

# Education for Indigenous Children

Country: Ecuador



## Millennium Development Goal:

**Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education**

**Duration:** July 2006 to September 2008

**Beneficiaries:** 775 children and 45 educators in three Area Development Programs (ADPs)

**Partners:** 39 indigenous communities, 30 schools in three ADPs, Ministry of Education and Culture

**Total project funding:** US\$99,992

**Funding source:** Private donations

**Project goal:** To contribute to improving the quality of primary education for indigenous children to increase achievement levels so they can continue on to secondary school

## What we have tried to accomplish:

1. Support the improvement of teaching skills for educators and raise awareness among parents about the importance of supporting their children's education
2. Provide extra-curricular remedial programs in language and mathematics for children aged six to eight to improve achievement levels

## Project Overview

Samuel Laguna is a seven-year-old boy who lives in a rural community outside Otavalo, Ecuador. After school, he usually helps feed the animals and tend the crops that provide food and income for his family. Despite these efforts, Samuel's family is numbered among the country's rural poor. Nine out of 10 indigenous families live below the poverty line, and the Andean region is home to 82 per cent of all Ecuador's poor.

Recent government efforts to reduce national poverty levels include increased spending on education. However, rural schools where most indigenous children like Samuel live receive significantly less funding than those serving mixed-race communities. Operating on limited budgets, schools in indigenous communities often lack essential school supplies, have difficulty attracting qualified teachers and must charge fees that many poor families cannot afford.

In addition to overcoming economic obstacles, indigenous children must also adapt to a school system designed for the Spanish-speaking majority. Most

indigenous students have difficulty learning in their second language while studying a curriculum that is not always relevant to the needs of rural communities. Parents who have faced these same obstacles themselves often believe that a child's time is better spent on the farm rather than in unproductive studies at school.

Consequently, the average education level for indigenous people is just 3.3 years—less than half the national average. The illiteracy rate among indigenous adults is 28 per cent, more than three times the national rate of nine per cent.

Without assistance, Samuel is unlikely to complete school and gain the skills he needs for future education or work. An entire generation of indigenous children in Ecuador faces the same challenge.

### Providing a solution for indigenous children

Through the Scholastic Aid project, World Vision worked in 39 indigenous communities in three Area Development Programs (ADPs) to help children succeed in school. Working with 30 schools in

Maquipuashun, UNOCANT and UOCIC ADPs, the project supported this goal by providing remedial programs for students, training for teachers and awareness events for parents.

Samuel was one of 250 children who benefited from special after-school programs organized in several schools in Maquipuashun. Each weekday afternoon for 10 weeks, Samuel attended a three-hour session where he received extra help in language and mathematics.

The project also aimed to improve the quality of education through teacher training. World Vision worked with principals and teachers to help replace the existing rote memory methods with more student-centred approaches that promote better understanding. For example, Samuel's teacher learned how to use games and other interactive methods that make learning enjoyable and relevant for the children. An innovative aspect of the project was the use of learning tools made from local and recycled materials such as seeds, leaves and an abacus made of bottle caps, along with curriculum focused on



local and rural issues. Teachers were shown the importance of supporting students emotionally as well as academically, which helped the children to develop confidence. Teachers were also evaluated on their ability to develop lesson plans and carry out new teaching activities in the classroom.

When Samuel attended the after-school program, it meant another family member had to do his chores at home. A key obstacle to improving education in indigenous communities is the lack of support from parents who often don't see the value of schooling because of their own experiences with the education system. Through community meetings, the Scholastic Aid project helped parents to see the benefits of keeping children in school and allowing them to participate in after-school programs.

Implemented first in Maquipruashun during 2006, the project helped 250 students between the ages of six and eight in six schools. The project was launched at 11 schools in UNOCANT during 2007, and at 13 schools in UOCIC the following year, and offered assistance to more than 250 additional students in each of these ADPs. World Vision is working alongside the communities to advocate with the Ministry of Education and Culture to incorporate the project activities into the school budget.

### **Building hope for a better future**

Community response to the indigenous education project has been very positive. Schools have cooperated with these efforts to improve the quality of education offered in indigenous communities. Teachers and community members have volunteered to take part in the after-school programs. And as children began to make better progress, the support of parents has been enthusiastic.

Most important, indigenous children are benefiting from the support they are receiving. Samuel says, "I like to go [to the after-school program] because Mr. Jorge teaches us a lot of nice things, and because I am learning more. He makes us sing and play, and the best thing is that I am not bored. We learn to do things that help us improve our performance."

After one year of the remedial program, the academic scores of indigenous children in language and mathematics increased two to three points on average. While the long-term impact of this program is not yet known, we believe this early assistance will help children to stay in school longer and

increase the number of children who are able to enroll in secondary school.

As a result of this pilot project, World Vision Ecuador expanded the program in 2008 to include 6,674 children in

2008 and an additional 12,000 children in 2009. With this assistance, more children will be able to gain the essential tools they need to envision a life free of poverty.

The Scholastic Aid project has already helped 775 children to succeed at school—a foundational step for reducing poverty in indigenous communities. In Maquipruashun, for example, education makes it possible for young people to find jobs in nearby Quito. For students who choose to work in agriculture, education can break the pattern of exploitation often experienced by illiterate farmers. Educated farmers have more opportunities to learn about technologies that could improve their yields and income.

World Vision is committed to helping provide access to education for children like Samuel, so they can be effective agents of change in their community.

"I want to keep studying," says Samuel, "because when I am older, I will be very important. When I grow up, I am going to be a doctor to help people who get sick, because here in my school, there is no one to help us when we get sick."

### **Results to date:**

1. Principals and teachers have been empowered to apply student-centred approaches that promote learning.
2. Parents are sensitized to the importance of supporting their children's education and community leaders take ownership of the project.
3. Academic scores in language and math for children involved in the program increased significantly.
4. Because of the project's success, the remedial program was implemented in 17 additional ADPs, benefiting 6,674 children aged seven to 12 and has been expanded to all ADPs in Ecuador, benefiting 12,000 children.

### **Policy influence:**

- Project partners are working with the Ministry of Education to incorporate project activities into the school budgets.

### **What we learned from this project:**

- Improving reading comprehension among primary school students greatly helps with their achievement in other academic areas as well as developing skills in problem-solving and conflict resolution.
- Using local materials as learning tools and examples that are relevant to students' lives improve understanding and increase motivation to learn.