

‘We also have hands!’ Building skills and gender equality in Condega

Junieth Peralta, Kathrin Sautter and **Irene Villafranca** from the Association of Women Builders of Condega highlight how training in technical skills and gender is making a difference to young women's lives.

The Association of Women Builders of Condega (AMCC) provides technical training for women and young people together with courses on sexual and reproductive rights, communication and citizenship. These technical courses integrate theory and practice and open up new opportunities. The gender classes help students to develop critical thinking and to deal with negative attitudes of people not used to seeing women working as carpenters or welders.

Diana Leticia Merlos Bellorín (25) is a welder, carpenter, coordinator of the youth group ‘Naci para Volar’, and AMCC’s vice-president. Diana came to AMCC in 2008 to attend a welding course. She recalls the comments that people would make:

“Whenever I was asked, ‘Where are you from?’ ‘What are you studying?’ I would answer ‘I am in Condega on a welding course’. People would laugh and say, ‘You can’t do that, you’ll get burnt, it will make you sterile, blind, etc.’ - lots of prejudices. Early on, we thought we had all the arguments to defend ourselves but the gender classes have given us more ideas. Sometimes we would say that we could get burnt just as easily working in the kitchen! Also, as health and safety is critical on the job, we are required

to be well protected. If one follows the procedures, nothing will happen. Another thing is manual work. If men work with their hands, we can too, we also have hands!”

Felipa Nery Ruiz González (58), a builder and AMCC president, talks about how the training has improved her self-confidence and self-esteem.

“I am not ashamed to say ‘I am a builder and I can do anything’. And if people say ‘If you are a carpenter, come and hang this door, put this lock on’, I will say ‘yes, with pleasure’. Sometimes, as women, we feel worthless. But that is wrong. Since I came here, I have developed my ideas a lot. I am a leader, I know where to go to talk about the training. I have managed to get people to come here and that makes me feel very powerful.”

Training courses include:

- The “Women’s Technical Training School” programme: basic training in carpentry, home electrics and welding; specialist courses in grain silo making and solar panels; and self-build courses such as remodeling buildings, improved adobe, and natural building.
- The “Advocacy and Citizen Participation” programme: training in sexual and reproductive rights, gender and violence, and communication strategies to break with traditional gender roles.

Interviews from “Atrevete de soñar” by Irene Villafranca : <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IqJc2tI2oVQ>
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 Further information:
 f AMCC - Condega
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 www.amcc-condega.blogspot.com
 www.mujeresconstructoras.org



Welder Diana Merlos

1987 AMCC set up when a group of women on a brigade from the US built the Moises Cordoba primary school. AMCC’s provides women with a place to learn technical skills and trades and to overcome prejudices regarding gender roles.

1995 Carpentry workshop inaugurated in self-built premises and the group starts classes on marketing products.

1999–2001 After Hurricane Mitch, 32 homes built for female heads of households.

2005 Women’s technical training school founded, offering basic courses and specialist courses for retraining.

2010 New larger premises built, using improved adobe and natural building materials and techniques. AMCC offers graduates and students the chance to do practical work on site.