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RAISING OUR VOICES

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WOMEN WHO LIGHT THE DARK

The Global Fund for Women has teamed up with acclaimed photojournalist **Paola Gianturco** to bring you *Women Who Light the Dark*, an exquisite expression of how women are tackling the problems that darken their lives. Paola independently traveled to 15 countries to listen to women describe their dreams and their work. Among the women-led organizations she met, 18 were Global Fund grantees. She interviewed

Moroccan women who produce plays that educate illiterate people about women's rights, met with girls in Zimbabwe who compose and perform poems that move communities to fight child rape and abuse. And in Slovakia she spoke to Roma women who are running programs for their girls that inspire self-respect and the drive to challenge deep-seated discrimination against Roma people.





EXCERPT FROM *WOMEN WHO LIGHT THE DARK*

Featured here is an excerpt about Global Fund grantee, *Mujeres Constructoras*, which trains women to build houses.

NICARAGUA: TRAINING TRADESWOMEN

Drive north three hours from Managua, Nicaragua. Turn off the Pan American Highway when you see the cemetery. Turquoise tombstones mark the graves of Sandinistas from Condega who lost their lives thirty years ago fighting against the military dictator, Somoza. You'll see the captured enemy plane that still looms on the hill like a ghost.

Amanda Centeno Espinoza

With feminist passion born of concerns about class and poverty, Amanda Centeno Espinoza vowed to provide the town's indigent women with job options beyond poorly paid domestic and agricultural work. **Mujeres Constructoras** was born.

Today, the workshop nestles among the few thousand houses that hug Condega's dirt roads. Built of cement blocks, each building has a corrugated metal roof; shutters close over windows with no glass. Cows moo luxuriantly as they wander down the street; roosters screech; dogs bark at nothing; horses clop along with donkeys tied behind them; pigs lather deliriously in the mud after rainstorms. The power goes out often between May and November, which makes it hard to teach

welding and electricity or to use the power saws for carpentry.

The workshop's early years were devoted to "learning by doing." Amanda raised funds in the United States for the first half of the *Mujeres Constructoras*' workshop. Tradeswomen from North America, in Condega to build a primary school, helped construct the workshop, too.

"When the forewoman left, my back was against the wall. I didn't know where to start. Necessity has a dog's face: if you need food, you just go out and get it. I began directing the job, just going with my own intelligence," Amanda recalls. Having learned welding, she built a spiral staircase to the second floor. Everyone pitched in, using what they knew and figuring out the rest.

Once the women had a workshop, they continued to share their knowledge and teach each other. They did "odd jobs" to earn money and experience.

In 1998, Hurricane Mitch affected everything. Condega is located between two rivers whose raging waters changed course, split neighborhoods apart, inundated and destroyed whole barrios. "At first, we evacuated people with our

pick-up," Amanda recalls. "After three days we thought to check our workshop." Just a block and a half from the river, it was awash with water. "We carried as much as we could to the second floor and prepared to truck the big machines to higher ground." Fortunately, the move didn't become necessary because the *Mujeres* were about to need all their equipment.

Mujeres Constructoras set to work building houses for single women whose homes had been destroyed. Amanda negotiated land from the government and contracted to erect 30 houses: an ambitious enterprise given how few—and how inexperienced—project participants were. But help was on the way: emergency relief funds allowed the women to buy a concrete mixer and a concrete block maker. Brigadistas flew in from the UK and the US—skilled tradeswomen who worked with, and taught, the Nicaraguan women.

Mujeres Constructoras hired men to build the frameworks of 19 houses; the women installed plumbing and electricity, then did carpentry work. Amanda supervised the construction of four of the 11 other houses, which the women built alone.

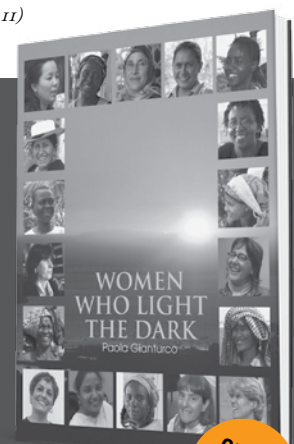
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BOOK TOUR COMING SOON

The Global Fund for Women will be hosting presentations and book signings across the US featuring Paola Gianturco, long-time Global Fund supporter and author of *Women Who Light the Dark*. We invite you to join us in

NEW YORK CITY · Wed, 9/5/07, 6–8 pm LOS ANGELES · Sun, 9/30/07, 3–5 pm
BOSTON · Mon, 9/10/07, 6–8 pm SAN FRANCISCO · Mon, 10/1/07, 6–7:30 pm
CHICAGO · Thurs, 9/20/07, 5:30–7:30 pm MOUNTAIN VIEW, CA · Tues, 10/2/07, 1–2 pm.

Visit our website, www.globalfundforwomen.org, for more information and to RSVP. Or call 415–202–7640 x322. You can preorder a copy of *Women Who Light the Dark* now on amazon.com. All author royalties will be donated to the Global Fund for Women.



EXCERPT FROM *WOMEN WHO LIGHT THE DARK*

(continued from page 5)



Adriana González

Adriana, 27, teaches carpentry like the Energizer Bunny. She is everywhere at once, coaching, measuring, correcting, encouraging and motivating.

One of five children, Adriana was raised by her grandmother who “gave me lots of love, worried about me, supported my education and gave me advice. She is the best.” Adriana’s first job was as an apprentice at Mujeres Constructoras in 1999. “I saw women working here, which caught my eye. My grandmother said, ‘If you want to go, go!’

Adriana has been teaching for over two years now and although at first she “was rebellious,” now she wants “to make the most of her work.” She is “gratified when all the students understand the furniture making process. If even one doesn’t, I am frustrated.”

Adriana knows, “When students look for jobs and show a sample, someone will say, ‘I don’t believe you made that.’ The women have to defend their work and skills. To be effective, they have to face their own fear, have confidence in their ability to proceed, and take risks.”



Mauricio Ramón Gómez Calderón

Three men teach at the school, including Mauricio, 43, a career electrician who joined the workshop a year ago. Generations of his family have lived in Condega; his parents still do and his grandfather did until he died at age 110.

Mauricio not only works with women, he lives with women. He and his wife have three daughters and unlike many Nicaraguan men, he helps care for the girls, cooks, cleans, helps with homework and takes them to school. “I can’t explain why women are described as “the weaker sex,” Mauricio muses. “They have the same mental and physical capabilities as men.”

Nonetheless, his first day at Mujeres Constructoras was “a big step.” His male buddies gave him a hard time “for training the competition. They were more upset because I became a teacher than because I was teaching women. I had only worked with male electricians before, so this is a big, new experience. On the first day, I felt I was entering women’s space. I had to be respectful, I was very aware of that. I still want to make sure they feel secure in themselves.”

“Are there job opportunities for women electricians here?” I ask.

“Women must make the first step. Everything they learn here, they have to show the world. Link their education to the market.” Mauricio knows “many women who have their own business. Some run them better than men.”



Global Fund for Women

The Global Fund for Women is a nonprofit grantmaking foundation that advances women’s human rights worldwide.

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We welcome your feedback on this or other issues. Please contact Sande Smith at 415-202-7640 or media@globalfundforwomen.org.



For the fifth year in a row, the Global Fund for Women has received Charity Navigator’s highest four-star rating, an endorsement of the Global Fund’s fiscal responsibility. www.charitynavigator.org.