

field report



Standing Room Only Secondary School Saturdays



The Bosawas Biosphere Reserve is the largest tract of tropical forest north of the Amazon. For hundreds of years, it has been home to the Miskito and Mayagna peoples, currently the most impoverished population in Central America.

In Bosawas communities without secondary schools, the use of primary school space for secondary studies on Saturdays is common practice. A single day each week dedicated to studies means condensed lessons, less instructional time, and fewer successful graduates. And in some communities, where government has been remiss in upgrading, maintaining, or providing adequate infrastructure at all, conditions for learning are less than ideal to say the least.

A visit to Saturday classes in the community of Tuburus reveals a dismal learning environment and a distressing lack of seating. In one open-air classroom, a single bench, a plastic patio seat, and a toddler chair are all that is available for the class of 15 students. Standing room only.

Realities in the Bosawas biosphere rainforest reserve in Nicaragua suggest a seemingly simple life. A closer look, however, reveals not-so-simple challenges. Challenged by a location that sees the people here being marginalized

by the centralized government, a river that makes trade and economic activities challenging, and natural disasters that threaten a way of life that relies on the land and its bounty, subsistence living on the banks of the Rio Coco is difficult to say the least.

Our plan to improve access to education in the Bosawas includes secondary school construction to provide students in the area, eager to continue their studies, with a roof over their heads. Every day of the week. This project means a more educated indigenous population. It means local people occupying positions of responsibility in the area. It means informed decisions for the people and the forest being made by those who hold the highest stake.

The provision of scholarships for girls and an education campaign to support and encourage the education of young girls and women who currently lack opportunity means that girls will attend school beyond grade six – an uncommon practice in the Bosawas.

Luz Maria and the rest of her fourth-year Secondary School class sit around the stub wall of the primary school comedor in Tuburus. It is Saturday and while classes are well-attended, drop-out rates are high. The absence of seating and desks and the presence of livestock in some of the classrooms reveals a lacking learning environment.



Stand up for education in the Bosawas by giving students a place to sit down.

124 million children and adolescents are out of school worldwide. Adolescents are nearly twice as likely as children to be out of school. (UNESCO, Data Release 2015)



Turning Can'ts into Cans

The construction of secondary schools in the Bosawas and the promotion of girls' education will allow teachers to turn can'ts into cans for students living in this isolated region. In an area riddled with CAN'TS – nearly 50% of the population can't read; many students can't attend secondary school in their own community simply because there isn't one; most girls can't travel outside their own communities or the indigenous territory to attend classes because of obligations to the household – it is time for a little CAN!



Barriers to Girls' Education

- Poverty
- Domestic and family responsibilities
- Lack of priority in the family
- No parental support
- Early marriage
- Distance to school and safety concerns
- Lack of resources for school fees and supplies
- Cultural norms
- Early pregnancy
- Poor infrastructure

It is estimated that if women had a secondary education, there would be 49% fewer deaths of children under age 5 in low and middle income countries: That would save 2.8 million lives.
(Unicef, allinschool.org)

52% of the world's out-of-school children are girls
(Unicef, allinschool.org)



Campaign for girls' education | *An investment in the future*

Girls and boys have the Right to Education. It's one of the fundamental rights. Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child spells it out clearly in black and white. 192 countries have ratified the treaty. And while we are making strides toward gender parity, girls continue to be underrepresented in schools in developing countries. Especially in secondary schools.

In the Bosawas, educating boys is prioritized while girls are too often asked to trade school for work to help support impoverished families. Campaigning for girls' education means changing attitudes to ensure girls are treated equally and it means promoting investment in girls' education as an investment in a community's and a country's development and future.

Investing in girls' education is not only good for girls on an individual level. In addition to resulting in increased autonomy and self-esteem, increased participation in community organizations and political processes, and increased economic empowerment (each year of secondary school education increases a girl's potential income by 15 to 25%), research has shown that each year of a mother's schooling reduces the risk of infant mortality by 5 to 10%.

Educated women are more likely to send their children to school, creating a ripple effect of poverty reduction for future generations.



Standing up for Girls' Education

- Provide equal access to education by making schools more accessible
- Promote gender equality in teaching practices
- Raise community awareness about gender equality and the importance of investing in girls
- Engage men and women, boys and girls, in the promotion of girls' and women's rights
- Provide school gardens with a shared bounty as an incentive for parents to send their daughters to school
- Provide scholarships for girls to pursue post-secondary education

Turning Dreams into Plans

A dream declared becomes a goal.

Maria is in the 6th grade of primary school, the eldest of 7 brothers, and the daughter of a humble peasant Miskito farmer in the community of Pamkawas located along the Rio Coco in the Bosawas.

Every afternoon she helps her parents in the work of their small farm growing taro, yucca, and rice. In addition to helping with the agricultural work, Maria helps sell some of the modest harvest within her community and also on the banks of the river to boat traders travelling from upstream Wiwili.

Maria maintains a keen interest in her studies despite her parents' reluctance to send her and her considerable responsibilities at home. She gets up daily at 4:30 am to help her mother make tortillas, and after breakfast she dons her tattered white and blue uniform and sets out on her journey to school through the rainforest. On her way, Maria daydreams of being a doctor.

A goal pursued becomes a plan.

Maria, now in her final year of secondary school, attends classes with much dedication. A new secondary school built by Change for children in the heart of her community has allowed Maria to continue her studies beyond primary school. Money continues to be scarce for her family. Maria's parents want her to marry so that she is no longer under their charge. But Maria has other plans. Despite how impossible it seems, Maria still dreams of being a doctor. While her community has a government health centre, it is frequently un-manned as doctors, not local to the area, travel in and out for months at a time, leaving her community vulnerable.

In her final year of high school, seeing her potential, Maria is offered a scholarship to continue her education – a rare opportunity to fulfill the dream that has consumed her life.

A plan with action becomes a dream come true.

Today, Maria is on her way to receiving a degree in general medicine. She looks forward to returning to the Bosawas to help her family and to give medical care to the children, youth, and adults in her community.

She will become one of fifteen people in the Bosawas who hold a bachelor's degree. As an educated woman, she is more likely to delay marriage and childbirth, to immunize her children, to improve her family's earning potential, and to contribute to the prosperity of her community.



Evidence suggests that among all levels of education, secondary and higher levels of education have the greatest payoff for women's empowerment.
(UN Millennium Project)

Secondary School: Not just for Saturdays anymore

Removing the barriers to education is the best way to increase enrollment for all children, boys and girls. Together, we can improve opportunities. Your support helps us educate communities about gender equality and the importance of investing in girls and helps us empower young girls through the provision of a safe and inclusive environment and education scholarships. YOUR support increases the number of skilled and educated people making informed decisions for the people of the Bosawas, for generations to come.



About 3.8 million primary school-aged children and 2.8 million adolescents do not attend school in Latin America and the Caribbean. (Unicef, allinschool.org)

"When you invest in women and girls, you invest in everyone." – Melinda Gates

Our goals:

- Accessible education for all at all levels
- Elimination of the gender gap
- Increased number of girls continuing to post-secondary education
- Increased family investment in girls' education
- Empowered women taking on leadership roles
- Reduced early marriage

Our commitment:

- 2005 Primary School Construction – Pamkawas
- 2010 Secondary School Construction – San Andres
- 2012 Secondary School Construction – Walakitang
- 2013 Secondary School Construction – Yakalpanani
- 2016 Secondary School Construction – Aniwas and Pamkawas



Remember that teacher? The one who told you that anything was possible. The one who picked you up when you fell. The one who gave gold stars, who took the time to write in the margins, who preached, "Never say never," and who forbade you to speak the words, "I can't" in the classroom, because, as it turns out, you could? Secondary schools in the Bosawas will provide a space for just such teachers to open the doors of opportunity for students facing many obstacles.

Please support higher education in the Bosawas. Turn can'ts into cans. And dreams into plans.

Special thanks to **60 million girls** and to the **Hurl-Smith Family** for their generous support of secondary school construction in the Bosawas.



40



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Change for Children partners with grassroots organizations in Latin America & Africa to support community-based solutions to poverty and social injustice while providing unique global education programs here in Canada.

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