

Horizons

OF FRIENDSHIP

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS TO END POVERTY IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO

Women’s Health Vital to All



Teachers in Guatemala participate in workshops prioritizing women’s health and well-being.

Prioritizing women’s health strengthens families and communities in the Global South. Yet, systemic barriers – like unpaid care work – often prevent women from focusing on their own well-being.

Primarily carried out by women and girls, unpaid care work often involves long, dangerous walks to collect water and firewood, caring for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities, as well as maintaining households. In low-income and rural areas, women may spend up to 14 hours daily on unpaid care work, with far-reaching consequences.

According to Oxfam International, 42 percent of women globally are unable to take on paid employment due to caregiving demands, compared to just 6 percent of men. This imbalance limits

women’s economic opportunities and restricts their access to education and adequate health care. With so much time devoted to others, many women are unable to focus on their own health and well-being, reinforcing cycles of inequality and poverty.

Today, Horizons continues to focus on the interconnectedness of care

work, education and healthy lives. When women and girls have the time and support to receive an education, they tend to marry later, have fewer children, and make informed decisions for themselves and their families.

Access to sexual and reproductive health education also empowers women and adolescents to plan their futures, contributing to lower child mortality rates and increased family wellness. Yet many countries still lack gender responsive healthcare or accessible education. This gap continues to put women’s health at risk.

In this issue, we highlight projects and partners working to advance gender equality, education, sexual and reproductive health rights, and women’s empowerment. When women’s health takes precedence, entire countries can be lifted out of poverty.

Men Share Responsibility



Community leader Genaro Aguilar discusses gender inequality with his community.

In the Global South, men remain primary decision-makers and financial providers while women carry the burden of unpaid care work.

This dynamic reinforces patriarchal structures and limits women’s influence over decisions that directly affect their lives. Women are often excluded as experts on their own health and needs.

Men have a shared responsibility in women’s health. When men are properly informed on all aspects of women’s health, gender-responsive healthcare becomes more achievable, health risks decrease, and family relationships strengthen, which can also reduce rates of gender-based violence.

Genaro Aguilar, community leader of the Marroquín Canton in Guatemala, agrees that men need to play a bigger role in women’s health. “It is our duty to eradicate gender discrimination,” says Genaro.

As part of our Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights project, men in Genaro’s community will attend workshops that promote their participation in the household and the reduction of gender inequality.

“It is important for families, including parents and children, to be educated on these topics together.”

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School a Safe Place for Women



Women attending Reyes Irenes Valenzuela School participate in workshops on positive mental health, self-esteem, and reproductive health.

In Mesoamerica, women’s mental health is negatively affected by high rates of gender-based violence, the burden of unpaid care work, and various economic inequalities. The young female students who attend Reyes Irene Valenzuela School for Women have experienced all three.

The school recognizes that positive mental health is fundamental for overall health and well-being, as it directly impacts self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, and academic performance. It not only promotes

empowerment through education but also provides a safe, welcoming space where women can recover from trauma linked to abuse and violence and focus on improving their mental health.

Reyes Irene Valenzuela ensures access to trauma-based health services, provides workshops on the importance of prioritizing mental health, and creates opportunities where women can express themselves freely and receive professional guidance.

Horizons is partnering with the school on a three-year project that will

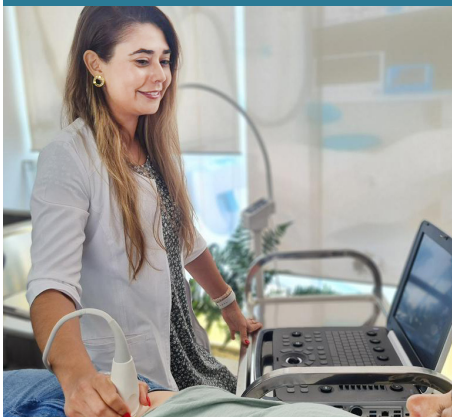
support over 200 students. The school is also teaming up with psychologists at the Catholic University of Honduras, who are providing free services to the students as part of their six-month professional internship.

“Before attending the school, it was very difficult for me to talk about my problems; I felt that no one understood me. Thanks to the talks with psychologists and the support we received through this project, I learned that asking for help is not a weakness, but a step toward feeling better.”

Student at Reyes Irene Valenzuela

“My hope for the future of Honduras is for women to have greater access to comprehensive health services, prevention programs, and public policies that protect their rights,” says Maria Enamorado, project coordinator at Reyes Irene Valenzuela. “Our goal is to build a more equitable society where young women can fully contribute to our country’s progress without limitations based on gender.”

COSTA RICA: New Partner Takes Holistic Approach



We are proud to be working with a new partner in 2026! CEPIA (Culture, Education and Psychology for Children and Adolescents) is a nationally accredited non-profit organization based in Guanacaste, Costa Rica. Guanacaste is recognized as a high-risk area for gender-based violence, human trafficking, and exploitation, especially affecting women, migrants, refugees,

and vulnerable youth.

CEPIA provides legal, psychological, health and social support to vulnerable populations, along with educational classes, life-skills development and entrepreneurship training.

As the first point of contact for those who need help, CEPIA’s lawyer plays a vital role in identifying risk factors, urgent needs, and starting the path to empowerment. Horizons is now supporting the cost of these legal services, enabling women and girls to access care planning facilitated by CEPIA.

Specialized support programs to help women and girls enhance their mental and physical health, well-being, and empowerment include:

Women’s Circles – safe and non-judgemental spaces where women find mutual emotional support and the tools they need to navigate

their personal struggles. These circles strengthen female identity, promote self-recognition and dignity, and encourage women to pursue their individual goals.

Girls’ Circles – provide support for girls ages 8 to 13 who are at risk of experiencing gender-based violence and social exclusion. Through these circles, girls are taught to recognize and advocate for their human rights.

Vida Mujer (Women’s Life) – ensures women in vulnerable situations can fully exercise their sexual and reproductive rights. This program provides gynecological care, accessible sexual education, family planning methods and access to medical appointments.

CEPIA’s holistic approach to health ensures that over 1,023 women and girls each year strengthen their mental and emotional health, understand their rights, and are supported in a comprehensive way.

Investing in Comadronas



A group of traditional healers (comadronas) at their monthly meeting in rural Quetzaltenango.

What does “quality care” really mean when it comes to women’s health? According to the World Health Organization, quality care goes beyond medical treatment alone. It means care that is safe, effective, and people-centred. It also means services that are timely, equitable, integrated,

and efficient, ensuring that everyone, regardless of background or location, can access the support they need.

In rural Guatemala, these principles come to life through the work of comadronas, traditional, Indigenous midwives who are often the first and most trusted point of care for women. At the heart of our Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) project (now called Utz K’aslemaal) is a commitment to strengthen this care by supporting the comadronas who provide it.

During a recent visit, Horizons’ staff gathered with local comadronas to discuss how this project can better support them. One theme stood out clearly: the importance of monthly comadronas’ meetings across each municipality.

These meetings are much more than routine check-ins. They are vital spaces for connection, learning, and mutual support. The comadronas share experiences, seek advice, and navigate the emotional realities of their work – whether supporting a complicated birth or managing sensitive family dynamics. In many cases, they must advocate for women in environments where care decisions are influenced by deeply rooted cultural and gender norms.

Improving women’s health outcomes, including reducing maternal and child mortality, depends on strengthening comadronas. Key strategies of this project include building their confidence in making referrals to clinics and hospitals for at-risk pregnancies, addressing

mistrust in the formal health system, and fostering collaboration between medical professionals and traditional healers.

Through Utz K’aslemaal, we are investing in both the professional and personal development of comadronas. Monthly meetings now include opportunities for skill-building, knowledge exchanges with healthcare workers, and activities that support emotional well-being, self-esteem, and leadership. This holistic approach allows us to support quality care and the people who deliver it.



Introducing Utz K’aslemaal

When naming our Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) project with Global Affairs Canada, we engaged local youth and community members to select a meaningful name in Maya K’iche’, one of the 22 living Mayan languages spoken across Guatemala. This choice honours the country’s Indigenous cultures and linguistic heritage.

The final selection was Utz K’aslemaal (pronounced oots-kahs-leh-MAHL). In English, this roughly translates into “Good Health and Well-being.”

Utz K’aslemaal is a concept of well-being that embraces living in balance with oneself, one’s family and one’s community, caring and respecting the land and natural environment, and recognizing that life depends on this interconnection.

This worldview holds that every person’s body and choices are sacred and deserving of respect. Sexual and reproductive decisions must be made freely, with full autonomy, in ways that are supported by equitable, healthy communities.



Ana Emilia Barrios



“La comadrona nace, no se hace.”

“A midwife is born, not made.”

— Ana Emilia, comadrona for 52 years.

Ana Emilia’s words remind us that comadronas carry generations of knowledge, responsibility, and care. Your donation supports these skilled providers – not only as vital healthcare workers, but as women and leaders – ensuring they can continue delivering culturally rooted, person-centred care grounded in trust, tradition and community well-being.

Seeing Project Impacts Firsthand



11 Educational Tour participants witnessed the Utz K'aslemlal project in action at a local hospital in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala.

In April 2026, 11 participants, Horizons' Executive Director and two staff members, embarked on an inspiring journey to Quetzaltenango, Guatemala to visit our projects with long-time partner, PIES de Occidente.

This year's Educational Tour began with a visit to the Safe Haven II project, which supports young mothers and survivors of sexual violence in a government-run shelter. In 2025, more than 1,000 survivors received education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, entrepreneurship training, and mental health support. Tour participants were able to chat, through an interpreter, with shelter staff about how the project is supporting the girls' hopes, dreams and plans.

PIES staff also introduced tour members to the multi-faceted Utz K'aslemlal project, which among other

things, is working to strengthen health systems for Indigenous women. During a visit to a local hospital, participants saw how this project bridges traditional Maya practices with modern medicine to ensure culturally respectful care.

The project-visit portion of the tour concluded with a traditional Mayan ceremony led by Indigenous midwives (comadronas), followed by a workshop on the importance of preserving ancestral knowledge.

Throughout the tour, participants were also able to explore historical sites, Maya ruins, and museums, deepening their understanding of Guatemala's history and culture.

One tour participant, Brooke Broughton, recently completed her Master of Science in Global Health, as well as a volunteer placement at Horizons. "This was such a rewarding opportunity to see Horizons' projects in action and understand the impact and importance of this work, while also experiencing the beautiful country of Guatemala and its cultures."

Horizons' Educational Tours offer a unique opportunity to witness project

impacts firsthand while connecting with the communities at the heart of Horizons' work. We encourage donors to join us on these tours to gain a deeper understanding of different realities, cultures, and the amazing people of Central America. To learn more, or to sign up for our next tour, please email ewilliams@horizons.ca.

Engaging Young People



Educational Tour participant Brooke Broughton 27, would like to see more youth involved in international development work, "Young people are great at advocating for change, brainstorming new ideas, spearheading action, and inspiring others."

Engaging younger generations is essential to sustaining efforts to reduce poverty and inequality. "My suggestion for young people who want to start getting more involved is to volunteer with an organization like Horizons. It's the best way to make connections, learn from others, and devote your time to a worthy cause."



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