

Current Projects in Nicaragua

The Maria Jose Talavera Women's Construction Project in Condega

The Colectivo de Mujeres Constructoras Maria Jose Talavera was formed in 1987 as a result of an international women's building brigade arriving to construct a school in Condega. Eight women from the local community were working as volunteers on site and were motivated to continue working together through this experience. They organised themselves as a building collective and over the next 5 years made and sold building blocks. Occasionally they obtained contracts to construct new buildings, which at times was difficult due to the economic problems and constant pressures of women working in a non-traditional area.



The collective embarking on a six-month carpentry and furniture making course

Some of these women never had the opportunity to attend school. They came from very poor backgrounds which meant they went out to work at a very young age to support their families. The poorest families, if they ever had any work, normally worked on the land, in the factories, selling food on the streets, or worked as cleaners in the homes of those better off. The unemployment situation has not improved. It is still rising and currently exceeds 70% in Condega. Nicaragua has over the past 15 years undergone many changes but for the vast majority of the population the unemployment, poor housing and poverty remain. Those most badly affected are women. The women involved with the collective want to escape from the poverty they currently face. They want to bring about change, gain independence and gain valuable skills.

Achievements to date :

- In 1992 the collective built their own workshop. During this time they learnt new skills through the attendance of a three month course in the theory and practice of electrics, supervised by CIT's first volunteers on this project, Jill Allot and Gill Irvin.
- In 1994 the collective embarked on a six month carpentry and furniture making course facilitated by CIT volunteers Helen Shears and Gill Wacey. The course covered basic mathematics, metric measurement, timber technology, technical drawing, health and safety, wood machining, carpentry and joinery and design.
- After three months the collective were already selling furniture (made to order) to people both inside and outside the community. This was largely influenced by the collective's decision to make furniture of new and original designs, a novel diversion from the existing traditional designs.

Future plans for the collective include new furniture designs and introducing new skills that will be essential for the collective's long-term sustainability, such as, marketing, financial management, self-organising, assertiveness training and the formulation of a business plan. These skills will provide the needed platform for the collective to survive. It will also enable them to use their workspace as a further training ground to encourage other women in the local community (and surrounding areas) to break down the barriers of women entering this non-traditional area of work.



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