

# Interviews

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## María del Rosario Flores Neira



*Founder and president of the credit and savings cooperative, the Association of Rural Women Workers (AMOC), former soldier in the Sandinista Army (1978-90), and feisty reformer, the spirited, straight-talking Rosario Flores helps women earn their daily bread and pushes them to stand up for themselves. Flores describes for us the workings of AMOC, the circumstances that led to its creation, and the army experiences which spurred her to develop her home-grown brand of feminism. As she discusses AMOC's many projects, she points out ways in which gender relations and women's health issues have been addressed through cooperative-related activities, and she highlights the crucial role that individual responsibility plays in making or breaking a cooperative. Flores details the complex challenge of changing traditional attitudes regarding saving money, paying back loans, and planning ahead, pointing out along the way the error of machista and asistencialista attitudes [promoting dependency] that have kept campesinas passive and subservient. Flores's observations reveal her practical nature and sense of humor, as well as her deeply-held belief that rural women must organize in order to survive.*

I've been working with country women since March 25, 1995, when AMOC [*Asociación de Mujeres Campesinas Obreras*, Association of Rural Women Workers] was created to help women survive economically and to value themselves as women.

It's important to have women's cooperatives because men are more likely to be wastrels [*despilfarradores de plata*] and to misuse money than are women, who are more thrifty [*retenedoras*]. We are the ones who manage the home, who are economical, and know how to administer what funds we have. Having been both father and mother myself, I had to learn quickly. The majority of women in AMOC are single mothers too. We are a group of women who have suffered, and our experiences make us want to help each other advance. We don't want anyone to say of us, "there goes that poor woman with her little suitcase and three rags." No. We have decided to fight to our last breath to help women at least to earn their daily bread; when you can do that you can retain your dignity.