



## What we do in Ecuador

- We've helped 9,508 children get a better quality education
- We're campaigning to reduce violence against children
- We're helping 8,000 children be better prepared in the event of a natural disaster or emergency



Although Ecuador is a fairly rich country – it has exploited its deposits of oil since the 1970s and is South America's fifth-largest producer – the gap between rich and poor people is immense. The extraction of oil has had a catastrophic effect on the environment and communities in affected areas, but they have received little in return.

The global financial crisis is taking its toll. Oil prices have plummeted, threatening government spending on key services such as health and education. And remittances from migrants – the second main source of income for the country – are reported to be down by almost 19.7%. Families use 80%–90% of remittances to buy food, clothes and other essentials, so the downturn is hitting poor rural communities hard. Politically, the new Constitution was endorsed by 65% of the population in October 2008. But political tensions in the region increased, flaring up into a diplomatic conflict with Colombia.

Out of a population of 13.3 million, 5 million are children or young people under 18. One in ten people live below the poverty line. Many children don't complete their schooling, as they drop out to find work to help support their family. One in three children don't complete primary school, while one in five drop out in fourth grade.

The country's inequalities still reflect its colonial past, with significant differences among social groups according to their ancestry. As a consequence of the domination of social classes that started after the conquest of the Americas, Ecuadorian *mestizo* children are

more likely to be rich, while Afro-Ecuadorian and indigenous children are far more likely to be poor, to do less well at school and be unable to get medical treatment when they need it.

## **Save the Children in Ecuador**

We began working in Ecuador in 2004, and since 2007 we've worked closely with Save the Children Spain, with the aim of operating as a unified presence. That means pooling our resources to have the maximum impact possible to support vulnerable families and children, including those near the border with Colombia who are victims of the country's armed conflict. We work in four provinces: Guayas, El Oro, Manabí and Esmeraldas, the coastal region. We work with 65 communities, and we provide technical support to local government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to improve the quality of education children receive. To date, our activities have benefited 9,508 children, more than half of them girls.

Our focus is on making sure that all children – including children who work – get a good quality, basic education. We're also promoting children's rights and child protection through education and awareness-raising sessions with both children and adults. In our work with government ministries and other partners, we're trying to make sure that children and young people have a say in the decisions that affect their lives.

In 2008–09, we carried out a child rights situation analysis (CRSA) to identify the main obstacles to realising children's rights. The CRSA helped us to define our planning and strategies for 2010 to 2015.

## **We're making sure children get a better education**

Each year, around 100,000 children do not enrol in first grade, and more than 750,000 others (aged 5–17) miss out on school. Poverty also keeps many children out of school: in 2003, 77% of adolescents in rural areas and 44% of adolescents in urban areas were from homes with a daily income of less than US\$2 a day. Some of the main problems are that the quality of education is poor as many teachers do not have the necessary skills and resources, the curriculum is outdated, and schools have poor infrastructure and lack of teaching materials. Families would rather their children were working and earning a living than in a school where they are not learning. Girls, children with disabilities, indigenous children and refugees are most likely to miss out on school.

We've helped 9,508 vulnerable children – child workers, other poor children and children who are excluded due to their ethnicity – get a better quality education. We awarded scholarships to 5,780 children, and provided books and other resources to 50 schools. We enrolled 188 young people who had dropped out of school into our accelerated learning classes, so that they can finish their schooling and stand a better chance of getting a job. We trained 424 teachers in child-centred teaching methods and positive forms of classroom discipline, resulting in a better, safer learning environment. And we provided training and awareness-

raising events for 3,700 parents on issues such as children's health and wellbeing, children's rights and child protection.

This year, we began a new programme in Esmeraldas, in the north, with funding from the European Commission. We're promoting inclusive education and children's participation, benefiting the refugee population and children from minority ethnic communities (Ecuadorians of African descent).

We're also helping young people aged 12 to 15 who have dropped out of school for various reasons such as lack of money, pregnancy, family or personal issues to go back to school and finish high school. We're using a method the 'accelerated middle school' method, which allows these young people to catch up on the three years of middle school in just one year. We have reached agreements with high schools to register these students regardless of their age.

### **We're raising standards in the education system**

We've supported the design and implementation of a model of local management of education in four municipalities (El Triunfo, Naranjal, Pasaje and Jama), which will make it possible to achieve the goal of universal education for all excluded children. We've trained 88 public officials and 25 staff from the Ministry of Education. In Naranjal and El Triunfo, we've helped to convince the municipal authorities to employ 20 early childhood education teachers, improving services for children aged three to five. In Jama, we've developed a local syllabus, textbooks and an ethnic museum, which is a learning tool for the children. We've also worked closely with the Ministry of Education to implement its Ten-Year Education Plan in Guayas, El Oro, Manabí and Esmeraldas.

### **We've campaigned for changes in the education law**

Through the Contrato Social network, we successfully campaigned for the government to increase the education budget by 6% of GDP (gross domestic product) and so abolish school fees. This resulted in some 250,000 more children entering school for the first time.

As a result of our lobbying, the government has also increased spending so that all children can have a preschool year when they are five years old, rather than going directly into primary school when they are six. We hope this will result in 50,000 fewer children dropping out of primary school in the first year.

We worked together with Contrato Social and other organisations to persuade the Constitutional Assembly to guarantee the right in the new Constitution (2008) for all children to receive free, high quality education and to ensure increased investment in education. We've given detailed technical support to the working groups, as well as organising children to lobby the Constitutional Assembly. In January 2009, we launched a series of events in various cities to promote awareness of the new Education Act, and in September 2009, we officially presented it to the National Assembly.

Together with other civil society groups and NGOs (including Grupo Faro, Diagonal-Capítulo Ecuador, Universidad Católica Santiago de Guayaquil, and CARE), we are a member of Educidadanía, a network that monitors implementation of the government's Decennial Education Plan 2006–2015. The plan includes providing universal access to education, increasing the quality of education, providing teacher training, improving school infrastructure and equipment, and increasing the education budget, among other provisions.

At national level, we work closely with social movements to raise awareness, mobilise communities and advocate for children rights, as well as lobbying for continued investment in education, children's participation, and educational and constitutional reforms.

## **We're protecting children**

About 660,000 Ecuadorian children and young people work to earn money – roughly 40%, a greater proportion than in other Latin American countries. And in the central highlands region, as many as 90% of children do some form of work, often harmful work. Many children are employed on banana plantations, for example, or on farms producing flowers for export, informal commerce.

We work in five provinces: directly in Guayas, El Oro and Esmeraldas, and indirectly in El Oro, Los Ríos, Guayas, Pichincha and Cotopaxi (from 2004 to September 2008), with local partners such as the Juconi Foundation. Over the last four years, we've helped more than 12,000 working children and young people to avoid the most harmful forms of labour and get better access to education.

We're supporting the national system of comprehensive protection for children, by training municipal officials responsible for public policies that cover children's rights. We're also following up the training with technical support and accompaniment to the institutions that make up the Child Protection Canton Councils.

In December 2008, with two local partners (the Jesuit Refugee and Migrants Service, and the Yupana Foundation), we began a project in San Lorenzo, near the border with Colombia. We're working to improve children's wellbeing and reduce violence against children, particularly refugees and other vulnerable children. We're coordinating activities with government services and other organisations providing services for children. Also, we're strengthening the local protection system through the Children's Canton Council.

We're helping working children address the problems they face, including access to schooling. We've helped approximately 4,000 children who work on banana export plantations around the commercial centre of Guayaquil, with scholarships, education materials, health and nutrition programmes. We're working in schools and with families to give training and psychotherapy support, to increase their knowledge of children's rights, especially education. Training themes include children rights, conflict resolution, nutrition,

health and wellbeing. We're working with them to lobby for changes in municipal policies on education and child labour. And we've helped some families find alternative sources of income, so that their children can return to school.

### **We're campaigning to stop violence against children**

We're leading a campaign in Guayaquil city to make people aware of issues around child labour and child begging. We plan to reach 2 million people through the campaign, helping them understand the problems and consequences that face children who work and beg on the streets. We're working in partnership with the National Children and Family Institute and other local children's organisations.

Also, in 2008, we developed a radio campaign in the province of Cotopaxi, involving 45 children and young people as reporters. They interviewed children from different backgrounds, municipal officials and others. These life stories and interviews were broadcast across the province on Radio Latacunga for three days. The radio campaign really gave children a chance to be heard. They got across their own messages about why it's so important that all groups in society work to stop not just violence against children, but all forms of abuse and exploitation.

### **We're helping children prepare for emergencies**

We're helping 4,000 children from flood-prone areas on the coast (Guayas), so that they're better prepared in the event of a natural disaster or emergency. We're working in three other municipalities (Pasaje, El Triunfo and Naranjal) to increase local communities' knowledge, preparedness and response capacity in the event of a disaster or emergency.

In 2007, together with the Ministry of Education and local organisations, we supported an initiative in the central highlands to help children in two municipalities (Penipe and Pelileo, in Chimborazo and Tungurahua provinces) affected by volcanic eruptions. Our aim is to help children living in zones affected by activity in the Tungurahua volcano, so that they know how to prepare for and cope with an emergency, should it arise.



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