



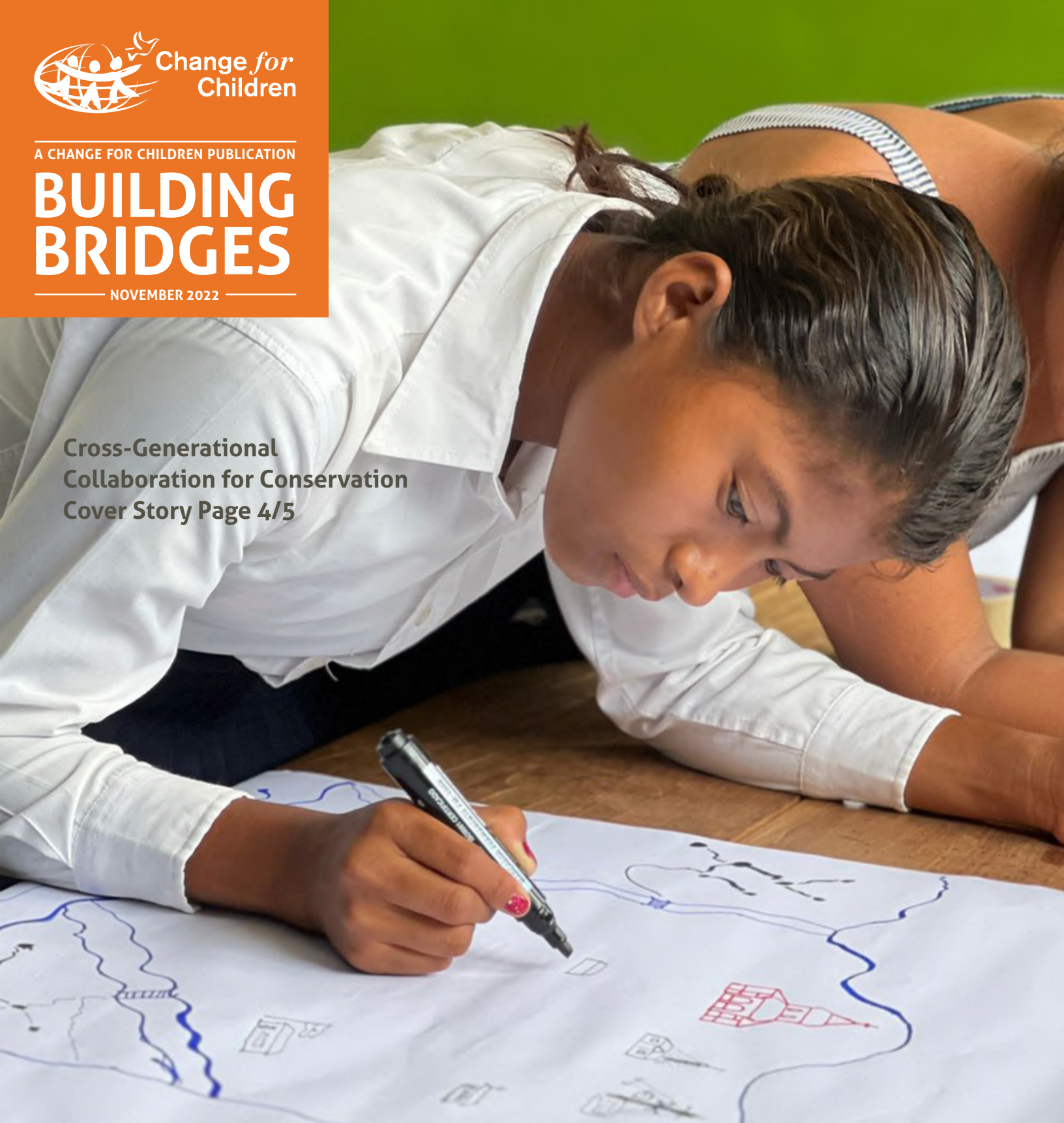
Change for
Children

A CHANGE FOR CHILDREN PUBLICATION

BUILDING BRIDGES

NOVEMBER 2022

Cross-Generational
Collaboration for Conservation
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**WOMEN AND GIRLS:
PROTAGONISTS IN THEIR STORIES OF RESILIENCE**
Demonstrating strength, creativity, and innovation in the face of challenge

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Change for Children works with partners in the developing world on rights-based development - women's rights, indigenous rights, children's rights. Making sure these are achieved is the root of our work.

This year, our work married technical knowledge with traditional Indigenous knowledge; we prioritized Indigenous language and culture, and we saw and supported the proliferation of natural medicine.

Our work deploying technology just prior to the pandemic allowed us to deliver valuable health information to vulnerable populations at a time when they needed it most. This same technology has provided a platform to disseminate sexual and reproductive health and rights information and has granted female teachers with familial obligations the opportunity to access valuable training otherwise not locally available.

"Gender equality depends on women having power, not just empowerment."

– Melinda French Gates

But our work, it seems, is never done. And today, we see the progress of our work hindered by the concurrent crises we see unfolding around us: climate change, conflict, scarcity and instability.

Though the devastating consequences of our warming planet affect us all, the damage caused by climate change is far from equal. The climate crisis is here, and it's disproportionately harming people in the countries least responsible for climate change.

It is increasingly recognized that as climate change intensifies, women will struggle the most. Women have less access to basic human rights and less ability to acquire land. Women are more likely to live in poverty than men, are more likely to be responsible for the care of others, and are more likely to face violence that escalates during periods of conflict and instability. This is the reality in which we work.



Change for Children seeks to confront this reality. Women and girls consistently demonstrate strength, creativity, and innovation in the face of challenge, and Change for Children walks with them as they claim their power.

Thank you for walking with us – and for helping us to plant the seeds of change that we so desperately need.

Lorraine Swift
Executive Director, Change for Children

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



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WOMEN'S ASSEMBLY AND INCLUSIVITY IN THE BOSAWAS

When Quelita, the group's presiding president, calls the WIMPA meeting to order, it is the first time she has done so in more than a decade – the cost and burden to gather over 70 women representatives of the 38 Communities on the Nicaragua side of the Rio Coco in the BOSAWAS biosphere reserve having been simply too great to continue without support.

Along with the housekeeping items, welcome speeches, and acknowledgements that typically open a gathering (whether in a big city conference room or hours downriver off-grid in a rainforest), the women also establish a list of their own rules and expectations that I can't help but think also projects aspirations for outside these walls — topping the list: **Everyone participates; Everyone is respected.**

Next comes the process of identifying priorities for their respective communities — what would help alleviate current challenges? How could the Territorial Government be more supportive? What could the WIMPA pursue collectively to advocate for the rights of women and girls individually? The women are not short on ideas. They have, however, been short a platform to express them for far too long. It is for just this reason that reviving the WIMPA is so important.

Never before had many of the women been invited to cast a vote. Never before had many of the women been asked to provide their input in small groups. To share ideas. To envision the future. Never before had many of the women had the time to give even a moment's thought to self-care, a foreign concept to the gathered group of women asked to relax, to close their eyes, to simply breathe – in and out. But here, together, if only briefly, **the women give each other permission to demand some breathing room.**

The women are proud to be here, to have been selected as representatives. They want to work together, to advocate stronger together, to take back their rights, to make sure that no one is left out of the process, to ensure that the needs of women and girls are considered in decisions that affect their lives, and most importantly, to be included in decision-making processes.

As hands are held in a large group circle during closing messages, there is a sense of belonging – a new beginning, perhaps. A fresh start, most certainly.



Change for Children is working with local Indigenous women to revive their traditional governance structure, WIMPA—the Miskito Women's association of the upper Coco River. This past May, more than seventy representatives from communities of all sizes along the Coco River gathered together for the first time in over a decade. The newly elected leadership will take their rightful place as a recognized governing body of the Indigenous territories of BOSAWAS and help to ensure that issues of local economic growth, gender equality, territorial defense, and climate change mitigation remain at the forefront of decision making.





ROOTED IN THE RAINFOREST

By designation, biosphere reserves promote solutions reconciling the conservation of biodiversity with its sustainable use. But with every acre that's slashed, every tree that's burned, and every species that is forced from its habitat by the actions and illegal encroachment of settlers into protected territory, the sustainability of the BOSAWAS biosphere reserve in Nicaragua is under threat.

The BOSAWAS is made up of a buffer zone intended to accommodate small-scale farming and a protected core zone where Indigenous people have lived for thousands of years. Granted land titles by the government, Indigenous peoples farm collective lands, hunt, and fish within the core zone.

But as migrants move to the region in search of fertile land and space, the buffer zone is being breached, and the core zone is also being cleared, illegally and subversively, and sometimes even violently.

And while not obvious from the river banks or from the front porches of homes in the small Miskito villages, deeper into the jungle, the forest bears its scars. A review of aerial photography charts the egregious destruction of pockets of forest land - deep pockets in many cases - that reflect back as vapid black holes amidst the surrounding tropical jungle.

It has been estimated that over 30% of the BOSAWAS biosphere reserve has been cleared, leading to drying of rivers, altered ecosystems, animal migration, and, ultimately, altered climate.

Miskito forest rangers, no longer funded by the government, were once tasked with patrolling, protecting, and preserving the territory. Volunteers, no less concerned for the forest's fate, continue to take on the task, though less frequently. Without support for enforcement of violations reported and under threat of violent confrontations, this valiant Indigenous stewardship is sadly unsustainable.

A NEW APPROACH TO ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION

Change for Children has recently introduced and deployed the use of MAPEO software in the BOSAWAS to enable local Indigenous communities to engage in monitoring and documenting environmental and human rights information by adding local detail to satellite maps. Forest rangers, who know every detail of the surrounding lands and territory, have been paired with students who

know how to navigate technology. Together, this cross-generational pairing of skill sets will allow the Miskito people to collect and document evidence of threats to the land, to document wildlife and altered wildlife patterns, to map important places and resources, and to record climate impacts. MAPEO documentation can be leveraged to support community action, reports to authorities, the launch of media campaigns, and the creation of maps for land claims and territorial defence.



THE NEXT GENERATION OF CONSERVATION

By Sherling Guerrero Fernández, Grade 10 student

I was born in the San Andres community in the BOSAWAS. I really like living in my community, because of the tranquility of living directly with nature. Soccer is my favorite sport, but walking in the woods with my uncles and cousins is something I also love to do.

Despite living in a community without access to technology like in big cities, I have learned to use technology recently thanks to the educational technology project that Change for Children implemented in my community. I was able to learn to use the computer, and it has helped us a lot to have access to a digital library.

Working with the forest rangers is a fairly new process for me. This is the first time we are collaborating. I am excited about the new experience and the knowledge I am gaining from them, but I am also embarrassed to realize how little I know about my own territory. I have learned many new things from interacting with the forest rangers, like becoming aware of names of places that I did not know before, understanding the boundaries of my territory, and learning the stories of the struggles over the years to defend our land.

The knowledge that the forest rangers possess is invaluable, and although I feel that the part I play is small, they have appreciated my helping them to better use the cell phones and the MAPEO software. It brings me joy to know that I am contributing in that way.

I am grateful to the territorial government and Change for Children for this opportunity to participate in a project in defense of Mother Earth that also recognizes the importance of encouraging women to be part of the solutions.

I think it is very important to protect the BOSAWAS, because the next generations depend on the actions we take today. If the actions we take are the right ones, the next generations will thank us and live to do the same. I believe that we must set the example. In the future, I want to become an educator or a forestry engineer, so I can continue to support the defense of my Indigenous territory.



Change for Children has been working with communities in Nicaragua to achieve their right to water since 2002, drilling water wells and providing community support in the establishment of Community Water Committees in a region with a long history of active civic participation and female-driven community organizations.



WATER GIVES VOICE

The voice of women in water management is critical given that the responsibility for water in families often falls on their shoulders. Ensuring women's access to information and increasing the number of women in decision-making roles when it comes to water and sanitation not only makes sense, but also encourages a more gender-equitable division of labour for the management and maintenance of water systems. Promoting the increased participation and influence of women also prepares and empowers women to find their voice in decision-making spaces at all levels: community, regional, municipal, departmental, and national.

Change for Children's support of Circuit Riders is a critical step to ensure sustainability of new water systems installed in cooperation with communities, with the goal of reducing and ultimately eliminating dependency on their visits over time.

BREAKING BARRIERS

The ground trembles underfoot as we cross in front of the pumphouse - the vibrations a telltale sign that the water pump has just kicked in, pulling water out of the ground and up into the nearby water tank towering over the Valle las Zapatas community.

Communities like Valle las Zapatas have faced many barriers in the pursuit of organizing to achieve legal recognition of their Community Water Committees (CWC). Obtaining land title of the water system in the name of the CWC, acquiring municipal and national registration, and having a bank account in the name of the CWC are no small hurdles. Legalization allows CWCs to function more efficiently and advocate more effectively for their water needs and rights. Legalization also means qualifying for a lower electricity tariff. Legal recognition has its benefits.

But, with or without legal recognition, CWCs are not without support. Valle las Zapatas is part of Maryuri's purview. It is one of 26 communities that she visits on her rounds as a trained water technician - a Circuit Rider.

While Community Water Committees are taking the lead in water management, breaking down the barriers that previously impeded the sustainability of community water, Maryuri is also breaking barriers in a male-dominated field. A graduate of Agroecological Engineering (and a ten-year veteran astride a motorbike!), she rides into communities trained, competent, and confident. As a Circuit rider, Maryuri provides water quality monitoring and technical assistance, community leader training, and capacity building to strengthen CWCs. Maryuri is breaking barriers in her field while helping communities to overcome barriers to clean water.



KEEPERS OF TRADITIONAL ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE

Rosa Emilia rocks back on her red plastic chair, gestures wildly with her arms as she recounts stories of her 45+ years as a midwife, and fills her front porch with the joy of a woman proud of her contribution to community. And, rightfully so. Like the Midwives before her, Rosa has provided pregnancy and newborn health monitoring and care to many, reducing the risk of death for women and children in her remote community in the BOSAWAS, Nicaragua.

And though she stares right through us with eyes that no longer see, they continue to provide a window to a soul clearly called to serve out of both necessity — in the past, communities did not have health personnel or clinics — and an aptitude for traditional medicine practices passed down by previous generations of women in her family.

While government health posts are present in some of the communities along the Coco River, small communities continue to lack formal clinics. In these small communities, Midwives and Traditional Medicine Practitioners are relied upon to give immediate response to both everyday ailments and health emergencies. And while Rosa may lack knowledge regarding the theory of medicinal plants or even their scientific names, she does know where to find them, what they are used for, how to prepare them, and how to apply them.

In recent years, Midwives and Traditional Medicine Practitioners report that deforestation, climate change, and drought have caused the disappearance of many plants that are used to treat patients. If it hadn't been Rosa's loss of eyesight, the need to cover long distances to seek plants in the forest or along the riverbank coupled with reduced mobility at her age, may have instead sidelined her practice.

But before Rosa lost her vision, before she could no longer fulfill her calling, she passed down the knowledge to a son and a daughter who showed interest, skill, and the gifts blessed to care-givers. This is how its done — the passing of ancestral knowledge. It is part of the cultural identity. It is a calling.

And it is a calling critical to the health of communities. While traditional healers and government health post personnel support one another and coordinate to provide care, Midwives and Traditional Medicine Practitioners are often on the frontlines of care, woven into the fabric of spiritual faith, traditions, cultures, and beliefs.

Rosa and women like her play a key role as stewards of natural resources and keepers of Indigenous knowledge.

In Nicaragua, Change for Children is supporting the strengthening and preservation of the work of Midwives and Traditional Medicine Practitioners by supporting the establishment of community gardens to address medicinal plant scarcity, by strengthening the transmission of traditional knowledge, and by equipping Midwives with equipment and materials critical to frontline care.





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PRIORITIES IN GUATEMALA'S HIGHLANDS

In Guatemala, we have prioritized initiatives that help women and girls claim their power. Nutrition, food security and food sovereignty interventions in the highlands are essential in an area where the current price of food is well beyond the reach of traditional Indigenous families. Our projects promote local food, traditional food, and indigenous rights in a country where cash-crops for export claim 90% of the arable land.



In a country where schools were closed for over two years during the pandemic, remedial programs are also necessary to help many kids catch up and fill the gaps in their learning. Our education initiatives encourage attendance by both boys and girls, and curriculum materials prioritize gender equality inside and outside the classroom.

Contact: cfca@changeformchildren.org
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Nurturing creativity and a respect for the environment and its inhabitants (big and small!) cultivates creative thinking through a conservation lens. Empowering young girls — future powerful leaders and change-makers for climate adaptation — to take part in sustainability initiatives results in more effective climate action.



Global gift cards in support of Change for Children projects can be ordered online at www.changeformchildren.org. Your support of Change for Children spreads comfort and joy this season.

Thank you for your support this season!



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