



Change for
Children

A CHANGE FOR CHILDREN PUBLICATION

BUILDING BRIDGES

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STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE AND SELF-RELIANCE
WALKING IN PARTNERSHIP AS AN ALLY TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES FOR 45 YEARS

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"AS Indigenous PEOPLES, WE REPRESENT 5% OF THE GLOBAL POPULATION BUT SAFEGUARD 80% OF THE WORLD'S REMAINING BIODIVERSITY. WE ARE THE CRITICAL BARRIER BETWEEN INDUSTRY AND THE LAND. OUR SOVEREIGNTY IS NECESSARY FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE."

*Ta'Kaiya Blaney
Tla'Amin First Nation*

2021 marks our 45th anniversary as an organization. For 45 years, Change for Children has promoted health and human rights by championing creative solutions to poverty through sustainable development. And for 45 years, Change for Children has been an ally working in partnership with Indigenous peoples. In cooperation with the Indigenous people of developing countries, our aim is to identify the root causes of poverty and, in the spirit of solidarity, assist in finding long-term solutions.

This has been, and continues to be, the Change for Children way.

This way - with your support - has helped **preserve "the lungs of Central America."**

This way - with your support - has helped **preserve Indigenous languages.**

This way - with your support - has helped **protect biodiversity**, of great importance to the planet.

This way - with your support - has helped **slow climate change** and helped Indigenous people adapt, pivot, and thrive in the face of it.

We are so grateful for your support as we chart the way forward in cooperation with our southern partners, and we hope you will continue with us on our journey down the farthest roads and along the longest rivers – all the way to off-grid, offline communities. In the remote, **we find and foster resilience.**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lorraine Swift".

Lorraine Swift
Executive Director, Change for Children

THE WAY WE WORK.

Change for Children supports projects directed by Indigenous peoples to elevate quality of life; to strive for the respect of traditions, languages and cultural identity; to strengthen individual and collective rights; and to provide material, economic, and technical assistance. This has been our way for 45 years.



Indigenous Peoples

have a historical link with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies; distinct social, economic, or political systems; distinct language, culture, and beliefs; and have (or had) their own land and territory, to which they are connected.

(UN.org) Indigenous peoples are the holders of unique languages, knowledge systems and beliefs and possess invaluable knowledge of practices for the sustainable management of natural resources. They have a special relation to and use of their traditional land. Their ancestral land has a fundamental importance for their collective physical and cultural survival as peoples. Indigenous peoples hold their own diverse concepts of development, based on their traditional values, visions, needs and priorities. Indigenous peoples often have much in common with other neglected segments of societies, i.e. lack of political representation and participation, economic marginalization and poverty, lack of access to social services and discrimination. They strive for recognition of their identities, their ways of life and their right to traditional lands, territories and natural resources.

In Partnership

Change for Children's rich history includes working in partnership with the Mapuche Nation in Chile, the Mosenen Indigenous peoples in Alto Beni, Bolivia, the Siona peoples of Ecuador, the Miskito and Mayagna peoples of Nicaragua and Honduras, and the Maya-Mam peoples of Guatemala.



There are more than **5,000** different Indigenous groups around the world.

With over 476 million Indigenous peoples living in 90 countries across the world, there exists a vast diversity of unique cultures, traditions, languages and knowledge systems. And while Indigenous peoples have a special relationship with their lands, many Indigenous peoples are under the authority of central governments who exercise control over their lands and resources.



BOSAWAS BIOSPHERE RESERVE

The Miskito and Mayagna peoples are stewards of the largest tract of tropical rainforest north of the Amazon, the BOSAWAS Biosphere Reserve in Nicaragua. Change for Children has been working with the Indigenous Government and peoples for over twenty years on projects supporting education, climate change mitigation and adaptation, environmental and cultural preservation, renewable energy, gender equality, and improved governance.

Self-Government

Change for Children has been accompanying the Indigenous territorial government on its journey to self-government and land management for more than twenty years.

Traditional systems of community-based organization and governance facilitate capacity and resilience to respond collectively to climate change.

Education and Equality

Recent access to off-line educational resources through our Technology for Education projects is improving learning outcomes and represents significant investment in the education of youth in an area challenged by economic marginalization, exclusion from most government services, and largely without textbooks or the internet.

Providing teachers (many of whom are not educated beyond Grade 6) with training improves their capacities to address gender issues, teach Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, explore issues relating to Indigenous rights, and emphasize resilience and environmental stewardship in the classroom and community.

Empowered youth become adults equipped with educated decision-making autonomy and benefit the entire region.



Cultural Preservation

One of the greatest achievements of the Technology and Training for Quality and Equality project is the keen interest of teachers and students to use the innovative curriculum resources in their mother tongue. Requests from communities for more educational content in Miskito, including locally produced content about Miskito customs, traditions, and adaptations, were received.

In response, project facilitators are engaging students and elders in the process of recording oral and visual history, stories, tales, cultural traditions, adaptations, and traditional medicine practices for inclusion on the digital libraries to be preserved and made accessible and available to all.



"WE WERE MISSING DEEP AND PROFOUND EXPLANATIONS OF CONCEPTS IN OUR OWN LANGUAGE. THAT NEED HAS FINALLY BEEN GIVEN A SOLUTION."

*Flor Martinez,
Preschool Teacher, BOSAWAS*

SAFEGUARDING LANGUAGE

(Nicole Farn, Communications Coordinator)

It is 2013, and I am visiting the BOSAWAS for the first time. I scribble down phonetic abominations of Miskito words in my pocket notebook. I offer up my mispronounced efforts with my handshake, and I smile too big, proud of myself. I listen intently as conversations are had in this language—the mother tongue of the Miskito people—that I do not understand. And then I notice that sometimes I do. I recognize a word here, an expression there. It is Spanish and even a little English.

And while some English and Spanish words have been colloquially adopted over the years, I also come to find out that some Miskito words just aren't there. They have been lost. Forgotten. And while this is surely part evolutionary as societies co-mingle, it is also part tragedy.

Miskito is the dominant language in a region historically characterized by three Indigenous language groups: Miskito and Mayagna languages, and Matagalpan (the Misumalpan languages). There are nearly 200,000 Miskito speakers in the North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region of Nicaragua (and some in Honduras), but it is losing ground. Mayagna is endangered in most areas where it is found, and the Matagalpan languages are long extinct.

With over 6000 languages spoken in the world (43% of which are endangered), only a few hundred languages have genuinely been given a place in education systems and the public domain. Less than one hundred are used in the digital world. Globally, 40% of the population does not have access to an education in a language they speak or understand.

Change for Children is championing efforts to increase the accessibility of mother tongue-based multilingual education in the BOSAWAS. And, we have started by better equipping those who have the greatest influence on what new generations are learning — the teachers.

Professora Perez shares that while Miskito is her mother tongue, many words remain unknown to her, and she only recently learned the months of the year in Miskito through the resources on her school's new digital library.

Technology by way of digital libraries and educational materials in the mother tongue of Miskito are now available in seven communities along the Rio Coco. Preserving the tongue, the traditions, and the legacy of ancestors is a treasure in any culture and is critical in maintaining identity as Indigenous peoples for the Miskito families in the Bosawas.



THE WAY FORWARD.

Resilience and Renewable Energy

As evidenced by a history of hurricane activity which continues to change the landscape, impact agriculture, and threaten livelihoods in the BOSAWAS, the Miskito and Mayagna peoples are vulnerable to the effects of natural disasters and of climate change. Mitigation strategies have included maintaining seed and crop diversity, modifying land-use patterns, increasing reliance on local resources, and diversifying livelihoods.

The deployment of solar power to power classroom technology has bridged both the energy and the digital divide and can now be leveraged to allow the transmission of Indigenous knowledge and citizen science data collected by Indigenous forest rangers to contribute to the worldwide body of data informing global conservation efforts as well as climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts.



What's Next

Efforts prioritizing local Indigenous knowledge to build conservation capacity are needed to improve the sustainable management of the BOSAWAS Biosphere Reserve, which is essential to the survival of Indigenous peoples in the face of climate change.

Activities with a focus on sustainability, self-sufficiency, and improved governance capacity—including engaging in citizen science initiatives, supporting natural medicine practitioners, and promoting comprehensive community planning with a gender equality lens—are being explored. We need your support to mitigate the vulnerabilities to climate change that perpetuate the cycle of poverty in Miskito communities.

“Indigenous peoples and marginalised populations are particularly exposed and sensitive to climate change impacts due to their resource-based livelihoods and homelands in marginal environments. Small population size, isolation, and the absence of recognised rights over resources contribute to their vulnerability to economic, social and environmental impacts that are exacerbated by climate change.”

(UNESCO, 2017)

THE ONLY WAY

In this remote area of Nicaragua, it is often absence that drives the way forward.

The absence of medical personnel in most communities and the absence of pharmaceutical drugs (either not available or too costly to afford) means that natural medicine is most often the ONLY option community members have to lessen the symptoms of common diseases. The Indigenous government's self-governance ordinance specifically provides for natural medicine to be used in conjunction with the Western Medicine offered by the Ministry of Health's sparse and under-resourced health posts in the region. The proliferation of natural medicine is a demonstration of results in response to need.

The absence of a traditional electrical grid makes solar power the ONLY sustainable energy option for most for turning on lights or for powering devices from radios to cell phones. Sure, the occasional hum of a generator can be heard, but generators and fuel to power them must be transported into the region by boat – a costly and prohibitive proposition for most.

The absence of curriculum materials, teacher training opportunities, or textbooks means that the digital libraries Change for Children has recently deployed in seven communities is the ONLY way to access educational resources.

In this remote area of Nicaragua, from scarcity emerges innovation and a resilience born of necessity.

This is the way forward.

"THIS INNOVATION HAS THE POTENTIAL TO ACCELERATE THE CAPACITY IN NICARAGUA TO ACHIEVE THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL OF HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION AVAILABLE TO ALL CHILDREN AND YOUTH BY 2030."

*Nicaragua Ministry of Education,
in response to Change for Children's Technology
for Education initiative*





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WE ARE REACHING OUT TO OUR COMMUNITY

THE WAY BACK



The global climate summit (COP26) recently took place in Glasgow, Scotland. And while countries agree to work together to curb climate change through emissions reductions, by mobilizing climate finance, and by building defences and adaptations for vulnerable communities and habitats to avoid loss of homes, livelihoods, and lives, it remains imperative to make nature part of the mainstream.

We must partner with nature—in our economies, societies, and everyday lives—to reduce our carbon footprint, to reverse course. Natural climate solutions have a huge impact in removing carbon from the atmosphere: Reversing deforestation, implementing smarter farming practices, restoring forests, grasslands, and wetlands.

“Protecting, restoring and managing natural landscapes and wetlands could deliver up to a third of emission reductions we need over the next decade.”

– *The Nature Conservancy*

And while it may seem overwhelming to make an impact as an individual, supporting Indigenous communities who manage some of the most carbon-rich and biodiversity-rich landscapes in the world is crucial in the preservation of these environments. Climate change will do the most harm to the people who have done the least to cause it; helping the most vulnerable thrive is a win not only against climate change but also in the fight against extreme poverty.

Today is the beginning of the way back. Let’s get to it.



Books are heavy, and boxes aren’t waterproof, but giving the gift of education and clean water is still at your fingertips if you **Give Outside the Box** this season! Change for Children projects are a product of Outside-the-Box thinking. And some of the best gifts are too! Global gift cards can be ordered online at www.changeforchildren.org. #giveoutsidethebox

Season’s Greetings from the Change for Children team: Lorraine Swift, Adrienne Wiebe, Nicole Farn, Olivia Krol, and Cecily Mills

Our work would not be possible without the support of local partners, global partners, and community supporters.

