

Strengthening Indigenous Communities in BOSAWAS, Nicaragua

Known as the “Lungs of Central America”, the BOSAWAS biosphere reserve is the largest tract of tropical rainforest north of the Amazon basin. Severe poverty threatens this reserve as non-indigenous peoples encroach upon the borders of the reserve, burning down the forest to grow their crops.

This reserve represents an area of great importance for the planet. It is a little studied tropical rainforest that is home to hundreds of species of birds, plants, animals and insects that have yet to be catalogued.

The health of the Miskito and Mayangna indigenous peoples in the region continues to be a tragedy. For this reason, Change for Children is implementing “the Community Health, Nutrition, Water, Sanitation and Empowerment Project for the Indigenous Communities of BOSAWAS” that places an emphasis on potable water, infant & child nutrition, the cultivation and use of natural medicines and the distribution of vitamins. It is evident that alternative solutions and health education are urgent and essential for the survival of these indigenous peoples.

With the survival of the Miskito and Mayangna peoples, comes the survival of the forest in which they live. A forest that is important to us all.



This project takes place in thirty nine communities in the Bosawas Biosphere Reserve in northern Nicaragua and will provide accessible and sustainable health care (with an emphasis on traditional medicine), potable water (water system rehabilitation in several communities and water filter distribution to every household), sanitation initiatives (latrines and community education), community leadership capacity building, income generation for women, nutritional improvement for community members (through community garden and community kitchen initiatives) and health promotion (through natural medicine cultivation and use).

Beneficiaries of this project are indigenous peoples (Miskito & Mayangna) who live in isolated communities in the Nicaraguan rainforest—within the UN-protected BOSAWAS Biosphere. All community members will benefit directly from project activities such as latrine construction, water system rehabilitation, water filter distribution and natural medicine promotion. Women will be the direct beneficiaries of the natural medicine cultivation project and the family garden and community kitchen capacity building activities, but the entire community will benefit from the results of these activities.



CHANGE FOR CHILDREN ASSOCIATION is an Edmonton-based charitable organization with a 32-year history of working for sustainable, grassroots community development in Latin America & Africa. Our development projects are determined by our Southern partners according to the needs of their communities. In Canada, our education program engages the public in a process of awareness raising, analysis & action on issues of global justice.

Three pillars of sustainability are combined in this project in a unique and innovative way. The social standing of women will be elevated because they are targeted specifically for training as health promoters and community leaders. Economic benefits will be gained by the promoters as their roles will incorporate an income generation opportunity that will directly improve their quality of life. Ecological health is also a key component of this project as it is crucial that the health of the indigenous population be assured in order to preserve this vital forest region.



The primary partner responsible for this project is the Nicaraguan NGO Centro Humboldt, a non-profit, civil society organization whose mission is to promote environmental protection through sustainable development. Centro Humboldt has been working on environmental preservation and sustainable development initiatives with Nicaraguan communities since 1990. Centro Humboldt will work directly with ADEPCIMISUJIN, the indigenous association that represents the Miskito and Mayangna communities in the Reserve. The mandate of the Association is to elevate the quality of life in the communities, to strive for the respect of their traditions, languages and cultural identity; to strengthen the practice of individual and collective rights, and to try to arrange for material, economic and technical assistance.

Project at a Glance:

- Rehabilitate 5 community water systems (replacement piping, establishment of public water posts, clean-up of contaminated sites, replacement of catchment tanks, tap replacements, filter installation, etc.).
- Form 5 Community Water Management Committees and train them in: national water laws, environmental laws, technical water use norms, functioning and maintenance of water system, protection, conservation and responsible water use.
- Train 39 female community health promoters in hygiene (water and sanitation), nutrition, preventable illness (with a focus on malaria prevention and prevention of STDs and HIV). They will be able to generate income from the cultivation and sale of natural medicines.
- Distribution of water filters to households as well as to 50 schools, training to teachers in use and support from Community Health Promoters and Water Management Committees.
- Construction of 100 latrines in 5 communities in order to support quality hygiene and water systems in the most populous areas of BOSAWAS.
- 116 families (preference to single mothers, families with young children who show signs of malnutrition) to participate in family gardens initiative which includes annual family garden management workshops which will focus on gardening knowledge, problem management and knowledge transfer between beneficiaries.
- Development of community kitchen initiative which includes community kitchen workshop series (twice annually) with 39 female community kitchen promoters. Workshops will focus upon cooking healthily with available foods, nutritional needs of various age groups, portion size. Community kitchen promoters will be responsible to replicate community workshops providing nutrition information gained to at least 218 women.
- Annual inter-community meetings will bring together indigenous community organizations to ensure full participation and support in project activities, network and build cooperation among the organizations and develop and share best practices.

PLEASE SUPPORT THIS IMPORTANT PROJECT



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