



that inspire


60 YEARS
TRANSFORMING LIVES


Por la niñez en Ecuador



60 YEARS

TRANSFORMING LIVES





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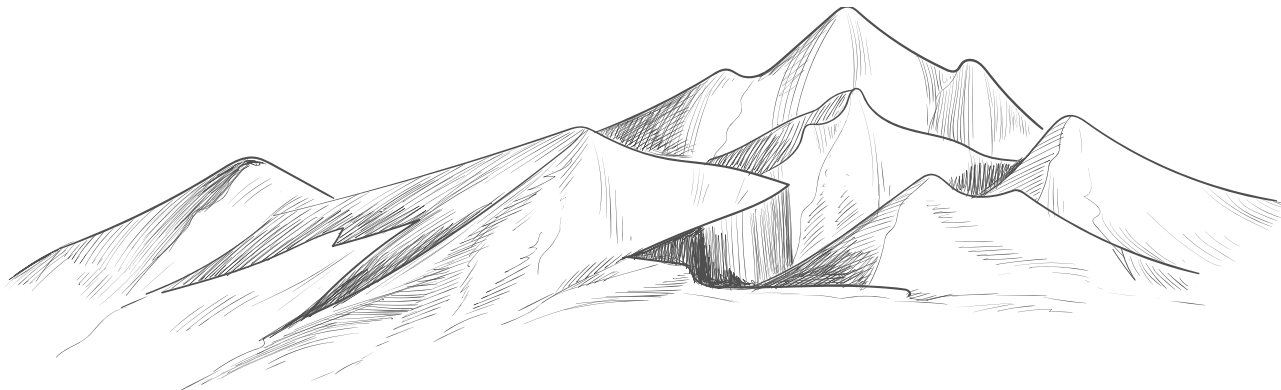
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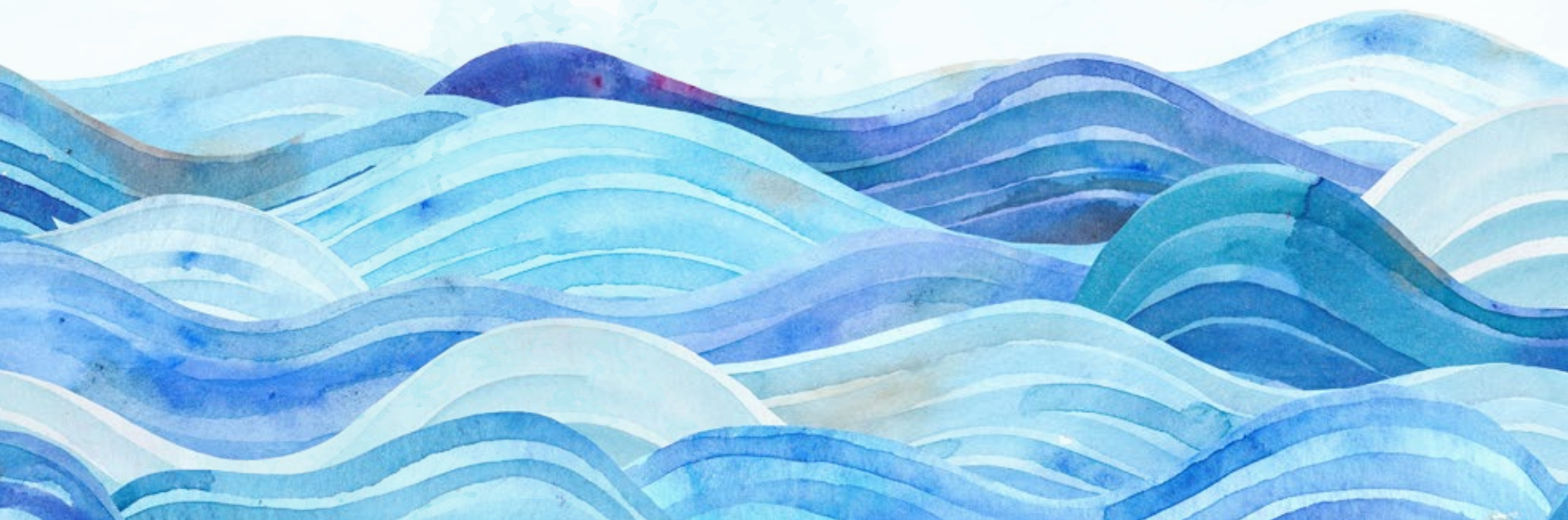
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Por la niñez en Ecuador





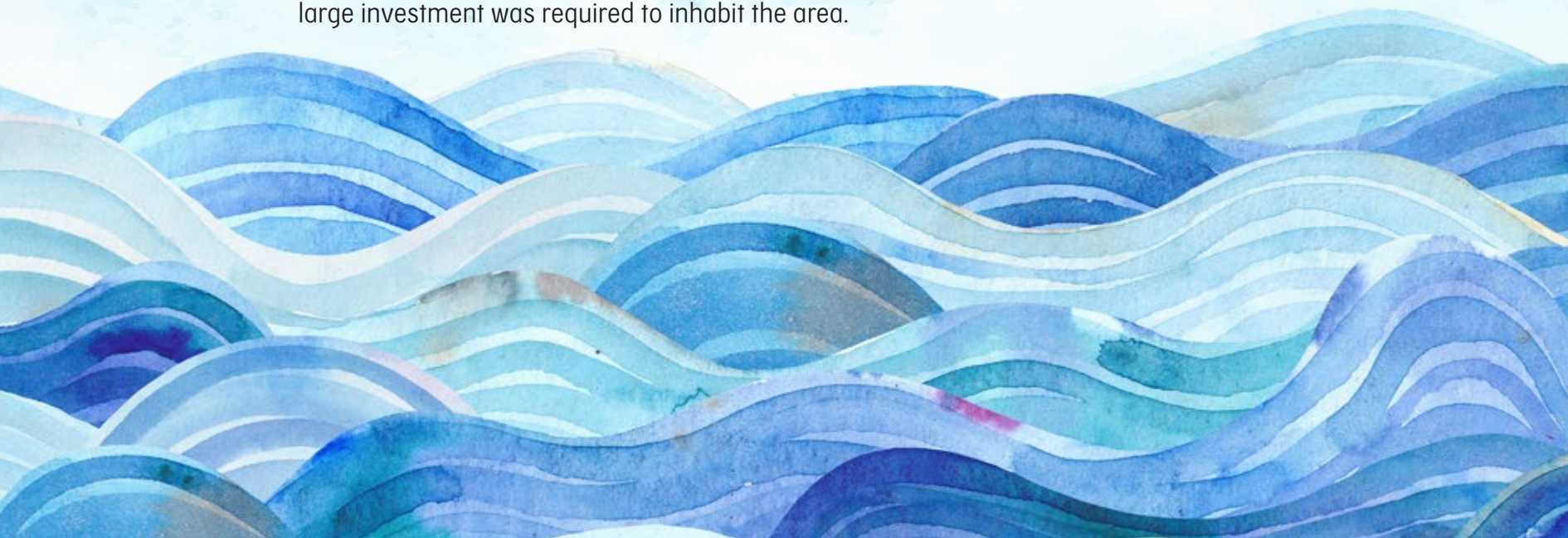
INTRODUCTION

*P*lan International was born in 1937 to care for children who were victims of the Spanish Civil War. Years later it also cared for those of World War II.

By 1962, the organization arrived in Ecuador to assist underprivileged children, although at that time the name was Plan de Padrinos.

After arriving in the city of Guayaquil, Plan International started its mission in the poorest sectors of the city, working in Guasmo and in the marginal neighborhoods of the suburbs where, due to political issues, settlements had been promoted despite the fact that they lacked basic services.

By that time, reinforced concrete had already arrived in the country, which would gradually replace the traditional wooden houses called “conventillos”. From that moment on, urban migration to the suburbs began, driven by the first populist-style proposals of the old leaders. The only lands that the Municipality had available were located in the west side of the city, but these lands were of null rent, since it was a flood zone, and a large investment was required to inhabit the area.



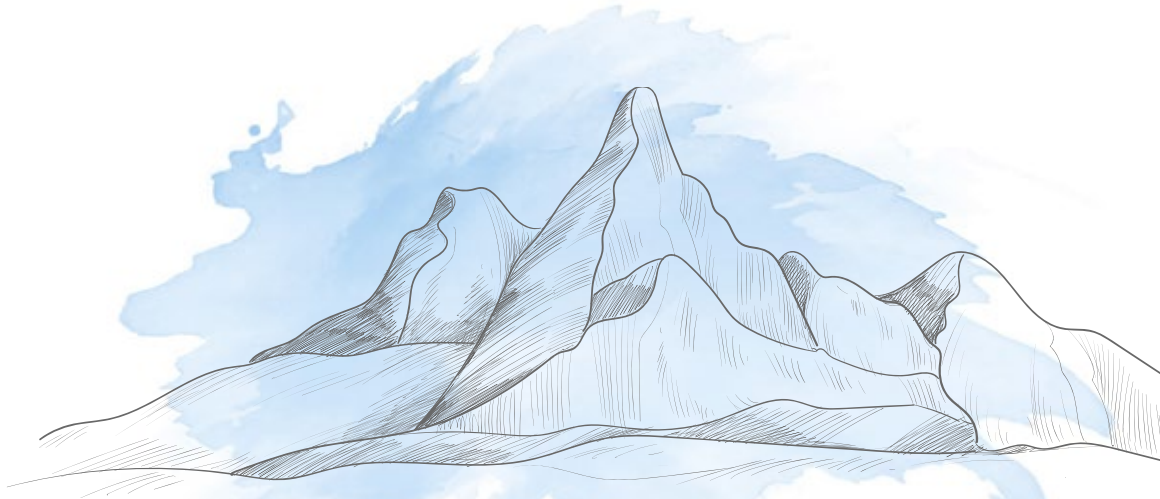
1962

We are talking about Ecuador at a time when it had not yet started to exploit oil and had found a source of income in bananas, although this income was not reaching everyone. The State suffered from a pronounced institutional weakness that prevented it from generating social benefits for the population in terms of health, education and infrastructure.

However, in Guayaquil there were already several welfare organizations that benefited from state support and maintained their own agenda to the detriment of state actions and planning. The main institution whose agenda was imposed was the Junta de Beneficencia de Guayaquil (JBG, 1888), other institutions were the Sociedad Filantrópica del Guayas (1849), and the Sociedad de Beneficencia de Señoras (1878). The importance of the Junta de Beneficencia in the health sector was that

it was filling a void left by the absence state in the city of Guayaquil; 71% of the hospital network managed by the Ministry of Public Health (MSP) was located in Quito and the difference was distributed nationwide. As a result, institutions such as the JBG covered 57.11% of the hospital services in Guayaquil.

When Plan de Padrinos arrived in Guayaquil, they replicated the welfarist model that at that time was viewed as development, whose actions were carried out worldwide in the developing countries where they had influence. In the Ecuadorian context, the actions of Plan de Padrinos were driven by the institutional weakness of the State, which continued even when the National Planning Board was created in 1954, when the social dimension was incorporated into the country's economic planning.



Subsequent planning documents produced after that date sought to solve several problems, such as the provision of basic services, including health, education, and social welfare, the integration of different classes into society by improving economic income, changes in the structure of society –as proposed in the Agrarian Reform–, improving living conditions, mainly for the country’s poorest, through modernization policies, improving the provision of health, education, and social security, and establishing labor legislation.

By mid-1964, Plan de Padrinos already had 40 beneficiaries, who received USD 15 per month, which were donated by their sponsor abroad. By the end of that year, there were already 608 sponsored children. In addition to the financial aid, children were also provided with free medical assistance, and clothing, and parents were encouraged to use this money to buy food and for their education.

The first sponsored children were: Ángel Suárez, Giovanny Fonda, Luis Ruiz, olanda Medina, Juan Arcentales, and Esmirna Martillo. Most of the sponsored children were up to the age of eighteen when they had to be canceled.

The case of the first sponsored child, Ángel Suárez, was a proof that the power of individual sponsorship creates a great impact. He was sponsored until he was 18 years old, he then went to work for Plan International for 10 years, as a secretary in charge of advising on the writing of letters to be delivered

to sponsors. Upon leaving, he became involved in other aid institutions as a social activist and community leader.

In the 1970s, the country had already obtained large profits from the sale of oil, but the Ecuadorian population was unable to overcome its fundamental social and economic problems. According to sources of the time, although there were good development plans, there was also a waste of resources, pressures, conflicts, and contradictions among the traditional economic groups. The end of the decade was marred by the setback of some labor and social gains.

Plan de Padrinos entered into an agreement with the government to carry out its work in places where the government was not involved, either due to neglect or lack of planning, in the areas of education and health. However, the organization also worked to improve sanitary conditions in the poor neighborhoods of Guayaquil, where it invested resources to complete the sanitary landfills – which until then had been made with garbage – and to carry out other civil works.

Plan de Padrinos signed agreements with the Municipality of Guayaquil to fill in streets, install public lighting poles, and build schools and community houses. Many times, the requests of the citizens who had arrived to these illegal settlements were not attended by the authorities, that is why the work of the foundation was so valuable.

In Guasmo, where Plan de Padrinos arrived in 1979, the situation was extremely critical since this sector grew a lot in a short period of time, so much so that by 1980 it had the same amount of inhabitants as the city of Cuenca, with a density of 230 inhabitants per hectare, while in Guayaquil there were 174 inhabitants per hectare. As the needs were growing, the organization also provided latrines, water tanks, tarpaulins and blankets.

This type of project represented the foundation's new approach, which shifted from paternalism - giving money directly to the sponsored people for their community development - to social projects, which were a direct response to people's immediate needs.

With the new social assistance approach adopted by the organization, the intervention model was also modified. From that moment on, Plan affiliates had to present projects, which would be analyzed by the community.

In the 1980s, Plan International deepened its action in the field of education through scholarships, donating textbooks, furniture, uniforms and school supplies, but also provided assistance through infrastructure -building schools, remodeling classrooms, laboratories, playgrounds and bathrooms-.

It is worth noting that the educational situation of children at that time was deplorable. Barely 20% of children between the ages of 5 and 14 in suburban areas attended school. In 1983, Plan International built 49 schools: 41 public, 3 municipal, 4 religious and 1 community school, benefiting 15,000 children in the marginal areas of Guayaquil and Bolívar. In addition to education, the organization also helped to improve the housing of sponsored children, as well as allocating funds to improve and build - sometimes from scratch - health programs, including dentistry, vaccinations, breastfeeding and, mainly, preventive medicine and sex education.

However, a major change took place in the 1990s when the United Nations General Assembly approved the International Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, which made children subject to the Doctrine of Integral Protection (DPI), under which children progressively exercise their rights, duties and responsibilities according to their age, regardless of their social, religious or ethnic condition.

Prior to the DPI, work was carried out according to the Doctrine of Irregular Situation (DSI), according to which children subject to social policies were those with antisocial behaviors, abandoned or poor, who were referred to as "minors".

The change of focus also occurred at the State level, which led to the creation of the Code for Children and Adolescents in 1992, which reformed a 1938 Code. In the drafting of this code, however, rights were established, but the mechanisms to enforce them were not specified.

However, the new law, in itself, was a declaration of the new approach to children's rights, since it was developed through a collective construction process carried out in 29 cities with the participation of more than 18,000 people through 200 public and private, local and international institutions.

Within Plan International it was also necessary to adapt the methodologies and instruments that were being used, for which the SAS (Sustained Self-Development System) tool was developed, which would later evolve into SASito (little SAS), when the foundation directed its actions towards child participation.

Community development policy takes on a new meaning as it develops objectives aimed directly at children's development and the improvement of their environment. In fact, at this stage programs were created that directly involved children - and linked them with teachers, health professionals, community leaders, mothers and fathers - through the

children's governments, the "Aquí los Chicos" (Here are the Children) radio initiative, and the Asociación Juvenil Nueva Generación (New Generation Youth Association).

Children's governments are a Plan International strategy to help children organize themselves and participate directly in the development of their communities to ensure that their rights are respected. This strategy proved so effective that the number of children's governments increased from 12 in 1999 to 142 in 2000.

Through the actions that were generated by the children's governments, such as tree planting projects, census and surveys, and collection of recycling materials to finance their schools, children become the main subjects of the news, gaining a relevance in public opinion that they did not have before. We know that something has changed when a child is sought out to say something about an issue. Since then, children have been willing to take on a public presence.

This presence of children and youth was encouraged because they also take on tasks as reporters, editors and newscasters in the "Aquí los Chicos" (Here the Kids) initiative. In this autonomous space, after professional training, the children and youth who participated in the program created content through interviews, reports, news editing, scripts, and voice-overs. This radio program became an experience that demanded a proactive attitude, responsibility and empowerment.

Throughout these years, the experience accumulated by Plan International Ecuador has been decisive in understanding the needs of marginalized sectors of society and, subsequently, in being able to further the levels of empowerment so that human rights are fully met.

A fair and free society is achieved through the daily practice of activities that promote the understanding of the rights of children and youth.



Adapting to change

We adapt to change and are committed to the communities where we work. This is one of the things I have learned at Plan International, where I have worked for 25 years. I began my collaboration as Office Manager of the Bolívar province where I had the opportunity to approach the indigenous world, it was a school, a wonderful human and professional experience that led us to return to the Simiatug area to work hand in hand with the indigenous organization Runacunapac Yachana Huasi. In addition, for 11 years I worked for Plan International in Paraguay and Plan International El Salvador, and when I had the opportunity to return to Ecuador I did not hesitate for a moment. Those were years of changes, adaptation and learning.

Plan International Ecuador adapts quickly; it is one of our characteristics as an organization. In the country, our approach has changed at least three times in sixty years, but we always remain committed to families and communities, especially children. In the beginning, we built a lot of infrastructure, which was much needed for many years, and provided direct financial support to our sponsored children. Then we focused on children's rights and capacity building, and now we are focused on equality for girls and young women, mainly on their empowerment. We realized that infrastructure is temporary, even though it can last for many years, but the skills one person develops are never lost and are passed on to others.

In the country, the Organization has evolved in the way it improves people's lives. At the beginning, the economic funds provided by sponsors were



Rossana Viteri

directly delivered to sponsored children and their families; we did some infrastructure works such as the filling of El Guasmo (when that area was just water with wooden houses on top), we built a bridge in Bolívar, which is still in use, and we helped to improve the homes of many families, as well as schools and health centers. Support in this area was much needed, because the central government had deficits in health infrastructure, education, roads, and housing; likewise, the municipality had other problems, such as managing public lighting.

In the 1990s, there was another change of focus when children's rights were recognized. As a result, Plan International Ecuador changed its strategy: children and adolescents were the protagonists as subjects of rights, reaching out to their families and communities. In this way, the presence of children increased exponentially through various projects, one of the most impressive was the "Sueño de Ser" (Dream of Being), implemented in the provinces of Guayas and Bolívar, in which young people were able to discover what they wanted to be through various activities such as theater, jewelry making, carpentry, dance, cooking and others.

Between 2006 and 2007, we as an organization asked ourselves again if it was enough to work for the rights of children and adolescents. Until then we had assumed that boys and girls had the same problems and needs. However, with our research - which became an annual report - we realized that this was not the case. Thus, Plan International Ecuador began to analyze the situation of girls in cities and rural areas, in situations of armed conflict, and, more recently, in the context of girls and the internet and their political participation.

At the global level, the Because I am a Girl campaign -which was a comprehensive strategy- was created to draw attention to the situations experienced by girls, since there is no absolute equality between men and women in any country. In this way, Plan International Ecuador included a gender-transforming approach, which does not leave aside boys and young men, but rather

includes them as allies in the cause of equality.

The Because I am a Girl campaign was born in Africa, where a donor saw a girl carrying a bowl of water and asked her, "Why aren't you in school?" And she replied, "Because I am a girl and I have to fetch water and take care of the house". This person witnessed the discrimination that girls experience simply because of being girls: they do not go to school, they suffer sexual violence, they experience more violence, they do domestic work, and they are mothers at a time when they should not be, among other injustices.

In Ecuador we implemented "Because I am a Girl" from 2012 through various initiatives such as "Girls' Letters", through which we received around 2,000 letters written by girls telling us what it is like to be a girl, how they suffer at school, at home, and in the streets. They used the space to speak the truth, which was very sad and alarming because of the high levels of violence.

To address this situation we launched the "Sueños de Niñas" (Girls' Dreams) proposal in which, through painting, girls made portraits of how they saw themselves when they grew up. It was an explosion of color and energy that contrasted the sadness of the letters. They all had big dreams, they wanted to be presidents, mayors, lawyers, doctors, there was a girl whose dream was to be an engineer in ecotourism because she lived in a rural area, there were also artists and singers. They all wanted to help their families and communities. We also produced "Cantos de Niñas" (Girls' Songs) with lyrics written by the girls, musicalized and recorded in a CD that was launched in a concert in the city of Guayaquil with great success.

Since we were already aware of what they were suffering and what they wanted, we started to work on their self-esteem, on developing their life plans, their resilience, and their leadership. Through a number of strategies they took over the ministries and the National Assembly, where they became assembly members and passed a resolution on girls and habitat. They were exercising their citizenship.

When Because I am a Girl ended, the girls asked us to continue because they had found a place for them, so they proposed the formation of a movement. That is how the Because I am a Girl Movement was born, the only one of its kind in Ecuador, in which they express their ideas, their leadership, and their proposals. The leadership schools and the Teenage Pregnancy - Free Zone project, among others, were the seedbed of the Movement. The Movement's leaders manage their social networks, have their own leadership style, and thus attract the attention of other girls along with allied boys who support this cause.

Through the Because I am a Girl Movement, girls have drafted four shadow reports, which are documents that refute official government information before international organizations to which Ecuador is accountable for having ratified international human rights conventions. Through the shadow reports, which are produced by civil society, it is reported what has been complied with and what has not been complied with. These reports produce recommendations that are binding for the State. There is no other similar experience in the elaboration of shadow reports by young people, reports that were prepared together with the Desde Nuestras Voces (From our Voices) coalition.

The girls can't get enough. They came to Geneva to present the reports they produced, and they were able to do so thanks to a strategy to obtain resources. To choose their representative, they made an internal selection. They do not have hierarchies, they work in a nuclear way. They are independent in their spokespersonship and take their position according to their ideals. They still need support in various areas, such as leadership, spokespersonship, advocacy and other tools; however, for Plan International Ecuador, the more than 600 young women, most of whom are from the provinces of Pichincha, Guayas, Los Ríos, Manabí, Loja, Cotopaxi, Chimborazo, Bolívar and Santa Elena, are our peers, and we consult them on girls' and young women's issues.

With the shadow reports they developed they also intended to reach the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) and after several

rejected letters they finally were granted a hearing to be heard. That was the first session at the IACHR presided over by young people. The girls trained by Plan International Ecuador have a very strong voice and a highly developed profile. One of them, a 16-year-old girl from the province of Guayas, was selected to speak at the presentation of Plan International's new global director in 2022, because of her strength and trajectory. Like her, most of the activists do mentoring for other adolescents, support workshops on reproductive rights, and participate frequently in activities, which strengthens their profile as leaders. They have been called to Paris, Geneva, and New York, and they have earned this through their own voice.

For Plan International Ecuador, the Because I am a Girl Movement has been a source of pride, since it has demonstrated all the strength that can be generated by working directly with stakeholders.

The work that Plan International Ecuador develops in distant territories and, for the most part, in rural areas, would not be possible without the important contribution of volunteers, most of whom are women and total around 2,000 people at the national level. Without the volunteers, we would not have the reach we have to help the more than 38,000 sponsored children - and thousands more people we support through our programs. Through volunteering, we have closer contact with children, young people, families and organizations. Thanks to the volunteers, the installed capacities remain in the community, as they are the ones in charge of spreading our message. Once Plan International Ecuador finishes its projects and leaves the territory, the volunteers will continue working in favor of the community, because they have taken on a commitment, training and development that transcends the organization itself.

Over the years, we have worked to ensure that change starts with the people, so that our presence as an organization is not indispensable.

However, our work in the territory is strong and concrete, we

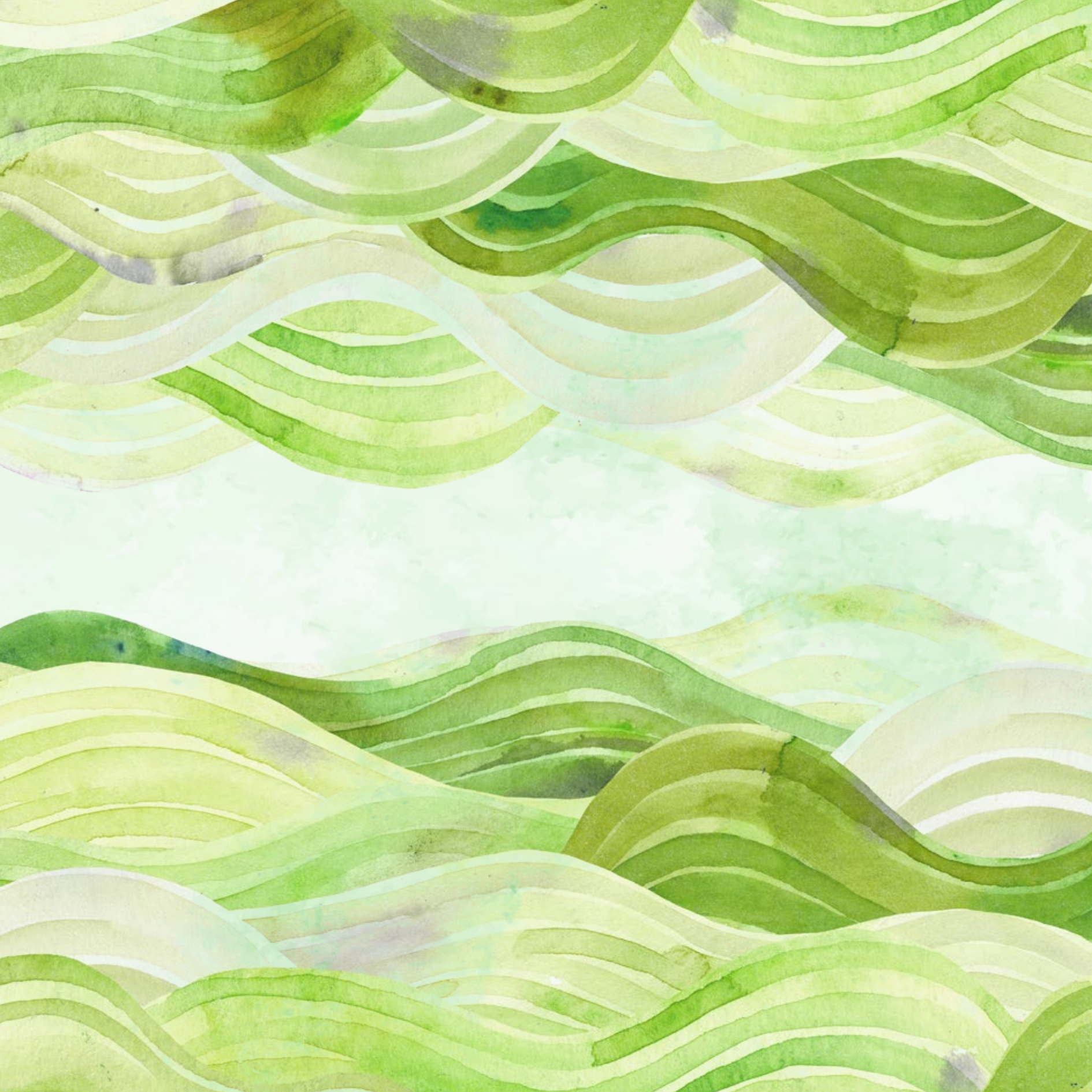


support capacity building, but also specific infrastructure projects when necessary. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, we worked together with other organizations to improve the sanitary infrastructure of schools.

As a development and humanitarian organization, we have been present in emergency situations such as the 2016 earthquake or the migration crisis, among the most recent ones. We work decisively with the population in a situation of human mobility, mainly in education, health and child protection. Using the Community Protection Mechanisms methodology, we have managed to bring Ecuadorians and Venezuelans together to work for the protection of children. In doing so, they have begun to connect and realize that we have many things in common.

Plan International Ecuador is an organization that has been redefining itself according to the changes and requirements of the country to become an expert in children's rights, gender equality, and emergency response. That is why we need everyone's support to make this change possible and to have an impact in more places. We have a highly professional and committed team. We have achieved impressive results in reducing early pregnancy in the areas where we work, building a movement of girl activists for girls' equality, and establishing a highly trained and dedicated volunteer community work force. Throughout these 60 years we have left installed capacity in each of the communities where we have been present. We have proven methodologies for early childhood, child protection and youth entrepreneurship. The support of the entire Ecuadorian society will enable us to go further in the coming years.







Mishell

I like to play soccer. I am a woman, I am feminine, but I enjoy playing soccer. My thing is to be upfront, as a forward. Whenever I play I always score a goal. Fifteen minutes from my house there is a dirt soccer field, where we go with my neighbors when we want to play. Near my house there is another field, but I don't like to go there because there are a lot of men and they look a bit strange at me.



I have always thought soccer is a beautiful sport, but I don't play it professionally, not even amateur, because I should have to train and for now I don't have much time. My friends say to me, "Mishell, go forward", and I stay as a forward and score goals. I like soccer as much as dancing, which is what I do most lately. I think soccer and dancing are two very similar skills. At home I dance with my mom. Not everyone can dance, but I see that she does it very well, and I inherited the taste from her.

In the past I would have been embarrassed to dance, but I have been working on my self-esteem. When I was a little girl I was ashamed. They used to tell me that I was a self-conscious child and they were right, because I was ashamed to give my opinion.

I didn't use to participate in activities because I lacked confidence, especially about making a mistake. Now I understand that making mistakes is part of the learning process, and that's okay.

Being at Plan International has helped me learn about self-esteem and confidence, qualities that I consider important for everyone throughout life. Whether it's an exhibition at school or later in a job, it will always be important to be self-assured. I have also learned a lot about empathy and companionship. I should not judge anyone, neither my neighbors nor my friends, as I don't know what their circumstances are, how they are doing in their life, in their school or with their family. In the same way, I have learned not to judge my father. Although he has not been so sexist in his life,

sometimes he made some comments that denoted it. With me he was never able to talk about gender or sexuality issues because he didn't know how to do it. On the contrary, I have been teaching him what I have learned in the workshops. This has been one of my little trenches.

Actually, my dad has been able to talk to my younger brother about sexuality issues. Many times he listens to the virtual meetings I participate in and asks me what he doesn't understand. I explain it to him when I can. I have seen a change in my nuclear family, which has spread around me, to my uncles, my cousins, and my grandmother, for whom it has been a challenge to talk about sexism and the role of women. Whenever she sees me in a video, she calls me and congratulates me. I know she supports my struggle and that is her way of showing it.

In general, Ecuadorian families are sexist and there is a lot of inequality within the home. Over time, within my family we have been able to identify some sexist practices and we have been changing them. I feel good with them because they have always supported me in this. For example, we always distribute the household chores. Another example is that my father never

forbade me to play soccer; on the contrary, he encouraged me to train. He wanted me to be an athlete or a sports journalist. In the end, I became an activist for gender equality.



Being an activist is not easy, over time I have learned that one should not always speak so openly, especially in these times.

I hold my position with respect, but sometimes I have to avoid some topics because people are not ready to discuss them. The other person will most likely not change just because of the two minutes I talk. Everything requires a process. I have learned that I have to be cautious not to be mistreated. People are sometimes very sensitive when they hear that their actions are affecting other people.

That is why, to speak out, to be an activist, I have to feel that the time is right to speak freely. I must feel safe and know that, even if people don't think they

like me, respect is going to be maintained. In social networks it is almost impossible to engage in a discussion with arguments.

There, anybody can talk there and call you anything. For me, the

forum promoted by the Because I am a Girl Movement is safe; it is a place where I can exercise my activism, even online.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic I keep my social networks private to control who I interact with, because they are people I know and many times they are from my close circle.

I have learned that I must be cautious on the networks. Some of the measures I have adopted are that I only exchange trusted pages with my group, I don't post my current location and I only accept acquaintances or family members. However, the best advice I can give is not to upload photos with the school uniform or photos with physical references, such as a street or a building that can be related to the school or university.

I usually share a lot of meaningful content, and I do webinars and

forums. These publications are used by the Because I am a Girl Movement and other organizations that do activism.

This is my way of supporting those who fight for the rights of girls and adolescents. I always hope that more people know what I do to raise awareness. These virtual spaces did not exist before, but now we have to make the most of them.

Now I study Communication and work in a project of the Municipality of Guayaquil that consists of conducting workshops for girls to improve their self-esteem and self-confidence. I share all the knowledge I once received from people who were very kind to me, who were patient and saw something in me that even I had not seen back then. I like to change the lives of many girls because I know that they too will make new little trenches for a better world.



A portrait of a young woman with dark hair and glasses, smiling. She is wearing a white t-shirt with a logo that reads "MOVIMIENTO POR SER NINIA". The background is a light green floral pattern.

Paullet

At the age of 16, I was the mayor of my canton Santa Lucia in the province of Guayas for one day. We call it a takeover. That day I fought so that they would give us what belongs to us and is our right: access to free education, technological tools -such as tablets-, and equity between boys and girls.

Being a mayor marked my life completely, because from that

moment on I gained confidence and began to believe in my abilities. I had never spoken in public before so, to help me, I was told to imagine I was speaking in the hall. My nerves were on edge and I was shaking, but I managed to present my proposals in front of the mayor and all the councilors.

The event was held on October 11th, the International Day of the Girl Child, and on that day we planned several activities that would have an impact on our community. That year we had digital education, Internet access, tablets for everyone and entrepreneurship courses. I can say that we managed to be heard.

In the canton, everyone knows me after that presentation. Some say: “there goes the mayor” or call me by my name, and that is very nice for me. Then I was also vice president of the Youth Advisory Council of Santa Lucia.

I began this journey with Plan International when I was 8 years old, when I accompanied my aunt to a gender workshop. I started with a project called Girls’ Letters.

These letters were documents that we girls handed to the authorities and they were about our personal stories, what affected us, the problems we were experiencing, and what we needed. It was the first time I was communicating with an

authority and I was looking for action to be taken.

Since then I have participated in countless initiatives for 13 years. Some of them are: the Teen Pregnancy Free Zone project, workshops on self-esteem, sexual and reproductive rights, how to speak in public, how to influence in a positive way; the Because I am a Girl Movement and Trainer of Trainers.



Thanks to my story and my experience with Plan International, my sisters were encouraged to join. They joined as sponsored girls and began to receive postcards, gifts and photographs that the sponsors sent them from their countries. It was exciting because we got to know other cultures and different realities.

Plan International helped me to discover that I have many abilities and to understand that I am made for many things. Now I am aware of the social reality we

live in the country and the problems we have. That is why I work to create actions that call the attention of authorities.

I had the opportunity to study Digital Marketing, level 1, with a foundation, in partnership with Plan International. I like to design, create graphic lines and develop strategies for social networks. I am amazed with what can be done on digital platforms.



I was excited about the workshops because I was learning a lot, but then the pandemic hit and I decided to undertake something. Since my mom became unemployed in those days, I came up with the idea of creating a food business called Cawani. We sell patacones (fried green plantains), cassava pastries, bolón de maduro (balls made of sweet plantains), wonton, among other dishes.

We created a logo, a slogan, a graphic line, and social media accounts. We have been evolving as a product and brand and we have taken the step towards the production of gourmet products. With that, I proved to myself that everything I have studied has been useful to me. My family and I want to improve the structure of the business and expand it to have a store because now we only make home deliveries and that way we could attract more customers.

In the Trainer of Trainers process, we were trained in project management and, together with other young people, we have started the creation of a social entrepreneurship. Our idea is to provide services for the good of the Municipality.

I am proud of what I have accomplished. I am the first woman in my family to go to university and I have encouraged my sisters to follow the same path. I was able to enter higher education and started studying law at the Catholic University, but in the third semester I had financial problems and could not afford to pay, so

I dropped out. That was the first obstacle, but I kept going and started looking for new opportunities.

I decided to take the exams again to study with the government plans and, with my score, I managed to get a scholarship for Social Work. I am currently in the second semester.

I like this career more because I have to be in the field and get to know the needs of the people first hand. It also ties in with my volunteer activities at Plan International Ecuador. I plan to continue teaching to help change the lives of other young people. I like social work and volunteering very much.

I plan to specialize in special abilities and sign language. Then I will pursue a master's degree in Project Management. In the same way, our plan is to strengthen our entrepreneurship.

In my house we are all women. I share with them everything I learn because I want them to be fully aware. I have always been surrounded by activism. I remember going to Quito with my aunt to my first feminist march when I was eight years old. She was always involved in feminist and gender activism and encouraged me to participate.

I am only 21 years old and I understand that I have achieved a lot. I feel I am on the right path. I look back and I say to myself: "well done, Paulet".





Kevin

I am a member of the Because I am a Girl Movement. You may wonder why a man is in a movement for girls. Let me explain:

In 2018 I joined the Teen Pregnancy Free Zone (ZLEA) project, which trains young people about their sexual and reproductive rights. In 2020, at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, I became more involved in this initiative.

At that time, trainings were easier and more frequent because we could participate from home. That was when I became more active in all the processes that I am now involved in.

Before graduating I went to school wearing the magenta T- shirt that represents the Movement.

My classmates at the time made fun of me because that color was supposed to be a girl's color. I was very proud to wear the T-shirt, but they thought it was wrong, so much so that they became distant, they pushed me aside, they didn't want to talk to me, they told me that I was "weird".

Many adolescent men are afraid to get involved in the Movement and say: what is a boy doing inside something called "Because I am a Girl"? I had a hard time making them understand that a color doesn't mean anything, that being part of Because I am a Girl promotes gender equality. Unfortunately, men are the protagonists of all inequalities and my classmates didn't understand that. I think that if men don't get involved in bringing about change, nothing will be achieved; it will just be a group of women who get together and discuss their concerns. I am sure that, with the contribution of men, it will be possible to make a change.

I entered this group not knowing anything. I was afraid of not

knowing what to say or do... or how to express my opinion.

However, what Plan International Ecuador does is to improve our self-esteem and I liked that a lot.

Many people do not have confidence in themselves. They think they are unable to do anything. I have learned that I have enough voice to speak in front of four hundred people or on a webinar with two thousand people.

I know that I can stand up and demand what I am entitled to by law, that I can stand up and express everything I have to say to the authorities, that I have rights and that I must demand that they are fulfilled, and many young people do not do this. They do not demand that their right to sexual and reproductive education be fulfilled. In the Movement I have been trained, along with other young people, girls and adolescents, to replicate this work in our communities, starting with our friends and family.

Thanks to these learning processes I have held other positions and activities. I am

currently the vice president of the National Advisory Council of Adolescents, which I took on when I was still 17 years old. I am also one of the national coordinators of the Network of Organizations for the Defense of Children and Adolescents (RODDNA), where I am a delegate of the Because I am a Girl Movement. In these forums





I have met some very nice people from many countries, such as Australia, Scotland and Belgium, with many different perspectives.

These connections help us to include those who are not yet part of it, because we want to form a broad network.

Something very important is that we, adolescents and young people, have put together the projects that we then execute, something that some adults thought we would not be able to do. We have the ideas and we work to obtain the funds we need for workshops or camps. . Recently, five young people of 17 and 18 years of age from the Advisory Council were able to hold a camp for 42 people nationwide. For me, it was gratifying to show that we are young people with the capacity to do anything. Adults often use children for their photos. I don't want them to use us, but to let us participate, to let us make our own decisions, to be heard.

I have also seen that, when a 15-year-old teenager speaks with a strong voice or gives a good speech, they say that he or she has been manipulated or that someone wrote the speech for him or her. Adults have a lot of prejudices that need to be overcome. We

young people have the potential to participate.

We ask for an adult to support us, to guide us in doing paperwork or preparing documents. We want to show that we can lead actions, even though it is a little hard to convey our thoughts to more than six million children and adolescents in Ecuador. There are adults who have supported us a lot with this task.

When I first became involved in the Movement, it was not easy for my family to understand. My parents simply did not agree. My father was against my learning processes in the Movement because he said that I spent too much time away from home and did not contribute to the household. He told me: "What good is it for me, as a father, to send you to spend two hours listening to those people". I didn't know how to respond, I just kept my head down, but when they realized all the actions that I was reproducing at home, when they saw that I am a person who gets involved and my father could see how empowered I was during one of my speeches, their hearts softened.

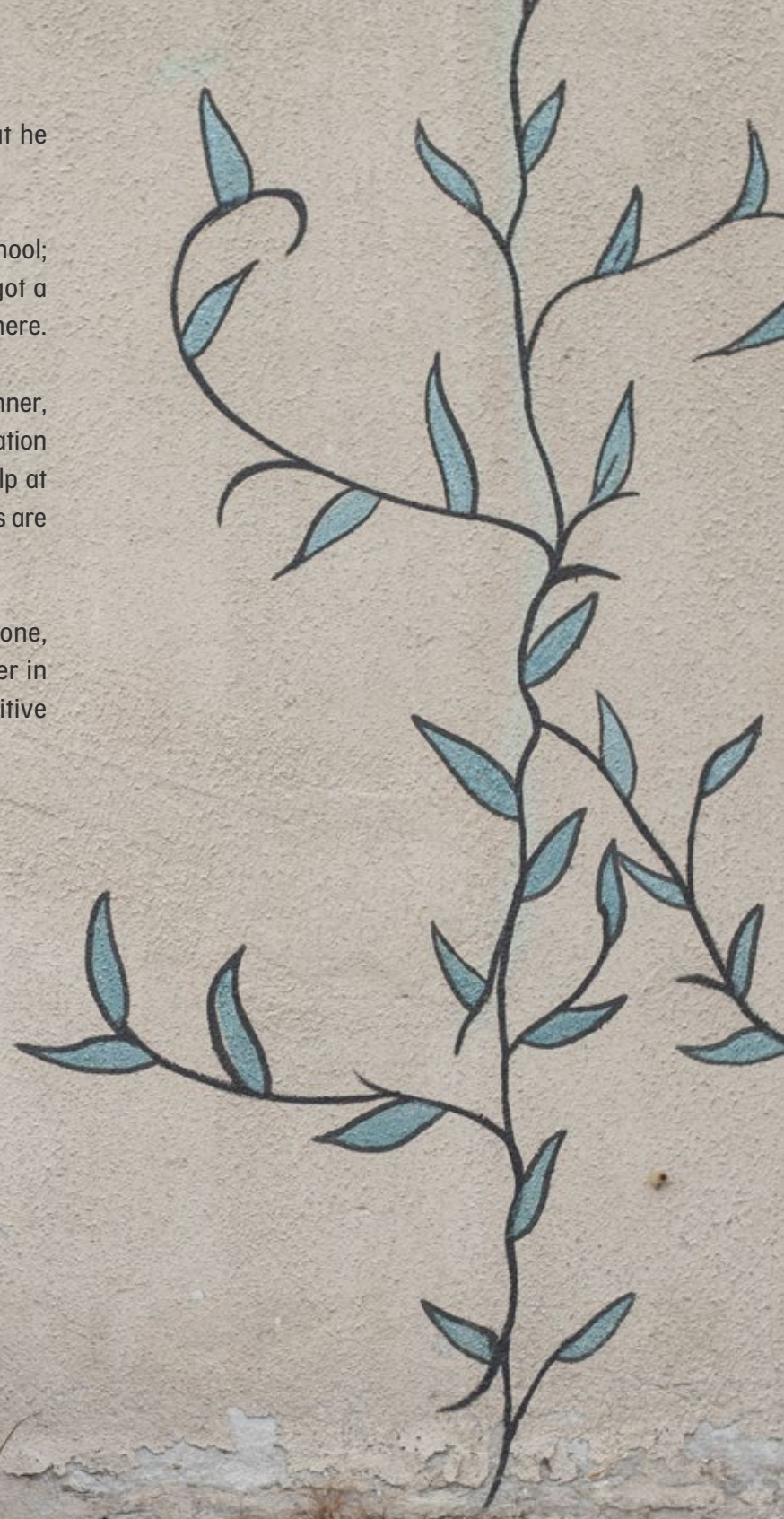
My dad was a person who was not involved in the household. He would go to work and nothing else existed, until the day we had a

conversation. To me, he was an absent-present father, in the sense that he was so focused on his work that he would come home and just rest.

He would never spend time with us nor was he there for my triumphs at school; for example, when I won the inter-school drama competition or when I got a certificate for another activity. I remember that my mother was always there.

I prepared a lot for that conversation with my dad. One day I told him: after dinner, I want to talk to you, I want to make you know what I really feel. The conversation was heartfelt and distressing. Then he himself started to ask: how do I help at home, what do I do? Obviously I still don't get a 100% change because adults are afraid to let their guard down, they are afraid to face new things.

After all this journey I can say that I am a leader, but not a complete one, I know that I must accompany my group because we will learn together in this process. The Because I am a Girl Movement has brought very positive things to my life.



A young man with dark, curly hair is looking down at a document he is holding. He has a focused expression. The background is a blurred indoor setting. A large, vibrant green brushstroke graphic is overlaid on the right side of the image, extending from the top to the bottom. The name 'Joel' is written in a large, green, cursive font across the middle of the image, partially overlapping the man's hand and the document.

Joel

Working at the United Nations is one of my dreams. I know that getting there will not be easy, but I have always achieved my goals with hard work. I still have many steps to take to reach my goal, such as learning to speak English or getting a master's degree, but I am convinced that every step I have taken in my life brings me closer to that big moment.

Sometimes I think if this aspiration is intrinsically related to my life story. Since I was four years old I have been part of Plan International Ecuador, at that time I was a Plan Child and I had a sponsor who helped me financially, to whom I would send letters telling him about my accomplishments until I was 18 years old. Now I am a professional and I work in this same organization as a logistic assistant in the Food Assistance program of the World Food Program. It gives me comfort to know that I am also helping those in need, just as Plan International helped my family and my community 20 years ago.

I am from the Santa Lucia canton in the province of Guayas, but I live in a rural area. Living conditions in my community are difficult because we do not have access to drinking water, and until recently we did not have internet. When winter comes, things get complicated because some areas are flooded, like the road to the school, and it forces children to walk almost twice as long to go to school. Most of the people who live in my area are farmers like my father and are dedicated to planting and harvesting rice.

My mother is a housewife and has been a volunteer for Plan International Ecuador for as long as I can remember. When she was younger, in the winter season, she would take a canoe and pick up as many children as possible so they wouldn't miss the workshop.

Everyone in my community knows Plan International Ecuador and when we talk about the organization it is like talking about a great

friend, everyone smiles when they remember it and they are very fond of it. Each one evokes it in their own way, the older ones miss the old Plan that arrived more than 20 years ago and built most of the houses and made it possible for us to have a little school and a

soccer field. They also helped us to build the road through which we now travel and most of the farmers use it to take their products to Guayaquil to sell them.

However, the younger ones know the modern Plan International Ecuador. The one that seeks to transform lives by changing people's way of thinking and acting so that the change is sustained in the long term so that future generations do not repeat family histories of poverty, mistreatment, or lack of education. Nowadays, it is common to see that all young people graduate from high school. Girls also have more freedom and it is less common for families to overprotect them and not allow them to go out and do their activities independently.

In my house, these teachings were deeply rooted and my three siblings and I have attended university and we all have our own independent life projects.

It is not like before when children also worked in agriculture. I studied Business Management at the Salesian Polytechnic University of Guayaquil

because I got an 80% scholarship for academic excellence.

One of my older sisters helped me pay the remaining 20% and my parents supported me with the cost of books, transportation and





other materials that I needed to study. However, at school I was the best student in my class and because of that I won a train trip to explore Ecuador. I got to know the country in a deeper way, because before I had not been able to go to the highlands and the coast.

My life has been closely related to Plan International, which has been combined with my strong commitment to be the leader I am today. In 2014, I was selected to join the Youth Advisory Council of Plan International Ecuador, and this not only helped me to be in spheres of power and act assertively, but I was also able to travel to Mexico to participate in a workshop for youth partners where we discussed sexual and reproductive rights and other issues that we considered a priority at the time.

A year later, a life-changing event took place that broadened my mind and horizons. In 2016, Plan International and Amigos de las Américas opened a call to participate in Youth Ambassadors, as it

usually happens every year. One of Plan international volunteers encouraged me to apply because she said that I met all the requirements. Her arguments were that I had worked for my community, that I was a leader in the area where I work, and that I had good grades. The idea went around in my head and one day I decided to fill out all the forms with great enthusiasm. I didn't know if I was going to be selected because a lot of people apply to this program.

One day I was notified by mail that I had been selected and that I had an interview at the U.S. Embassy. At that moment I said to myself: "now I really have to show that I am a leader" because this program was going to work a lot on leadership. Weeks later I was selected and the excitement was immense. Everyone in my community was happy for me. I was the only one who had traveled to the United States.

Getting to know that country changed my perspective of the world

because I got to know Washington, a city with dazzling buildings. I was also in Texas and saw what life is like for an American living in the suburbs, which is so similar to the movies.

When I returned, I went to university and stopped participating in Plan International Ecuador's programs because I had very little time because of all the studying I had to do; besides, I had to travel from my canton to Guayaquil every day. However, whenever I could, I would go to a workshop or at least try to stay in touch. While I was studying to become a Business Manager, I always thought that it must be very enriching to work at Plan International Ecuador and I dreamed of getting a job there. When I graduated, I applied several times to work for this organization. Almost a year after applying to Plan International Ecuador, the Human Resources officer called me and told me that I had entered the selection process. In 2022 I started my second year of work and I love what I do, not only because it is another goal that I was able to accomplish, but also because combining my social activism with my profession fills me with happiness.



A man with dark curly hair and glasses is focused on using a power drill on a wooden structure. He is wearing a dark t-shirt and a tool belt. The background is a blurred workshop or construction site. The image has a green brushstroke overlay on the left side.

Hamilton

My greatest motivation is to teach and share everything I have learned in my community. I enjoy it, I am passionate about it, and I hope to continue doing it.

I am from the province of Santa Elena, I am 25 years old and I came to Plan International when I was 8 years old, as a sponsored child. At that time we used to receive letters and toys from our sponsors, and for me it was always exciting to receive those gifts.

I live with my father, who is a security guard, my mother, who is a housewife, my sister and my brother. We are from a rural area where we are dedicated to agriculture and fishing, it is a very beautiful place, with lots of vegetation and nature.

In our home we have been taught to study, to pursue a profession and to help our community.

With that idea in mind, at the end of 2020 I achieved my biggest dream: to graduate as an engineer in Electronics and Telecommunications, at Peninsula Santa Elena State College.

For me, it was almost natural to study this career, because when I was a little boy I liked to assemble and disassemble everything, and I can say that my taste for engineering was born from there.

But it wasn't easy, because it was difficult for me to reach my classes. I had to take two buses, go from the rural area to the canton and from there take a city bus to the university. The trip

was two hours long and very expensive.

Thanks to my good grades, Plan International granted me a university scholarship that allowed me to cover my daily expenses and transportation. But it wasn't just economic support;

I also attended workshops, meetings and training in expression techniques, communication, self-esteem, gender, among other topics that contributed to my integral formation.

I even received a visit from the sponsors of the Netherlands (a country we still call Holland) at my university. It was very nice to meet them, to know what their culture is like... we even planned to go there in the future.

I gave my all during my university studies. That's why I was a teaching assistant in Mathematics, Electrical Circuits and Calculus. I also won two robotics competitions that allowed me to travel to Quito, Cuenca and Guayaquil. In the fifth semester I took Robotics classes and we created a climbing robot that In another contest I





won third place with a robot that could solve a maze by itself.

The university taught me that I can combine the social part with my professional education, and that's what motivated me the most to continue studying. For example, I once wanted to help blind people, so, together with a team, we created an intelligent cane that detects objects around us and we also designed a GPS tracker that helps us locate a person in our care. These projects are at an advanced stage, the next step is finding the money to implement them, but we need some investment.

With Plan International I have been a sponsored child, a scholarship recipient and now I am a workshop instructor under the Youth Economic Empowerment Agreement. This has been a powerful experience because I see how young people are encouraged to follow their dreams, apply for scholarships and imagine their projects.

I also participate in the Youth Entrepreneurship program, where I give courses in home electricity, carpentry and cell phone repair to children from several communities. I hope to continue with the workshops and implement more advanced ones for those who

cannot enter university and want to start their entrepreneurial ideas. When I am in the classroom, I always put myself in the student's shoes, I understand what their needs are and that way I achieve better results. I share with them my life testimony of how I started at Plan International and the achievements I have obtained. More than a role model, I want them to see that it is possible to achieve their goals and motivate them to keep going forward.

Now I have an entrepreneurship, which was born in the university, called H&L Electronic & Robotics. There I provide free and paid training on topics related to electronics. In the future, I want to have my own physical space to give courses, do a master's degree in Education or Projects and teach at the university. For me, it is rewarding to teach what I have learned and to see that others can create new projects.

For now I do not imagine myself living in another country, I want to stay in my province and fight for education. Here we need more support so that young people can finish their education and follow their dreams. Many of them only reach high school or drop out, so my goal is to continue with my training and share what I have learned.



Laura

I decided to pursue my dream despite the difficulties and economic limitations we had at home. I am one of the first young women in my province to become a professional, I am in my fifth semester of law school and I am very proud of that.

I am 20 years old. I am a Kichwa woman from the Guamote canton, and I belong to the Puruhá nationality of the province of Chimborazo.

In my community we are approximately 254 families.

In Guamote there are very friendly, sociable, hard-working people and very strong women. It is a place where you are always welcomed with open arms and with very beautiful traditions and customs.

My family consists of my parents, my 18 year old sister, my 12 year old brother and my grandfather. My parents are my greatest inspiration, as they have worked very hard for us to be able to study. Seeing the bravery and courage with which they have pulled us through, fills me with strength to continue day by day. My mother, for example, despite not having higher education and not knowing how to write or read very well, has always supported me in my university studies. She doesn't let me down, she encourages me to continue, since studying has never been easy for an indigenous woman.

I have been sponsored by Plan International Ecuador since I was 14 years old and now I am a volunteer, so I participate in talks, as a representative of the community, and I help the technicians in events, trainings and in the development of projects. Among the activities in which I have collaborated, I would like to highlight the gender focus workshops, the Because I am a Girl Movement, Pregnancy Free Zone, Leadership School, Youth Innovation, among others. In all of them, I have sought to empower children and young people and

to make them aware of their rights and to ensure equality.

The people I have met as a volunteer are like my second family. They opened doors for me to continue preparing myself academically and in leadership. Thanks to the training I have received, I have been able to develop my life project.



Currently, I combine my education with volunteering and I am a member of the Guamote Cantonal Council for the Protection of Rights. I am a spokeswoman, leader and activist, and my mission is to bring the needs and realities of rural areas to the attention of the authorities.

One of the most important moments I have experienced with Plan International was a trip to Bolivia in 2019. For two days, I participated in a meeting of Latin American women activists, along with young people from Mexico, Guatemala, Brazil, Colombia, Argentina and Chile.

I was chosen among 30 candidates after going through three phases. It was a very important thing, I could not believe it. By then I was 18 years old, it was my first time traveling by plane and the first person in my family to leave the country. My parents were happy and proud, and I was nervous and excited.

I remember that day I wore my Puruhá nationality dress: a white hat, a white necklace, a pink baeta (traditional skirt), an embroidered

blouse, bracelets and alpargatas (espadrilles).

In Bolivia, we talked about gender issues and the problems we have as young women. Each of us shared our experiences and how we have faced the obstacles. Those were very inspiring testimonies.

I try to convey these emotions to the girls with whom I share my experience. It is not easy to take the baton from the previous volunteers because you need to empathize a lot with the communities and break several barriers. I have been gaining space little by little.

However, I have had to struggle against cultural patterns and stereotypes that have existed for many years and limit girls' access to higher education. Many times, their education was seen as an expense and not as an investment, and the ideology that it was the man who should be educated because he was going to have a family to support prevailed.

Indigenous women face many limitations: ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and economic. I speak Kichwa and I studied in this language, but when I got to university I had to study in Spanish and it was very complicated.

And it wasn't just that, when I entered college they told me: "I don't

think you will make it, you don't need to study because you are going to have someone to support your home, you should think about starting a family".

But I was clear about my life project and I knew what I wanted to do. I always held in my heart the desire to study law, to support and enforce the rights of my community, and to be an example and inspiration for other girls.

I was motivated by the students who shared their stories and told us that education was the only tool to improve our lives. Now I share my testimony to encourage other girls to fight for what they yearn for. I have also trained more women about their rights in order to, little by little, eliminate gender and domestic violence.

Currently, my siblings are also members of Plan International Ecuador. My brother is in the Champions for Change project, which seeks to raise awareness and disseminate the rights of girls, since we know that boys must be involved in this process, as they are our best allies.

We all have a dream that beats in our hearts and is waiting to be fulfilled. I am just going for the first one, the next one will be to specialize in Law and Criminology. Persistence is the key and getting ahead is the goal.





Nataly

I completed high school thanks to a scholarship that Plan International Ecuador gave me. Without that help, I am almost certain that I would not have finished my high school education because my parents could no longer support me.

One day my cousin told me that Plan International had awarded her a scholarship, so I asked her what requirements were needed because I wanted to finish my education. At that time, I was six months pregnant and my situation was becoming more and more difficult.

My cousin told me what to do. I talked to a Plan International technician and I told him that I was pregnant, that my partner had a job but earned very



little, and that it was not enough to pay for my education. My father could only support me morally, but not financially.

Then, they began the process to grant me the scholarship: I handed in some documents that they requested, then they came to visit me at my house, and one day they told me: “you won the scholarship”. Then we went with my daddy to Plan international offices. He withdrew the money and we immediately bought shoes, a backpack, some notebooks that I needed, and my uniform. When I received the scholarship, I was very close to finishing high school.

For three years, the scholarship helped me pay for my school supplies and meals. During the Covid-19 quarantine, I was able to recharge my cell phone and follow my classes virtually, because I did not have internet at home, so I was in contact with my teachers and was able to send my homework.

The scholarship was such a great help. Thanks to the scholarship, I was able to enter university to study Business Management, where I am learning a lot and making new friends.

In addition to the scholarship, I also received help to make a garden, where I have been able to work to obtain fresh food for

my daughter, my partner and myself. I have cultivated this vegetable garden with the help of my mom, who is dedicated to agriculture, and the support and advice of Plan International Ecuador. I grow carrots, cabbage, onions, herbs, radishes and beets. Since not many of these vegetables are cultivated in my sector, I have been very successful in selling them here and in this way I have obtained an extra income. With this money, which is not much, I can buy diapers for my daughter or pay university fees. When I finish my degree, I want to start a company to give jobs to teenage mothers and single mothers. Although I am still not sure what my company will do, I know that it will help me to give my daughter a better future.

I became a mother at a very young age. Now I am 20 years old and my daughter is 2 and a half years old. I am very happy to have her in my life. With her I learn new things, I like to see her smile or hear her first words. Anyway, I tell my friends and classmates at the university to take care of themselves, and to make good decisions, because it is very difficult to be a mother. Despite all the difficulties I have had in my life, I have managed to get ahead with the support of my family and Plan International Ecuador. I know that there is a good future awaiting me, but I have to study to reach it.





Jeydi

It has been a long road for me to overcome shyness and the fear of having my voice heard. When I was nine years old, magic and puppets led me down an unknown path, where I discovered that I could relate to other children.

The first time I attended a Plan International Ecuador workshop was also my first contact with art and theater. On that occasion, I used my voice to animate the puppet of a little girl that I built over a period of several weeks using recycled materials.

At the beginning I was very nervous and also very shy, because I had never been with so many children. However, I always remember that workshop because they awakened in me the need to share my life experiences, and at the same time I was generating a bond of friendship with others.

That was the beginning. After the magic and puppets, the singing followed. I still keep in my mind the words of my friends from the program in which we created and sang a song for gender equality. "Raise your voice," they said when they saw me nervous, and doubting my abilities. "You can do it, you can do it," they repeated.

Their words encouraged me to get on stage and, from then on, public speaking became easier and easier, to the point that today, at 19 years old, I am studying Political Science and once I graduate I hope to pursue a master's degree in International Relations and Diplomacy.

Remembering the words of my friends still comforts me and, when I look back, I acknowledge the changes.

I have undergone in my self-esteem, in the way I organize things, to persevere in my goals and something that I like very much: sorority.

The Because I am a Girl Movement has been that big door to meet other girls, share what I want to be and even visit other countries outside of Ecuador. As a teenager I was part of the Pregnancy Free Zone, a workshop aimed at preventing teenage pregnancy, where I learned about sexual and reproductive rights, gender and

self-esteem. I got to look at my imperfections, my body, my personality and from there I was able to think about a life plan.

In a takeover I was vice-prefect for a day. The speech on gender and equity I gave that day still fills me with pride. After listening to me, people used to tell me that I had matured fast.

When you join Plan International Ecuador's projects it's like throwing a snowball. One leads to another and that's how I came to Amigos de las Américas. I was 14 years old when I got involved in this initiative, which led me to live for about two months in the community of Santa Cruz, in Guamate, in the province of Chimborazo, to participate in a leadership program for the production of bee honey.

It was hard to separate from my family, but just as I lost my fear of public speaking, in a couple of weeks I could overcome the homesickness of being away from home for the first time. However, I was working with children and young





people and I was with a family where I felt welcome and accompanied.

That first experience away from home gave me the strength to sign up for the Youth Ambassadors program the following year. I was in one of Plan International Ecuador's offices in Latacunga when I saw the poster and decided to submit my proposal to lead education workshops on sexually transmitted diseases in my community.

I called it "Secure your future with responsibility", since I have worked on the issue of teenage pregnancy all my life, so I wanted to do something to help people make better decisions about their health and their lives.

It was a great joy just to be shortlisted for the program. Then I went through rounds of interviews in English and Spanish. Several weeks passed until I received the call I had been longing for: I had been chosen to travel to the United States to develop my project.

I was screaming a lot and I was in shock. I ran to see my parents who were behind my house. When I told them the news they were crying with emotion, they were so happy that they hugged me and congratulated me. I was so happy.

My happiness was completed when I saw the support that my own community was giving me. In my school, they collected money to help me with the travel expenses and even the Prefecture of Cotopaxi supported me. It was something I did not expect.

The program brought me to the states of California, Wisconsin and Washington. There we volunteered and delivered, for example, food to the homeless in San Francisco. I also met people from Colombia and, with my host family, I had the opportunity to work in an organic vegetable garden.

This trip marked me a lot because it helped me to connect with more people and with the world, and it was the inspiration for me to decide to study Political Science. I also think that learning about empowerment, about not being afraid to speak in public and to be more participative marked me a lot.

Upon my return, I could implement my proposal to provide information about sexually transmitted diseases in my community. Plan International taught me much more about the subject and provided me with materials and advice to help me get the message across to young people. Then I traveled to Belgium to participate in a youth leadership project that has been very important in my formation.

I see a change in myself, in my family and in my community. In my home sometimes we don't distribute the tasks well, but we are capable of realizing it and talking about it. We are more equitable. And in my town, men are no longer afraid of talking about sexuality or menstruation, I feel that there is more openness to talk about these issues. In addition, we have been able to bring boys and girls together in a more equitable way, and that is what matters.



A black and white portrait of a young man with dark, wavy hair, smiling warmly. He is wearing a dark, quilted jacket. The background is a soft, light green wash with some darker green brushstrokes. The name 'Ángel' is written in a large, green, cursive font across the middle of the image.

Ángel

Where I live, in Loja, we are known for the friendliness and charisma of the people. Everyone greets you with a “good morning” or “good afternoon”. Our landscapes are beautiful where the green color and the mountains are predominant.

I wake up, look out the window and see a very beautiful mountain. I listen to the animals: the roosters, the dogs and the birds. I feel enormous peace and strength to work, study and get ahead. In my community, we are very fortunate.

I am 19 years old. When I was five years old I joined Plan International Ecuador and I have learned many things in a process that has been long. When I was in

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school I didn't feel the need to have plans for the future, but since I was in high school I wondered if I would have the opportunity to enter university. After making many sacrifices at all levels, I am currently fulfilling my dream of studying medicine. Through Plan International Ecuador I have been able to train and grow on a personal, academic and social level.

One of the best experiences I had was in 2019, when I won a scholarship from the Youth Ambassadors Program, sponsored by the U.S. Embassy and managed by World Learning, in partnership with Amigos de las Americas and Plan International. It was my first time getting on a plane and leaving the country. I met young people from other parts of the world, such as Colombia and Brazil.

The selection process was very difficult. 254 young people applied and only 13 were selected, based on their academic and volunteer profile and their resumé. For the interview I had to travel to Cuenca, which is more than five hours away by road. All along the way I was thinking about the language, as they were going to ask us some questions in English. In my head, I practiced the greeting several times. I was very nervous.

I was asked about my community, my volunteer work and my aspirations. The results were back within 15 days. One of the program coordinators called me: "Angel, congratulations, you were selected for Youth Ambassadors". My family was very excited, my grandparents cried, and preparations began to go to Quito, a 14-hour drive away, for the visa interview. Of the 52 interviewees, only 13 of us were selected.



We arrived in Miami, and from there we went to Madison and finally to Washington. I brought some traditional sweets from Ecuador: snacks made of sugar cane and roasted peanuts, alfeñiques (raw cane candy) and huevos faldigueros (kind of marzipan); and one of the costumes from the Sierra - highland region for an artistic presentation, where I would wear a poncho, white shirt with thread embroidery, black espadrilles, a wool hat and a zamarro, which is made with sheep wool and was so heavy that it was half the weight. In the end, we spent three weeks learning a lot. We received workshops on leadership and support to plan a community project, which in my case was the creation of an art school for dance and music workshops.

I like to dance. I love traditional music and the mix of sounds

between flutes, drums and wind instruments. Rhythms are lively and the costumes are wonderful, that's why we presented them in the United States.

Besides dancing, in my free time I like to jog, to be with my grandparents and my mom, and to visit my friends.

Changing realities is difficult. That is why we must start with ourselves, and then take action with the community. First, we must be clear about our actions, do things right and then life will begin to change. I started as a beneficiary in trainings and workshops, and for the last three years I have been a volunteer. I have participated in several programs and more than 80 trainings. Some of them are Champions for Change and the Because I am a Girl Movement, which seeks gender equality and equal opportunities for men and women, as well as the Sexual and Reproductive Rights Promoters project, in which 325 girls and boys were trained. I have also completed diploma courses in Public Relations, Democracy and Political Leadership.

I am currently working in workshops on jewelry, ceramics and painting entrepreneurship. I am also in charge of building alliances with entities and with some foundations in the area of communication.

I would like to reach the most remote areas of the country and share my knowledge to build a more just and equitable society, and even if it is just a little, I know that this is how great changes are achieved.

My family has supported me in all my formative processes and they are proud of what I have achieved. I believe that knowledge is power and I always seek to continue learning, and then teach what I know to my family, my friends and my community.

In addition to my university degree, I am pursuing technology in Human Talent Management virtually, with a 90% scholarship.





I inherited my love for medicine from my mother, who works in public health. I study at the National University of La Plata, from Buenos Aires, Argentina, and since the classes are virtual for now, I have been able to continue with my community work and continue teaching.

When I found out I would be studying in Argentina, I went backpacking through several cities of the country, up to the border with Colombia. The adventure lasted three months and during that time I looked for volunteer work in health foundations, medical centers and brigades, where I asked for lodging. I visited the coast, the beaches and the Amazon.

Immediately after the online classes are over I will have to leave and I know it will be difficult. While we are at breakfast and talking about it we cry, but it is clear to me that I will return to the country.. This is my place and it is painful for me to leave it. There

is a lot to work on in my province: the representation we have as children and adolescents in public decisions, access to information, reducing teenage pregnancy, empowerment, ending gender violence and domestic violence.

But the journey has already begun and in the future I see myself as a Doctor Without Borders. I want to help in the most remote areas of the country, where health information does not reach.

I also want to work more with children and adolescents, because they are the future. With Plan International Ecuador we have traveled all over the canton and the communities like what we do. They always say: "when will you come again?, when will you come back?".

That fills my heart. It shows me that we are on the right track and that people like to participate. That is my motivation to keep going.



Juliet

One day my mom received a call from a Plan International Ecuador technician who told her: “your daughter should participate in the training on sexual reproductive rights”. My mom asked me and I said yes, I wanted to go. That’s how I started this beautiful journey in this organization.

At the beginning I received the trainings at home, it was during the time of quarantine due to the Covid-19 pandemic. I became immediately interested in the subject, precisely because it was a topic I always wanted to talk about, but, for fear of what people, my friends or my family would say, I didn’t say or ask anything. Now I am a promoter of sexual and reproductive rights.

For me, it is really important to talk about sexual and reproductive education. I was in a Catholic school where there were no talks on these topics. In general, by not talking about this, teenage pregnancy figures increase. But other things also happen. In my school, psychological abuse was very common, it was normalized to make sexist jokes. I remember one time when a boy lifted up a classmate's skirt and I said to myself: why is he doing that? I wanted to ask him, but I could see around me that no one was saying anything. The girl was leaving extremely depressed because her privacy had been violated. Later I was able to understand the shame she felt and why she left like that, when I acquired the knowledge I have now.

I think it is important for children to be educated in sexual and reproductive health so that they do not have children at an early age. It is also important not to celebrate other people's abuse and to understand that lifting a classmate's skirt is disrespectful, to say the least. In addition, I believe that education in sexual and reproductive health is very important for two other reasons. First, because girls and boys can think better about their life project, with their feet on the ground. When we think about our future, many things come to our minds. For example, I want to have a boyfriend or I want to have a family, but we have to ask ourselves: do I have the resources to support

my family, to have a house, or am I mentally and emotionally well enough to succeed as a mother?

The second is for sexual and reproductive health to stop being a taboo. It is essential that young people and adults, such as school principals, teachers, mothers and fathers, receive this education.

People say that young people are the future. But no, young people are the present. To achieve the future they long for, they need knowledge, they need to be prepared to identify disrespect, psychological and sexual abuse, and to create their own life project.

When I was preparing to become a promoter, I was very nervous when I attended the first trainings.

I was used to keeping my thoughts to myself, but in the first talks on sexual and reproductive health education, boys and girls were speaking very freely, and that gave me the confidence to participate as well. The first time I raised my hand to speak, I wanted to ask

a short question, but I went on for a long time, and that happens to me in most workshops. I know I talk a lot because I have kept so many things to myself, and I know that now I can finally say them.

I always feel comfortable participating. In the past I used to be





afraid, well, I still work with the fear of being told: “no, it’s wrong”, because, in my school, those who gave an incorrect answer were singled out, criticized, or made fun of. But now I participate and Plan International technicians tell me: “very good, I like your point of view”; or they tell me: “ Let me explain this to you in case you didn’t know it”, being kind and respectful.

I feel that Plan International Ecuador has helped the real Juliet to blossom. Before this training, I wanted to fit into the macho society of the canton where I live, in the Andean province of Loja. I used to put on a lot of layers, but now I have the confidence to be who I am. For example, I say: I want to do this activity, how do I do it? The technicians are always willing to help. Here I have felt that what they say about being yourself is fulfilled. I have been told: express yourself as you want, as you feel, release your emotions. After I started being a promoter, I joined the Because I am a Girl Movement in my canton. From there, more opportunities have come into my life. One of those opportunities was to be a mentor at the leadership schools, where I give trainings. I never imagined sharing my knowledge with other girls. The connection with them is very

nice, because it is an intense exchange of knowledge. Thanks to Plan International I have met many wonderful boys and girls with great potential.

I like to give trainings. It’s so nice when the girls thank me for what I teach them or remember my name. That means they paid attention.

They tell me: “thank you for the knowledge”. Or, sometimes, in a debate, someone says: “I don’t agree what you are saying, but I want to know more about this information”. When I give trainings, I like to make them dynamic, I like the kids to raise their hands, to put emojis if the workshop is virtual, or to ask questions while I am explaining. For me, to give trainings is also to learn from all the knowledge that is shared. I always say: what we have in our minds can help save a life. It may be that someone needs that knowledge to get ahead. We have to share.

When I am giving a workshop, I feel an extremely high level of happiness. I really like to build trust with other people, that they tell me: “stay at the end, Juliet, because I want to tell you something”;



that is, when they share something very personal with me. That's gratifying because they remind me of myself when I was looking for a trusted person to whom I could tell the situations I was going through and I never found that person.

At the end of the workshops I always like to give everyone some words of motivation. When they are virtual workshops I usually tell them: "have a good day", but when they are face-to-face, I tell them: "I hope you achieve all your dreams", because sometimes words are what we need, and these words are not said every day.

It is very nice for me to see how I am growing, both in age and knowledge.

I think that the girls in the Because I am a Girl movement are happy with the way they are now, as I am. There is a future ahead of us to continue learning. For the time being, I am going to continue with my interest in learning and training other girls and boys. Only the day when a girl or a woman is not raped, when there are no suicide alerts, I think I will stop and say that my job as a mentor or trainer is over.





Wenddy

Migration: a word that runs through my life. I am from Caracas, Venezuela, and in 2017 I migrated to Ecuador. I never imagined that this process would enable me to get to know myself in depth and recognize the hidden potential I have.

My parents are from Pueblo Nuevo, a rural area of Portoviejo in the province of Manabí. Twenty-six years ago, when they were 18, they left their homeland to live in Venezuela, where my sisters and I were born. Years later, we returned to Ecuador, although I did not want to come.



I was a little familiar with the area because we used to come here on vacation every two years. However, when my parents made the decision to return I felt that everything would be new for me and thousands of thoughts went through my head. I was studying law, I was in my seventh semester and I didn't want to drop out. I suggested my parents the possibility of staying in Caracas until I finished my degree.

That conviction changed when a friend of mine was killed in a protest by a gas bomb. At that moment I said to myself: "I've come this far. Here the lives of young people are worthless, I have to leave".

Life in Venezuela was very hard in 2017. Although my family and I had enough to eat and cover our needs, danger and insecurity stalked us. We lived in a vertical neighborhood - a complex of very tall towers - that had been given to us by the government. However, living there became dangerous. We always heard gunshots and on one occasion we had to walk next to dead bodies. My younger sister, who was six years old at the time, was traumatized, and when she heard a detonation, she would hide under the bed.

When I arrived in Ecuador, I had certain advantages over other Venezuelans, because I have Ecuadorian nationality, a house to live in and my family. But I was not used to living in the countryside. I wanted to continue studying but Pueblo Nuevo is a rural area where there are no city conveniences, no air conditioning, no internet and, of course, no universities. Besides, to continue studying I had to pass the entrance exam, but I knew

nothing about the history of Ecuador and I had little memory of mathematics.

Since I had nothing to do, I took over the household care. I went from having a very active life to staying at home. I used to study English, participate in an orchestra and sometimes worked. In Pueblo Nuevo, I was bothered by the sound of the roosters and the birds because they didn't let me sleep. It was too hot and I thought: "Where did I come to? I got sick with pleural effusion and was hospitalized because I had fluid in my lungs. I had hit rock bottom, but strangely enough, everything just flowed from there.

One day at my sisters' school a teacher asked me to replace her for a few hours, so she could go to the doctor's. I hesitated to accept because I had always been shy and hated to speak in public, until I told myself that they were just kids, that nothing was going to happen and I accepted. Little by little more teachers asked me to help them because they appreciated my work.

In 2018, it was time to apply to college and on the application, I had to write two options of careers I wanted to study. The first one was Law, but I could not move to the city because my parents could not afford my stay and my second option was a bachelor's degree in foreign language teaching. I am about to graduate with my bachelor's degree and a year ago I started studying law online.

In the middle of this process, Plan International Ecuador came into my life and I got out of the depression I was going through.

Plan International was working on some projects in my community and they let me participate in their programs, even though I was a foreigner and a couple of years older than required. I was happy because many people had discriminated against us for being from a misunderstood country, from which more than five million people have fled.

At Plan International Ecuador I met people who accepted me for who I am. I managed to make my first group of friends in the country. I participated in my first journalistic program in the network of community reporters, where I learned to record and edit videos to generate content, speak in front of the cameras, and speak on the radio. I discovered that I have the ability to speak in front of people and to convey my message in an assertive way.

One day I was invited to a radio station in Portoviejo to tell what we young people from rural areas were doing and the journalist who interviewed me was quite fascinated because I performed so well, to the point that he offered me a part-time job in that radio station. After thinking about it, I accepted. Part of my job was to voice and manage the controls.

I am also a member of the Because I am a Girl Movement, which changed my way of thinking 180 degrees. I began to understand feminism, sorority, and that women fight for the inequalities we experience just because we are women.

At the beginning of 2022, I started to participate in a project developed by Plan UK on Education in Emergencies.

It is a project that works collaboratively with eight countries, and Ecuador is the only one in the Americas. Our work consists of learning about the circumstances of children in Ecuador with respect to unsafe educational environments and proposing solutions to these problems. The project is supported by 22 delegates in the provinces where Plan International works.



At the end of July, I traveled to Paris to participate in a youth event on Education in Emergencies organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco). At a personal level it was a huge challenge because, for the first time in my life, I had to speak in English and demonstrate my potential. At a professional level, it was a source of immense pride, because I am preparing to become a teacher. Being able to go to an organization like Unesco to speak about the things I am most passionate about is a source of pride that I can't get enough of.

I can't say enough about everything that migration has given me. Although I still miss my country, I know that migrating to Ecuador was the best thing I could have done. I am no longer Wendy, the shy girl who was ashamed to even ask how much a pair of shoes cost; now I am an empowered woman

who is in tune with her community and works for the rights of children and adolescents in rural areas, because being in a rural area should not be synonymous of inequality and abandonment. After five years in Ecuador, I realize that it is a privilege to live in harmony with nature. Now I don't know if I would go back to live in a big city. I am no longer bothered by birds or roosters crowing. I value tranquility, watching the stars and coming home and disconnecting from the chaos of the world.





Leonel

On April 16th, 2016, we felt death up close. It was horrible. That Saturday we were with my family in our house which is made of cane when we started to feel that everything was moving abruptly.

We thought it was not going to last long, but as the seconds passed the magnitude of the movement increased.

It was a 7.8 earthquake with epicenter in Pedernales, province of



Manabí, which left 670 people dead. We live in Portoviejo and fortunately our house was not badly affected and no member of our family was injured. But people we know and some friends lost their loved ones.

I was 13 years old at the time and I was sitting in a hammock. I started going down the stairs while the earth was still shaking. It was a mistake, but upstairs I had been with my aunt and uncle and I wanted to be with my parents and siblings.

My dad kept asking me to stay still. That day they were cooking and the pots with the hot food fell over, the refrigerator opened completely and everything inside came out.

Everything happened. The damages in the city were immense and we kept hearing about the dead everywhere. At that moment, I was grateful to be alive and we decided to help those who needed assistance. After the earthquake, I participated in Plan International Ecuador's Intelligence Factories, which consist of creating, through games and talks, friendly places for emotional recovery after a crisis.

I had already participated in Plan International years ago, since I

was eight years old, mostly following the example of my two siblings: my 24-year-old sister and 14-year-old brother, with whom we had participated in the "Vacation Magics".

Now I am a member of the Because I am a Girl Movement, where I have learned to respect and recognize women, and to be a strategic ally.

I have participated in several training processes for children, adolescents and youth in the community, the leadership school, the network of popular communicators, and in programs on healthy masculinity and sexual and reproductive rights, among others.

My parents work in agriculture and their income is minimal, so we are very strapped for cash. My father grows coriander, onions, beans, broad beans, lima beans, cucumbers, achojcha (*cyclanthera pedata*), among other vegetables.

My family has always supported me to participate in the programs. Even when I had to go to college, they were there to help me not to get discouraged.

I had to struggle for two years to get into college. I did not give up





with the first or the second failed tests, I kept on preparing myself until I was accepted. I graduated from high school in 2020 and until March of this year I started my first third level classes. In October 2021, I got a place in Communication at the Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro, in Manta. I am only in my first semester but I feel that it is a very beautiful career and I have learned a lot from it. I am making the most of my time.

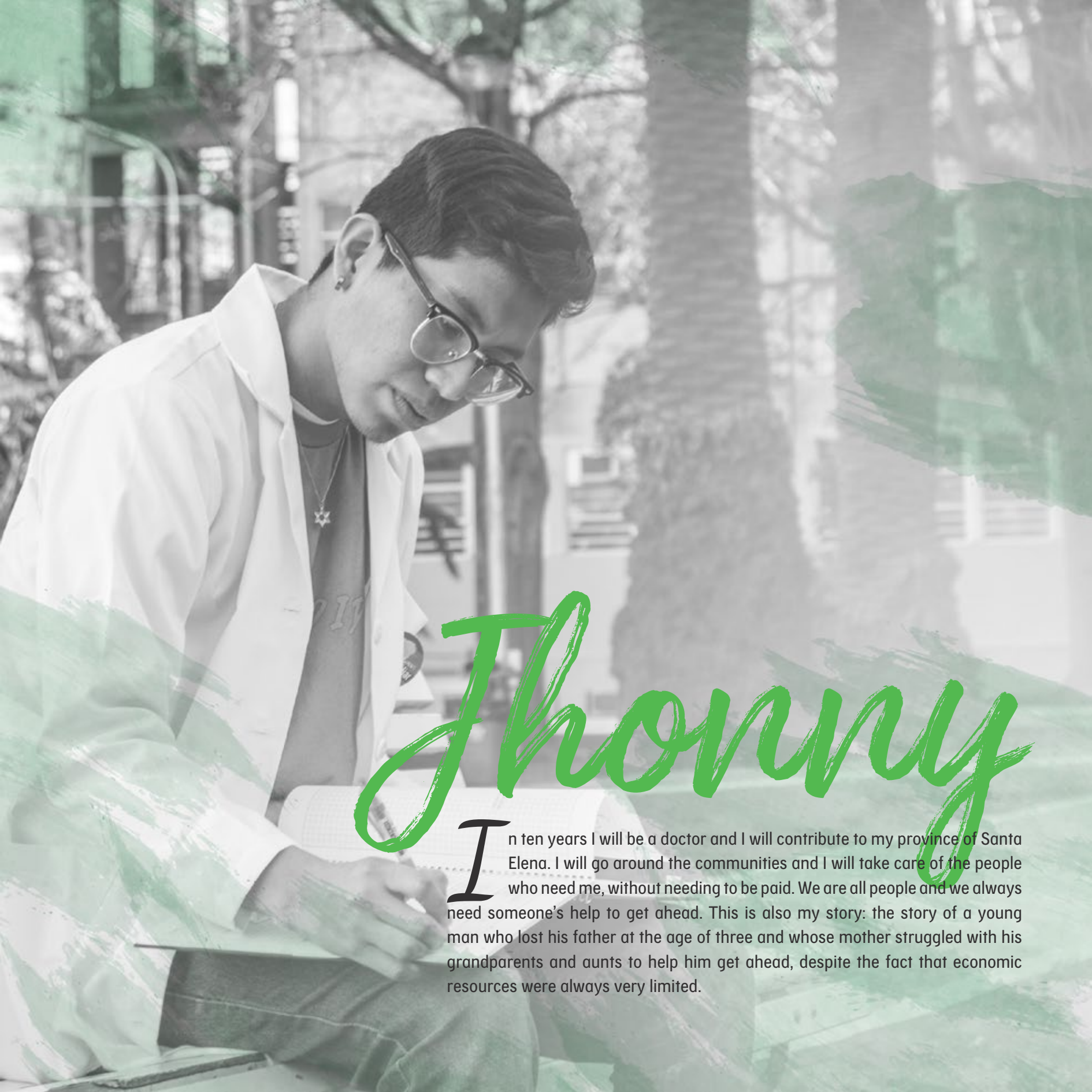
I am the second in my family to be in college. It is a very important step that I will continue until I get my university degree, start a business and help other people.

Manabí is very beautiful and I am proud to be from Portoviejo. You fall in love with any part of it: it has a very traditional culture, exquisite gastronomy, and the people are very nice, welcoming, simple and humble. There are no words to express how beautiful it is.

Thanks to Plan International Ecuador, I have been able to reach other communities in Manabí. I love sharing ideas with other young people, and getting to know their realities and how they live. For me, that is very important.

In Manabí, the work has just begun: we need to improve education and security and work for equality. We started the Trainer of Trainers process and, together with 17 other people from several communities, we are promoting a social enterprise that can hire our training and education services.





Thommy

In ten years I will be a doctor and I will contribute to my province of Santa Elena. I will go around the communities and I will take care of the people who need me, without needing to be paid. We are all people and we always need someone's help to get ahead. This is also my story: the story of a young man who lost his father at the age of three and whose mother struggled with his grandparents and aunts to help him get ahead, despite the fact that economic resources were always very limited.

I believe in dreams, ideals and social activism, because the combination of these three elements brought me to my destination: Mar del Plata, Argentina, where I study medicine.

In my family, no one ever imagined that one of us would get this far, because until now only one cousin had gone to college. I am the second to do so. For me, it is an achievement that summarizes what my grandfather always taught us: that we should study with dedication, since it is our ultimate responsibility.

I don't think he ever imagined that his words would change the history of my family. He is a security guard and, with his earnings, he used to fix the house so that we could all live well. When I was a child, he bought a television, which we sometimes watched to entertain ourselves because I didn't have many toys.

The women in my family have been my inspiration, especially my mother, who after being widowed at the age of 25, returned to my grandparents' house with two small children. To help us get ahead she worked and, at the same time, she studied to become a nurse's aide, and she succeeded.

She was the one who introduced me to the world of medicine. Sometimes, when I was eight years old, the school bus would drop

my sister and me off at the hospital where my mother worked and we would wait for her to come out. In that hospital, the doctors were empathetic with us and would make us laugh or give us a chocolate to make the wait more pleasant. It was there that I understood that medicine is social and should serve to help everyone.

Sometimes I think that everything in my life has been weaving



together for me to achieve my dreams, but I have had to change my vision of the world. Although at 14, I was already part of the Council for the Protection of Rights of La Libertad Canton and at 17 I was president of the Consultative Council for Children, Adolescents and Youth, I had a macho vision, even though I have always wanted to make a change in my society. At that age, I thought that we men were the only ones who should be at the head of leadership positions, such as the mayor's office. For me, it always had to be a man, and when I saw women participating in a leadership role, such as councilwomen, I thought they were doing it wrong. Even in my home, even though most family members are women and all of them worked, I felt that my

grandfather was the man of the house and the provider.

This perception changed when I met María Belén, my best friend, an empowered teenager who always talked about gender equity and

women's empowerment. She was a member of the Because I am a Girl Movement of Plan International Ecuador. Through her I also met Maria Esperanza, another activist who helped me to open my eyes, to see the world in its diversity, and to realize how wrong I had been until I was 17.

Maria Esperanza's conviction was so strong that when she invited me to participate in an English course for teenagers, given by Amigos de las Americas in collaboration with Plan International, I accepted. The first thing I saw when I arrived at Plan International's offices were the walls full of banners promoting gender equality. I didn't know much about it, but I was starting to get interested. However, in the beginning, my main motivation for attending the program was to improve my English comprehension, because it was a language that was very difficult for me. At the end, in the classes, I not only learned the language from scratch and reinforced my knowledge, but at the same time I was learning about gender because many of the activities in the classes were related to this topic. I loved it and that was the beginning of my activism in the promotion of equality.

When my English classes ended, I was invited to participate in the activities of the Because I am a Girl Movement, which I also accepted. I never say no to new challenges, especially when it comes to social activism. Over the years, I can see that not only my change began there, but also that of my family and friends. Although I had previously attended empowerment

and leadership workshops with other organizations, Plan International's workshops were very special, because they changed my perspective of the world, of what it is to be a man. Then I learned about gender identity and it was the first time I realized that this did exist and that it was a reality that I had turned my back on due to ignorance. However, my work did not stop there, I decided to talk about this with my grandparents, who are Catholic, Apostolic and Roman, and although it took me a long time to make them understand that gender identity existed, today they accept this and respect it. Even though they are old, they have understood that the world is changing, that people are not the same, and that this is not wrong. My mom also understood this and now, when a trans or gay person comes to her work, she treats them with empathy.

In my home, no one has a specific role, we all do everything. When I was there, I used to prepare dinner, my sister prepared lunch, my grandfather cleaned, and so everyone contributed to making everything run smoothly.

Now it inspires me to see a girl from a very remote community who can take on a leadership position, like being mayor for a day, and make decisions that benefit her community. That's incredible, it's admirable and it enriches me a lot. I am a spokesperson for change to keep it happening. As a man, I play a leading role so that girls and women can raise their voices and be heard.





Zoila

My dream is to be a school teacher. I think it's nice to be in front of children, to teach them math, English or natural sciences. It's nice to talk to them, they always surprise me with a thought or a phrase.

I am in the ninth grade of basic education in a school in Guamate. I come from a very beautiful community in the middle of the highlands, although the weather is hostile because there is a lot of wind and it is extremely cold. In addition, the Sangay volcano is nearby and can be a health risk for our community.

We live from agriculture. In the orchard, we grow potatoes, mellocos, corn, mashua, and strawberries. That's why the fields are so colorful. The image I like the most is the dark green of the hills.

We also have animals like cows, sheep, donkeys, guinea pigs, rabbits, chickens, horses... sometimes you can hear the wolves and, if you are lucky, you can see them.

Most days I have to travel from my community to Guamote to go to school. The school is very far away, sometimes there are buses but it takes me a long time to get there. My mom gives me a dollar a day for transportation and food. When I'm lucky, I make it an hour from my community to Guamote, but there are days when the buses break down and I miss classes. I was on the verge of dropping out of school because I was sick, but thanks to Plan International Ecuador's technicians who motivated me, I continued studying.

Sometimes I stay in a room my parents rented in Guamote. When I'm there, I can get to class on time, but that only happens one or two days a week. That makes me sad.

On the days I stay in that room, after school, I have to cook, tidy up and do my homework.

When I go back to my community to see my mom and my grandmother I am happy. There I have to get up really early to help my mom cook. When I come back from school I help my mother with the laundry, cleaning the house, and taking care of the crops, and I also take the cows and sheep to graze. We also have a pig, guinea pigs, and chickens that we have to take care of and feed.

In my community, we have a savings and credit group made up only of boys and girls. Our mothers help us because they also created a savings and credit fund with the support of Plan International Ecuador.

Having a savings and loan fund with children is very good because we can save and obtain loans with the guarantee of our mothers. In my case, I received a loan and bought a sheep, and other children bought chickens and pigs.



In the savings and loan fund, I can put everything I learn into practice. I like to add and subtract. Maybe that's why I love math. I think it's good to know the multiplication tables to keep track of the children's funds, so we can know how much we've managed to save.

To be a teacher I have to study everything. What if I don't have to teach math? I have to be well prepared, so I want to learn several subjects.

I would have liked to teach my brothers and sisters - I am the youngest of nine - but they no longer live in our home because they left home to go to another city to work or because they got married. I think it's wrong to get married too young. Before getting married, I prefer to be a professional. That's why my idea is to continue studying and even better if we can go to school every day.

Classes by phone were very complicated. I could study when my dad lent me his mobile phone, although I had to put credit on it every month to receive the classes. I was able to cover this expense with the scholarship that Plan International Ecuador has been giving me since 2010.

The cell phone signal does not reach my community very well, it only works well in some places. That's why I had to leave the house to go to a higher part, to the hill, to locate

the signal, so that I could receive messages from my teachers. In my community, only the radio signal is good.

Since May, I have been a member of the Because I am a Girl Movement in Guamote and I am very happy. A little while ago we had our first meeting with the other girls. I was a bit sick but I still managed to go. At first, I was nervous and quiet, but as the minutes passed I became more confident and I even participated.

I have seldom had the opportunity to intervene. Once I had to speak in front of my classmates, I was very embarrassed, but then I managed to overcome my fears and be confident. Now I know that I have more experience to express myself in front of people, and I have to do it because teachers have to be confident in front of children. In the Because I am a Girl Movement we talk about our experiences and discuss issues to prevent violence. I like it a lot so far.





A black and white photograph of a woman wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a plaid shirt, smiling and holding a cob of corn. She is standing in a field of tall grass or corn stalks. The image has a warm, golden glow overlaying it.

Karina

I have dedicated almost half of my life to social action. For a long time, I have been a community advocate and have mediated in cases of domestic violence.

Here, in Simón Bolívar parish, I have also dealt with cases of psychological abuse. We do it here because we are many kilometers away from Santa Elena canton and there are no good roads or public transportation companies for people to travel to file a complaint or seek attention. Without an option, families choose to remain silent about violence.



I am very happy to help prevent violence in my parish. I like working with people. I know that in order to stop abuse, violence, harassment or femicide, prevention must be done in the long term. Prevention must be done by giving the right information, because if someone gives the wrong information, they are not helping to end the problem of domestic violence.

The important thing is to protect life. The first case of violence that I measured was that of a father who physically abused his family every time he consumed alcohol, and we found out because the school principal reported that the son of this man showed signs of abuse. I risked going alone to the family's house because I did not find the police or the *teniente politico* (first civil authority). I was a little afraid, but I made it to the house. The father came to the door and the first thing he said to me was: "Are you going to take me to jail?", and I told him: "No, I just want to talk to you". He told me everything was fine, but something gave him away. The wife was on the bed, with her face bruised. We talked a little and I told him I would come back the next day. I left with sadness and concern.

I knew it was a sensitive issue because the wife did not want to file a complaint. She said: "I'm not going to do it, because he's going to kill me for sure". The boy was crying. After a while, we managed to take the case to Santa Elena, so that the family could receive professional visits. In these cases, following up with the families

is the most important thing, because aggressors are vigilant and they will not perpetrate the same mistreatment.

I get stressed in situations of injustice and mistreatment, but when the violence ends, I have a little peace, because I have managed to do something for others. However, this peace has also cost me some family sacrifices.

Because of my work as a community advocate, I often had to stay up until the wee hours of the morning, and it didn't take long for problems to arise with my family. They would say to me, "You care about other people, why don't you care about us? They felt that I was neglecting them because I could not dedicate much time to them. Some of my children are now adults, others are teenagers. Now I can explain to them about social work, and we talk about constructive and destructive criticism. One of my youngest daughters likes this work, she likes to help and serve others. So, I already have my legacy. I now have the support of my family and I will try to make sure my daughter has it too.

I know that many families trust me as a community advocate. I have also earned that trust thanks to the volunteer work I have done with Plan International Ecuador. Volunteering is a beautiful experience.



I have worked together with other fellow volunteers from several communities. I have volunteered in the area of communication so that families can express what they feel through letters; in the area of health, I have provided training in the communities to prevent diseases; in the environmental area, I have taught children that they should not pollute nature, and I have also trained them in self-esteem and rights.

I also work as a basic education teacher in the parish school. This vocation has helped me to reach out to parents to pass on to them what I have learned. I have passed on to them the same lessons I have received. This has helped me to approach parents to encourage them to change their mentality.

I am currently the president of the Simon Bolívar Parish Autonomous Government in Santa Elena. It is a public position through which I have continued to help my parish. I got to this position because of my vocation of service, not because of a political position. Families trust me and look to me for help in situations of violence prevention. In this position, I have worked to continue providing training for fathers and mothers, and this should not disappear. As I always say: in life, you never stop learning, and there is nothing better than to be with your family and not fall into violence.

My dream is to see my parish completely transformed. One of my commitments is to achieve the construction of a first-order access road because we do not have paved roads and we need them, because in our territory people are dedicated to agriculture and livestock, and they need to transport their products.

However, my greatest commitment is to continue providing violence prevention training for children, young people and parents. We must also promote training in entrepreneurship, basic electricity, carpentry, cell phone repair, women's leadership training and teenage pregnancy prevention.




A black and white portrait of a young man with dark hair and glasses, wearing a light-colored, vertically striped button-down shirt. He is smiling slightly and has his arms crossed. The background is a light, textured wall with large, abstract orange brushstrokes. The name 'Mauricio' is written in a large, orange, cursive font across the middle of the image.

Mauricio

My greatest joy is serving my community and working as a volunteer. Since I was a child, I used to tell my friends and family that I wanted to be a leader in the neighborhood and help those who had problems in their homes. Now, my job is to push them to get ahead.

Working with children, youth and older adults motivates me. Serving others is an impulse that comes from spiritual formation and religion since I have been a catechist since I was 14 years old.

Now I am 23, I live in a neighborhood in the south of Quito and I have been working with Plan International since I was eight years old. It happened



exactly when I needed it most: I had many conflicts in my family because we had problems with coexistence and mistreatment. Participating in the activities organized by Plan International Ecuador helped me to forget what was happening at home. The workshops helped me to work on my self-esteem through emotional support.

My uncle was a volunteer with Plan International in another neighborhood and he used to tell me that he was going to these children's workshops; he told me all about what they were doing, so I asked him to sign me up.

It was very special for me to exchange letters with my sponsors. Every month, a person from the organization would come to our neighborhood, give all the children gifts and take two photos of us with a member of our family: one was for us and the other for the sponsor. That's how I formed a visual memory of that time.

In addition to the letters, my sponsor would send me gifts for Children's Day, Christmas, and the beginning of the school year. He would also remember my birthdays and send me candy. He never left me alone.

We would get together to play with children from the sector, we would do dramatizations, puppets, and handicrafts and we would also go out to the moor and to the parks. I felt very good during those times, I knew the life stories of my friends and that comforted me. In the meetings and workshops, I focused

on having fun, being a child, on having peace and tranquility.

I have been a catechist in a church since I was 14 years old, working with children and young people so that they can have a better future. I am always looking for them to attend, to know how they are in their homes because there are very sad realities, so I try to help them in whatever they need, without expecting anything in return. It is gratifying when I see how a person grows stronger and how they achieve their goals and projects.

When I was 15 years old, Plan International invited me to be a volunteer leader in my neighborhood. I accepted with great joy. Every month we had entrepreneurship training in various neighborhoods. My childhood dream was coming true.

One of those projects was Aflatoun, which lasted two years. In the beginning, we were three young people and we ended up being 60. In Aflatoun we learned how to manage money and we did many different activities. I was the project manager and cashier in my neighborhood cooperative. Our motivation was to save. We all deposited 10 cents, 50 cents, or a dollar every day, and that's how we came to have good money.

At the end of the project, we organized a fair with other neighborhoods. We sold bracelets, tablecloths, paper figures, piggy banks, and paintings. It was there that I learned the basics of how to run a microenterprise. I also learned how to





make decisions and take the baton of leadership.

In our neighborhood, Plan International helped us to build infrastructure such as the community school and some classrooms, and encouraged us to use these facilities for children to hold workshops. It was a huge change and I have witnessed the progress of my neighborhood.

Finishing high school has been a great achievement in my life. I then entered the Catholic University and soon I will graduate in History, I just need to finish the thesis I wrote on 'Nationalism in education in the war of the Cenepa'.

I am the first in my family to go to university. To be honest, I thought this step was a long way off for me. Fortunately, I got a scholarship from the government. They told me that I could enter any career and I decided on History because it goes hand in hand with education, philosophy, and the understanding of the human being.

I used to be very shy and had a lot of fears. Now I have learned to know myself better, to make decisions, and to rely on the people I love. Now I visualize my future and I know what is the right path to follow. This is what I share in the workshops. I always tell them: we can achieve our dreams and goals.

In the future, I will do my best to study for a master's degree. I see myself as a teacher and, in Plan International, I will be a technician in the sponsorship area.

I am currently working as a donor recruiter because I am a testimony, with a life story that changed for the better. Through this, we motivate families to sponsor a girl or a boy. When they hear my story and see how my life has changed, they realize that it is not an expense, but an investment. I am a professional, I have a job and I have moved forward because someone believed in me. There are still many children out there who deserve a chance.



A woman with long dark hair, wearing a grey polo shirt, is looking down with a somber expression. The background is a nursery with various plants and trees. The word "Yesenia" is written in a large, orange, cursive font across the middle of the image.

Yesenia

Anita" is the name of the native and ornamental plant nursery that I manage in honor of my mother who passed away due to Covid-19. Together with my sister, we grow plants from our area to sell them.

My mother was very fond of plants. During the quarantine, we would try to go for walks with her near my house. When we saw a nice plant, we would get out of the car and cut some branches to plant it at home. Sometimes we did it without anyone seeing us, sometimes we had to ask for permission. When my mother passed away, we had a lot of plants, and so the nursery was born.

Working in the nursery motivates me a lot. Taking care of the plants and watering

them every day has become a passion, I feel it injects me with motivation to continue healing from the loss of my mother. The plant nursery is a new opportunity and a new learning experience. Sometimes children from my sector who are sponsored by Plan International come to take pictures to send to their godparents. As I am a volunteer for the organization, I call them to have meetings here because it's a beautiful place, full of color and joy, and makes the photos stand out.

I have participated in the fairs organized by Plan International with the seedlings from the nursery. This makes me very happy, because I can get a little money. Anyone would say: who is going to buy plants, but people do buy and that encourages me to continue taking care of the flowers and of everything we have in our nursery.

I have been a Plan International volunteer since 2006. During that year I was a member of the team that collected information in the territory. I didn't attend meetings very often, but little by little I became more involved in volunteering. First, I was in the health area, in the weight, height and vaccination control brigades with children in my community.

Being a Plan International volunteer motivated me to continue studying to do what I do today. I graduated with a degree in Education Sciences, with a major in Early Childhood Education, because my volunteering has always been related to children and young people. When I was just starting out, I participated in the Leadership Schools, in which there were many professionals who encouraged me to continue studying. They told me that a professional career is a way to have more job opportunities, so I decided to go to university.



I do a variety of activities as a volunteer. For example, I have given workshops to children in the Holiday Magics, which are recreational and learning activities during the school vacations. I have also delivered food kits and incentives for children. People thank me, but I tell them: "don't thank me, thank Plan International, because they are the ones who are giving this to us". Those moments are nice and bring a lot of affection.

I have also worked as a volunteer in risk management workshops (to know what to do in case of emergency), and lately on social media safety. We teach children and adolescents they should not upload photos on social networks or send them to strangers.

I know that if something happens to someone, that person has the confidence to tell us, the volunteers, in case their mothers or fathers are not there. Since people know that I am a Plan International volunteer, they ask for my help in an emergency situation, because I am willing to help whether they are enrolled in the organization or not.

For me, the work of a volunteer is very beautiful. I could define it as a person's intention to share their time with the people in their community. Everything I do is for the welfare of children. When you do volunteer work, you have to be clear that it's done without any interest or profit, this activity must be born from the heart.

I am always looking for more people to get involved. Right now I am trying to convince my sister-in-law to take the lead in my sector so that, in case I am not around, she can collaborate in the community and in this way we can contribute to its growth and help ensure that the benefits of Plan International reach as many people as possible.





Sara

Despite they are younger, my children, with their example, motivated me to change. They belong to Plan International Ecuador: my daughter was a young ambassador, so she had the opportunity to travel to the United States to develop a project for the community through which she became a leader, and my other son followed her footsteps. That's how it all started.

About five years ago, while my daughter was a youth ambassador, the local development technician that was working in my parish invited me to volunteer with the organization, and I accepted.

Volunteering has been a process of serving others in my community.



One of the main activities I have done is to accompany teenagers and young people to the workshops that are organized outside the parish, which is known as chaperoning.

In 2016, I accompanied the young ambassadors to Quito, representing their mothers. That was the first time I traveled by plane. It was a very nice experience because not only did I go as a mom to watch and provide protection, but I was also present at the talks. I have traveled to Guayaquil and other cities, and in this way, I've got to know the country, little by little.

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The organization has taught me a lot about Early Childhood, Teen Pregnancy-Free Zone, and First Aid projects.

I know I am quite friendly and trustworthy. My kids say, "once they

get to know my mom, she's trustworthy and even goes toe-to-toe with young people". I believe that to get along with a teenager, you have to put yourself in their shoes and try to understand them.

On the other hand, my involvement in volunteering has contributed a lot to improving my family environment. In my home there was machismo; for example, it was thought that women had to spend their time at home and doing chores. But one day I said: "I want to get ahead and I want to do something for my family and my community. At first, it was a little difficult to attend the organization's training because my husband was used to seeing me only inside the house and not going out every day. The change occurred because, on some occasions, he had the opportunity to travel with my daughter, as a young ambassador, and listened to the workshops, so little by little, he understood what machismo is and how it affects us as a society.



Now my family is organized: I go out to do my volunteer work and my husband does the cooking or maybe buys food. My husband doesn't put any obstacles in my way to go out. Things like this have made us grow as a family.

In Plan International Ecuador I had the amazing opportunity to become a certified Trainer of Trainers and later we started the Camino al Éxito (Path to Success) social enterprise, of which I am a partner and legal representative. This business helps us to develop our skills and have a quality life, both for those of us who are trainers and those who attend the workshops.

Plan International Ecuador helped the 18 people who today make up Camino al Éxito to specialize in two projects: Early Childhood and Teen Pregnancy-Free Zone. At the moment, we are giving workshops on these two initiatives. I always tell my colleagues that, if we want to engage in another activity, we have to prepare ourselves, feel confident that we are going to do it well, and know how to reach the public.

I know I still have a lot to learn about the social enterprise. I don't quite feel that I am an excellent leader yet, but I am getting there. I know I want to continue volunteering and being part of the social enterprise. It hasn't been easy, but now I can engage in conversations, answer with solid arguments or elaborate on the information. I feel that I have grown, that I am doing something productive for my parish, and that I have motivated more people to do the same.

Volunteer work is a learning experience that motivates me every day. Besides, I have met many people. I am grateful to the volunteers who taught me and guided me to carry out these activities, which we do from the heart. But above all, I thank my children, who, with their new vision, showed me a different path to follow in my life.





Blanca

I am a very proud indigenous woman. I always wear my clothing with joy, because it belongs to the community that represents me and the land that I cherish in my heart.

I belong to the Puruhá nationality and, wherever I go, you will see me with a hat, baeta, blouses, a white necklace, skirt and espadrilles, which if I go to the countryside I change for boots.

My name is Blanca, but I am affectionately known as Blanquita. I am 48 years old. I belong to the Pancún Ichubamba community, in the Cebadas parish, Guamote canton, in the province of Chimborazo. It is a rural area, inhabited by noble, strong and brave indigenous





people, despite all the needs we face.

At home, we are six siblings, and my mother was courageous enough to help us all get ahead. My childhood was marked by difficult moments, for example, I dropped out of school because we had no money. I resumed school when I was 15, but this time I studied at a distance.

In high school I met my husband, and we fell in love, I stopped studying and went to live with him. I cannot say that everything was perfect, there were difficulties, but we always managed to solve them and we were a happy family. I had three children with him: a boy, who is now 28 years old, and two girls, aged 26 and 24. I used to be a housewife, taking care of my children and doing the housework.

However, the world came crashing down on me on July 6th, 2009, when my husband died in an accident. The pain was insurmountable and, even though 13 years have passed, it still affects me. I was left

alone and had to be a father and mother. It was very hard because I had to struggle and work hard to raise my children. My mom and my siblings were fundamental in this particular stage of my life.

In this process, I learned about Plan International and I joined as a volunteer in 2013. My life changed during that year because I became aware of topics that were unknown to me, for example, gender equity, children's rights, self-esteem, and entrepreneurship, among others. Through these activities, I became more confident, I left my shyness behind, I began to believe in my abilities and I became a leader.

The workshops and meetings have been opportunities for mutual learning. We share our experiences and do dynamics with children so that they also become interested in the issues.

In my community, we work to raise awareness about child abuse and to stop teenage pregnancy, because these are girls who end up taking care of other children and have to leave their dreams behind.



Thanks to the knowledge I have acquired, I can help solve the problems of my community, I give them advice and talk to them about their rights and duties. Sometimes serious cases occur, such as sexual abuse, and then, with a lot of pain, we have had to go to the authorities to get justice.

I have always liked to support my community. Four years ago I founded a women's organization, where we face hard struggles against discrimination, machismo, male violence, and inequality between men and women. The initiative was born with the objective of increasing women's participation and finding a source of income to support their needs and projects.

Along the way, and with the help of Plan International, we created the Educas Nueva Esperanza community savings banks and credit fund, in which each one of us saved what we could. It didn't matter if it was just a few dollars, the important thing was to add up and start with something. It is an enterprise led by women and I am the treasurer. We prioritize helping women because we are the ones who take care of our families, we know what the household expenses are, and we have demonstrated that we have the capacity to improve the quality of life of our families through our work. However, there are also male members, although with less participation.

I hope that our small savings fund will become a savings and credit

cooperative and that the girls and adolescents who are preparing themselves will be the ones to manage and take over this business. In time, we will increase the capital and thus be able to develop other projects.

Through the community savings banks we have demonstrated that women can achieve what we dream of and support our families and that we can contribute to the household economy. We lend money for education, health and business, for example, to buy dairy cows, for agriculture, etc. We are a seed capital for families.

I like to be enterprising and active: I have a small store with a copy and printing center, I also grow strawberries, have dairy cows and occasionally make cheese. My dream is to have a bigger store and sell healthy and agroecological products. To do that I have to graduate as a professional and specialize. I don't mind my age, I finished high school as an adult, when my children were independent and were finishing their technical courses. I understood that this is my moment to follow my dreams.

It is clear to me that I am going to continue working for children, whether through Plan International or any other institution, whether public or private. Children need a lot of attention and education. They need a lot of support to develop their life projects, and to know that their dreams can be achieved.





Ana

If I had to define my life, I would choose three words: strength, bravery and courage. At the age of 30 I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis and was told I would never be able to walk again, but here I am, nine years later, fighting, moving forward and fulfilling my dreams.

I was in a wheelchair for three years because I could not walk. Now I can move around, but I can't use much force. I always kept hope, although I had difficult days in which my family was my greatest support. My mother, my grandmother, my siblings, my nephews and my children were always with me.



I have four children: three girls, aged 24, 16 and 14, and a 19-year-old son.

They discovered the disease because I had a lot of pain in my knee and one day I fainted when I was playing soccer. At that time I was working on a plantation and I could not go back. Now I help my family with the farming work.

I live in the province of Cotopaxi, in Pujilí canton. The countryside is a beautiful place, you live from nature and, although it is quite cold, I love the climate. You can breathe fresh air and take advantage of it to grow corn, potatoes and vegetables. It is a heavenly place and a land that has given us everything.

I joined Plan International 20 years ago as a volunteer. I was a single mother with a 4-year-old daughter. As soon as I arrived, they taught me a lot of things about self-esteem, which has helped me to be stronger, to express myself better, to discover my capabilities and to develop my potential. I have also received training on entrepreneurship; on one occasion, for example, they provided me with products to knit and support the women's group I belong to, so that it could move forward. At the same time, I have taken bakery and safety workshops, which have encouraged me to

create things for myself, instead of buying. I remember very much a journalism workshop where I learned how to conduct interviews and write news stories.

I had to withdraw from volunteer work for a while because of the disease, but then I came back. When I was very sick I received a lot of help from Plan International, they supported me psychologically to overcome my depression, they took care of my children, found scholarships for them, and motivated them to study and follow their life projects.

The organization has been a light of hope, not only for me but for the whole community. They have supported us in our projects, and also to continue studying, and they have shown us that there are possibilities. In the training, we analyzed the issue of violence and child abuse. As a result, in my community, care for children has increased, and, little by little, violence has been eradicated.

In the 20 years I have been with the organization, I can say that every step I have taken has been an opportunity to learn more about myself and to build a support network. I am motivated by the fact that I can contribute with my work. As a community, we have learned that if we help each other, we can all win.



The projects we develop at Plan International will continue to be fundamental for people in the neighborhood, including children and adolescents. We have gone through difficult times, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, and we have overcome them, which shows that it is possible.

I still have goals. I was not a high school graduate and decided to study regardless of my age. I enrolled in school and was selected for a scholarship that I applied for through a Plan International program for volunteers to finish high school. I had two years of high school left to finish and I finished them during the pandemic.

It was exciting to meet with neighbors and friends, also older, who were studying accelerated high school. We were united by our desire to study. Due to the circumstances, we studied virtually and graduated in April 2022.

Graduation was beautiful and exciting. Although I did not graduate when I was young, the effort I put into it made this accomplishment sweeter. I always say: age is not an impediment and the spirit will always be young.

Now my dream is to continue studying and pursue a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education. I love working with children because they are the most important people in our society. I am going to continue studying without giving up.

At the same time, I will keep working with the community, to listen to their needs and look for ways to solve them. It makes me happy to serve people, to visit other provinces, and to provide support and encouragement to other women. I trust that my story of life and struggle will be inspiring because I have been strong, I have been brave and I have had the courage to overcome adversity.



A portrait of a woman with long dark hair, smiling, wearing a light-colored shirt. The background is a soft, painterly wash of light brown and beige tones.

Marlene

In volunteering, as I have given, I have received. The lessons my children have learned at Plan International have motivated me to join volunteering, to help in any way I can.

I am a mother of four: three children over the age of 18 and a 10-year-old girl. My children, my husband and I live in a neighborhood where kids make a lot of bad decisions, like taking drugs or getting married at a very young age. However, Plan International Ecuador's workshops have helped my children to think about their future and to have the fervent desire to study.

My children, from a very young age, have attended workshops

on digital marketing, entrepreneurship, and domestic violence prevention. I know that no matter where they go, they will be able to think about what they are going to do, because they are prepared. They now see life in a way that motivates them to move forward.

I think of myself as a very friendly woman. We laugh with my children because I always meet friends wherever we go, in the city center or on a trip. While my children were attending Plan International's workshops, I made friends with the technicians of the institution, who encouraged me to become a volunteer and, as I have always liked to help, I joined.

I used to be a volunteer in another foundation, that is why I believe in helping without profit. Today, thanks to volunteering, I have many friends of all ages. I have been a volunteer for more than five years.

Volunteering gives me the opportunity to learn. It makes me grow as a person and helps me to fulfill my dreams. I recently attended a workshop on entrepreneurship at the *Escuela Politécnica del Litoral* organized by Plan International, which I really enjoyed. I learned how to run a business. My children and I have the dream of starting a restaurant, a dream that is crystallizing little by little, with the knowledge I am acquiring.

Right now I am studying at a technological institute with a scholarship from the Municipality of Guayaquil and Plan

International. I finished high school at 22 and then I got married, but I always wanted to go to university. For me, it was very difficult to continue studying because I had my three older children one after the other, and when I wanted to study I was worried about who was going to take care of them, and who would help me with them. So my aspiration to study was put on hold.

Now I tell my children: my dream has come true. Although it is not exactly a university, but a technological institute, I am very happy to study and fulfill another goal in my life. I have always loved sales. When I can, I sell cosmetics, clothes, or natural products. I like the idea of educating myself and, fortunately, I have always been close to people who like to help other people to achieve their goals. In September 2022, I will finish my sales career, and I have already done an internship in a hotel in this area.

What I do in volunteering is to accompany young people. For example, some time ago, I went with them to General Villamil Playas to take a workshop for two days. I made sure that they were well and calm and that they didn't go out somewhere they shouldn't go.

Accompanying them encourages me because I see and hear everything they learn. They are taught to differentiate between right and wrong. At lunch or during a break, I talk to these teenagers and tell them that trust is something we earn and we must keep it.



Volunteering has changed my life. My husband knows that I like to improve myself and he understands that my motivation is to help. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, I helped in the distribution of food baskets to people in our surroundings, and I also visited some ladies in their homes to give them food baskets. Everything went well.

For me, volunteering is a blessing, it is giving from the heart. I have seen that my children have received in equal measure. I have

given support and my children have learned. Sometimes it has been their turn to give, but they have received in equal measure.

One of my sons had the opportunity to travel to Belgium and for me it was a blessing. I would never have the possibility to help him make such a trip, but he had this life-changing experience. Seeing him travel was a great feeling. All of our dreams are being fulfilled through my volunteering.





Edison

¿Who is a father?

It's a question I have asked myself and, although the obvious answer is biological, which refers to the person who participated, along with the mother, in the conception of the child, my experience showed me that the father is the one who shares the responsibilities, who guides and supports, who understands and evaluates whether to speak or not to speak. Life has not given me biological children, but I have been a father many times.

When my mother had her last daughter, before menopause (a pregnancy that almost caused her death), I took the liberty of assuming my sister's raising my sister, who is 21 years younger than me. Only then I could understand the sacrifices and dedication of a parent, because I had to take care of her

when she was sick and provide for her education, clothing and a myriad of unforeseen events. After having faced this challenge for several years and seeing that she is now a full-fledged woman, I have now dedicated myself to my nieces.

For some time I also sponsored my sister's education. My intention was for them to have at least some craft training, so that they could be entrepreneurs self-reliant to not depend on their husbands. It has been years of struggle against machismo, gender inequality and violence, it has not been easy to reach this point. I have fought against the most distressing situations that can be witnessed, I have fought against macho men, against institutions, against a part of society, in short, I have fought against the system.

To understand my activism a little better, you have to go back to my childhood in Anconcito, province of Santa Elena. I grew up in a family with 11 children, the first two died, so I was the second oldest - although I was born fourth. My father became an alcoholic, and money began to be scarce and, although there was little violence, hunger came into our lives. My siblings and I knew what it was like to go to sleep without having eaten and to wake up with the sadness of feeling an empty stomach. I soon realized that this situation was not going to change unless I did something, so I decided to go out into the world and work. I was 12 years old and I swept

houses, bathed dogs, took care of children, or went out to sell flour pancakes and melcochas (local sugar snacks).

My siblings also did their part: they would go with hooks to the sea and bring back fish to sell. We ate those fish and the few other things we could buy. My mother always had a very dignified attitude

in this situation, she always had an answer to our questions and never let us see her cry.

She was a woman who could not go to college and lived in poverty with an alcoholic husband. The school was a whole other world for me. Despite everything, I was a good student. My teachers said I was wasting my time. At the age of 16 I started to get involved in activism with the LGBTI community, helping them to access HIV testing; then I worked with the Ministry of Health and INNFA, where I saw terrible cases of violence. I was 18 years old and sometimes I had to confront the aggressors to make them understand that violence is not the way to solve problems.

Many of the cases I handled as a mediator were derived from alcoholism, because it is a pattern that repeats over and over again: the alcoholic uses all his or her resources to drink (and satisfy the illness), and basic needs such as education, food, or family welfare are repressed.

When I was 27 years old, I began to collaborate with Plan



International Ecuador, since I knew the territory and where the cases of inequality and family violence existed.

By that time I knew that you cannot work in social processes if you do not recognize that you are an imperfect being. I had learned that one should not hesitate between can and cannot. To know the realities, you have to go to the communities and cry with the parents and children because sometimes the injustices make them feel impotent.

During these years of work, I have been able to see that machismo is the cause of many of the evils that affect us as a society. For example, 90 out of every 100 girls could fulfill their dream of becoming professionals, but machismo interrupts the continuity of this process and forces them to assume a certain role. This pattern is still deeply rooted and a lot of work is needed so that the new generations grow up with a different mentality and with more solutions.

I believe that schools for parents should be resumed since they are a fundamental pillar for the growth of children. When this type of intervention has been carried out in the community, cases of gender violence, domestic violence, rape, and teenage pregnancies have dropped to almost zero. Working with parents must be an ongoing process because it is difficult to fight against social stigmas. Many times I saw that after some meetings only mothers would come because fathers preferred not to go to avoid being labeled as “henpecked husbands”, that is, as men subjugated by women.

We have to fight against the stereotypes of society. In my case, I have proudly worn the t-shirt of the Because I am a Girl Movement, and when I have traveled to other provinces, I have also used the bag they gave us. There has always been someone who has looked at me sideways and judged me, but



I ignore them. I continue to learn to love and value myself as a person because that is the only way to enter the minds and hearts of others.

I could see it in my own family, where initially my father was very resistant to my activism. But, over the years, he has learned. It is never too late to learn and be an example.

I became a councilman of Salinas canton. It is a very important political position, but it has not changed me as a person: I still cook and I have learned other things, now I know how to make men's and women's clothes, I learned how to make desserts and I give workshops. I have made the most of my time in politics because it makes it easier to reach people and implement projects.

Now it is my time to start a family. A friend of mine died single and without any children a few years ago and his nephews and nieces arranged the funeral. That really touched me and I cried with my father, I felt like a stranger in my own land. I know that my generation must go on and I myself am stalling it.

Someday we will come to understand that skin color means nothing, economic status means nothing, and public office means nothing. Only then will we move forward as a society. Only then will women stop being discriminated just because they are women. I am certain that we have learned about the rose through the thorns, that we have walked through puddles and mud, that we have fallen down, accepted the scratch and got up again. I am certain that there will always be a helping hand and together we will reach our desired destination.



A black and white portrait of an elderly woman, Rosa, smiling. She is wearing a dark hat, a beaded necklace, and a white blouse with intricate floral embroidery. A grey shawl is draped over her shoulders. The background shows a blurred mountain landscape. The name 'Rosa' is written in large, orange, cursive script across the middle of the image.

Rosa

I was born 53 years ago in the middle of the green mountains of Simiatug parish. Since I was very young, in my community I learned to fight against injustice, first against the discrimination we suffer as indigenous people by mestizos in the haciendas of Guaranda, in the province of Bolívar, and second, against the machismo that exists in my own community.

This pushed me to dream, to the point of holding a public position. From the Parish Government of Guaranda I have promoted programs to reduce machismo in my canton. The outrageous scenes I witnessed when I was a teenager are rarely seen today. At that time I only observed what was happening, because my transformation and empowerment

took place in my adulthood when I already had a home and three children –years later, two more would add to my family–.

In Simiatug there were bars everywhere and alcoholism was widespread. Outside the bars, women waited for their husbands, carrying their children and pulling their horses. Meanwhile, the man would spend his money on liquor and, when he returned home, beat and mistreated his wife. Men used to order women to shut up and tell us: “shut up, you don’t know”, “shut up, don’t give your opinion”. This still happens and the woman’s voice is ignored.

In the midst of this situation and the economic difficulties my parents were going through, I dropped out of school after finishing elementary school, the years passed and I never went back. When I turned 15 I married the man who is still my husband. At 21 my first daughter was born. The following year I had a son and then came the third. I dedicated myself to being a housewife and supporting my husband, who at that time was a teacher.

I never imagined that 30 years later I would be a member of the Bolívar Parish Government and vice-president of the Road Commission of my parish. Getting there was a process through which I began to understand the importance of valuing myself and having high self-esteem.

I understood that all women should go through this process, which is not easy. When Plan de Padrinos came to my community, back in the 1970s, I had not been involved yet, but in 2000, when they were already called Plan International Ecuador, I started working

with the organization. I started as a volunteer mainly helping children to prepare letters for their

foreign sponsors so that they could help them financially on a monthly basis. We also did some infrastructure work, such as classrooms and toilets.

In the midst of this work to improve the rights and well-being of children, volunteers were also told about their rights, like studying. Plan International Ecuador’s workshops opened my eyes when I learned that I was valuable and that I had and should take ownership of myself. In other words, they encouraged me to make my own decisions and not have anyone make them or think for me. I understood that my decisions had to be respected. Thanks to the workshops, little by little my confidence and self-esteem increased and, most importantly, became stronger. These lessons were not only for me but also for my daughter, whom I also enrolled in the programs.

Although now my memory fails me a little and I no longer remember what year things happened, I do remember the events that changed my life. Plan International Ecuador was committed to providing houses to its beneficiaries as part of one of its programs, and my

daughter and I were among the lucky ones. At that time I was not working formally – I was a housewife – and we only lived on the salary of my husband, who continued to work as a teacher in the rural area. By then there were already six of us in the family.

Over the years we left the small community of Potrero, where I





was born, because I left to look for a job in the canton. My mother, who is 80 years old, now lives in the house of Potrero.

At the same time, I began to study at a distance school and finished high school at the age of 30, but I didn't stop there, because my desire to improve told me that I could do more. Now, at 53, I will soon graduate as a sociologist from the Bolívar State University, so now I can say that I am a woman with extensive knowledge who can debate with anyone. I know that I have the capacity to propose solutions to the problems that come my way and I hope that one day I will fully understand the society in which we live.

In the last decade, I opted for political life and for two years I took on the position of member of the Parish Government of Guaranda, in the Parish Board. Today I am the president. From my position, I have supported Plan International Ecuador to have better outreach in the communities and to promote programs that support gender equality and sexual and reproductive rights. Currently, I have also realized the importance of tackling child malnutrition, which is very common in the rural parishes of the highlands, such as Simiatug. In addition, I am trying to improve the living conditions of our senior citizens.

From my position, I also try to make women who hold a position of power become empowered because it is common to see that men impose their way of thinking and their beliefs. I tell these valuable women: "ladies, don't be quiet, you have to complain, here we are three, four, or all the women you can find, and men have to learn to respect us as we respect them".

Although I don't know what will happen in the future, I dream of eradicating machismo, and teenage pregnancies and that girls and boys in the countryside have the same rights as those in the city. I hope that one day women in my community will follow in my footsteps and go beyond me.



A black and white portrait of a man with dark hair, wearing a light-colored jacket over a dark shirt. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. There are some orange brushstroke-like graphics in the top left and bottom left corners of the image.

Bernardo

Education is an essential part of my life and my work at Plan International Ecuador. I have been with the organization for approximately 20 years.

In August 2001, I joined the organization as an education technician and since then I have worked very hard in both basic and high school education.

During this time I have been supporting some activities to improve education in the indigenous communities of the Andean province of Chimborazo. Rural schools have been abandoned for years, so I have focused on trying to improve them by equipping libraries with

books and materials, managing the construction of bathrooms, and equipping schools with kitchens and dining rooms for students to receive school meals. It is a really great job for all those children that almost no one thinks about.

Everything I have done has been for children to receive a quality education. We had to start by redesigning the curriculum so that indigenous people are also educated in Kichwa, their native language, in order for children to learn in a better way, understand and continue with their education without difficulties. By doing so, cultural demands in Spanish and Kichwa can be met.

From Plan International Ecuador, I have worked very hard on three aspects. The first was access to education because, when I joined the organization, very few children were able to study in the province of Chimborazo and only a minority entered school at the right age. I met children of six and seven years old who had not started their education, which was very worrisome, so I focused on sensitizing families through campaigns so that boys and girls would attend school according to their age on permanence, because many children reached second or third grade and then dropped out, often because their parents did not have the economic resources to pay for the education of all their children. Most of the time it was the daughters who dropped out of school.

Once these two points were achieved, we had to ensure quality education, for which we trained teachers and parents, and

supported the equipping of classrooms.

My work with the students and teachers of the schools in four cantons of Chimborazo has been permanent. I remember that

once we went to a workshop in El Puyo, capital of the Amazonian province of Pastaza and, when we arrived, they noticed that the lodge where we were staying was full of vegetation. It looked beautiful, full of flowers and life. When we returned to the schools in the communities of Chimborazo, I told them that we could also give life to our schools, and that we would sow plants, including flowers and trees, so that the little birds could sit and sing. They all accepted and those of us who visited the lodge, together with the parents, made a commitment to get native plants such as yagual, linden and alder.

We planted trees next to the corridors in the schools, we found ornamental plants and the environment improved. Together we managed to change the visual appearance of the schools, which is an important aspect of education.

Now, students eat their snacks or school breakfasts sitting on small benches or in the little huts that we also built. Before, when children went out to the playground, their sandwiches or fruit would get dusty because of the dry environment of the area. After this intervention, the change was radical: the schoolyards and school surroundings became safe areas for eating food.





I am currently working as a Local Development Technician. I have to conduct workshops as part of five projects of the organization. The experience I gained in the education system has helped me to carry out these activities smoothly, to be at the forefront, and to put active and participatory methodologies into practice. The community savings bank project is something especially inspiring for me, it is a savings and loan fund for entrepreneurship. In my area there are five projects, where I provide administrative support, go to meetings to make suggestions, and help to balance the accounts using my computer.

This project is financed and managed by the communities' own people. The members decide who receives a loan, the interest rate and who are the shareholders.

This initiative has been in operation for more than six years and has worked very well.

In the beginning it was only for adults, but today there are several Educas for teenagers, women and children. It is nice to see children saving and saying: "I already have enough money, I want to start a business". Seeing that motivates me a lot.

Sometimes I feel that I am going slowly, but then I look at the things I have done and they prove to me that I am making positive changes. I plan to continue working for education, teaching and learning about gender equality, especially supporting girls and women so that we all have the same opportunities and, in this way, build a more equitable, equal, and fair society.



Norma

I am a proud indigenous woman. I belong to the Puruhá people, of the Kichwa nationality. I am 40 years old. In our community, we were the first family to send their children to university. There has always been the idea that studying is a waste of time and that working in the fields is the only thing to be prioritized.

I was born in a modest home, in a hard-working family. I am the oldest of six siblings. My father and mother have always helped us all to study and achieve better living conditions.

My siblings and I grew up helping our parents with the farm chores. At the age of 18 I entered university with the help of a scholarship. I obtained a doctorate degree in Health Promotion and Education at the Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo (ESPOCH).

While I was studying at the ESPOCH, my parents supported me with the maintenance and all the expenses. There were very difficult times when we did not have enough to eat and money was limited. The university was in Riobamba and to get there I had to take a bus, but the trip was exhausting and I didn't feel it was going to work. We decided to rent a place nearby. We found a small room with just a few small wooden boards to sleep on. In the communities, we didn't even know what a mattress was. Little by little I bought what I needed. On weekends, I used to go back to my parents' house and work in the fields. They gave me a piece of land so that I could plant crops and keep animals, and with the money I earned, I could pay my university expenses. On Mondays, I used to leave at four o'clock in the morning and take the bus to arrive in Riobamba at 6:30 in the morning.

When I was in the seventh level, at the age of 21, I began to do

internships with Plan International Ecuador and so I visited several rural communities. We used to go out twice a week to visit families and hold meetings.

We provided support in the areas of education, health, and nutrition for children. We gave talks on leadership and student leadership training. We also trained them in sexual and reproductive rights.

At that time, many children were dying from easily preventable diseases, such as intestinal, respiratory and infectious diseases. When I heard about these cases, I felt very sad, so we began to educate them on care and nutrition.

When I go to the communities and see the girls, boys and young people, I feel identified with them, because I used to be like that. It makes me happy to change their lives. This is not a momentary help, but one that they will carry with them forever and many will replicate it with younger kids.

That's what community work is about: transforming lives, finding





new opportunities, and protecting children from violence.

I have two young children and that is why I promote the issue of protection. I want them to have a future without violence.

In addition, by teaching I learn. It is mutual training. I have been trained in leadership, I have improved my self-esteem and I feel like an empowered woman. Since 2015, I have been a Local Development Technician and I am in charge of implementing projects in the communities. It is a great job, focused on girls, on empowerment and capacity building, so that they can keep studying and have the opportunities that society has wanted to take away from them.

The girls begin to participate in their communities and we try to make them reach broader levels, such as the cantons, the provinces, and the national level.

I have worked on several projects such as Teenage Pregnancy-Free Zone and Comprehensive Early Childhood Development. Little by little, families are opening their doors to us. We are facing a new generation which understands that it is necessary to study and is looking for opportunities to get an education.

However, much remains to be done for gender equality. In our communities, machismo is still present and very strong, so we must continue working. We have leadership schools for girls, but boys are also our allies, and with adults we work on the issue of positive masculinities, so that fathers do not feel that their role is only to be providers, but also to participate in their children's upbringing.

We have a youth innovation laboratory project to promote entrepreneurship and find ways for these girls and young women to have their own resources.

It has been a long journey and I am proud of what we have achieved in my community. I never thought, for example, that the girls would travel to national and international meetings. These achievements make me happy, because little by little they are contributing to their life projects.

I hope that communities will begin their own economic development and exploit their potential. Some of them are located in strategic places for tourism, agriculture, and livestock. We need to get producers to become direct exporters.

It is never too late for anything. I am very demanding and I like to do things well, and with honesty. I always carry in my heart the ancestral principles: ama llulla (don't cheat), ama killa (be hardworking), and ama shuwa (be honest).

I live with my two beautiful children and my husband, José. They and my parents make me very happy, seeing their faces fills me with joy.

It is never too late to study and now I am finishing my master's degree in Social Intervention in Societies of Knowledge at the University of La Rioja (Spain). I started my postgraduate studies quite late and it has been a huge challenge because I also have to work and take care of my children, but my husband has been an ally in this process and has helped me with everything. He has been my support and confidant.





Luis

I never thought I could be the mayor of the Guaranda canton. At 48 years old, I am the highest political authority in my canton, but there was a time when I was very poor and needed support.

I was a “Plan child”, I was sponsored by Plan de Padrinos since I was five or six years old. I didn’t understand why a sponsor would send me letters and encourage me to study. Later, when I was older, I learned that Plan International Ecuador had helped us to have water by providing us with hoses, so we no longer had to go to the creek to fetch water from the wells. They also helped us build water tanks, latrines, and a bridge. It was nice to see water coming into the house and not having to strain your back carrying it. Years later, when my sponsorship finished, the organization supported my younger siblings with their education.

We used to live in a hacienda whose owners had the title deeds because they had inherited the land. My family



had the obligation to work for free on the hacienda in order to survive. That is how we became poor because we had the right to a huasipungo (plot of land) that they never gave us.

The name of my community is Casaichi Herapamba. Before, there were only a few dirt roads, so Plan International technicians used to come by motorcycle after a long and difficult journey. They wore water ponchos with their badge and brought letters from sponsors, economic support, and sometimes a gift.

The house where me and my family lived was thatched, but later, with a lot of effort, we were able to build a tile roof. We lived with my grandmother, my father, my mother, my two siblings, and an uncle. It was a single room of about five by five meters. We had a wooden bed, made by my great-great-grandfather, whom I had known, which was buried and tied with rails made of taxo, a natural fiber that is very resistant. On this bed we had a mattress of straw and thick blankets of sheep's wool that had also been made by my great-great-grandfather. The last gift he gave me was a reddish-colored poncho, painted with natural paint. He died when I was a teenager.

Our diet was rich in grains. When it was time for fanesca (a kind of stew) we had tender grains. We would eat oca, mashua, melloco with potatoes, beans, and cooked corn. We would sit in a circle on the floor and eat our food.

As far as sanitation was concerned, we had to make our own way.

Whether it was day or night, we had to go into the bush to relieve ourselves. In this way, we did not produce wastewater, but it was unhealthy. We used to dispose of the waste from cooking and from washing dishes and pots in the fields, as it served as fertilizer.

In my parents' house there was machismo, it was the man who had to manage the money, made the decisions, ate the biggest corn. When a boy was born, people congratulated the father, but when a girl was born, they said 'uh', even though the most important chores in the house were always done by women.

As far as health was concerned, to cure us there were healers, midwives, veedores (medicine men) and bonesetters. They would tell us what herb or ointment was good for this or that. If there was a cripple or a fracture, the bonesetters would fix it. For fevers, we had the veedores. The midwives received the babies and the healers knew how to see the illness reflected in a guinea pig. If a patient had blood in the lung or a tumor in the head or stomach, it would appear in the animal. After the diagnosis, they would send us to take remedies that were normally plant-based, such as verbena, yanachaqui, tsetsera, caballo chupa, llantén, ashcomicuna tsilin, tañi, mellocoyuyo, or lotoyuyo. Some of these plants are disappearing. The fat of hen and sheep was also used.

My father used to travel to the coast to earn some money and would return every four months. In the meantime, my mother used to work for a day's wages. I remember that one day we had





nothing to eat and we went to visit an aunt to borrow some barley. She gave us dinner and two baskets of barley, which we toasted and ground. With the coarse milling we prepared barley rice, without salt or sweetness; with the flour we made machica (type of flour), with which we prepared chapo (mixture of machica with a sweet drink) with hot water and, to make it sweet, we looked for the warmi chilca and removed its shell to be able to mix it.

I used to study at the Santa Rosa de la Pamba school, which was three kilometers from my home. Before that, the nearest school was six kilometers away, so my parents did not study and only received literacy training at night. In my school, my teacher did not know Kichwa and we students did not speak Spanish. She used to teach us the letters, for the “a” she would draw the circle and then the stick, but for us what she did was incomprehensible.

When I was 12 years old, I stopped receiving financial aid from Plan de Padrinos and went to work in Los Ríos, as a day laborer, rice loader, bricklayer, machinery helper and field worker. I had left in search of money because that was what my family needed, although I knew I had to continue studying. I came back when I was 17 and started a career as a leader. Then I finished high school on my own.

I could not finish college because of my obligations as a father. After many years of leadership, I was nominated for mayor, because there was no one else to run. I accepted the challenge and won.

I have three daughters and two sons. My daughters have a very strong character because since they were little I have told them that they are not less than anyone else. My first daughter has already finished her master’s degree and is going to continue with her doctorate. My sons are studying medicine at the university.


Although my children are lucky, I never forget my people and I work for their well-being. Together with Plan International Ecuador, we implement a project to eradicate chronic child malnutrition. We also give workshops to give more opportunities to women, eradicate gender violence and improve the self-esteem of boys and girls.

Self-esteem is important, especially for an indigenous child who has been poor. Since I am not good-looking and my skin is dark, I knew I had to be a useful human being, kind-hearted, helpful, supportive, and respectful. I bet on being loved, I went far, but I never forget my roots or those who supported me when I needed it the most.









Fredy

2 years ago I stopped being a civil engineer to become a “social engineer”. When I joined Plan International Ecuador, little by little, I came to know a reality that is usually hidden. Since then, for the last 22 years and until I became manager of the Loja office, I have been in this organization that changed my life.

The distance between civil engineering and an institution dedicated to promoting the development of skills in girls and adolescents is very large since in my profession there have always been problems due to a very strong machismo. Deep



down, we are all machistas because we absorb cultural patterns that encourage gender violence. That is why it was necessary for me to learn about these issues in order to remove them from my life and from my family. I have undergone a transformation in all aspects: my relationship with my family, with society, and with myself has improved thanks to everything I have learned in my work. In the world, reality evolves and you have to adapt.

When I joined Plan International Ecuador I was already aware of social issues because I had been a volunteer in a prison, where together with other volunteers we used to discuss a lot about the rights of prisoners. Because of this, I already knew about empathy, and about feeling the suffering of other people and their realities.

When I came for the job interview, rights were a fundamental issue and, once I started working, the institution surprised me since everything was managed through policies and regulations for the protection of children and adolescents, which have become stricter over time.

At that time we had a development approach in relation to people's

economy, through monetary contributions and the construction of infrastructure with which we solved unsatisfied basic needs, which at that time were many and pressing. When we started working in a community, we allowed them to lead the project so that they could empower and contract the works themselves. This was done in the areas of health infrastructure, education, and water supply.

In the communities in my area, in the south of the country, there were rustic adobe houses, very few were made of cement, and there were schools with few classrooms and many students. Access roads were precarious, in many areas there was no electricity, and, in the beginning, the organization focused on facilitating the provision of electricity. Although it is true that we did not have to work on roads, we used to coordinate this kind of work with municipalities and other civil society organizations.

We built many classrooms, but it was not enough, because we realized that teachers were mistreating students. So we also worked to raise awareness so that violence in schools would cease.

That is when the educational infrastructure was built, we improved



the quality of education.

The same happened with health infrastructure. At that time, many children were malnourished, among other reasons because the health centers were not close to the people. This is why we implemented actions to improve children's nutrition, thereby increasing their school performance. Normally, at that time, these children did not aspire to go to high school, they hardly went to elementary school.

In other places, once the water supply was assured, we had to collaborate with the community so that they would be charged what was fair so that there would be no abuses and it would be easier to access this service.

I have had the opportunity to work in Loja and Cañar, where I have visited areas with extreme poverty and, as they were close to the border, there were specific problems of fuel and drug trafficking. These were areas whose needs were 100% unsatisfied. In one project we met a family of seven people: a young mother and father living in a shack with cardboard walls and a plastic roof with their five children. In this place, the floor was made of dirt. Despite everything, when we arrived, the children welcomed us with a smile, because they were happy regardless of all the injustice. It brought tears to my eyes to see this scene and we were deeply committed to change the situation of this young family through a new house and a job for the husband, who was in charge of supporting the family.

Other times we saw people who had three stones to cook with, or families with children sleeping in beds without mattresses or quilts. We helped everyone with everything we had. I used to tell my team that we should always feel grateful to be able to help change the reality of those people.

We have worked on issues of economic empowerment and entrepreneurship, we also delivered small animals so that families could be better nourished and have an income.

In the area in charge of civil works, it is necessary to work with a lot of honesty, since corruption problems may arise during the supervision and delivery of works. That is why we must always think of the people who have waited all their lives for a particular work and who will lose the most if things are not done well.

With the passage of time, Plan International Ecuador no longer saw the need to prioritize construction to improve basic needs because, although there are pending issues, little by little access to this type of infrastructure has been solved. That is why the organization made the decision to make its beneficiaries the main protagonists in the fulfillment of their rights. We have moved towards capacity building, the strengthening of people's skills and the real participation of girls. Today, we are working very hard for equality, especially for girls.

When I work with them I think of my children: a boy and a girl to whom I give all the love I have, because that is what they need at their age. My daughter is wonderful and has very solid values. I tell her that she must prepare herself, that she must have dreams so that she does not become a victim of the society that assigns a role to women. With my son I do a similar job, I try to take away the cultural patterns he learns at school with his peers who live in macho environments. With my wife, we try to make our home different, to leave a different legacy that breaks social paradigms. I have wanted my fatherhood to be different from the one I lived. It is not easy, but you have to adapt to the new times.





Rosendo

My relationship with Plan International started in my childhood. I was a sponsored child from the age of six and that experience marked my life for the better. Currently, I am a Local Development Technician in the coastal province of Santa Elena.

One of the functions of my position is to visit the communities to contribute to community development, focusing on children and the neediest families in the most vulnerable sectors where Plan International has a presence. Fieldwork is a unique experience because I learn a lot from the people I meet in each place I visit.



There are very participative families, boys and girls who stand out in the projects we carry out.

When the project ends, I evaluate the results and assess whether the three months of workshops in each community have been successful. Usually, children and their parents will say: “we don’t want this workshop to end”. Then I plan other trainings and methodologies to move forward.

For me, the most important thing about the workshops is to make sure that what people learn remains in the communities, because there is no point in conducting a workshop that people will soon forget, or if the technician does not return to the territory. The teaching process must be continuous and sustainable over time.

People need time to grow, to improve, to change. I still remember

that, when I was a sponsored child, Plan International technicians would come to my house wearing their blue vests and I would tell my family: “when I grow up I’m going to work there”. I’m turning 40 soon and I’ve been involved with the organization for 34 years. It’s been a long road, and I’m fulfilling my dreams.

When I was a child, I experienced sponsorship through the letters and gifts my sponsor sent me from abroad. In my opinion, to be a sponsored child is to have the privilege of being in contact with a person from another country, even if it’s only through letters. I felt that there was someone who cared about me even though I did not know him personally. I felt that my sponsor and his family loved me and cared about what was going on with me, whether in my studies or in my family life.

When I received a letter, I felt immense joy. The letter traveled a

long way until it reached my community and, of all the children, I was the one who always received some news. Then they would take a picture of me to send to my sponsor. I would smile or wave and in this way, with this detail, I reciprocated his generosity and expressed my feelings and emotions.

However, sponsorship went beyond letters; in fact, it changed my family's life. At that time, we were living in a house made of cane and the organization helped us to build a cement block house, which improved our quality of life a lot. I come from a very poor family and I needed a lot of support to achieve the Computer Systems Technology that I studied and love.

Now that I am an adult, I understand how sponsorship can change the lives of children. I was determined to give back, through my work, all the help I had received and, sometime later, I joined the organization as a sponsorship facilitator. I used to tell my story to motivate children and their families to keep in touch with their sponsors, as many were reluctant to write a letter or have their picture taken, but I would tell them that their sponsors also wanted to know what they needed. Many times, as a result of this contact, it has been possible to carry out projects to improve the community.

Sponsorship is about interculturality. That is to say: we share our culture, our way of seeing life with people who live far away and, in turn, they also tell us about their traditions, what they eat, the climate or their family.

Sponsorship also means sharing feelings and emotions. It involves the commitment of the family and the sponsored child to answer the letters and share how school is going and how the family's social and economic life has evolved. Currently, 98% of the sponsored children are studying and healthy. 94% of the families are satisfied with our work. Undoubtedly, sponsorship is an opportunity for thousands of children in Ecuador to have a quality life and a better future, like the one I am living.





Héctor

I am the son of a mother who broke the chains of male violence. The life of Melva, my mother, was always difficult. For many years she was dedicated to domestic chores and had a submissive attitude to whatever my father imposed. In addition, what she could contribute was not valued, even though she was largely responsible for the education of her five sons.

When I was a child we used to live in a small cell block house in downtown Guayaquil, but the family's dream of having our own house led us to settle

in the western suburbs of the city, even though the conditions implied a setback in our quality of life: the cane houses were over the waters of the Estero Salado, and we had no sewage system, bathroom or bedrooms.

We lived like this for many years, until Plan International Ecuador came to the community and began to fill in the estuary. As the process progressed, the laughter of children playing in the new street would emerge during the afternoon. The suburb was a dangerous place for young people, as crime and drug use were rife. Fortunately, the discipline my father imposed was strict and kept us away from the vices we might have fallen into, even if it meant he would punish us with the strap.

My father was from an earlier generation that did not understand reasons. He was a civil servant who liked to be served by “his wife” when he came home from work. He would arrive at three or four in the afternoon and my mother would leave the food ready for him to serve himself. He would complain about her absence and she would reply that he should just take the lid off the pot and serve himself the food. During that time, my mom was attending the community programs organized by Plan International Ecuador, where people organized themselves to look for solutions as a neighborhood. As much as my dad complained, she told him that she would not stop attending these activities.

Little by little, in the house we managed to replace the illegal electricity connection, we built concrete walls and we also replaced the zinc roof that a storm blew away and left us out in the open, and we built a bathroom and internal walls. My brothers and I were growing and we needed privacy. Improving the entire infrastructure in the neighborhood –urbanizing, and improving the houses took about 20 years.



During that time I lived at home, and my mother distributed the household chores equally, according to the age of each one of us. I admired and respected her courage and became her ally. I stood by her side when there were problems of male violence. My mother was learning and discovering that she was a valuable woman who could achieve her goals; on the other hand, my father did not change much, he just substituted aggressive behaviors for longer absences from home. Years later she decided to separate from my father, she said: “I can’t take it anymore, I want to leave home”. We supported her in everything she needed. A large part of her income came from the nursing services she provided, a profession she learned with the job of Plan International Ecuador while working as a volunteer.

In the meantime, I made a living from a very young age. At 16 I was a seminarian in the Church, so I often had to walk long distances. Then I worked at the now disappeared Instituto Nacional del Niño y la Familia (“National Institute for Children and the Family”, Innfa), until I was able to apply to work at Plan International Ecuador.



My desire to join was so strong that I accepted the position even though the salary was not better. I had studied Educational Psychology at the university, which filled me with pride, because I was the first professional in my family. Then two more brothers graduated, another one is finishing university and only one could not get a bachelor's degree.

I got married at 24 and had three daughters. Then I got divorced. Without realizing it, I had learned some subtle forms of machismo, but I didn't realize it. Once, when my oldest daughter was young, she painted her nails. We were watching the news after lunch and I realized what she had done. I said to her: "Honey, who gave you permission to paint your nails? She replied, "But, dad, if the nails are mine why do I have to ask for permission?" I was shocked, I thought about her answer and I realized that she was right. So I began a relationship with my daughters that involved a lot of listening and a constant review of my behavior in the light of what they were telling me. My relationship with my daughters has been very loving, with a lot of play and fun, and, by maintaining an attitude of openness towards them, they have had the confidence to tell me what they think and have gradually educated my behavior.

Now my daughters are professionals. One has a degree in Administration, the other is a doctor and the last one is a psychologist. They ask me what my life was like as a child and I tell them many stories about that time.

I have told them about how my mom and dad were, and that I used to clean when it was my turn, and that I learned to cook when I was little. That's why I always cook when they visit me.

In my parents' house we were poor. We had a total lack of infrastructure in the first years of our lives; although we went to school, we had no didactic or technological resources; our health was poorly covered, we had just enough to feed ourselves and we had no access to recreation or culture. The most we could do was to go by bus to Esmeraldas, where my father's relatives lived, and eat what the sea and the land provided. That is why in my family we thought that only education was going to get us ahead. Here, my father takes the credit, because he used to tell us that we had to set goals and strive to achieve them.

Now I understand that school education is very important, but we can also change our lives when we work on our skills, on our autonomy to learn, and on our self-confidence. That is why I always support everyone to develop and fulfill their life project. Some of the sponsored children now work with me. They have changed their lives through hard work and effort. I know that when a young person empowers themselves, they will be able to get ahead, I have seen it in my family and with my daughters and, above all, in my own life, since I was a poor child, I worked, I joined the organization as a technician and now I am the manager of the Guayas and Los Ríos Program Unit.



Raquel

I love my job as Emergency Programs Manager at Plan International, but my history with the institution goes beyond work. I was born in the community of Marcopamba, in the province of Bolívar, in the Ecuadorian highlands.

Marcopamba is a very green area, surrounded by cornfields. Some 50 or 60 families live there and work in agriculture and cattle raising. As in any small town, we have a school, a community house, and a church. Over the years, we have managed to have a drinking water and irrigation system.

I was a Plan Girl, that is, I was sponsored by the organization. I remember that every month the promoters from Plan International would come to give me letters and gifts from my three sponsors



who would send me stickers with fruity scents that I liked very much, because they were new to me. I also used to send them thank you letters to tell them that I did receive the presents. It was really nice for me to wait for those letters.

After a while I stopped being sponsored because my sister became a sponsored child and there could not be two children from the same family in the sponsorship system. So I started to help my dad, who was a volunteer in the organization. Together we collected data in the family census once a year so that children could participate in community projects.

At university, I studied Risk Management and Disaster Management. Then, little by little, I got involved with international cooperation in various organizations. I learned a lot from great teachers who came into my life until I was able to join Plan International Ecuador. I did not even imagine that I could do it, because I knew that high profiles were required. I have been working here for about seven years. I first joined as a technician for a European Union emergency and disaster preparedness project implemented by Plan International Ecuador in association with the Ministry of Security Coordination and the Secretariat of Risk Action; then I took on the role of manager of that project.

Plan International Ecuador also called for a consultancy on risk management and climate change, and I applied. I was selected to fulfill that role and my responsibility was to provide technical assistance to colleagues in the field. I like that job very much.

In 2018 Venezuelan migrants began to arrive in Ecuador. From Plan International Ecuador we provided attention to that population: we delivered food, hygiene and shelter kits to people arriving at the Carcelén bus station, north of Quito.

I remember that we created a group of organizations to set up a temporary shelter for migrants in Quito, which was called La Gran Sabana and was an initiative with the private sector. Those who arrived on foot received food and hygiene supplies, they could rest



and continue on their way. Many of them were going to Peru.

I really liked to participate in the mingas (ancient kind of community work) to set up the facilities or plan the donations. When I went, the migrants who were there called me “mother Raquel”, and I felt that at least I could help them in some way. There came a time when the shelter could no longer continue operating because specialized staff was needed and it was maintained with networks of volunteers. We continued to help migrants in other ways until the Covid-19 pandemic arrived in 2020.

Then I was appointed as Response Manager for Covid-19. Then, we provided relief to all the needs of the population affected by the pandemic, both Ecuadorians and migrants. Consortiums were consolidated with other organizations to deliver food and hygiene kits and we were able to reach 100% of the families sponsored by Plan International Ecuador.

I remember that our colleagues in the field would send us messages of gratitude from the families in the most remote areas we assisted. For me, those messages were the driving force to endure the


exhausting hours of work. In my case, I had to divide my time between work and taking care of my young children.

I love humanitarian assistance work because I can alleviate people’s suffering. I know that families in emergencies or disasters go through really tough situations. I know it is difficult, but we volunteers try to alleviate that distress, at least through a meal.

Humanitarian action consists of helping people, thinking that it could be ourselves. On some occasions I have invited my children to join me in an activity. I am certain that we can achieve a fairer world if we work with children. My nine-year-old son is the one who has been most involved, he knows my work and likes to help me take care of the people who need it most. Whenever we go, we always bring items or toys in good condition to share.

At Plan International Ecuador we carry out comprehensive risk management. We work on prevention, that is, preventing the occurrence of an emergency, and reducing the impact of a catastrophe so that it is not devastating. We must be prepared to provide a timely and adequate response to families.





Mireya

The world was not made to my size. When I go to the ATM I can't reach the keys, and when I go to the hospital to make an appointment, the service window is too high up. I am a small person and, because of my condition, I have lived with a complex most of my life.

When a person has a disability, people's teasing starts right away. It happens all the time. I had a very critical childhood, because the first thing people looked at was my height. At school I suffered a lot and that's why I didn't like to study. Anyway, I finished elementary and high school, and when I went to college, I felt bad. I studied Management and then Social Work, but I didn't finish any of them.



There were people who told me: “Look, if you want to study, you won’t be able to work because of your condition”. So I dropped out of university because, apart from my family’s economic problems, I was disappointed, my self-esteem was low and, in some way, I felt defeated.

I am 49 years old and I always wonder what would have become of my life if I had finished college. Completing my degree is a pending challenge that I put aside because at that time I lacked conviction and effort.

Then I looked for a job but no one wanted to give me a chance, everyone closed the door with the typical phrase “don’t call us, we will call you”, but no one called. One day, a friend told me to send my application to Plan International Ecuador because they were looking for people to do cleaning services. Although it was not my dream job because I have

always wanted to be a secretary, it has allowed me to earn a living for my family and, apart from the economic issue, I have also been able to attend the workshops that the organization gives to learn about leadership, self-esteem, entrepreneurship, gender and other topics. I joined the organization in 2010 and, according to what my work friends have told me, at the beginning I looked like a chick just hatched, until I felt confident. Since then I have not stopped growing and learning.

Once I was empowered and no longer ashamed of my short height, I decided that I had to look for other opportunities, to take up again some of the many opportunities I had passed up. That’s how I came to an organization for people with disabilities. At first I was afraid, but there I met human beings with diverse problems and I was able to get involved with them because I was living their same experiences.



I gradually progressed in the foundation for people with disabilities and even became president for two years, but I had to resign for personal reasons. However, when I returned, I was re-elected and have been president up to the present. At the foundation we work for the defense of the rights of people with disabilities. There I give workshops with the material I learn at Plan International Ecuador, so that associates understand how to deal with discrimination through empowerment. We also talk about violence against women: I tell them that we must not remain silent, that we must raise our voices so that we are not abused.

I usually talk to children with disabilities because they are very discriminated against and mistreated. I encourage mothers to stand up for their children's rights, because maybe they can't do it, especially if they have a mental disability.

Despite being an activist in my work, at home the situation has always been complicated, because it is very difficult to change people's mentality. Currently, I live with my mother, three brothers and a sister who is a widow.

My mother has always supported me, she tells me to keep preparing myself so that I can stand on my own two feet when she is not around. She also tells me to learn as much as I can about discrimination and to achieve my goals.

On the other hand, my brothers are not supportive. In fact, they were supported by my father, who was very macho and always gave them the reason, that's why they shout, they are the ones who eat first, the ones who choose the biggest piece of chicken, the ones who must be served. They do not listen to reason. When I complain to them, they tell me: "Go with your rights somewhere else".

However, I am not going to stop demanding my rights, because we, the people who were born different and are discriminated against, also want to enjoy a good life, have a good job and be happy. Personally, I want to be treated like anyone else for whom the world was made to fit.





Paola

Being a Plan child gave me the opportunity to discover myself as a leader. I was sponsored from age 11 to 18 and, thanks to the workshops I received, I discovered my vocation as a social communicator and negotiator.

When I was a child, I could not imagine how or why someone from another country would be interested in supporting me. I don't remember my sponsor's name, but I know she was very young, maybe four or five years older than me. It made me happy to know that there was a person who cared about me, especially at the age she was.

Every time I received a letter from her it was an indescribable moment, it was more or less like the emotion you feel when you exchange little cards with your boyfriend.

She would always send me pictures of her house, in winter or summer. I clearly remember her describing the weather; for example, she would tell me what it was like in autumn, and she would tell me how the leaves were falling. At the end of the letter, she would tell me that she was looking out for me, that I should keep moving forward with my dreams, and that I should not give up. I never met my sponsor, but that doesn't diminish the value or honesty that I perceived in her letters. When I responded, I would tell her that I was on vacation or going to classes, and what year of school I was in.

When I turned 18 I stopped being a sponsored child because you can only be a sponsored child up to that age and I started other challenges, but I continued to be involved with Plan International. I participated in leadership projects with young people, received training in self-esteem and communication, and with that knowledge I began to make plans about what I wanted to do in my future.

We, young people, took the lead role in bringing about change in the community. We organized clean-ups in the common areas, such as the parks, the church or the meeting center, organized other activities, like Children's Day, or helped the elderly. For me, being in this group

of young people meant having a social role. I was no longer a passive young person leading a normal, ordinary life, but I looked at life with other eyes, I made a different analysis of the areas in which I could help, and I had a more critical vision to look for strategies or people to work with for my area in the social sphere.



For a while I participated in a project called Reporteros Comunitarios (Community Reporters). We were a group of young people from four communities who gathered information for the San Gregorio radio station. We looked for news, recorded, edited and sent the notes to the radio station. We were the spokespersons for our communities.

That's how my vocation and curiosity for the media awakened in me. However, due to lack of money and the distance to the university, I put that dream aside. In order to pursue my university studies, I began a career in Systems Engineering, but I did not feel fulfilled, it was not what I was looking for. I had always been in touch with public speaking, poetry, and radio, I liked to speak a lot in youth groups and meetings.

And so I enrolled in a private university, in the career of Journalism. I studied in the morning and in the afternoon I worked in a pharmacy to pay for my studies. I got my bachelor's degree in Communication Sciences, majoring in Journalism.

I worked for three years as a communicator for an assemblywoman



in Quito. I never thought of doing communication in that way but, as I have always been a risk taker, I ventured. There I learned many things that, little by little, made me discover that I have other skills, which I now put into practice in my work at Plan International.

In 2016 I had a high-risk pregnancy, I was expecting twins. One of my daughters managed to be born, but she passed away after 15 minutes. This happened on April 13, and three days later we were hit by the earthquake in Manabí, which caused many deaths and a great disaster. At the same time of the earthquake, I felt that I had had my own tragedy.

That year I became involved with the organization. It was a period in which I received a lot of help. When I joined Plan International as an Emergency Communication Technician, I felt that I was being valued as a person, and that my skills and abilities were recognized. In that position, I had to work in the field, in the Intelligence Factories that operated during the emergency. These

were tents with recreational areas for children from the shelters or from the communities. Just looking at them made me regain strength and hope. This was a process that helped me to heal. In addition, I received psychological support and that brought me back to life.

I feel that Plan International values its human talent very much, that's why I have progressively held other positions, I have been growing. In March 2017, I took on the role of Marketing Technician, and currently I am the Business Development Coordinator. My work is linked to three major outcomes: cash fundraising, in-kind fundraising and individual donor fundraising.

I have the ability to negotiate, to open paths to close contracts with companies, and thus meet the objectives of my position. However, these skills and abilities do not come by themselves, they have to be developed through constant learning, which is why I took a diploma course in fundraising.

I have always been very passionate about what I do. I believe that if social stakeholders, the public sector, businesses, and local governments come together, we can change the reality. When I meet new partners, I tell them: “I am the evidence that Plan International’s work produces tangible results. I am the proof that we can build a different and fairer society for women.





Rocio

"I can, I esteem myself, I value myself"

This phrase has guided a big part of my life. At one point it even took me out of the abyss I was in. I learned to work on my three "I's" in theory, until I had to believe them and make them part of me.

There is a story I don't like to tell, but now, after time has passed, I feel able to share it in the workshops I give. Years ago, I was a victim of male violence by my ex-husband. I am not going to explain the details, but I can say that I would not have been able to get out of that situation on my own. When I dared to get it out, to cry out what was happening, everything changed. My family supported me and





there came a time when I felt that I also needed myself. “I can do it, I esteem myself, I value myself”. Eventually, I managed to forgive the person who abused me. After all, life is a circle and it puts people where they belong.

My son saw many times the abuse I received from his father. During his childhood he witnessed a lot of violence. That is why I have always talked to him about domestic violence, machismo and other issues that I have learned in Plan International Ecuador’s workshops. Fortunately, he now has his own home where communication and good relationships between everyone are a priority and, at 49, I am now a grandmother.

Plan International came to Echeandía, in the province of Bolívar in 1981, because it was a very poor rural area. We had no electricity, water or sewage. Since I used to live near the river, I had to go every afternoon with buckets and cans to fetch water. But I did not go alone. We went men and women, in groups, because there was always the danger that a snake or something else would appear. At that time we didn’t even think about kidnappings or rapes. There were other dangers.

Plan International came to my community and installed the electric light and water systems that still operate nowadays.

Since it is piped water, we have to boil it, just in case, but we have the advantage that the water reaches our homes and that has made our lives easier. The organization also built a school and a sports field inside it.

Then, as there were children who lived far away and could not get to school, Plan financed a bridge between Barraganete and Tangara, so that they could get to school. The bridge has benefitted the entire community to this day. Back then it was common to organize a minga to build infrastructure. The organization provided the resources and we provided the labor. Even though I was a child, I also helped carrying rocks and gravel. For me, the mingas and community work are important to promote social welfare.

Machismo in Echeandía was quite prevalent and there was also a lot of alcohol consumption. My father had a very dominant personality and, I must admit, he was abusive. My mother endured the abuse she received. Although I don’t want to justify them, I understand the context in which they lived: they didn’t have basic school education, they were illiterate. Perhaps the frequently repeated phrase in the countryside “even if he beats and kills, he is the husband” was normal for them.

For my parents, but especially for my father, things began to

change when he attended the training workshops given by Plan International. Since I joined the organization as a sponsored child, when I was eight years old I used to receive money that my parents had to manage, so they were taught how they should spend it so that my growth would be optimal. In this way, unwittingly, I was part of my father's learning, because he and my mother had to attend workshops as a result of my sponsorship. He also received workshops aimed at lowering violence, and they taught him that he had to take his children to health checkups and that he had to support my education.

My father used to say: "How can it be that my children have studied and I have not". That embarrassment motivated them, together with my mother, to study high school at a distance, and they succeeded. My dad now talks to us, his children, and remorsefully says, "Wow, how I mistreated you guys. Now, he has become an advocate for his grandchildren, at home we share the household chores and we have become a fairer and more equitable family.

You can see the change when my father now says: "we all do the household", and he no longer offers his "help" to do the housework, but shares it equally. In addition, in the meetings of the farmers' social security that he leads, he promotes fair treatment and equal opportunities for women. My father has already adopted the equality speech.

In addition to machismo, the community also faces the problem of teenage pregnancy, which is a constant struggle, although we have managed to reduce its incidence. Through the -Teenage Pregnancy-Free Zone- (ZLEA) project, we work on self-esteem

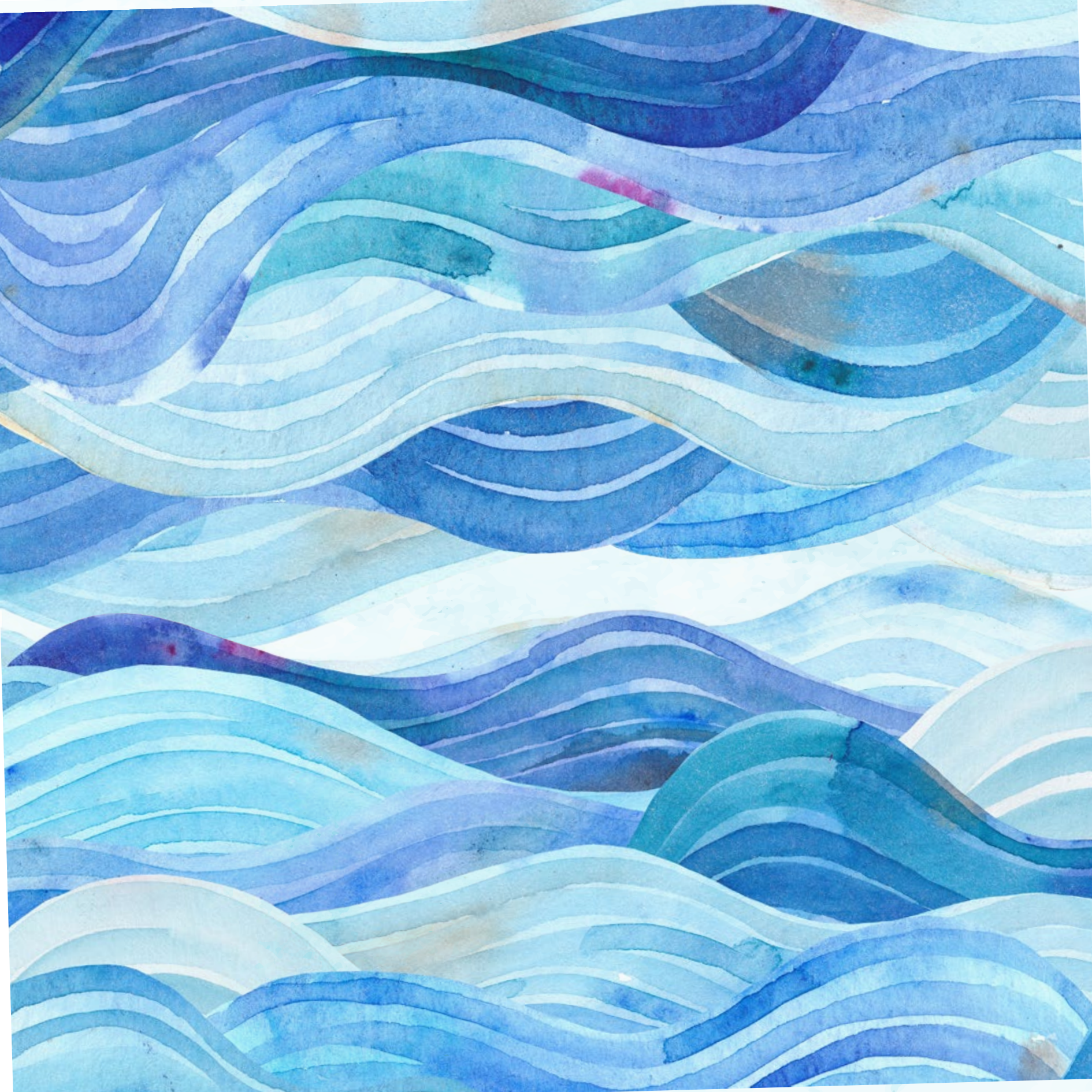
and encourage girls to develop their life projects, and we involve fathers and mothers.

For 10 years I was a sponsored child and learned about leadership and how to carry out projects, which helped me to work in the municipality of my canton. In 2004, I was told that there was an opportunity to join Plan International's sponsorship area and I applied. I was chosen out of 15 applicants. When I started, I said to myself: I am finally achieving what I always wanted. It was my second time participating and I already had my university degree in Business Management. My first attempt was in 2000 and I didn't even make it to the interview. So far, I have been with the organization for 18 years.

Now I am a Local Development Technician and Gender Focal Point. In the workshops, I still hear: "I have to consult with my husband," which shows me that there is still a lot of work to do. Then I tell them that we can also make decisions and make our voices heard. However, I still find women who are subjugated by their husbands. That is why my struggle must continue, I must not reduce my efforts to ensure that girls, adolescents and young women have opportunities. We must build their confidence so that they realize that they can do whatever they want to.

When I listen to these women I do not know, I think of my granddaughter who lives in Guayaquil. I work for her to have more freedom, more opportunities as a woman and achieve her dreams. I think of her, I think of my family and I think of nature. I am surprised how the place where I live has changed, I am amazed to see all that I have achieved and the beautiful direction I have taken.







CONCLUSIONS



In six decades of presence in Ecuador, Plan International has been able to transform the lives of thousands of people in a positive way. A common thread running through the stories in this publication is, precisely, the change in several areas: personal, family and work. Moreover, the people who participated in our initiatives, especially girls and young women, brought this change to their environments to create better conditions in their neighborhood or community. It does not matter if people participated for a shorter or longer time in the organization's programs, the transformation occurred in a constant and conscious way so that they become more resilient and stronger human beings, and so that they persevere until they achieve their goals or their dreams, and improve the conditions of their family and environment. It is something that fills us with pride and we want to continue doing it even more strongly in the years to come. For this, we require the support of the entire Ecuadorian society.

The empowerment achieved through the various methodologies used has resulted in young people ready to achieve economic and social autonomy, face difficulties, and find solutions to the challenges they face every day. They are young people who are not afraid to speak in public to ask for, and sometimes demand, the fulfillment of their rights. At the same time, they are caring young people with the ability and willingness to help others who are going through adversity; they are generous and share their experiences of success, which inspire others to follow a similar path.

We aspire to see the Because I am a Girl Movement grow and consolidate as a respected voice and a reference in the field of equality. We want the Movement to be heard throughout the country by society and the authorities.



We have made great progress toward improving the living conditions of children and adolescents in the country. Our progress has been strengthened over these six decades. We have innovated and focused on the development of soft skills and abilities to overcome adversity in a better way.

Plan International Ecuador shows a great capacity to respond to the communities in which it operates, and changes according to the context of the country and the world in order to further a development proposal adapted to the reality of where it operates and to the progress of global development theories. This flexibility means that Plan International can respond effectively to very diverse contexts in terms of urban and rural areas, emergency situations, such as the 2016 earthquake and the Covid-19 pandemic, new technologies, the Venezuelan migration crisis, among others.

Our education-centered work has enabled us to provide access to basic education, high school and university for thousands of girls, boys, adolescents and young people. In the same way, the efforts made to strengthen their capacities have borne the best results, and at each step, we find strong, resilient young people who are leaders in the causes of children's rights and equality for girls and boys.

Technology is our ally. In the coming years, we want to use more technology in our initiatives. We have already tested it during the Covid-19 pandemic, when we successfully executed our training programs through virtual media. We intend to continue incorporating technological tools that will help us reach more girls and boys with quality projects. Similarly, we need to strengthen our work in positive masculinities to advance gender equality. We need boys, young men and adult men as strategic allies in the construction of a more egalitarian society. Girls and boys need to have parents who are close to them, who do not differentiate between their sons and daughters and who encourage them equally.

Plan International Ecuador builds skills in all the environments where it works, generating capacities in each group of people with whom it interacts so that they can take it further, to more people. Two examples of this include the Because I am a Girl Movement, which has more than 600 leaders in 10 provinces in the country, and the volunteer movement, which has significantly increased its capacity to implement successful projects.



We have found that working on self-esteem, especially with girls and young women, unleashes their potential. When a girl feels self-confident, she can change her own environment, stop injustices, ask for help, and transform her future, leaving behind the culturally assigned role of submission and silence. In this way, the change towards a more egalitarian society begins.

Part of our legacy includes proven methodologies that ensure results in the improvement of the quality of life of children, young people and adolescents, including: (i) the “Teenage Pregnancy Free Zone” to reduce early pregnancy, (ii) Leadership Schools to promote leadership among girls and adolescents, (iii) “Fathers who Care” to encourage the involvement of fathers in the upbringing of their sons and daughters, (iv) “Community Protection Mechanisms” to protect girls and boys from violence, and (v) “Youth Innovation Laboratories” to promote entrepreneurship.

One of our challenges is sustainability, which we promote through the management of resources from several national and international sources, civil society, and other entities. We implement awareness-raising campaigns to disseminate the importance of contributing to the causes of children and youth. We want to do much more, we aspire to engage more stakeholders to work with us. We also encourage social enterprises—recently formed by community volunteers—to prosper, both to offer high-quality training services and to generate resources for the participating families.

We will continue our work with migrant populations, both with those who come from other countries and those who migrate from the countryside to the city. Due to the regional situation and climate change, we believe that projects with migrant and host populations will continue to be a constant. We intend to increase initiatives related to climate change in collaboration with youth organizations, especially with women.

There is still much to be done. We face new challenges every day, but we are committed and capable of responding through our gender-transformative work, so that girls can live in safe environments free of violence, and families can promote more harmonious environments with opportunities for all their members.



Plan International Ecuador is a life option, a continuous commitment with the most vulnerable populations, especially girls. We are certain that the journey we have traveled has enriched us with learning and experiences and gives us the satisfaction of having fulfilled our duty; but, at the same time, it opens new options for us to renew, grow and innovate.

In these 60 years we have worked in collaboration with countless partners with whom we are immensely grateful. The work of Plan International in Ecuador has always been done in collaboration with all the stakeholders in the territory, such as local organizations, the public and private sectors, academia, the media, and, in particular, volunteers, who are our best allies in the communities. We are only 300 people working in Ecuador as an organization, but together with the volunteers, we are more than two thousand people who carry the same message of change, resilience, perseverance and optimism to transform the realities that limit us.

We will strengthen youth employment initiatives because it is essential to change the current situation in this country where only three out of ten people are adequately employed. Our young people are ready to enter the workforce, they have developed many skills and have tremendous potential, but they need an opportunity to have a job, continue to grow, and to gain experience.


60 YEARS
TRANSFORMING LIVES


Por la niñez en Ecuador



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