner CODEMUH.

In working with other Canadian organizations through the APG to steer Canada's trade and foreign policy towards a rights-based approach that facilitates democratic and sustainable development as defined by affected communities, CoDev seeks to fulfill our mandate of building global justice. ■

## WHAT'S NEW?

### Holiday Open House!

CoDev & Café Ético would like to invite all our volunteers, members and supporters to our annual Holiday Open House on **Monday, December 12th from 4pm to 8pm at the CoDev office, 260-2747 East Hastings Street, Vancouver, BC.** There will be tasty treats, warm beverages, eggnog, a membership draw, and plenty of holiday cheer for all. We hope that you can join the CoDev family to celebrate the holiday season.

### Save the Date!

Join us for the 11th annual **CoDev World Community Film Festival** on **February 10-12, 2012** at Langara College, Vancouver.



The annual film festival features documentaries about social justice and environmental issues set around the globe. Watch our website for updated information about this great festival and become a CoDev member to get discounts on film festival passes.

## SUPPORTING SOLIDARITY

Photo: Janek Kuchmistrz



*“Solidarity not Charity” is what inspired Janek Kuchmistrz to give to CoDev because he wanted to find a way to have a lasting impact on community development.*

### How did you first hear about CoDev?

I first heard about CoDev when I was fortunate to become a member of the BCTF’s International Solidarity Committee. At this committee, CoDev presented reports about their work and it was upon hearing about CoDev’s partnership model that I became convinced that I should be supporting them.

### What aspects of CoDev’s programming are especially important to you?

I think what is most important is the strengthening of the unions in Latin America and enhancing the power of women in those organizations. I believe that it is a recognized axiom that empowering women in any society yields the most benefits.

### What drew you to support CoDev personally as a donor?

Everything I heard at the BCTF persuaded me that CoDev was a very effective NGO. I was impressed by how CoDev supported their partners in building the capacity of local indigenous groups to gradually build their own civil society. I had been a monthly donor for ten years through a child sponsorship program. Unfortunately, after having sponsored three different children, one to adulthood, I had to recognize that this effort of mine did not truly alter the life of these children, nor their community. It felt like a temporary panacea for my guilt as a lucky citizen of Canada - one who had won in the lottery of birth on this planet. I wanted to give where my donation could have the most impact.

### What do you see as key issues for CoDev in the years ahead?

The struggle for stable funding to continue the work is a major concern for me. I feel that federal funding is mutating into an irksome and exasperating entity that I feel is unlikely to support CoDev’s work long term. Reaching out to more individual donors and organizations to secure more funding is crucial. For this, CoDev needs to find a succinct way to explain what it does so that an individual donor can more readily be convinced to become a supporter.

### What are your hopes for CoDev’s future?

My hope is that CoDev will continue growing so that it can do more to help local unions and organizations improve the lives of their members and by extension, their community and their country. I would also like to see CoDev, in the long term, provide its expertise in other regions, such as, Africa. ■

## CODEVELOPMENT CANADA



building partnerships for global justice

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