Fall 2026

Horizons OF FRIENDSHIP

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS TO END POVERTY IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO

Preserving Cultural Identities

Community members of Cerro Congo are all beneficiaries of ACUN's work, keeping their Indigenous culture and language alive.

Sustainable development is a phrase used very often, but what exactly does it mean? When countries prioritize the needs of today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, they are working toward sustainable development. It means everyone has access to stable employment, education, quality health care, non-discriminatory policies, and a healthy environment.

So why does sustainable development seem so difficult to achieve? In many countries across Latin America, persistent challenges – such as discrimination, patriarchal structures that limit women's rights, crime, job insecurity, the climate crisis, corruption, and forced migration – continue to create barriers to lasting progress.

These challenges are also shaped by the enduring legacies of colonialism. Colonial systems have historically marginalized Indigenous knowledge, languages, governance structures, and relationships with the environment, often replacing them with Westernized systems that do not always reflect the realities or aspirations of local communities.

Achieving sustainable development requires more than economic growth; it requires addressing historical inequalities and recognizing Indigenous Peoples as leaders and decision-makers in their own communities.

In the Ngäbe Buglé region of Panama, our partner ACUN and Indigenous leaders are working to combat the lasting effects of colonialism in their communities. Recently, ACUN director Blas Quintero brought together Indigenous leaders to discuss the preservation of Indigenous languages and culture.

Indigenous languages are not simply methods of communication, but living systems that carry collective memory, values, traditions, environmental knowledge, and cultural identity. Their growing displacement by Spanish is a significant concern, making it vital to strengthen Indigenous language transmission within families and community spaces.

"We need to recognize that the revitalization of Indigenous languages begins with everyday use and relationships between generations," says Blas. "Looking ahead, ACUN will continue expanding the presence of Indigenous languages in schools, media, and public spaces. This is a small step toward ensuring cultural preservation."

The loss of language is just one example of how colonialism still impacts communities today. Supporting Horizons of Friendship means investing in partners like ACUN, who are advancing Indigenous leadership and building resilient communities for generations to come.

Fighting Colonization

One of the primary objectives of Horizons' current project with our partner ACUN is to protect and preserve the cultural identity of the Ngäbe Buglé Peoples of Panama. Together with Indigenous leaders and elders, the ACUN team is working to reverse colonial structures and enhance the autonomy of the Ngäbe Buglé.

"We are not poor; we have all the natural resources that we need," says Marcelino Montezuma, community leader and beneficiary of our project with ACUN. "We have minerals, forests, tourist areas and many other resources.

"With ACUN's help, we have been able to organize ourselves to fight against colonization. All of us here together, we will continue to deconstruct the old way of doing things while building our own structures and learning from our past mistakes. We won't be here forever, but with the systems we build, new generations will continue advocating for Indigenous autonomy."

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

GUATEMALA Partnering as Equals 2
HONDURAS Lifting Girls Out of Poverty 3
EL SALVADOR Supporting Youth with Disabilities 3
MIGRANT WORKERS: Turning Isolation into Belonging 4

PLUS! 2025-2026 ANNUAL REPORT

GUATEMALA

Partnering as Equals

PIES and Horizons staff use team building exercises to ensure a unified vision for the Utz K'aslemal project.

This past May, members of the Horizons of Friendship team travelled to Quetzaltenango, Guatemala to spend two weeks alongside our long-time partner, PIES de Occidente, and the team leading the Utz K'aslemal project. While project visits are often described as opportunities to monitor progress, this experience reminded us that the strongest partnerships are built through mutual learning, trust, and shared leadership.

This approach is at the heart of decolonizing partnerships – or, simply put, partnering as equals. It recognizes that the people closest to the challenges are also closest to the solutions. This moves us away from traditional models where outside organizations shaped the priorities, and instead places decision-making and leadership firmly in the hands of local communities.

We joined environmental health specialists from Guatemala's Ministry of Public Health for workshops exploring the connections between sexual and reproductive health and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). These conversations reflected one of the unique strengths of the Utz K'aslemal project: addressing health through an integrated approach that recognizes the inseparable relationship between people, communities, and the environment.

> **"Our role is to listen, accompany and support local leadership."**
>
> *—Tamara Mendieta-Britton, Horizons of Friendship*

Our team also attended presentations by PIES staff who shared the progress, challenges, and lessons emerging from their work across dozens of Indigenous communities. Their presentations highlighted not only measurable results, but also the importance of adapting programming to each community's cultural, linguistic, and geographic needs.

Their ancestral knowledge, relationships, and lived experience continue to shape the project and remind us why local leadership is essential to lasting change.

One of the most memorable moments was participating in the final workshop for more than 30 young Indigenous women from San Juan Ostuncalco. Participants rotated through interactive learning stations on life planning, gender-based violence, legal rights, sexual and reproductive health, and environmental stewardship before celebrating the completion of their six-module training.

Seeing many young mothers attend with their children reinforced a key message: meaningful participation requires welcoming, accessible spaces that fit people's real lives.

As Horizons of Friendship continues its commitment to decolonizing international cooperation, visits like this reaffirm that equitable partnerships are not built by bringing answers. They are built by creating space for local leadership, mutual accountability, and shared learning so communities can lead the change they want to see.

To everyone who supports Utz K'aslemal and the sexual and reproductive workshops we host, thank you. Together, we are not only investing in healthier communities but also actively reshaping international partnerships by ensuring those most affected by the issues are leading the solutions.

In partnership with Canada

UTZ K'ASLEMAL

Lifting Girls Out of Poverty

37 young women have already graduated from Reyes Irene Valenzuela School for Girls in 2026.

Over the past few years, Horizons has prioritized re-entering Honduras, one of the most violent and unequal countries in Central America. This April, we started a new partnership, financially contributing to the Reyes Irene Valenzuela School for Girls in Tegucigalpa. Our project supports the school in providing accelerated education, vocational training, and essential legal and health services to girls ages 12-18 living in poverty and employed as domestic workers.

Poverty remains a formidable barrier to development: as domestic housekeepers receive extremely low wages, schooling often becomes inaccessible. Without an education, these young women cannot secure higher-paying jobs, locking them into a perpetual cycle of poverty.

The story of Merari Sánchez exemplifies this struggle and the power of intervention. At age 14, Merari lived in the home where her mother was employed as a domestic worker. Merari also worked there as an unpaid nanny in exchange for attending a nearby school. Although she suffered sexual harassment in the home, Merari remained silent in fear she would lose her education.

Three years later, Merari, now 17, was referred to Reyes Irene Valenzuela, where she has transitioned from a life of fear to one of strength and self-love. "My past experiences turned me into a fearful person who did not love herself," Merari says.

"Now, I have seen a positive change in my life. The school has made me more confident. I value myself, and believe I can achieve my goals, receive a university degree, and get a well-paying job to provide for myself and my mother."

Since our project with the school began:

- 37 young women have graduated
- 60+ parents have learned effective communication methods for families

With your help, these young women can break the cycle of poverty and build a future defined by confidence and opportunity.

EL SALVADOR: Supporting Youth with Disabilities

Pablo Escobar advocates for the rights of his daughter, Andrea Cristina, and other young people with disabilities.

While working on our project with new partner, Asociación Los Angelitos in El Salvador, we saw firsthand how governments and policies can restrict development, reinforce poverty, and act as a barrier to advancing human rights. In 2025, the current government approved the Foreign Agents Law, placing a 30% tax on all funds that NGO's and civil society groups receive from overseas.

This policy places an extreme financial burden on civil society groups. "The government and political situation continue to be unfavourable for those who fight for the rights of people with disabilities and advocate for social justice," says Director Wilfredo Salazar.

Thanks to your gifts, Horizons was able to transfer emergency funds to cover project costs before the law took effect, ensuring our partner faced no financial penalty. We are deeply thankful that your continuous contributions empower us to support partners whenever emergencies like these arise.

The work of this organization is vital. They teach families, parents, and entire communities about the rights of youth with disabilities and provide accessible habilitation, rehabilitation, and education. In the first half of 2026, over 62 families participated in workshops on their family members' right to health, employment and social services.

One family participant is Pablo Alberto Escobar, whose daughter was hit by a stray bullet that left her paralyzed. "Being part of this organization has taught me that people with disabilities have rights that must be respected and guaranteed, and that families and parents have an important role in defending those rights. This knowledge allows me to support my daughter better and understand that she, like anyone else, deserves opportunities to develop and achieve her goals."

Your generosity continues to ensure parents like Pablo, and hundreds of other families of children with disabilities are receiving the education they need to advocate for health, participation, and accessibility.

MIGRANT WORKERS

Turning Isolation into Belonging

Noe, a migrant farm worker in Northumberland County is not only a beneficiary of Horizons work, but also a welcoming face to others who are new to the community.

Loneliness and isolation are endemic among migrant workers, striking at the core of mental and emotional well-being. Uprooted from their home countries and residing in remote rural areas, the workers face long work hours, language barriers, and the loss of the community networks they once relied on.

Horizons of Friendship recognizes that helping these workers means addressing this deep human longing for connection. Thanks to the compassion and generosity of our donors, we are able to provide the essential resources and friendship that turn isolation into belonging.

"The first few weeks are always hard – we are adapting to leaving our families behind and the differences in culture," says Noe, a migrant agricultural worker from Mexico who has been coming to Canada for over seven years.

"Horizons helped me to overcome obstacles just when I needed them most. During my first year working in Canada, I was placed in a difficult work situation. Horizons helped me find a new employer and a stable job, provided access to legal advice, and connected me to local services."

Horizons' dedicated advocacy ensures workers in precarious situations are never alone, giving them a clear path to assistance when they need it most. This approach also eases the stress of arriving in a new country.

"Horizons supports our migrant worker community by providing groceries, offering friendship, and acting as a bridge to essential services," continues Noe. "Often, Horizons is our only source for information. We learn about our health and our rights, and they care for our personal well-being. I thank Horizons for welcoming us and letting us be part of this family!"

Horizons actively works to reduce isolation felt by migrant workers by creating opportunities for workers to share meals, celebrate their culture, build friendships, and access resources and education.

Thank you for helping us create these welcoming spaces every year in Northumberland County.

PIES Comes to Canada October 22–23

Join Horizons of Friendship in welcoming our partner PIES de Occidente from Guatemala for two days of engaging dialogue.

- **Oct 22, Donor Appreciation Event.** Free. Enjoy meaningful conversation with PIES on the projects sustained by your donations; refreshments included. 50 Covert Street, Cobourg, ON, 6 - 8 pm. **For more information:** horizons.ca/events | ewilliams@horizons.ca, 905-372-5483, ext. 22.
- **Oct 23, Speaker Event.** ***Decolonizing Health Systems: The Utz K'aslemal Project and Indigenous Health Equity.*** Engage in discussion with PIES and guest speakers exploring the challenges Indigenous communities face within Western medical systems. Canadian Canoe Museum (11 am - 3 pm). Paid registration required. Includes lunch and full museum access. **For more information:** horizons.ca/events | Irania Ledesma, iledesma@horizons.ca, 905-396-0368.

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