Stories of Courage
50 powerful women who turned adversity into possibility
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This publication was financed by the government of Canada through the Technolinks+ project implemented by MEDA.
This publication is dedicated to all campesinas (small-scale women farmers) in Nicaragua.

We present it to you in the hope you will read these stories by and about women and that they may inspire you to be part of MEDA’s effort to create entrepreneurial solutions leading to the reduction of poverty.

Please write your name in the space below, as owner of this work, which was inspired by another book, “Good Night Stories for Rebellious Girls”, by Elena Favilli and Francesca Cavallo.

Name

This publication was reviewed, edited and adapted to MEDA by Dr Cony Peralta, Nicaragua Country Director and Jorge Luis González, MSc., project manager.
The stories in this book were brought together as part of the Technolinks+ project titled “Advancing towards inclusive prosperity in Nicaragua’s agri-food export sector”, which is financed by the government of Canada and implemented by the Mennonite Association for Economic Development (MEDA) in Nicaragua.

First and foremost, MEDA would like to thank very especially the women who agreed to share their stories and allowed them to become part of this book, along with the photographs which were taken, illustrated and included herein.

MEDA is grateful to Global Affairs Canada, which believed in this project and has long supported the people and above all the women of Nicaragua, by developing capacities leading to their economic empowerment.

MEDA is grateful also to the government of Nicaragua, which through its public institutions, in particular the Ministry of Family, Community, Cooperative and Associative Economy (MEFCCA), not only accompanied the process, but were deeply involved in the follow-up to the progress being made by these women in their learning process. We thank in particular the technicians of the MEFFCA branches in Estelí, Nueva Segovia, Madriz, Jinotega, Matagalpa, and in particular those in the municipalities of Siuna and Rosita, in the North Caribbean Autonomous Region.

Special thanks go to our consultant, Dr Wendy Márquez, who used not only her intellect to gather and write down the stories told her by each of the women who are the protagonists of this book, but put her heart into it, with all the love, respect and admiration she has for Nicaraguan women, in this case those who participated in the “Rural Women and Entrepreneurship Program”, a MEDA in Nicaragua initiative.
When we refer to campesinas, or small-scale women farmers, we are talking about women with a high degree of resilience and an enormous potential to get ahead in life through entrepreneurship. Their worth is incalculable: individually they are the economic mainstay of their families; taken together they are a pillar of the Nicaraguan economy.

This book contains the stories of fifty powerful women who are real fighters, turning adversity into possibility. It is an output of the Rural Women and Entrepreneurship Program, implemented by MEDA through the Technolinks+ project and financed by the people and government of Canada, in coordination with the Nicaraguan Institute of Agricultural Technology (INTA) and the Ministry of Family, Community, Cooperative and Associative Economy (MEFCCA).

The aim of this book is to motivate other women as they learn about the reality lived by Nicaraguan campesinas, in the hope they will feel inspired to take important decisions, knowing it is possible to get ahead, overcome adversities, start businesses and learn to use knowledge as a fundamental tool in their personal development and advancement, aware that it is inner strength which, given the necessary tools, are the key to defeat the constraints that hinder not only personal and family development, but that of an entire country.

In this book we introduce you to fifty women who describe the reality of Nicaraguan women farmers as told by themselves. In addition to these fifty, there are of course thousands more who would love to tell their stories but are often silenced by poverty and violence. We hope that those who read this book feel motivated to work for our women, who are waiting somewhere in a corner of our beloved Nicaragua.

Dr Cony Peralta
Country Director
MEDA Nicaragua
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The past only reminds me of how strong and brave I am.
Hello! My name is Nicomedez Manzanares Hernández and this is my story.

I am a farmer, the mother of seven children. I grew up in a poor family and was one of seven siblings. I’ve been working since I was nine years old. I used to wash clothes, making two córdobas a day. I’d give one to my mother and the other to my father. I wanted to study, but I needed to work and help at home.

Fortunately, I knew a schoolteacher, and she taught me the sounds of letters, so I learned how to read, using newspapers and the Bible. At age fourteen I worked at a hotel, washing, ironing, cleaning rooms. I got married to a farmer when I was fifteen. He was a violent man, who beat me, humiliated me and was unfaithful. That was destroying me inside and outside; his words and blows hurt my skin and my heart. He’d say things like “You’re worthless”, “without me you’d be nothing”, or “nobody will ever want you with all those children”.

At 27 I tired of his abuses and gathered the courage to tell him I was leaving. He said: “Nobody’s going to take you, you’ll be on your own”. We separated and he got the house; I had nowhere to go. But for love of my children I decided to start a business raising chickens and pigs. Slowly I got enough money to buy land, and am now the owner of 11 hectares.

Today I like how I live, I’ve got a house, belong to the UCA SOPPEXCCA cooperative, and although I can’t read really well, one of its authorized signatures is mine, and I’m very proud of that. With my sons I produce coffee, plantains, oranges and poultry.

How did we get to this story? Well, I was selected to participate in the MEDA TL+ program, the one they call “Rural Women”. There were a full four days of training, but I managed to go to all of them because my sons agreed to take care of the business. Both the community and the cooperative were very encouraging. I like to have training because it strengthens me both personally and economically. Now I think in a different way, I realize it’s not enough to just have an income, the business has to be profitable, and I know I have to take care of my own self. I want to consolidate my poultry and pig business and am applying for a loan.

Life is a school in which we need to learn how to think before acting and not waste the money we make. Let us be independent women and get ahead by working with our children. Let us take care of ourselves. Youth doesn’t last forever.
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Let’s keep going and never stop
Hello! My name is **Flor de María López Sobalvarro**

I declare myself a winner. I defeated scarcity, abandonment, fear and shame. I never had a father, and my mother raised us by making tortillas, but without earning enough to support us. At age eleven I started working, so as to help her. There was no time to play. I worked as a housemaid, and because I was still so small I had to stand on a chair to do the ironing.

At fifteen I was employed by a Dutch project to work in its vegetable fields. What I made I gave to my mother. With the Dutch I learned how to work under pressure. They were demanding, insisted on punctuality and discipline, values that today I find help me a lot. My dream was to be an agricultural engineer, but I wasn't to be. For a while I felt frustrated, but now I’m a woman farmer with an enterprise, and I’m loving it.

The mother of three children, I’ve been in business since I started selling tamales in the street, carrying a bucket on my head. After some years I earned enough to build my house, where today I live with my partner and children. Sometimes I wonder how many thousands of tamales I sold in my life to build this house. Currently I’m taking a diploma course in agronomy with a scholarship I got from MEFCCA. My business is the making of foods made from maize. I employ two women and pay them a decent wage. My business is run from home and I earn enough to cover our basic needs.

I’m sharing my story today because I was invited by MEFCCA to take part in the MEDA TL+ Rural Women and Entrepreneurship Program. The workshop lasted four days and my family agreed that I should go. So I went and my workers took care of the business, while my mother helped with the housework. Some people criticise us, they say we women go to the trainings just to get away, to hang out, but I don’t listen to them The program gave me new knowledge so I can grow my clientele. I learned about the importance of exchanging experiences with other women. Tools like having a budget and being able to calculate profitability serve to make better use of my time and money. The topic of beliefs made me realize I thought of myself as ugly; I didn't consider myself pretty or valuable, I felt like I was an ignorant person, but I learned that these beliefs were holding me back and I decided to change how I think about myself. Now I feel like dressing up, I look in the mirror and I like myself.

My goal is to build a typical Nicaraguan eatery, in order to offer a better service to my customers. I’ll achieve it by getting a loan. Let me conclude by saying that we need to advance with whatever we have, always going forward, let's not stop moving. We need to talk to each other with love and make the decision to free ourselves from the limitations we have in our minds. We've got to have faith in ourselves and our talents.
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Being independent allows us to be owners of our time.
Hello! My name is **Heydi Mariela Alfaro González**
I am a young farmer, business woman and student. This is my story.

I’m single, no children. When I was growing up, I thought life was easy. As a girl I lived with my parents until my mother decided to emigrate to Costa Rica and work. I stayed back with my father and brother. I felt sad when my mother left, but over time I got used to being without her. I understood she was looking for a better life.

I started to work at the age of fifteen, taking care of a five-month-old infant. However, I left because I was bored and decided then and there to start a business. I’d look at tutorials on YouTube and that was how I started my chicken farm, with economic support from my mother. My neighbours were reassuring, because they told me it was a profitable business. I wanted to be independent and make my own money, although I was still young, and I’ve done so. With my income I’m able to pay for my university studies in natural sciences. So why am I studying if I like being a businesswoman? Because when I was little, I wanted to be a teacher and once I get my degree, that’s what I’ll do. To be both a businesswoman and a teacher, that’s my goal. When my business is in its low season, I live off my savings and reinvest in my farm. I work from home because it is on a piece of land our father gave my brother and me.

I was chosen by MEFCCA to become a part of the Rural Women program. Since I work on my farm with funds I get from the government’s Zero Usury program, and all along have been an excellent client, MEFCCA invited me to the program it has with MEDA. To be able to attend I faced what for me was a serious obstacle, namely the fact that I’ve always been afraid of speaking in public because I might make a mistake and people would laugh at me. But at the workshop I overcame that barrier and now I feel more secure. My family wanted me to go, my community knows me as a young and enterprising woman, and my neighbours congratulated me.

My aspirations and goals for the future are to finish my university studies and grow my poultry business. I’ll be increasing the number of customers, of sales and am going to look for funds to expand the farm. What I learned at the workshop helped my time management skills by learning how to set priorities. Now I see myself as a businesswoman capable at the same time of being a professional. I learned that I have the power to choose and am the leader of my own life. I don’t have to depend on anyone else to take a decision. Let me close my story by saying that to start a business allows us to become independent as women and take decisions by ourselves. Even when we start out small, by our own efforts we can grow to be large and the owners of our time.
To empower oneself as a woman is the first step towards economic empowerment.
Hello! I’m Marbely Salvador González and I thank you for reading my story.

I’m married, the mother of three children, an entrepreneur and president of the CCOTUCPROMA, a community tourism cooperative that works to protect the environment. I grew up in a home with five brothers, and we all worked the farm, growing cassava and beans. But we also went to school, which meant walking some 6.5 km every day. It was hard, trudging along under the burning sun in the dry season and getting soaking wet when it rained. When we got home, my dad would say: “Darling, if it’s too much with all that sun, just stop going to school”. But when I imagined myself leaving school it just broke my heart, and I’d decide to stay on. Eventually I graduated, applied for a scholarship to the university, and got it.

My first enterprise took place at the university, where I offered my services to lazy students who didn’t like to do their homework. I’d charge them and with what I made paid for part of my expenses. I managed to graduate, and was by that time already the mother of my first daughter, but in my marriage I was living a situation of psychological violence. I overcame that when I began working at the Nueva Segovia Union of Agricultural Cooperatives, where my job was to empower women. This gave me courage I needed to stop the violence: I confronted my husband he never yelled at me again.

Although I had studied at a university, I went back out into the country, to live like a campesina, like a small farmer, because I love the countryside and rural life. Having been a part of the Rural Women program I’ve decided to increase the profitability of my businesses by diversifying them. Now I produce and make dairy products out of goat’s milk. My target market is my community, to whom I will offer these products by highlighting their nutritional properties as a way of promoting healthy foods.

My main takeaway from the program is that, by taking the lead in my own life, by believing in my capacities, I can become a better businesswoman and influence other women in my community, so we all flourish together by doing business, improving both our personal futures and that of our communities. To empower oneself as a person is the first step to economic empowerment. My family gave me their support so I could attend the MEDA workshop and at the cooperative I was asked to share what I had learned. My message to you is that we must believe in ourselves, make every effort to learn everything we can and always be on the lookout for new opportunities to start a business.
To start a business, we need to have faith in ourselves and value what we do.
Hello! My name is Angélica María Pineda Hernández

I am a young campesino woman, an entrepreneur and this is my story. I grew up in a family of farmers, with my parents and six brothers. I was the youngest. Now I’m 18 years old and I love everything that’s related to business. That’s why I’m studying accounting. I started to work when I was 17 by planting celery with a group of young people in the community. We didn’t make any money, but no matter – really the objective was to demonstrate that we could create a savings bank for young entrepreneurs and motivate the community with our example. We know that with effort and work one can do well in rural areas.

Having been a part of the Rural Women program, I decided to launch a business, together with another girl in our community. With our savings we bought thirty chickens and started a small poultry farm. We’ve been applying what we learned about setting intelligent objectives, the process of reflection needed before investing and the knowledge to analyze the potential profitability of a business. With the first results, we realized that selling eggs was not profitable and that we’d have to make a bigger investment if we were to be sustainable, because with the initial sales we couldn’t cover costs and keep the farm going. I don’t think of this experience as a failure, but rather as a lesson learned. Now I’m going to buy piglets and fatten them. To be able to do that, my friend and I are working part-time at an agricultural services dealership. With our wages we pay for our studies and are saving money to buy the first pigs.

From the program I learned about resilience and how failures are lessons and experiences acquired that should ensure that we persevere as businesswomen. When MEFCCA asked me to join the program, my family congratulated me. I’ve shared what I learned with my family and other youngsters in the community. My goals for the future are to continue studying, to have my own business and serve as an example and inspiration to other young rural women in my community, so they too thrive as empowered women who go on to become the leaders of their own lives.

My message to women farmers and to young people in particular is that they should accept themselves as they are. We all are valuable in our own way. If we want to invest and launch a business we need to have confidence in ourselves, and make people see and understand the value of what we’re doing. We must believe in God, let the past go and remember only the lessons it left us. Women need to work together, united, in cooperation with other women and like that we’ll achieve more. Respect for others and the honesty and courage to say what we like and also what we don’t – that is what will make us effective women leaders.
Let’s teach our children to believe in their talents and potential.
Hello! My name is Arlen Ruiz López

I’m a woman, a farmer, an entrepreneur and this is my story. I am married and have two children, twins. I love cacao and nine years ago we started to grow it on my father’s farm. So I grew up in a family of nine cacao planters. My mother was a housewife who raised animals and sold food to support us. I started work when I was eleven by selling things my mother made, like popsicles and plantain chips. I’d sell at the schools, in the mornings and the afternoons. Ever since I was a child, I wanted to study a profession related to farming. So after secondary school, I studied to become an agricultural technician and also have a diploma as an executive secretary.

Although I had to work when I was still a girl, I remember that my childhood was a happy one. It was fine and today I’m grateful for everything. Now I’m a member of the COSMU R.L. cooperative and I work at an eatery in the marketplace in the municipality of Rosita. At the moment I can’t dedicate all my time to my business because I still lack resources to make enough products, become profitable and depend only on my income from the business.

I was pleased to be able to partake in the Rural Women program. My husband supports and backs me. I share everything I learned with the women who work with me at the market and being able to share knowledge with others makes me feel empowered. It’s the same with the women in my cooperative and my friends, some of whom are victims of violence and need to empower themselves and take ownership of their lives as leaders so they can overcome their situation of domestic violence.

Having been a participant in the program, the matter of the impact certain beliefs have on us, the topic of women and leadership, faith and resilience – all these have helped me to change the way I see myself. Now I feel more self-assured and I can say that although thus far I don’t have the money I need to start a business, I know I can do it! My hope, my goal is to work full-time at making and selling cacao jams and marmalades, because I think this is a delicious offer, different and with a good possibility of success. I believe in my products and their potential.

What I need now is time to gather money, buy the jars and equipment necessary to generate an income and make a profit. Meanwhile I’m saving and looking for funds. To those reading my story, I say: Get going, work hard and you’ll make it. Let’s teach our children that they can do anything they want to in life if they put in the effort and dedication it takes. Above all, let us teach them that when they grow up they should do something they like, according to their talent and potential.
We need to demolish the fear of what others may think or say, and evolve as women.
Hello! My name is Carmen Onelia Pérez Zelaya

I’m a widow and the mother of four boys. I grew up in a family of coffee growers, one of nine siblings. I’ve been working since I was eight, harvesting coffee with my dad. Ever since I was a girl, I wanted to become an independent woman because I saw machismo all around me. I wanted to have my own business and be the owner of my time. I got married when I was fifteen and at the beginning my husband was a family man, but I wasn’t his only love.

The beliefs imposed on us by society forced me to stay married for the sake of the children and live with the suffering caused by my husband’s infidelities, which led to depression. This went on until one day I decided I didn’t care what people thought anymore and I left him. Although this was painful, the decision was an act of personal liberation. My husband and I had a farm, it was a family business, and despite our separation, we continued working together. I had the strength and intelligence to separate my feelings from our business matters, until one day he died of a heart attack.

Currently I run a nursery, have a biofertilizer business and a coffee farm. MEFCCA picked me to take part in the Rural Women program. I made the effort and attended the four-day workshop, although it meant shuffling my business tasks and responsibilities at home with the children. But I was able to accommodate things and didn’t miss a single day. This experience has strengthened my capacities as a woman because it gave me the opportunity to see other women who are now where I was at when I got started in business. I felt really motivated when I saw how much I had achieved by fulfilling my ambition to own my business and my time.

To become an economically independent woman is what’s kept me alive and with the desire to get ahead. The program helped me understand myself as a capable, valuable and empowered woman, the leader of her own life. My future ambitions with my business are to expand my market and grow. I’m looking for funding, so I can invest. My message to anyone reading my story is that we need to overcome the fear of what others may think of us, be willing to evolve, overcome whatever holds us back, and organize together, because alone we won’t be able to knock down the barriers we face. To exchange our stories and share our experiences helps us to see every story as a spark that can light our internal flame and any one of the women can motivate another woman who needs her inner self to be awoken.
Pain made me grow, not give up, so I became the valuable woman I am today.
Hello! My name is Celia Maricela Toruño Gutiérrez

I grew up in a home that was economically comfortable. However, my parents had no time for me and I felt very much alone. When I was five years old one of my parent’s customers abused me sexually; I ran and didn’t tell anybody for fear of being punished. At the time, people thought that if a woman were touched by a man before marriage, she would lose all her worth, and I used to believe that.

At the age of fifteen I had a boyfriend who was 25 and I told him that I had been abused as a child. He took advantage of that to have sexual relations with me, and as a result my mother forced us to get married. I had no experience, I didn’t know how to keep house and he’d say “You’re no good as a wife”, and I’d believe that too. At school, in turn, I was criticized for having gotten married early, but even so, I managed to finish secondary school. I became a mother at eighteen and decided to attend a university, against the wishes of my mother and husband. But when she saw me persevere, my mother helped me economically, although not without making insulting comments regarding the use I made of the money. When I graduated with a degree in Spanish, I separated from my husband.

I thereupon became a teacher and met a man with whom I had two children. However, he was violent, and then I lost my job, meaning I became dependent on him. He was a musician and didn’t make enough to provide for us. I tried to leave him, but couldn’t, and instead had another baby. Eventually, though, I became a single mother. I didn’t make enough money, and they’d cut off the electricity and water for lack of payment and at times we went hungry. Still, I never gave up and the situation I was in made me think of starting a business of my own. Although I suffer from multiple sclerosis, I feel blessed, because I was able to set up my business. It’s called “Mary’s Crafts and Gifts”. I work from home with my daughter, making all sorts of handicrafts, decorations for events and teaching decoration courses.

I joined MEDA’s Rural Women program, and at the workshop I learned how to set priorities, identified the beliefs that kept me chained and now I’m replacing them with beliefs that help to train me as a businesswoman. I’ve changed the way I see the past and I think this has contributed to my strength as a woman. During the workshop we learned about some valuable tools with which to run a business. Now I want to consolidate it and position myself in the handicrafts market in the town of Jinotega. To conclude, I would leave this message: pain shows us how to deal with life and its adversities. Don’t ever give up on your dreams!
Perseverance is the mother of all virtues.
Hello! My name is Elisa Asiel Díaz Altamirano

I am a young woman, a small farmer and an entrepreneur. I grew up with my grandparents. Our family is one of farmers, growing coffee and maize. When I was a girl, I wanted to be an adult, but now I see that every stage in life has its own time. Once I finished secondary school, at the age of 18, I started to work and earn an income.

At 24, I had the opportunity to attend a university, and I studied social sciences. I haven’t married and have no children because I’m waiting for the right person to come along. I’ve seen how women I know have had bad experiences when they got married. So I prefer to wait and focus on my education, my work and on training, so that I become economically independent and if someday the question of marriage comes up, let it be with a partner who accepts me the way I am, someone who acknowledges me as a valuable woman.

Like I say, today I feel valuable, I’m quite clear about what I want from life, and that’s why I’m a businesswoman. A friend and I run a bakery, called “Sweet Temptation”. We make bread from wheat and maize, rosquillas (a ring-shaped snack made of maize and cheese) and tortillas. At the beginning it was hard because we didn’t have enough money and were afraid of failing, but we’ve persevered and here we are. With the income from our bakery I cover at least 60% of my basic needs.

When I was named to attend MEDA’s TL+ Rural Women workshop, my family, and my mother in particular, told me I had to take the opportunity. I learned many things in those four days, put them into practice and people have told me they notice I now have more self-confidence. With what I learned about budgets, profitability and other such tools, we grew the bakery, and although some said we’d fail because we were too young to run a business, we’ve kept on going. The program helped me to change certain self-limiting beliefs I had about myself. Today I feel I can do business and my self-esteem has been strengthened.

My vision of the future is to continue to expand, refurbish the locale, offer a home delivery service and employ other women, especially if they are unwed mothers. I want to be a successful entrepreneur who supports other women and serves as an inspiration. I’d like to leave a message to those who read this book: the things we wish for don’t always come to pass in the way we wanted them to, but perseverance is the mother of all virtues. So let us forge ahead together and always persevere!
“A smile has the power to overcome difficulties.”
Hello! My name is Marely Anielka Matey Figueroa and thank you for reading my story.

I grew up in a family setting that was healthy and full of love. My mother is an example to follow. In addition to housekeeping, she made pork tamales and ran a fried food stand to help with the family income. When I was a girl, my dream was to become a lawyer and defend the rights of vulnerable people, but it was not to be, because I couldn’t afford the university. I started to work when I was 18, helping my mother in her business, and got a technical degree in accounting. Now I’m taking another technical course in customs management.

I’m married, but we don’t have children. At 19 I lost a child, and that experience got me researching natural medicine so I could treat my physical condition using plants. That was the most painful experience in my life, but I’m not embittered. To the contrary, it was very transformative for me as a person because I discovered I could also create an enterprise around natural medicine. I love life and don’t let myself be hemmed in by boundaries. I learned how to accept difficulties and discovered that being able to smile in the face of pain is a medicine for the soul and helps us to move on.

The first MEFCCA training helped me to start an enterprise. I learned how to make plant pots and handicrafts using recycled materials. Further, I deepened my knowledge of medicinal and exotic plants. That was how I started my medicinal plants business, to which I dedicate the late afternoons and evenings, since during the day I work as an accountant to ensure I have an income, while the business grows.

My husband was among those who motivated me to attend the MEDA TL+ Rural Women program, which left me a very important lesson about resilience. That was when I became aware I am a very resilient woman and that no one and nothing can cut my wings to prevent me from flying in this life.

The goal of my enterprise and on which I want to concentrate as a businesswoman is to establish a botanical garden, to honour the environment by taking advantage of the valuable medicinal plants that exist in Nicaragua and to rescue some that are on the verge of extinction. I intend to practice natural medicine and offer my services to improve the health and quality of life of the Nicaraguan people. Let me tell you with all due certainty that we as women cannot allow ourselves to be defeated by some beliefs they may have put in our heads when we were little girls and that now limit us when we dream of creating an enterprise. We must have faith in ourselves and our business ideas.
Stories of courage: 50 powerful women who turned adversity into possibility

“Only those who don’t set themselves goals don’t achieve them.”
Hello! I’m Yelba Yarisca Colindres Escalante and I want you to know my story.

I was raised in a very poor family. We didn’t have our own house. My father’s a farmer, my mother a housewife. I started work when I was very young, taking care of seven siblings. We lived at my grandparents’ house, where we were maltreated because they saw us as freeloaders. Anyway, there were about twenty people living in that place. With great effort my father and oldest brother finally were able to buy a piece of land, and by struggling and sticking together we were able to get out of where we were, at long last.

When I was 22, I met my partner and went to live with him. We were very poor and once again I went through not having a place to call my own. This time my parents lent us a space, until eventually my father gave us a piece of land and we were able to build a small house. So now I finally have a place and we’re not overcrowded because there’s only my partner, myself and our daughter. I wasn’t able to study much and only got to third grade, because of my family situation, but now I am able to give my daughter the opportunity to study and that makes me happy.

My partner and I have a model parcel, on which we grow all sorts of crops to make a multi-grain cereal: velvet beans, pigeon peas, roselle, cacao, peppers and sorghum. The workload is shared: he’s in charge of sowing and growing, I do everything related to production, to the actual making of our products. Every month we sell between twenty and forty pounds of cereals and up to 120 pounds of annatto. With that we cover our basic needs.

My approach to growing the enterprise is to improve the quality of our packaging, increase the number of customers, place our products in stores, eateries and other businesses, like the stands at the market in the town of Ocotal.

When I was invited to attend the MEDA TL+ Rural Women program my partner wanted me to go. My only problem was that I couldn’t leave our little daughter alone, so I took her with me to the workshop because I really didn’t want to miss it. The training changed how I see things. I learned about the importance of understanding what products are profitable, to value my work in terms of effort, costs and the time we invest. I also now see myself differently. Sharing experiences with other women at the workshop helped me to overcome the fear of speaking in public. Today I feel I am a capable woman, confident that I can reach my goals.

My message to all women is: let us learn to believe in ourselves, believe that we are able to overcome any barriers and start our own businesses.
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Never give up on our goals

“”
Hello! My name is Ernestina Rodríguez Pineda. I am grateful for this opportunity to share my story.

I’m married, have three wonderful children and together we’re known as “the Pinedas” in the community where we live. When I was seven, my parents decided to move to the municipality of Jinotega. They were farmers, mainly raising cattle and growing coffee. We were fleeing from the war, and in the hurry to get out of the conflict zone my parents sold cheaply the land and assets it had taken them so much effort to put together. I graduated from the university with a degree in physics and mathematics, then worked as a primary school teacher, which had been my childhood dream.

I had met my future husband while in secondary school, and together we moved to the community of Apanás, where we began our enterprise growing vegetables. I can say that I’m a happy person, hardships notwithstanding, because there will always be some. My family is united, we work together and love what we do. We are a blessed family, through our faith in Christ. Ours is a family business, we grow and market lettuce, celery and parsley, and thanks to our efforts and perseverance we now sell our products to Walmart, PriceSmart, the market in Jinotega and the Oriental Market in Managua.

Our family works as a team, and each has an assigned role. We employ twelve persons full-time and another eleven part-time, since we don’t have the capacity to keep everyone on the payroll all year round. I supervise the processes, my husband and oldest son deal with management and sales, and my younger daughter helps with quality control.

I was a participant in the MEDA TL+ Rural Women program. My entire family wanted me to go, because we felt it was a valuable opportunity for our family business. The experience added to my knowledge, in particular as regards improving processes and becoming more aware of how to overcome some problems that can happen to any business, like losing customers. One of the things that helped me most was learning about resilience. For me understanding what it is has been key, and I can now focus on carrying on, problems notwithstanding.

Our plans for the future are to consolidate the business as a family and transform our products so we gain access to new lettuce markets by using an aquaponic system, which is environment-friendly and adds higher-quality nutrients to the plant. The goal is to become known as “Pineda Agribusiness”.

Although sometimes there are challenges in life, my message is: “Let us be women of faith, never give up our goals and keep an open mind to everything that’s possible”. 
Love for our children inspires us to face any challenge.
Hello! I am Derling López Vega and I want to tell you about my life through this story.

When I was little, I had many dreams: I wanted to have a shelter to rescue dogs and cats, a home for the elderly, and to study medicine. I never did study medicine, but instead got a degree in agricultural production systems. After that I became pregnant with twins and only one survived, although she has infantile cerebral palsy, microcephaly and epilepsy. But even with this painful experience, I consider my life valuable because I’m healthy and have a family, with my husband and daughter.

I’m an entrepreneur who works from home, because like that I can take care of my princess. My business consists of making bracelets and other ornaments using thread, and I top up what I make by working at a store. My husband has a job and together we support the family.

I learned about the MEDA TL+ Rural Women program from my friend María Magdalena López, who had attended the program earlier. I applied and was accepted. The first challenge I faced was that I had to convince my husband to take care of our small daughter for those four days I’d be gone. The second was to get permission from my boss. Of the two, the second went well, because she not only gave permission but assured me it was the right thing to do. But with my husband it was harder. After considering several possibilities, he gave in and agreed to take care of our daughter for the duration of the workshop. This in turn gave rise to something very positive in our relationship: he said that before he hadn’t had the chance to spend time alone with her, but now understands what it takes to care of a girl with a special condition.

The program left me some great gains, both at personal level and that of my enterprise. For one, it changed the way I value myself and my work, because before the prices of my products and services were beneath their real cost. It was important for me to discover I had beliefs that were in practice limitations, because they filled me with fear when it came to charging a fair price for my work.

Now I want to invest, consolidate my business and grow the number of customers I have. I hope to employ single mothers of children with disabilities so I can help them to become self-sustainable. As a message I would say this: we can overcome the obstacles we face in life and knock down the self-imposed barriers that hinder our development.
We must live each day keeping in mind the thought 
Yes, I Can!
I’m the daughter of farmers who grow staple foods, such as beans and maize, as well as cacao. When I was a little girl, I dreamed of becoming an astronaut, because I wanted to visit the moon, which seemed like such an isolated and unique place. While growing up I was always obedient and paid attention to everything my parents told me.

I started working as a babysitter when I was 14, but then I stopped working so I could study medical technology and find a job at a clinical laboratory. That was really my parent’s choice, and I wasn’t happy because I didn’t have a purpose in life set by myself. I lived according to my parent’s wishes and what others wanted me to do.

One day my mother was diagnosed with depression, brought on by a situation on her side of the family, and that was when my life took a sharp turn. I had to take care of my mother and dropped out of the university. I began working at the COMUCOR cooperative in Rosita, as a traceability technician, and although it may sound strange, for me leaving the university came as a relief, because I learned how to take my own decisions. One of these was to study accounting, and I’m glad I did so. I’m still working at the cooperative, but plan to open a business, a clothing store. I already have the locale, and am now looking for seed capital to buy the merchandise so I can get started.

I joined the MEDA TL+ Rural Women program because the cooperative knows I want to go into business. So I was a natural candidate and by consensus with my partner we decided to take the opportunity. I shared what I learned at the workshop with all members of the cooperative, and the men came to realize that the workshop is not there to teach women bad things about them, because sometimes that’s what people think in the communities.

The workshop helped me to improve my communication skills. I used to be very shy and afraid of speaking in public, but when I heard all those other women giving their opinions, I was excited about making a contribution. Then my participation won a prize, and that too helped give me confidence and overcome my fear. I’ve changed how I perceive myself and feel more secure, more capable, decided and I’m optimistic about my enterprise.

What I learned about networking opened my mind to the idea of devising a business strategy. I am very grateful, and want to leave this message to other women who may be reading this story: we need to cultivate our self-confidence, believe in our value as women, and live each day keeping in mind the thought “Yes, I can!”
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“Now I’m going for it!”
Hello! My name is Gelsomina Gregoria Flores Ayestas and I want to tell you my story.

When I was a girl I dreamed of becoming a customs agent, because I thought that would help me learn about and meet people from other countries and work in an office. My mother was an enterprising woman, she sold food to support us. One day my father left and went off to start another family. Supporting seven children was hard on my mother, and she had to give me to my oldest sister, who raised me. My sister and I worked selling tortillas so we could attend school. It was a major effort, but I managed to finish secondary school.

I met the father of my first girl and went with him. It was a painful experience, because he was very domineering, so I left and with my daughter went to my mother’s home. I started to work as a cook, and met my current partner, who is a barber. Although we have financial problems, I’m all right, because I have a stable family. With our savings and some help from my mother we were able to build our house. I run my business from home, and am very proud of it. I began by buying a table and a chair and my first sale were five enchiladas. I’ve grown it since and now have plans to expand, especially after everything I learned at the MEDA workshop.

The community can be suspicious when women go off to be trained. When I was asked, some neighbours criticized me, but I paid them no attention. I saw it as a very profitable investment of my time. Before this program came around, I was quite discouraged, because sales were slow and I felt I couldn’t continue. However, I learned many things I can do to improve and now that I’m applying what I learned I see that things are looking up.

What I learned fills me with hope. I’ve acquired knowledge that will help me to increase customers be expanding my network of contacts. To carry a record of expenditures and income is helping me make better decisions. I used to feel a bit off and didn’t see myself setting or achieving any objectives, but now I think I have a better chance of success in my enterprise. Also, getting to know the other protagonists, hear about their fears and hopes, has helped me to recover my self-confidence and carry on, which after all is what I’ve done since I was a girl.

I want to improve my business by making changes to my sales point, so I can offer a better service and increase the number of customers. I’ve got some savings and I intend to get a loan so I can invest in some improvements and equipment. To the women out there I say: Let’s concentrate on setting and achieving clear goals. We need to find people who train us really well and see us as the valuable, enterprising campesino women we are.
Let us leave fear behind
Hello, I’m Yesenia González Ponce

I grew up with my parents. My mother had a business, she sold fruits and vegetables; my father was a farmer. I began harvesting coffee when I was eight years old, and with what I earned I paid for my school supplies, for at nine I started my education, and managed to finish secondary school. My life as a child and adolescent had its ups and downs. Sometimes we went hungry, and it was tough. At the time my parents didn’t have their own house, and we were staying with my grandparents.

Today I’m a single mother with a 17-year-old daughter. I have my own house, and besides my daughter, my parents and a sister and her children live with me. Despite its fluctuations, I think all-in-all I lead a good life, and one of my achievements is to have become a businesswoman. I sell used clothes and roasted ground coffee. I am determined and well-organized, and that is why I was chosen to be trained. Family is important in a woman’s life, the support it offers is crucial to development, and that was how I was able to attend MEDA’s Rural Women program.

At the workshop I learned a new way of seeing a business. I now understand it is not only a matter of earning an income, but that we also need to make a profit, so as to make it worthwhile to invest time and money. I also learned that businesses must set realistic goals, must keep its feet on the ground. When I think in those terms, I see myself as a successful businesswoman. Before, I had doubts about myself, but having learned about leadership has strengthened my perception of my talents. I now have a clear view of what I want to achieve.

Today I can say: “Yes, I can!” My goals for the future are clear and one of them is to help my daughter finish her studies. In the short term I want to grow my two businesses, increase my customers and put into practice what I learned about networking.

I want any woman who may read this to know that we can be very committed to ourselves as women and are able to achieve what we set out to do. But we must be wise, and wisdom comes from God. We must never lose faith in ourselves, and instead must leave fear behind. If we fail, we need to get up and try again, as often as necessary, and never give up. We must forgive those who have done us harm and move on.
I learned that I’m a capable person.
Hello! My name is Elba Lilliam García and this is my story.

To begin with, I never knew my father because he died before I can remember. My mother is a hard-working woman, and at the time was a housemaid who supported me and my brother, who has a disability. My mother always found a way to get ahead and worked hard all her life. As a result she now owns a store and works with my brother, who makes piñatas.

When I was growing up, life was hard, because my mother worked in Managua, and we were taken care of by a neighbour, who maltreated us. When my mother found out, she looked for someone else, but it happened again. In the end, we grew up practically alone, taking care of each other.

As a girl, my dream was to become a nurse. I liked seeing nurses dressed in white. But at the age of 12 I started working as store clerk. I didn't feel I was getting much support, because due to her job my mother was almost always absent, and there was no one to help me with my studies, so I grew up feeling very much alone. Time went by, I ended up studying topography and took a course to become a barista. Life continues to be difficult, but I have the hope I can forge ahead with my children. I work cleaning homes, sell roasted ground coffee that I buy from an intermediary and am employed at a store.

As women who have children from different fathers know, it is hard to lead a balanced family life. I hope that my partner and I can get help so we become a united family and all the children are treated equally.

When I said I wanted to go to MEDA's Rural Women workshop, my partner did not agree. He became angry and wouldn't support me, so I had to take my young son with me and leave my daughter with my mother. That was a for me a big decision to take, but I don't regret it because the workshop helped me to raise my expectations as a woman and entrepreneur. I’m changing my approach to challenges and possibilities, so I can overcome this stagnation and get ahead with my children. At the workshop I was able to face up to my fears and felt capable of overcoming the problems I face. I learned about networking, how to calculate profits and whether a business is worthwhile or not. My mind was opened to using an approach I want to put in practice as I continue with my business.

For now my objectives are to achieve economic Independence through my business, which is selling roasted ground coffee. I want to label it in order to sell a more attractive product and like that increase the number of customers.
We need to lose our fear and believe in ourselves.
Hello! My name is Katerine Beranay Tórrez Vásquez

I am a campesino woman and my enterprise is about producing and selling honey. In other words, I’m a beekeeper. Some people think it’s dangerous because they’re afraid of being stung, and it’s true – those bees sting hard! What got me started was curiosity, and although it may sound funny or crazy, that is what got me going as a woman whose business is beekeeping.

Everything started in the year 2019, when I had the opportunity to be trained in beekeeping, together with 25 other women. Like I said, I went because I was curious, and over time grew to love working with and handling bees. And that was how my enterprise began. It’s called DELIKAMIEL. The anxiety I felt was a challenge. However, I really needed to work and get on with life, and that was stronger than my fear, which I overcame with the support of my family.

As an entrepreneur, I faced two additional challenges: being young and being a woman. People kept telling me that beekeeping was for men only and that since I was only twenty, I was sure to fail. But I decided not to listen to these negative voices and said to myself: “I’m someone with very clear goals and I know what I want, so I’m not going to let these pessimistic opinions affect me”.

When the occasion arose to attend the MEDA TL+ Rural Women program, other windows opened up and I learned how we as enterprising women need to take ownership of ideas that inspire us to overcome those negative voices. I realized I need to fill my mind with enabling ideas that help me to get on, to believe in myself, in what I do, my goals, my business. I now know that if I want to be the leader of my life, it is I who have the power to make choices, whom to believe, whom to listen to so I can be successful.

To you, who are reading this, I want to say that if you want to and feel you can start a business, do it! Don’t hold back because of your age or gender. I invite all women to believe in ourselves, in our abilities. Let us concentrate on what helps us to get ahead and avoid those thoughts that get us bogged down in predicaments, because every one of us has skills that can help us reach our objectives, our dreams. Let us never stop believing in ourselves and if we’re going to lose something, let it be our fear.
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“The past has no power over us.”
Hello! My name is Leyla Lisseth González García

I grew up in a family of three children. My parents were enterprising people. My father sold maize-and-cheese rings and my mother raised pigs. I finished secondary school when I was 17. I'm the mother of a 12-year-old son, and he and I constitute a family. The hardest thing I've ever done was to be a single mother, because after four years together I never imagined my partner would leave me and on top of that deny he was the father of our son. This situation led to a diagnostic of depression, which I overcame with my mother's help, who is the person I'm most grateful to in my life.

I say that my path as a businesswoman began when I bought a sow. My mother was my example and everything she taught me served as training for the job. When I started my enterprise, our neighbours made me feel discouraged, saying the pig was going to die or run away and that I would never be a success at this sort of thing. But I decided to persevere. I raised her and she had ten piglets. That was my first experience as an entrepreneur.

Being a single mother was one of my biggest motivations, and with my small pig farm, as I call it, I've been able to support my son. My dream when I was a girl was to become a nurse, but I wasn't able to study nursing when I came out of secondary school. No matter, my enterprise has given me the opportunity to pay for my studies and I eventually got my degree as a nurse. But now I've decided to focus on my business as my main source of income, and the knowledge I acquired in my studies can be a second source of income as I offer my services in the community.

I participated in the MEDA TL+ Rural Women program. This workshop allowed me to share my experience as a businesswoman with the other protagonists, and that made me feel valuable. It boosted my self-confidence and reminded me that my value as a woman depends on what I choose to believe. I came to understand the need to leave the past behind to be able to get on with my life, my business and my family. I became aware that I have many possibilities as an enterprising woman and that if I decide to concentrate on what lies ahead, I can achieve a better life for myself and my son.

If I were asked for advice, my message would be that the past has no power over us, and once we leave it behind, it is where it’s supposed to be: over and done with.
"We must learn to forgive, so we can move on and be at peace with ourselves."
Hello! My name is Reyna Isabel Peralta Colindres

My story is similar to that of many women farmers in Nicaragua, a country with a history of warfare, and war was the reality I grew up in. My mother had been a guerrilla fighter and afterwards became a cook in the army, while my father was a member of the army’s border troops. My and my brother’s childhood was cruel, we suffered physical and emotional abuse on the part of our aunt and her husband, with whom our mother had left us when we were very small. My brother and I began working by helping to cut up pigs. I was nine, my brother only five. They imposed forced labour on us, making us get up at one in the morning to help with cutting up the pigs they butchered. They’d beat us with ropes if we didn’t work at the pace they expected. It’s hard thinking back to those times.

At six in the morning we were packed off to school, where of course I fell asleep in class. When we got home we had to wash everyone’s clothes in the river. And that’s how we worked, day and night. I only got as far as third grade.

I freed myself from this life of abuse at the age of sixteen. I went to Managua, where another aunt gave me work making tortillas. I met the father of my children, and although we lived well enough, my violent past wouldn’t let me live in peace with him. So I went back to Ocotal. I’ve put myself through a process of forgiveness and today I can say that I’ve forgiven those that maltreated us. The spiritual experience of fasting and praying healed me.

Today I’m single and have my own home. I continue to work as a butcher, now of cattle, and I’ve started a business selling goat’s milk and dairy products, which is unusual around here and offers people a healthy and nutritional alternative. This enterprise has made it possible to employ two more persons.

The Rural Women program helped me to reflect on many things, but one of them is how valuable I am. The tools and knowledge I acquired regarding finances have helped me improve how I spend my income. The training in how to calculate profits allows me to place a value on my efforts and decide how and on what I’m going to invest my time and money.

This sort of training is needed so we can be successful in our businesses. My plans for the future are to grow the goat dairy products business, train more on how to diversify what I make and figure out how much I would have to invest. As businesswomen we need to look to ourselves. To be enterprising, we need to start with what we’ve got and the rest will come with our daily effort.
You need courage to overcome fear
Hello! My name is Karelia del Socorro Romero. Thank you for reading my story.

I began to work at the age of nine selling things in the street with my mother. We sold pork tamales, maize-and-cheese rings and cavendish bananas. If we sold everything, I would get to keep thirty córdobas.

From the ages of 15 to 25 I was a housemaid. When I got married and had two daughters, it got harder to keep studying and so I resigned from my job and started a business. I did so for two major reasons: one was that I had to support my children; the other was that were I worked I wasn’t treated with respect. My business is to prepare products derived from maize. I make tamales, fritters, tortillas and cereals. I’m convinced I can improve the quality of my and my daughter’s lives by pursuing this business. Despite the adversities, I feel good about myself, my family and consider my life a gift. My daughters are my inspiration to keep going.

I was trained at MEDA’s Rural Women program, and I must say that for me it was a major challenge because it meant leaving my community for four days. But my neighbours and my family motivated me and offered their support. This training is different from others, because here I learned first of all that I’m the leader of my own life. This leader was already in me before the workshop, but through these shared reflections I strengthened and took ownership of that truth. I am the one who decides how I’m going to deal with the obstacles I meet on the way, and it is my decision how to do so courageously.

I’ve become aware of how important it is to be a brave woman, to overcome fear, heal myself inside and get on with life. At the workshop I felt appreciated, I came to understand that my name has worth as an entrepreneur. I realized this when we got to the networking module. Now I see myself as a businesswoman, and more than a seller, I’m an entrepreneur and a woman with a business vision.

In the future I envisage myself with my own stand out of which I’ll be selling the products I make to my customers, in a quality setting and under my own brand. I learned that I can seek funding if I can come up with a business idea and a budget. With some effort and faith in myself I can reach my goals. Let me tell you that all roads come to an end, everything passes, and the barriers we face are converted to the lessons life teaches us.
The key is to have faith and be able to help others.
Hello! My name is Lilliam de los Ángeles Chavarría and this is my story.

I grew up with my nine siblings and my parents, who were farmers. When I was five, I began to work harvesting tomatoes. I was paid three córdobas per bucket picked. With what I made I could buy clothes, shoes and school supplies. I managed to graduate from primary school. The hardest thing for me when growing up was not being able to continue my studies, because my father was of the opinion that to invest in a girl's education was a waste of money. His way of thinking was that when girls grow up they married and had no way to use their education.

The best thing that happened to me when I was a girl was graduating from sixth grade. I wished my dad had done with me like he did with my brothers, for whom he paid all the way to higher learning, although they weren't interested in studying. There being no other alternative, and as so often happens in rural areas, I became pregnant and had my first child, a boy, at the age of 16. So I went to work growing vegetables. I’ve employed my sister and by selling the vegetables we grow I’m able to support my children.

I’m married, and when I was invited to the MEDA TL+ workshop, my husband was against it. “You women go to those workshops and come back uppity”, he said. So I asked him to respect my decisions, like I respect his. Anyway, thanks to the workshops I go to we do better in our business and that benefits him too.

At this workshop I learned many things that changed my way of thinking. For example, before I used to have goals, but I never drew up plans for how to reach them, so I’d fail. After the workshop I applied what we were taught. For example, I wanted to improve our house, wanted it to have a tile floor. So I made a savings plan, sold a pig and was soon able to buy the tiles. I’m putting into practice also what we learned about how enterprises need to have specific plans and actions.

What they taught us about beliefs made me see myself as deserving of a nice home for me and my children. Now I understand that valuing myself as a woman is to take care of myself, treat myself well and do the best I can for my family. I’m sure to succeed! My goals for the future are to build a small plastic tunnel in a greenhouse, so we can grow seedlings and set up a stand from where to sell vegetables, cactuses, succulents and flowers by roadside. I’ve got the land, and what I need now are funds with which to build the stand.

Women, let’s never say “we can’t”, because like that we’re only setting limits for ourselves. Although we may feel tired sometimes, let us forge ahead, because “yes, we can!”
Don’t let yourself be defeated. Remember, no two days are same. The bad days shall pass.
Hello! I am María Esmeralda Gadea Riz

I grew up with my parents and ten siblings. I’ve worked since I was five. I carried water, ground maize, made tortillas and helped with all the housework. My father was violent towards my mother, and she would take it out on us. This threatening environment didn’t let me dream of being anything when I grew up. Instead, I felt guilty about the violence of which my mother was the victim, because I thought that it was because of us, the children, that my father would fly into a rage and fight with her. On her deathbed I asked her to pardon me, and she asked me to pardon her. With much effort I made it to third year of university, where I wanted to major in business administration. Meanwhile, my husband made some bad decisions. He mortgaged our house, went off with another woman, we lost the property, and then my own brother bought it at an auction and now he lives in it. I’ve pardoned those who’ve done me harm, and have decided to move on. It was necessary to pardon, so as not to just give up. My faith in Jesus has helped me live in peace and carry on with my projects.

My first enterprise was a passion fruit orchard with medicinal plants, all agroecological. But I lost the investment because I was on the property my husband had mortgaged. I’ve been through many setbacks, but I just keep on going. Today my business is the production and marketing of bio-organic inputs. At the outset it wasn’t easy, people told me I was crazy, that it wouldn’t work, but I paid them no heed and got ahead, despite the limitations.

I was asked by MEFCCA to join in the MEDA TL+ Rural Women program because I’m known in my community as a leader and enterprising person. The workshop helped me to renew my mind as concerns the way I saw and valued myself as a woman. What I learned about time management and the need to set priorities helped me to reconsider my business ideas by order of importance.

Thinking about resilience helped me see myself as a brave woman who despite great hardships and suffering was and is able to get ahead, help other women and leave the past behind. My goals are to increase production, get back to growing medicinal pants and to that end I need funding so I can invest. I’ll be visiting different institutions and I also have some savings. My final message is: take advantage of time in the present; don’t let yourself be defeated by adversity. Put effort into your work, know that we are the leaders of our own lives and that it is we who decide whether or not to believe in our abilities. It can be you have to start off with very little, but start anyway, because I’ve learned that small things can become big ones if we make the effort and work at it day after day.
I may fall, but I’ll get back up. I’m stronger than I thought.
Hello! My name is Walkiria Azucena Altamirano Ramos

I am a young campesino woman. I grew up with my parents. My mother was a housewife, my father a day worker. I was born with a heart murmur and was operated on when I was six. In addition to my disease, my father was an alcoholic, and I felt very embarrassed because people looked down on him. As I grew up I was shy and afraid of going to secondary school, but I did and I graduated. I wanted to study psychology, but it was expensive, so with much effort I got a degree as an agricultural technician, and I’ve come to love this career because it has strengthened my love for the countryside.

I am now 24 and haven’t married because I haven’t fallen in love with anybody. I have a bakery together with a friend and it is called “Sweet Temptation”. She and I attended the Rural Women workshop together.

I must admit I almost gave up on the bakery, because at the start we were cheated by some people we had gone into business with. So now there’s only my friend and I, and together we’ve overcome many hurdles, especially because few people believe that young adults, and young women in particular, can be successful.

The program has a very good methodology, because it rewards effort and this motivated us to do our homework for the next day so as to win the prize offered. What I learned helped me to feel capable, empowered and to visualize my business as the best or one of the best in the community. The workshop helped me to reflect on how blessed I am, and I became aware that I am the owner of all resources I need to be successful. Money and the rest will depend on what I do to achieve such results.

What I learned changed my mind about my value as a woman and entrepreneur. Now I see myself in the future growing my business. I want to buy my own house, finish my studies and I’ll manage by overcoming my fear of failure, applying my talents, and really going for it. I would ask any reader to never give up, think big and keep up the effort because one feels strong when one is the owner of one’s own business, one’s time and one’s life.
"I am a determined woman."
Hello! My name is Marbely de Fátima Rocha Bucardo

My story starts with my mom and dad. My remembrances are happy and my toys were dolls my mom made of corncobs which she dressed up with socks. I was able to study and got a degree in psychology and chemical pharmacy. Since I was a child I suffer from absence seizures due to a disease called cysticercosis, but that hasn’t stopped me from being the woman I am, a mother, an entrepreneur and a professional at the service of my community.

I married a military man who was violent and beat me, so I got a divorce. Then I met someone else and we had a daughter, but he left us. I’ve been through hard times, but I’ve overcome them and today I’m happy. My disease was a problem when it came to conception, but I still was able to become a mother, so I feel blessed. I’ve achieved what I set out to do in life. I’m a determined woman, and that has helped me a lot in my enterprise.

I run my business from home, offering products made from medicinal plants, like syrups and teas. I also give therapeutic massages. With my business I’m able to cover our expenses. My mother and I work together, and all the knowledge we have of natural medicine we got from my grandmother.

I was chosen by MEFCCA to attend the MEDA TL+ Rural Women program. Although I’m a woman who’s been trained before, I have to say that what I learned at this workshop helped to change my approach to how I offer services in the community. Now I’m networking and have learned to forge alliances in the market, so I have more customers and commercial allies, all with a win-win vision among ourselves as enterprising women.

Above all, the workshop helped me to change the way I see myself. I came to understand what it means to be the leader of my own life. I’m now aware that I can’t be a leader in the community if I don’t have control of my own life first. I learned to visualize myself in the future, and what I want is to have a well-equipped natural medicine clinic where I can attend to my clients and contribute to their quality of life by natural means. This I will achieve through effort, training and looking for funds with which to invest. From what I make in that business I expect to buy a house in which to live with my daughter. Believe me when I say that all women are capable of achieving their objectives if they make up our minds to do so. We need to cultivate self-love and acceptance of who we are, and treat others the same way, doing all we can with love in order to serve them better.
If what we wished for today didn’t happen, it can be that tomorrow it will
Hello! I’m Yuri Sarahí Rivas Herrera and this is my story.

When Hurricane Mitch struck my father lost everything he had – his poultry and pig farms. He went into debt and emigrated, so I was raised by my mother. I started work as a housemaid at the age of 14. The grandmother of the man I worked for taught me how to clean and wash. I finished secondary school and went to live in Managua. There I met someone, but when I became pregnant he left me. To be able to support my son I continued working as a housemaid, and my mother helped by taking care of the baby. Then I quit my job and started to sell the tortillas made by an aunt of mine. My mother died of an overdose of anesthetics, which was a terrible loss for me.

I’ve been through many things, and were I to tell them all they wouldn’t fit on a page, but I’ve resisted and persevered. I have another partner now, and we have a child, so now there are two. Even in adverse situations I always look on the positive side, and I can say I’m happy. At the moment I’m working from home making carrot candies which I go out and sell at social or public events and fairs, and like that I’m making them known. My husband doesn’t like that I go out to sell, but we’ve learned to talk things over and now he is more accepting.

I went to the MEDA TL+ Rural Women workshop. At first my husband wasn’t very pleases about it, but when I came home the first day, shared what I had learned and told him we could get a motivational prize for sharing our experience, he was happy for me.

For me, as a woman who’s in business, the workshop changed a lot of things in my life. Before, I used to get depressed because things weren't going well, but with the exchanges of experiences at the workshop I feel inspired, took courage and haven't given up. I still don't have the money to strengthen my enterprise, but even so, all the reflections about the impact beliefs have on us as enterprising women and thinking about resilience has helped me to see the future in a different way.

I’ve decided to replace my insecurity with self-confidence and I’ve recovered the faith in my candies, my ideas and my business. I’m no longer afraid I won’t be able to sell. I need to get a sanitary registration for my product and have my own physical space from which to make and sell them. I know that with perseverance, effort, strategy and diligence, I’ll be able to do so.
Fear can only limit me if I allow it to
Hello! My name is Lairalena García Cuellar

I grew up with my maternal grandparents in Cuba. I started working when I was 13, ironing clothes, washing pots and pans, and taking care of our neighbour’s children. I went through times of scarcity when I was a child. My grandmother made shoes with rubber soles cut from tires and when it got hot my feet would burn and I’d start running. I never had toys; my dolls were empty penicillin bottles I dressed up so we could play.

Once I grew up I had occasion to study and eventually graduated with a degree in psychology. During that time I met a Nicaraguan doctor and we got married, moved to Nicaragua and had children. In 2021 I was named by the Caja Rural de Waslala Cooperative to take part in the Rural Women program. Before the workshop I really wanted to start a poultry farm. I already ran a business out of my home, a small grocery store where I also sold home-made ice cream, but I didn’t dare try my hand at the poultry farm for fear of failure, and that kept me back. At the workshop I learned about these self-limiting beliefs and the impact they can have on an enterprising person. And I learned how to replace them with thoughts that help me conquer those fears and achieve my objectives.

That was how I overcame my anxieties, and with the help of Mr Jerónimo Loaisiga, the MEDA regional director, who is himself an entrepreneur and has a poultry business, I began my own farm on 28 October 2021. I started out with ten birds and now I have fifty. In the first month I had some losses because some of the chickens died, and I said to Mr Jerónimo: “I’m not going to continue. I can’t do it”. But he said: “You just carry on, don’t stop now”. I remembered what I had learned: I’m the master of my fate and I won’t let the things I’m afraid of limit me.

Now my goal is to grow and expand the distribution of my products (chicken in pieces, sold by the pound), and work not only from my home but through other businesses as well. I will now try to get some funding in order to buy equipment for my enterprise. My message is that although the perspectives for investing may look dim due to the economic crisis, and notwithstanding the beliefs that limit us, like the fear of failure, we need to find a crack in the wall and look beyond these things. We need to get to know ourselves, our capacities and to value ourselves as enterprising women by saying: “Yes, I can!” Look at what we’ve achieved thus far – that alone will motivate us to try again, as often as necessary, until we achieve what we’ve set our mind on.
Age doesn’t matter. It’s never too late to make our dreams come true.
Hello! My name is Mayra Alicia Hernández Mendoza and this is my story.

My father was a farmer, my mother a housewife. She was a vivacious woman and a fighter, but my father was violent, jealous, cruel, and he tortured the animals on our farm. Once he tried to kill my mother, but she pardoned him, which for me became an example of love and forgiveness.

I started working at the age of ten, with the hope of being able to study someday. I sold candies and bakery in the street, harvested seeds and cut fodder for the cows until at the age of 23 I began my studies and eventually got a degree in general pedagogy. I had the satisfaction of having my mother see me graduate before she died.

After that I had a partner who turned out to be an abuser. He tried to sexually abuse my younger sisters and it was the same way with the young girls who sold tortillas in the street, whom he would pay to let him touch them. When I found out, I left him, despite the social pressure of what people would think, because I was ashamed of what he did. Today I'm a very different person, and I know my rights. In the past I couldn't enjoy the right to an education or even to live a childhood free from violence. But now I'm aware that we need to assert our rights.

Currently I'm studying social science, teach on Saturdays and during the week work as a dressmaker in my sewing business. I was sent to the MEDA program's workshop by the Hermandad Campesina Cooperative in Río Blanco. I took my little girl with me because I didn't have anyone with whom I could leave her. I found what I learned at the workshop very liberating, because it used to be I had negative thoughts that prevailed in my mind. I thought that because I hadn't been able to study modern sewing I wouldn't stand a chance as a seamstress, but what I learned about the impact of such false beliefs on the life of an enterprising woman allowed me to overcome my fear of failure and today I think I'll be all right. I have faith in myself. After all, if I don't believe in myself first, who will?

Now I'm aware that I need to trust my talents in sewing and use them. My objectives are to establish a sewing workshop at a locale of my own, and later on I want to have a pig farm. To buy my first sewing machine I'll sell a pig I already have, then I'll look for funding to start the farm. My message is: we women need to be brave and overcome the fear that holds us back. We have the power to decide to change and exchange fear for courage.
When I decided to start a business, I stopped looking to the past. Now I look only to what the future holds.
Hello! My name is **Gloria Talavera González** and this is my story.

I grew up in a home with loving parents, fighters and enterprising people, both of them. My mother raised pigs, ducks and chickens; my father was a farmer. I started working when I was 12, and at 14 I got a job as a cook at a nursery for children of working mothers. At the time I couldn’t go to school because the country was at war and when I finally began, I had to walk for two hours to get there. So I only finished fourth grade. When I was a child I wanted to be a nurse, because I wasn’t afraid of anything or anybody and I learned how to give injections, bind wounds, and that was how I joined a health brigade.

Today I consider myself a fulfilled and happy woman. I have a husband who supports me as a woman and leader, my family is stable and I’m grateful because we’ve achieved that our three children became professionals. As a businesswoman I’m proud of my achievements. I was sent to England by the SOPPEXCCA Union of Cooperatives, in representation of the Las Hermanas (The Sisters) coffee brand. I’m the president of the Julio Hernández Cooperative and am myself a coffee grower. I work helping women who have orchards and continue to be on the health brigade.

I was named by SOPPEXCCA to go to MEDA’s Rural Women program. The workshop helped me gain a deeper understanding of the value of the beliefs I hold true as a woman and entrepreneur. I am now in the habit of feeding the beliefs that strengthen so I can overcome those that constrain me. I learned about the importance of thinking things through before embarking on an enterprise and setting goals that are clear, realistic and measurable, and how to prioritise them. Planning is key so I can concentrate without getting distracted from my objectives. I also learned how to calculate a business’ profitability, because if it’s not profitable there’s no sense wasting one’s time and losing one’s money.

At this point in life my objectives are to grow and not stagnate as a businesswoman. That’s why I want to expand my business and start raising quail. To do that I’ll use the resources I have from my businesses and then seek some additional funding to top it up. The message I would leave to anyone reading this story is that we as women have everything we need to invest in our being, our gifts and talents. The most important thing is to get ahead, with faith in God and ourselves, without worrying about what others may think. With what we’ve got, even when it isn’t much, we can get started and multiply it.
To start an enterprise you have to first improve at personal level. That’s the only way to be successful.
Hello! My name is Altagracia Pérez Mercado, I am an indigenous woman and this is my story.

I am a Chorotega woman and belong to an indigenous community in Río Arriba, municipality of Somoto. I grew up alone with my mother because my father died in the war. My mother was an enterprising person and while she worked, I took care of my brothers and sisters, so I couldn’t study. I felt frustrated and without opportunities to reach my dream, which was to become a teacher and an artist.

When I was fifteen I got married to a man who turned out to be violent and alcoholic. He beat me and threatened me with knives, until one day he died in an accident. After that I had two other partners, but these relationships didn’t work out either and I ended up being a single mother with five children. But notwithstanding these difficult experiences, I managed to get ahead and was able to build my own house. My business is to make and sell homemade wine, made of roselle and sour grapes. I also grow and harvest maize and beans, and raise poultry and pigs. In addition, I make maize gruel and pork tamales. All this to raise my five children.

I was chosen by MEFCCA and the Mujeres en Progreso Cooperative to partake in the Rural Women program. The workshop experience has strengthened my personal leadership and the image I have of myself. It also gave me the self-confidence I need to continue my enterprise. I’ve been able to take ownership of my talent as an entrepreneur, have bolstered belief in my abilities and in the quality of my product, my wines in particular. Before the workshop I had stopped going to fairs, because I was discouraged, but the knowledge I acquired at the workshop regarding networking has opened my mind and given me the courage needed to carry on and grow with my business. I’ve already begun to improve the appearance of my bottles by changing the labels. My customers have told me they like the change and are recommending my wine to help grow my clientele.

At personal level I look at myself and feel more valuable. I’m now better organized after what I learned regarding time management. I aspire to position my wines at municipal, provincial and regional level, and I dream of obtaining an export license someday. I’m going to make the effort to achieve this and will look for funds so I can invest. To conclude, I would like to say that we can’t grow as entrepreneurs if we don’t have clear goals, plans and strategies. Let’s help one another as businesswomen in the communities, let’s work together, think of our rights as women and assert them.
"I, Ima, am valuable"
Hello! My name is Ima Yerid Alfaro Lira, I am a goddess and this is my story.

When I say I’m a goddess it’s because I belong to a cooperative called Las Diosas (The Goddesses), but with that title I also honour the valuable woman I am. I grew up with my parents and a brother. My mother was a seamstress who also made handicrafts and my father a construction foreman. My brother, Roberto Carlos, was diagnosed with morquio syndrome and other children made fun of him due to his physical appearance, but I always defended him. He used to say I was his heroine. When I was a girl I wanted to become a teacher. I had a blackboard at home and taught classes to my friends. At one point my partner and I had a daughter, but we separated because he went to live in another town. I must say he’s always acknowledged and taken responsibility for his daughter.

My first job was as a popular educator and facilitator of women’s empowerment. Currently I’m the president of the Las Diosas Cooperative and single because I’ve decided to focus on my personal development and contribute to the social transformation of my community. I own a family business, which is raising quail and selling their eggs. I also produce roselle, maize and beans, which are grown with agroecological methods. I started working with quail in 2018, mainly out of curiosity. I bought seven eggs and soon had five males and two females; only three months later I had over a hundred birds. I easily recovered the investment and was able to continue. Quail have a high nutritive value and that is why they are in demand in upscale markets. They generate profits because they are worth more than traditional poultry species.

MEFCCA recommended me to MEDA so I could attend the Rural Women workshop. What I learned about networking allowed me to approach business in a different way and visualize my quail business at a different level. Now I’m diversifying my business by adding pickled quail eggs. At personal level the workshop helped me to see myself without my title as cooperative president or community leader and strengthen my personal value just as “Ima”, for who I am rather than any position, and say: “I, Ima, am valuable”.

My goals as a businesswoman are to expand my market and grow the number of customers, export quail eggs and diversify my products. To that end, I’ll invest a part of my own funds and will look for additional funding from some institution. I would like to conclude by saying that our beliefs and their impact on our lives is essential, not only as entrepreneurs, but also as women. We must believe in ourselves, believe we’re capable of achieving our goals. We rural women are essential agents of change when it comes to energizing the economy of our communities.
I forgave so I could move on
Hello! My name is Blanca Argentina Rizo Sobalvarro and I want to share my story.

I grew up with my mother and stepfather. I managed to get to the first year of secondary school and at the age of 15 began working. I sold tamales, and by then was married, since I wanted to get out of the house because my mother maltreated me. I have two children, one of which has cerebral palsy, due to poliomyelitis. My children's father was unfaithful and violent, saying no other man could possibly love me or take me for a partner. I used to think this was normal, because of the belief imposed upon us women that she should always obey. Now I understand it shouldn't be that way. I left the father of my children and found my current partner, a man who appreciates and values me.

I started an enterprise selling maize, tamales and vegetables. In the beginning I had no capital, but then someone donated a hundredweight of maize and a large pan so I could start my business. Once I made some money I bought five heifers, but four were stolen. I sold the only one left over and bought pigs with the money, but they died. This entire experience was a serious blow for me, and I came to think that my fate was to be poor for the rest of my life. After that I was so disappointed and fearful I no longer wanted to invest, and I started to waste money on vanities and debts, but when my daughter became pregnant I was moved to change and think of my family again. I decided to forgive my mother and my former partner for the mistreatment I received at their hands. I forgave so I could move on. Today I lead a good life, and I’m aware I have the right to decide for myself and to value myself. I work from home with my tamale business, with the support of my partner and daughter.

I was picked to attend the MEDA program and the workshop helped me to organize my time by priorities, organize my finances through a real budget and design a time management plan to make good use of both my time and money for the sake of my business. I learned that it is good to have an enterprise, but that I also need to take care of myself, take a break now and then, because I deserve some time for myself, I'm very valuable. I've thought about how I used to perceive myself, all the insecurities I had in my mind. I thought I was a limited person who wouldn't be able to improve our living conditions. Now I think I can, now I believe in my capacity to flourish as a businesswoman.

The next steps are to improve my home so I can better attend to my clients. I'd like to say the following to those reading this: don't let anything or anyone stop you. With effort and work, and believing in ourselves, we can achieve our goals. The negative opinions other people may have should not influence us – instead, we must be guided by faith in our value as the women we are.
I admire myself
Hello! My name is Carmen Alicia Montenegro Rivera and I want to share my story.

I grew up with my mother because my father went off to war and then started another family. She had a food stand in the Jinotega market with which she supported her three daughters. My mother worked too much and didn't have time to spend with us, so we lived with my grandparents. I missed a father's love and I feel that his absence left an emptiness in me. Also, my mother was sometimes pretty hard on us. My solace were my studies; studying filled my heart.

I started my working life as a clerk in a store when I was thirteen. I used what I made to pay for my studies. With the support of my mother and an aunt and uncle I eventually I got a degree in industrial engineering. I'm the mother of two boys, and am separated from their father. Today I feel my life is meaningful, because I have a united family and am healthy. Although I'm an industrial engineer, my passion is farming and living in the countryside. I like being in business because I want to be an independent woman. My first enterprise was a roadside restaurant serving a variety of dishes. I also began a pig farm, so now I'm doing that as well. I have a partner and we live in harmony with my mother and daughters.

I'm also a member of a women's cooperative that grows and markets medicinal plants. All twelve of us were trained by MEFCCA in how to grow these, and that's why I was recommended to become a participant in MEDA's program. After what I learned at the workshop, I feel empowered and self-confident. I'm more aware of everything I've achieved thus far, and despite my shortfalls and the troubles I've faced, today I can say I admire myself. Before the workshop I would have been embarrassed to say that, because people might think I'm a vain person. Now I understand it's a belief that helps me to assess myself as the valuable woman I am. What I learned about networking has motivated me to grow with my roasted ground coffee sales and to distribute it to new sales points.

My goals for the future are to grow the pig farm with profits from the restaurant. I'll be looking for funding if more is needed to make investments. My message is: never give up and don't let our self-limiting beliefs stagnate us. We need to see ourselves as successful, as people who reach their goals, even though we may be alone. It should be a practice to talk to each other with love. Start by admiring yourself, don't wait for someone else to do so. We need to recognize we have many capacities. There will always be problems, but remember that over time they all pass.
Resilience prepares us to overcome difficulties
Hello! My name is María de los Ángeles Muñoz Castillo

Until I was ten I was raised by my grandparents. My mother worked as a housemaid; my father was a farmer. It wasn’t easy to be separated from my parents. I’d see other children with their families and felt lonely. I always dreamed that when I grew up I’d own my own business, a grocery store. I began working as a teacher when I was nineteen, and at the university I studied forest engineering. I was close to graduating when I became pregnant. That affected my self-esteem, and I went on to become a mother. But my development stagnated because I didn’t think I could raise a child and continue growing as a professional. I overcame that phase of low self-esteem with the love I had for my children. I now have four, am married and our family is united. My husband is a staple foods merchant, he buys and sells maize and beans. I have the store I always wanted and work at the Mujeres Empoderadas en Acción Cooperative.

At the moment I’m starting an enterprise producing several flavours of mead. I was invited by Ayuda en Acción (ActionAid) to join MEDA’s program. The workshop was an experience that strengthened my self-confidence, particularly when I learned to identify the beliefs that were acting as constraints and those that can help me to advance as a woman and entrepreneur. I’ve understood that I can’t guide other women as a leader if I’m not the leader of my own life first. I need to believe in myself, to have faith in what I do, and know I can do it. I understand that I’m a resilient woman, because I’ve overcome many obstacles and if I did it once, I know I can do it again. The knowledge I acquired regarding time management helped me to organize my tasks as a woman, mother, wife, leader and entrepreneur. Now I’m more willing to delegate work to others, to acknowledge I can’t do everything by my own.

My future goals are to grow my mead business. That means I have to continue working on my self-esteem and willpower, because I’ve had family problems that affect my moods, and that distracts me from focusing on my business. But still, I carry on, I’ll never surrender.

My message to those who read my story is that resilience is for life. Overcoming obstacles only empowers us more. There will always be barriers, but our challenge is to face up to and deal with them, using our knowledge and keeping in mind that if we were able to get through a crisis in the past, why shouldn’t we be able to do so now? Let’s show our children how to get started in business, let’s teach by example.
I am an inspiration to my children. My aim is that they be better than me.
Hello! My name is Xiomara Dalmira López Ortiz and this is my story.

I never knew my father and grew up only with my mother. She worked cutting fodder, maize and beans, raising chickens and pigs. I helped my mother with the housework and took care of my two brothers, so I couldn’t go to school. We had many limitations and poverty affected us because we lived in a situation of scarcity. When I grew up, I wanted to be a dressmaker, because my mother was an inspiration to me. I remember that she would make our clothes herself, always following the fashion at the time.

At fifteen I went to Managua and worked as a housemaid. At fifteen I started primary school, and managed to finish secondary school at the age of 31. The woman I worked for supported me so I could take sewing and tailoring courses and I graduated with a diploma in dressmaking. I came back to the countryside because I didn’t want my children to grow up without me. I separated from their father because he insisted on keeping me under his economic control. He was also unfaithful and said he would throw me out if I threatened to leave him, so I did, taking our three children with me.

Now I’m an independent woman who works from home and manages several businesses with my children. Through what I learned at the dressmaking school I sew all sorts of garments. But I also make artisanal wines, pork tamales, handicrafts and grow plants and flowers. I’m such a self-assured woman that I feel I could go into almost any business. I do what I like to and if at first I don’t know how, why, I just learn.

I was chosen by MEFCCA to take part in MEDA’s Rural Women program. After the workshop I’ve changed how I act and take decisions. I’ve strengthened my self-leadership and now I can say I know who I am, what I want to do, why I want to do it. I strongly believe I can achieve my goals. I feel more love for my businesses and my vision has expanded so that I now plan the networking in such a way that I can grow my enterprises.

Now my priority is to invest in a locale that brings me closer to my clientele, so they have a space at which to sit down and enjoy my products. To conclude, I’d like to say that the best decision we farming and enterprising women can take is to get training and strengthen our knowledge so we become empowered, independent leaders. Our children are not a hindrance to being enterprising – we can start a business even if we have children! We shouldn't let others take care of them; they need their mother. With perseverance and love for ourselves and our families we can succeed.
To start a business you only have to believe
Hello! My name is **Yoneyda del Rosario Bermúdez Mejía** and I’ll share my story with you.

My father was a farmer. He had a really strong personality, while my mother was a housewife who didn’t want to have girls. She preferred boys. I started to work at the age of nine at a maize mill. I also made tortillas and hauled water by mule for almost seven kilometres every day. After work, I’d go to class and had no time to play. I managed to finish primary school, but my mother wouldn’t let me continue. According to her, women didn’t need to study.

At the age of 15 I had my first partner, but left him three years later because of his violence. When I tried to return home, my mother wouldn’t have me and so I was forced to go back to him. After that, he took me to El Salvador to try and sell me, as in human trafficking, but I managed to escape and came back to Nicaragua. He pursued, found and forced me to return to him, and so I became pregnant. His violent behaviour continued until one day he killed a cousin of mine and his brother killed my uncle. Both fled to Honduras and I again tried to go home. My mother wouldn’t accept me until after much imploring, she finally relented. Still, the family rejected my child, to whom they referred as the “son of a murderer”.

After all that, I met someone else and became pregnant. Thereupon he abandoned me and so now I was a single mother. That was when I decided to forgive my mother and focus on my studies. At the age of 29, I finished secondary school and began training in beekeeping, with the aim of starting a business. Currently I’m concentrating on raising my children and I have another partner who is accepting of my two sons. I’m doing several things, really, there’s the honey, from which I also make soap, and I’m also starting to make and sell sweet bread and other types of bakery.

MEFCCA recommended me as a participant in the MEDA workshop. After the training I decided to get involved in networking, which helps me to understand that what I have in front of me are my clients. Learning about imposed beliefs made me believe in myself, that I’m capable of doing what I set out to do. Now I aspire to buy my own oven and the accessories I need for the bakery business. I’d like to conclude by saying that we women too are a divine creation and everything we live through has a purpose, even when it can be painful. Every problem leaves a lesson if we look for it, rather than waste time harping on what we’ve been through. We need to feel good inside and outside, we need to look after our wellbeing, for the love of ourselves and our families.
I must be strong, courageous and make an effort.
Hello! My name is Selena León Cerna and this is my story.

I lived with my parents until I was 15, when my father left us and started another family. I began working at the age of nine milking cows, herding cattle, guarding the fences and cornfields. I got to the last year of secondary school, but didn't graduate because they wouldn't accept my doctor's notes certifying that my absenteeism was due to a heart condition I have. The principal asked for money if I wanted to graduate, something I couldn't accept. The biggest lesson I've learned ever since I was a child came from watching the effort made and work done by my parents. I grew up without television, let alone cell phones, and that was good because we really lived together as a family. But while my father was there I was also afraid, because he was violent and would yell at my mother.

Today my life is calm. I've been with my partner for seven years, work at a pharmacy and have my own business, a poultry farm I began after attending the workshop offered by MEDA's Rural Women program. I realize I need to strengthen my self-confidence, need to be courageous and strong. I'm scared of making my relationship formal because of what I saw my mother go through.

Having been asked by the Hermandad Campesina cooperative in Río Blanco to attend the workshop, I had to figure out how to get there, because I live far away from the place where it was to be held. I got up in the wee hours of the morning, travelled and found lodging in the town where the training would be. The workshop helped me change the way I see myself as a woman. I've identified my anxieties and faced the worst of them, namely the fear of failure. I became aware that I need to boost my self-confidence, have faith in myself and my capacities. With what I learned about resilience I've decided that if anything goes wrong in my planning, I just need to think it through and try again. I want to have a mind filled with enabling beliefs and I'm going to cultivate that in my thoughts. I've decided to manage my time well, using the tools they gave us at the workshop, to take advantage of what I learned and not lose sight of the goals I set myself.

My objective for now is to buy an incubator for my farm with what I've been able to save. With the support of my family and funds from some institution I know I'll be able to. As a final message, I'd like to say that every effort is rewarded and that we should not give up if things don't work out as planned in our first attempt. We need to confront our anxieties and believe in ourselves. Let us be strong and brave.
We need to find our inner voice as women.
Hello! My name is Reyna María Gómez Florián and this is my story.

I grew up with my parents and brothers. My father was a farmer who grew staple foods and my mother had a business. She made pork tamales, tortillas and rustic clay handicrafts. My father was an alcoholic, which affected the family because he’d go off drinking and leave us alone. I started working when I was 12, selling curd in the street with my mother. We used the money to buy utensils and I made it to the fourth year of secondary school.

At the moment I am living with my partner. We don’t have children, because I’ve been through three miscarriages. Although that’s been painful, I have faith that God’s plan is perfect. I think I’ve achieved my life goals. I have a store and make artisanal wine with fruit like pineapple, roselle and nance. I also make curd and cottage cheese. The hardest thing I’ve faced as a businesswoman is the rejection of my wines by the community. The women accused me of corrupting the men. So I started to sell the wine elsewhere, and with support from MEFCCA I was able to find other options at which to position my wines, among them the fairs the institution holds in several municipalities. That was how I converted my main hurdle into an opportunity, because if I hadn’t, I would have been rejected in the community, maybe even physically attacked, and in any case limited to a small and hostile market. Instead, the situation forced me to be creative, adapt and seek alternatives, in other words, be resilient. So, really, I’m grateful to the adversity I encountered!

I was selected by MEFCCA to participate in MEDA’s Rural Women program. At the workshop I learned to use valuable tools with which to run the business, like having a budget, carrying a register of income and expenditures and so on. These have helped me to manage my resources better than before. The program also taught me to throw out the beliefs that limited me, such as the idea I might be physically attacked in the community or my dread of speaking in public. I learned to see myself as the leader of my life and feel empowered to take my own decisions, without worrying about whether I have my partner’s support and with the certainty we can deal with any disagreement by means of dialogue. Through this program I’ve found my inner voice as a woman.

My objective now is to build a room in which to make my wine. I applied for a loan from MEFCCA and have begun building it. My message to those reading my story is that what we learn at the training we must put to use and forget about worries or embarrassment. Let us share with other women what we learned, as well as our successful experiences, so we can all thrive together.
The key to start a business is perseverance.
Hello! My name is Yudi Margine López Santander

I grew up with my mother and sister. My mother worked as a housemaid to support us, so my sister and I lived with my maternal grandmother. It was difficult, but I’m grateful for my mother’s effort, because it was due to her that I managed to get to a university and graduate as an agricultural engineer.

I have four children. I separated from the father of my first three children due to our incompatibility, and my current partner is the father of my youngest son. I’m an empowered woman and I want to flourish with my business. I’ve always been a fighter and I’m pleased with what I’ve achieved so far, but I know there’s more that can be done. I have a family business called El Parador, which is located at a bus stop along the highway and where I sell fast food to travellers. We also sell squash and plantains.

I was recommended to the Rural Women and Entrepreneurship program by MEFCCA. Before that I was afraid of starting the food business, I thought I might fail, and I was scared of leaving the farm. At the workshop I was made aware that this sort of thinking was limiting me, and I learned how to overcome them. The exchange of experiences with other protagonists also helped me to put my business idea into practice. I wasn’t sure the mayor’s office would rent me the locale, but I had faith and would visit the place to visualize the restaurant. And I’d pray. In the end, the mayor’s office did in fact accept my proposal so I got started with what little I had available – basically my will and faith that I could do it. I learned how to assign roles, because we’re a family business, and we’ve seen encouraging results.

My main objective is to have more clients and that will happen through networking and other strategies I learned at the program. The next step is to make some improvements and refurbish the locale, so I can offer a better service to my customers. I’m looking for options to get some additional financing, and with the savings from our sales, I’ll be investing little by little. My message is: “Where there’s a will, there’s a way”. Sometimes we and our trepidations are our own obstacles. We need to look for options and not get bogged down due to the hurdles we might face.
Stories of courage: 50 powerful women who turned adversity into possibility

Don’t miss any opportunity to be trained as an entrepreneur
Hello! My name is Josefa Chavarría Centeno

I come from a large family, made up of my parents and thirteen siblings. I had a twin sister, but she died after only six months. My parents were farmers. When I was 12 I’d go to the cacao and coffee plantations to hoe, weed and prune. I finished high school and am currently studying natural sciences. I’m a licensed teacher and work at a primary school in my community, so right there I’m fulfilling my childhood dream. I’m happy with my family, which consists of our four children and my husband. Together with four other women, we’re starting a business selling organic biological inputs for cacao, beans, maize and garden plants.

I was sent by the COOMUVEMAR cooperative to learn new things in the Rural Women and Entrepreneurship program. What I found out about women’s leadership and the need to believe in ourselves has strengthened the way I perceive myself and inspired me to feel capable of starting a business making artisanal chocolate. The reflection on beliefs that limit us helped to awaken my mind. I also acquired the knowledge needed to calculate the profitability of my business and this in turn means I value my work more. I now know that I need to assign my time, effort and experience a higher value, so as to put a fair price on my products.

My objective is to grow my artisanal chocolate business. It is called El Tilinche, after a bird that is on the endangered species list in the region where I live. My main need is to procure chocolate-making equipment, and I’m looking around for options, while I continue my training so I learn more about this business. My message to those reading this is that we need to love ourselves, love what we do and show love for others. Our businesses should have a vision based on making a profit, yes, but we must also support each other as businesswomen who work in unison so we can all make progress together.
I am not a victim
I grew up with my parents. My father was a farmer, my mother did a lot of things: she was a masseuse and acupuncturist, she made soaps, cosmetics and grew medicinal plants. Their dream was to have a boy, but I came along, so they raised me as though I were one. They taught me how to play baseball and cards, ride a horse and so on. I enjoyed it all very much.

At sixteen I became pregnant with the first of my four children, a boy. But his father was psychologically abusive, unfaithful and given to humiliating me. Still, I was with him for six years. Looking for the partner I wanted, I had my other children, but without ever marrying their fathers. After so much searching and not finding anyone I decide to stay single, and I’ve now been on my own for nine years.

Many said I couldn’t get ahead, burdened as I was with four children, but they were wrong, because I did. Today I am a technician in forestry and teacher. I’m a fulfilled woman who focuses on her goals. I’ve left the past behind and came to understand that it was because the relationship with my mother wasn’t based on trust that I had no confidante and kept looking for love with the wrong persons. I don’t blame my mother for being incapable of giving me the love I needed. After all, she was abandoned by her father and maltreated by her mother, and so later on she couldn’t give what she didn’t receive.

Today I work at the Association of Female Victims of War. I’m in charge of storing the cacao it exports. I’m also developing my enterprise by creating costume jewelry and accessories made of seeds and organic raw materials. For now I’m making them on commission. I was named by the Caja Rural de Waslala Cooperative to partake in the MEDA TL+ Rural Women program. There I learned how to see my past as a story of strength, resilience and courage. I am not a victim. I learned how to strengthen faith in myself and to believe in my capacities to grow as a woman and entrepreneur. I had the occasion to reflect on the impact high self-esteem has on a woman who aspires to become an entrepreneur.

Now I see myself in the future growing my business by adding bamboo furniture. I want to be successful so I can continue to live in Nicaragua and demonstrate it is possible to prosper in our homeland. Women: let us cultivate self-esteem, because believing in ourselves is crucial to getting ahead, no matter what negative things others may say. It is faith in ourselves and in what we do that makes us capable of becoming more self-assured and stronger in our enterprises.
Stories of courage: 50 powerful women who turned adversity into possibility

I’m an independent woman, I don’t let anyone mess with me
Hello! My name is Mabel Díaz Montenegro, and I want to tell you my story.

I grew up both in the countryside and in town. My father was a coffee grower and barber, my mother a housewife and businesswoman. We were 13 siblings. At the age of six I began working by selling bread before going to class. I earned a tiny amount: two córdobas a day, but with that I bought my own shoes. So I felt good about making my own money, I felt independent at a very young age. My father was very loving, and so I enjoyed my childhood. He and I did carpentry work together. My mother, however, was rigid in her thinking and punished me; my father corrected me with love. I was never subjected to violence, except once by a brother, but I fought back. When I was 15, I married a man of 57, and we were together for twenty years, until his death separated us. To be single through widowhood has been liberating for me, because while I was married I had to take care of our children and those of my husband by an earlier marriage. Still, I studied and became a librarian.

Now I have a business selling used clothes and am president of TEPEYAC, a multi-service cooperative, and do volunteer service at my church. Through my business I’ve set up a network of ten women who sell used clothes in the communities. I pay them by commission. Like that I’m generating self-employment for these courageous and hard-working campesino women. There are problems, of course, because one of my sons is an alcoholic and drug addict, I have a daughter with cancer, but I face these situations with faith and hope and don’t let myself be discouraged, let alone defeated. I refuse to give up!

I attended the MEDA TL+ workshop and I can say that after that experience my mentality changed as concerns my self-esteem. I’ve become aware that I need to take care of myself too, that I come first, because if I’m well, then I can better help the people I have a relation with. I became aware that I’m capable of continuing to grow my business and serve as a leader in my community, notwithstanding the personal circumstances I face. That is what resilience is, to get ahead and carry on despite the obstacles.

My objective is to acquire a sewing machine so I can make pillows and mattresses and sell these in the communities. I hope to hire more campesino women and empower them as they get into the business of selling. My message is: let us get training, because for us women farmers it is an opportunity for personal growth, empowerment and becoming economically independent.
Our value as women is not something granted by men.
Hello! My name is María Aracelly Betanco Méndez

I began working when I was seven, making tortillas. I wanted to grow up and become a secretary working in an office, or join the army. Childhood dreams. I did, however, have the chance to study and I graduated as an executive secretary. Ever since I turned 11 I had to fight off sexual harassment by the men in the community where I lived. Sometimes I had to walk 13 kilometres alone to get things in the village, and once down by a river three men tried to rape me. I fought back and managed to escape, but because I knew them I was afraid to file a complaint. So I didn't tell anyone.

Eventually I got married and suffered violence. It was an unbearable life. I once had a weapon in my hand and came close to killing myself. One day I got up my courage, took my two children and walked out. As a single mother I worked growing maize and beans and selling bread. It was hard, I struggled, but I also overcame the difficulties and today, although my life isn't perfect, I'm married. My husband is a farmer. So am I, but I also make piñatas and cakes.

Because of everything I lived through I had given up on having a partner, a relationship based on love, but I have met a man who treats me with love and respect. People criticize and laugh at us because he's 18 years younger than I am, but I decided to enjoy our love and live my life.

I was nominated by the Hilario Sánchez Cooperative, a women’s organization, to attend the MEDA TL+ Rural Women program. The workshop taught me how to organize my time by priorities. I became aware that when running a business, time is a valuable asset that one needs to take care of, like with the money. I thought about my experiences and now I know I’m resilient. After everything I’ve been through, I find I’ve adapted, have continued ahead, haven’t given up. The workshop helped me understand how to cultivate beliefs that fill my mind with possibilities, that I as the owner of my life can choose to focus on the possibilities I have to get ahead. I have set goals for my piñatas and cakes enterprise. Now I want to invest in equipment and utensils so as to improve the quality of my products.

If by telling my story I’ve helped a woman who perhaps was thinking she couldn't continue with her business, let me say to her: don’t let anyone humiliate you. Cultivate a strong will. If someone looks down on you, remember that there's always someone else willing to love you – and that person should be you yourself.
We overcome fear by taking action
Hello! My name is Leddy María González Rodríguez. Thank you for allowing me to tell my story.

I grew up with my mother and seven siblings. She worked hard growing coffee. I remember going hungry, and having no toys, although my mother made me dolls using corncobs. As a girl I dreamt of becoming a nurse, but life always takes us down unknown paths.

At 13 I began working as a babysitter and with some effort I managed to finish secondary school. I got married at the age of 21 and am pleased to say that my partner is a good husband. We were saddened when we lost our first baby and I didn’t want to become pregnant again, but I overcame my trepidation and now we have a son.

My husband and I grow coffee and sell it once roasted and ground under the local brand name “El Mañanero”, although that’s something we’re still working on. My husband had to emigrate to the United States to make money so we can pay the debt we still owe on the farm, but I harbour the hope he’ll be back soon. For the moment, I live alone with our child.

When I was told by MEFCCA I was to join the MEDA TL+ Rural Women program my husband had just left. I felt insecure because I’d never been in charge of the farm alone and now I had to give orders to the workers, collect from customers, sell the coffee, and at one point I thought I wouldn’t be able to. But at the first day of the workshop I learned about beliefs, which ones to discard and which ones help to strengthen me. I decided then and there I could strengthen my self-confidence, prove that I’m able to learn, manage the business and defeat my insecurities by being brave.

What I learned in these four days helped me bolster my faith in myself as an entrepreneur and as a woman, as well as to take ownership of my ability to lead, both as a person and as a businesswoman. I've headed both the family and the business, now that my husband isn't here. The knowledge, reflections and experiences shared with the other protagonists gave me the strength, courage and will to get ahead, and stand by my son. The networking tools have served to increase sales. As for the future, I see my ground coffee business expanding to additional sales points outside the municipality, such as Quilalí and El Jícaro, as soon as I find a seller in those places.

I know each story is different, but I’d like to leave my message: we can take control of our lives and continue onward, even if we still have doubts.
Training is necessary because it turns us into business women with a vision.
Hello! My name is **Rosibel Ramos**. Thank you for letting me tell my story.

I grew up with my mother and eight siblings. She used to work in the cotton fields and as a cook. I began school when I was six, but wasn’t able to continue. I was 34 by the time I finished primary school through the government’s adult education courses. At 45 I graduated from secondary school. Finally, I got a university degree as an engineer in the processing of natural medicine. It’s been a long road to this point in my academic life, but I feel fulfilled.

Before starting my studies I had a partner, from whom I suffered violence, but I only separated from him when I changed my way of thinking with the help of a foundation that supported women. I never had children, because I can’t, biologically speaking. I’m single as a matter of personal choice, and am now focused on my enterprise. I’m making syrups, oils, soaps and pomades, all based on medicinal plants.

I’m an independent woman who is satisfied with her life. The most precious thing that’s happened to me is that I was able to awaken my own interior voice and gave it a face, because we women, because of the violence, all too often nullify ourselves. I’m a member of the Las Diosas Cooperative, and in its representation have travelled to France, Peru, Brazil, Cuba, El Salvador and Honduras in search of markets for our coffee.

The cooperative wanted me to be part of the MEDA TL+ Rural Women program. I’m a trained woman, but I must say that the tools they gave us with which to prepare budgets, carry a register of revenues and expenditures, and so on, have helped me in my business and made it so I now value my work and am more aware of my businesses’ profitability, which is so important when taking decisions. I learned how to visualize in a specific, realistic way how far I want to get, and definitively my priority is to establish a natural medicine pharmacy, since I don’t see myself doing anything small. The vision I want and how I want it helps me break things down so I know what type of financing I need so as to place my business in the market. That’s my dream. If I may leave a message, it is that we women must believe in ourselves and our capacities. That will inspire us to act even if we harbour fears, but we must be sure to try.
“I have the power to decide to exchange sadness for faith, hope and courage.”
Hello! I’m María Magdalena López Molina

I grew up with four brothers and my parents, both of whom were merchants. I started working when I was 16, selling medicine at my parent’s business. But my skills as an entrepreneur really began coming to the fore when I was 12. I liked business, I sold handicrafts, coffee, all sorts of things. I studied accounting, but wasn’t able to graduate because it was expensive and my income wasn’t sufficient.

At the moment my life has its challenges and both my father’s and my brother’s support have been important during some painful family experiences such as the Alzheimer’s disease with which my mother was diagnosed six years ago.

With the first partner I had I suffered psychological maltreatment. We had a daughter, but I decided to separate. Currently I’m a businesswoman and work on the decoration and organization of events. I also make handicrafts, tablecloths, curtains, and teach decoration classes at a training institute and at programs implemented by the mayor’s office.

I attended the MEDA TL+ Rural Women workshop and my first challenge was dealing with my partner, since he considered it a waste of time and told me that my responsibility was to take care of my daughters. I thereupon simply took them with me.

The workshop showed me the personal limitations that were hindering my growth, and I’m working on overcoming them. One belief I had was that because of my two small daughters and the need to take care of my mother I couldn’t be successful in my business, but after the networking strategies we learned I think I’ll be fine. I also learned how important resilience is, because I discovered I’m strong and can get ahead amidst all the adversities because I face them with creativity, flexibility and faith.

I can see myself as the owner of my life and I’m going to continue working on my confidence in my capacities as an enterprising woman. I know I am a fighter and I think I can succeed. My goals are to invest in the equipment I need for my business so I no longer have to rent it. That would boost my profits, as would growing my sales, my income and my savings.

If this can be considered a message, it would be that our daily problems can be overcome if we believe in our capacities and use what we have to take advantage of our current possibilities, with hope for the future. We must continue learning so as to grow both as women and as entrepreneurs.
Let’s believe in ourselves and not let anyone humiliate us
Hello! My name is Santos González Paz, and I thank you for reading my story.

I grew up with only my mother, because my father died when I was six years old. I started working at the age of 12, helping my mother grow coffee and maize. I couldn’t go to school because it was far from home and in any case I had to help my mom. At the beginning, I was poorly treated and often scolded, told I wasn’t any good and they’d make me stay in the field until late. I met my children’s father, and although he never beat me, he humiliated me, because he’d say in front of other people that I wasn’t good at anything. He was forty, I was 17, so I decided I’d had enough and left him.

I’m a member of the Caja Rural de Waslala Cooperative and I have a business making artisanal chocolate, cacao butter to be used as a pomade and coconut oil for the skin. I was selected to participate in the MEDA TL+ Rural Women workshop, which taught me a new way to do business by using contacts in the community where I live, as well as how to make my products more attractive and increase the number of customers. The way I see myself has changed too. I’ve been shy all my life, but I realize I have to believe in myself. I know that not knowing how to read and write is a limitation as regards the possibility of growing the business, and that’s why I’ve asked my daughter to teach me how.

What I learned about time management made me see how important it is to set deadlines, have clear and realistic goals, act one step at a time, but act. I can now imagine my business in the future and I want to learn how to use those machines that make chocolate faster, so I can buy them and sell better chocolate, with an improved appearance, so as to increase my customers.

After the workshop the MEDA TL+ program took me to Río Blanco to visit a cooperative that specializes in making chocolate, so I could see what a chocolate business looks like, and it helped me understand what I should and what I should not do. Now I’ve improved my budget and I know I need to save, get a loan and buy the equipment and tools I need. If I were asked to give advice what I can say is that we need to overcome our shyness if we want to grow as women and as entrepreneurs. Let us be independent so no one can humiliate us, own our own businesses and make our own money. This is what will empower and make of us an example for our children.
Let's be happy. This is something which takes courage.
Hello! My name is María Alicia Amador Aguirre

I grew up with my parents and ten siblings. It was a very hard childhood, because when I was five a family relative abused me sexually, and to avoid a family conflict no complaint was filed. At the age of six I harvested beans and washed clothes. These were just household chores, but demanding for a child my age. I went to school and studied until I was 14, then fell in love with a lovely young man, but he was very poor, so my family wouldn't accept him, and they forced us to separate. By that time I was already pregnant.

My dad punished me by taking away my studies and I had my daughter. At 16 they forced me to marry someone and we went to live in town. But I wasn't happy. My husband drank, and I stayed with him to fill the emptiness I felt inside. He wouldn't let me work, and so I depended on him. I was still in love with my first boyfriend, but out of respect for my family we never saw each other again, even after I became a widow. And later on, he died too.

Once I was widowed, I returned to the countryside and started my businesses. At 71, I’m a happy woman, free and passionate about my work. I grow maize, cacao, plantains, malanga and am establishing a pig farm. I’m also a member of the SOPPEXCCA Union of Cooperatives.

I attended the MEDA TL+ Rural Women and Entrepreneurship workshop, where I learned about resilience, the importance of overcoming the past and that helped me to let go after years of pain over the abuse incident and the resentment caused by not having been able to live with the true love of my life. But talking about it helped me close that chapter. Today I feel liberated.

The practical exercises consolidated my self-confidence and my value as a woman. I’ll work one day at a time to cultivate these new beliefs in my mind that will help me on my way. I am still mourning the death of a son, and at the workshop I came to understand I need to see it as a process and live through it. Being strong doesn’t mean we can just block out the pain and that’s it. No, it’s something we need to move through so we can let it go.

As I said, I’m an enterprising woman. I want to improve my farm and increase the quality of my crops and get my pig farm up and going. There are many things to say to the women, but I want to leave it at this: please let us be happy, which is something that takes courage. Let’s not live to make other people happy. Don’t let anyone maltreat us. Always remember: we are the owners of our lives and there are people who can help us.
Failure is a learning experience
Hello! My name is Rosa Estelvina Larios and this is my story.

I grew up with my grandparents because my mother died of cancer, and I never knew my father. I was sent to school and it took me three tries to pass first grade. I paid no attention in class and thought I wasn’t smart enough. I had a tough childhood; in all that time I can’t remember having had a pair of shoes.

At 14 I started working as a cook and here is where I finally bought my first pair. At 17 I met a man with whom I had four children. He left me and I struggled on alone with my children, selling oranges, washing other people’s clothes and I managed to get them all through primary school. Then I met someone else, but the same thing happened, and like that successively, they all left me. I began a business making pork tamales, artisanal wines, bread and like that I advanced, little by little. Today I live a calm life, have a partner, and I feel I’m an energetic and fulfilled woman.

I went to the MEDA TL+ Rural Women workshop and I must say that it helped me to consider new ideas, such as networking. I used to have many limiting beliefs, one of them because of my age. I thought I could never learn to do math, but the workshop showed me that this was only in my mind. So I’m not giving up, I’m going to practice making budgets so my business calculations become more accurate.

I think my products are of good quality, but I can make them better. My objective is to improve the quality of my wines and label them so as to make the presentation attractive. To do that, I’m going to save profits from my sales. I also need some training to learn new fermentation techniques. I want to tell you this: to start an enterprise, we need to lose our fear of failure. Try – if it doesn’t go well, try again. Learn to see failure as a learning experience.
We need to believe in ourselves. That should be our priority.
Hello! My name is Juana Francisca Gutiérrez González

I grew up with my parents and six siblings. I was able to get to fifth grade. When I was a girl, I wanted to become a teacher. I gave up on that dream because I wasn't any good at math. At 15 I fell in love with a young man who took me to live at his house on a farm. I became a housewife, doing farm chores and dealing with the workers. I had three children, one of whom was murdered. I haven’t lived my life according to my wishes, but according to the instructions I got as a child. That has caused me sadness, because I feel I’ve lived out other people’s expectations of me.

I would like to have my own business, live my life according to my own initiative and be an independent woman. When they told me I had been chosen to attend the MEDA TL+ Rural Women workshop it was a challenge, because I live in a very remote community. Much of the way has to be travelled on foot, but I decided to go anyway and it was a very valuable experience.

At the workshop I heard all the other experiences lived by the other protagonists. The part about beliefs and their impact on the life of a businesswoman made me think about my value as a woman, my right to be the one deciding on my own what to do with my life. I am now aware that it is I who need to recognize my value as a woman first. I need to believe I am a valuable person, need to have confidence in myself and my abilities. I can overcome my insecurities if I have faith in myself. I learned many things, but it would take several pages to mention all of them.

I want to develop my business by investing in an oven and the utensils I’ll need for a bakery. I'm going to check out some options to get a loan. I know there are people or organizations whose doors I can knock on. I learned an important message I want to share with you: nobody should decide for us, not as women and not as entrepreneurs. We need to struggle to be able to do what we want. Life goes by and opportunities do too. We mustn't let that happen just because we've been told our life should be geared to living up to other people’s expectations.