

Primary School Construction in Bosawas, Nicaragua

Nicaragua is geographically located in the heart of Central America. Although it is a fairly small country, it boasts a large population of 5.1 million people, of which 53% is under the age of 18.

Nicaragua is the third poorest country in the Americas and faces major challenges of inequity and poverty, which affect children and women most severely. While the country's per capita gross national product of \$453, its foreign debt is roughly \$6 billion and the repayment of this debt gravely affects 2.3 million Nicaraguans who live in poverty, 831,000 of whom live in extreme poverty, as the Miskito indigenous people of BOSAWAS do.

Coupled with high levels of poverty are low levels of education. In half of the poor families, the most educated family member has - at maximum - an elementary school education. This member is usually the man of the house, as the women of poor families do not typically receive a formal education.

Access to education in Nicaragua is extremely limited - nationally only 79 per cent of primary-school-age children are enrolled and this number drops significantly in these Miskito indigenous communities to under 45%. In addition, the quality and relevance of the Nicaraguan education system is in question - especially in isolated areas like BOSAWAS which have largely been ignored by the Nicaraguan Department of Education. Here only 19 per cent of children complete primary schooling.



Extreme poverty affects school participation, with many families unable to afford the direct or hidden costs. Poverty also results in child labour, which affects more than 167,000 Nicaraguan children and adolescents.

“It is education that will provide the next generation with the tools to fight poverty and conquer disease, and it is equality for boys and girls in access to education that will ensure a future in which girls and boys are equally safe, healthy, protected and empowered. **This is not a charitable enterprise, but a moral imperative....**

Decades after commitments and reaffirmations of those commitments have been made to ensure a quality education for every child; some 121 million children are still denied this right.”

- UNICEF State of the World's Children Report 2005.



CHANGE FOR CHILDREN ASSOCIATION (CFA) is an Edmonton-based non-profit, organization with a 30-year history of working for sustainable, grassroots community development in Latin America, Africa and the Philippines. Our development projects, their cost and priority, are determined by our Southern partners according to the needs of their communities. In Canada, our global education program engages the public in a process of awareness raising, analysis and action on issues of global justice.



In the Miskito indigenous communities of BOSAWAS, one of every four households is headed by a woman. Extensive family violence here has led to family disintegration and a culture of violence which has affected community development initiatives quite severely and hampered compliance with national directives designed to improve quality of life. For example, today in Nicaragua, 36 per cent of children are not legally registered due to administrative, legal and cultural barriers which cause problems with their access to education and health care. Another example is the prolonged existence of approximately 76,000 landmines across the country - and especially in the border regions where these indigenous communities lie - which continues to be a high-risk factor for children.

The primary school will be built in the indigenous community of Pamkawas, on the Rio Coco in the BOSAWAS Biosphere Reserve. It will provide primary school education for 320 children who are currently not attending school and an additional 120 that currently attend school in a sub-standard facility. Primary school education has

been the single most important factor in improving and diversifying opportunities for the children of Nicaragua - especially in isolated areas like BOSAWAS. BOSAWAS, along with its sister reserve in southern Honduras, form the largest tract of tropical forest north of the Amazon basin. Known as the "Lungs of Central America," this 730,000-hectare reserve is a critical habitat for hundreds of species of birds, animals, plants, and insects.

As stewards of this precious forest, the Miskito people are in need of educational and capacity building initiatives that help them to manage the forest reserve. The Miskito children of BOSAWAS, if educated, will have many opportunities to work on community development initiatives, on agricultural diversification and on economic development initiatives. In April of 2005, the Miskito people gained title to their traditional lands which are located inside the forest reserve of BOSAWAS. They are currently drafting plans for land management and self government - initiatives which will require an educated population in order to be successful.



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