



# LOS RIOS COMMUNITY PROFILE



## GENERAL OVERVIEW

The community of Los Rios is relatively young, having been established by just two families in 1972 along the Napo River. Today, the community is home to a population consisting of both indigenous and migrant families. Los Rios faces a number of challenges which stem primarily from its relative isolation.

WE is excited to be working with the community of Los Rios and the local government to remove barriers to education. Through our WE Villages program, we will implement programming in Los Rios by empowering community members through increased access to quality education, clean water and sanitation facilities, health education and economic opportunities. Together, we will break the cycle of poverty in Los Rios. In Ecuador this is accomplished through '*mingas*,' a tradition in which members of an entire community come together to work on a project for the benefit of all.

## ECUADOR FACTS

- Ecuador's primary exports include oil, bananas and shrimp
- 95% of Ecuador's population is Roman Catholic
- The average life expectancy in Ecuador is 76 years
- 1/3 of Ecuadorians live in rural areas
- 35% of the Ecuadorian population lives below the poverty line
- 7.5% of children aged 5-14 are engaged in child labour





# WE VILLAGES DEVELOPMENT MODEL

WE is a movement that brings people together and gives them the tools change the world. With two divisions, WE Charity and ME to WE social enterprise, we empower people at home and around the world. WE Charity empowers change with resources that create sustainable impact.

For two decades, Free The Children's WE Villages, a program of WE Charity, has been engineering an international development model to end poverty. It's not a handout or a single solution, but a combination of key interventions that empower a community to help themselves.

Our core mission is empowerment. In North America, we empower people to create positive change around them. WE Villages applies the same philosophy in developing countries, where our local staff work with rural villages and regional governments to support, teach and empower people within our five Pillars of Impact: Education, Water, Health, Food, and Opportunity.

## AT A GLANCE

Through WE Villages, we have:

- Built over 1,000 school rooms for young people around the world, educating more than 200,000 children
- Provided access to clean water and sanitation programs and facilities for more than one million people
- Provided more than \$36 million in medical supplies to the health facilities servicing our partner communities
- Enabled farmers and families to produce over 15 million nutritious meals to fuel their communities
- Helped empower more than 30,000 women with financial independence



### WE Villages is:

- **Holistic.** We know that poverty is a complex problem, and no issue or solution stands alone. We work through five key development Pillars of Impact to provide solutions that support and amplify each other.
- **Led by the community.** Our partner communities take ownership of the programs and projects that create lasting change.
- **Capacity-building.** We help community members develop the skills, strategies and infrastructure to take charge of their future and maintain long-term change.
- **Connecting communities.** When you support our programming, you become part of a global family. We connect partners and supporters in North America and the UK with communities overseas to build relationships that inspire change worldwide.
- **Transparent.** We've invited third-party experts and the brightest analytical minds in the world of international development to look at our model from every angle. They confirm that our solutions are effective and built to last.
- **Sustainable.** Our goal is to provide the training and tools communities need to thrive for generations and take ownership of the projects we've implemented.





## EDUCATION

When children are educated, they are armed with the courage and self-confidence to better themselves and their families, their communities and the next generation. When you break down the barriers to education, you help break the cycle of poverty.

Since the establishment of a small school for 18 students in 1974, the school in Los Rios, Unidad Educativa Fisco Misional Padre Hugo Mena, has grown to become a central location where approximately 175 students from 10 surrounding communities travel to receive an education. Unfortunately, the educational infrastructure is insufficient to accommodate this number of students.

Some classrooms are currently overcrowded, eight out of the 10 existing classrooms are dilapidated and the current number of classrooms was only reached when several of the teacher's accommodations, the dining hall and the school kitchen were re-purposed for use as classrooms. Presently, teachers are sharing space and living on the second floor of two of the classrooms.

WE will support education in the community by: building and rehabilitating classrooms, supporting the construction of new teacher accommodations to improve teacher morale and create safe, dignified living spaces for educators, creating a new library to support student skill development, and by implementing a summer school program to further support youth in the community by creating a safe, nurturing environment outside of school.



CURRENT CLASSROOM

The school is overcrowded and falling into disrepair.



## WATER

Improving access to clean water is one of the most crucial and quickest ways to lift a community out of poverty. It reduces illness, allows girls to go to school instead of bearing the responsibility of fetching their family's water and leads to better agriculture and access to food.

A significant concern in Los Rios is access to clean drinking water. The entire community is currently reliant upon a water source that is known to contain waterborne diseases and parasites that commonly cause illness among community members.

The community also faces significant issues arising from inadequate sanitation facilities. For instance, the school at has four bathroom facilities, all of which have fallen into disrepair, rendering them unusable for staff and students. These conditions, in conjunction with a lack of hand washing facilities and contaminated water, contribute to a increase in the instances of waterborne illness in the community, decreasing student attendance rates. These issues also create an inhospitable environment for adolescent girls who reach the age of menstruation, becoming a major deterrent to female school attendance.

WE will install a water treatment facility to capture and treat spring water for distribution to the community. Furthermore, the construction of bathroom blocks will help to alleviate sanitation challenges. WE will also provide training to ensure that hygiene and sanitation techniques are well understood and that the capacity exists in the community to maintain all projects.



CURRENT WATER SOURCE

The water source here is contaminated with bacteria and parasites and poses a health risk to community members.



## HEALTH

Families who have access to health care can run farms, keep their families fed and their children in school. They can pull themselves out of the grip of chronic illness, and eventually out of poverty.

Improving community capacity with respect to healthy practices will be paramount to improving school attendance rates and supporting productivity within the community. With this in mind, WE will work with medical practitioners from the local clinic, as well as with health promoters from the Ministry of Health to develop and implement workshops which will educate community members on relevant health issues, the importance and usefulness of the local clinic, and healthy habits which can be integrated into the home to bolster family health.



### STUDENT GARDEN

Students created a heart shaped garden while participating in health programming at school.

## FOOD

We work with communities on programs that promote food security and improved agriculture, like school gardens and irrigation projects. Through the Food Pillar of Impact, we provide families with better access to healthy food and surplus food to sell, empowering them to grow strong.

To accommodate the growing population at Los Rios' school, both the school kitchen and dining hall were converted to classrooms, leaving just an open fire pit built by the parents to prepare food. Not only does the fire pit represent a hazard for young students, but the school lacks adequate space for hygienic food preparation and student lunches. WE intends to construct a new kitchen and dining hall for students and teachers to ensure that their dietary needs are met in a safe, healthy manner.

In addition to the kitchen and dining hall, WE has identified the need to supplement government-provided snacks with additional nutrient-dense food. Presently, the government provides snacks which consist primarily of oats and nutrient enriched cookies. WE hopes to augment this program by establishing a school garden which will provide the fruits and vegetables that children require for proper growth and development. Furthermore, the garden will be used as an educational tool to raise awareness about important nutritional and agricultural concepts among both students and community members.



### KITCHEN USED AS A CLASSROOM

Preschool students gather around for their class that is being held in the current school kitchen.





## OPPORTUNITY

Children can only attend school if their parents have the financial means and time to invest in their education and basic health. So we teach parents, often mothers, skills such as animal husbandry to help them generate income, accrue savings and ensure sustainability. Through a mix of engaging the local government and developing alternative income programs, we help our WE Villages partner communities reach a level of self-sufficiency within an average of five years.

To support young girls in the pursuit of education and success, WE will work to establish Girls Clubs in the community of Los Rios. Through mutual support, skills training and workshops, and access to resources, these groups will empower young women to stay in school, equip them with the skills to drive their own success and feel pride and value as women within their communities. Furthermore, WE will support mothers to establish alternative income sources through the creation of womens groups. These groups will receive support in the form of resources and training to help establish successful business ventures. By improving financial stability, parents will feel confident in their ability to pay for fees associated with schooling, and student attendance will benefit as a result.



### OPPORTUNITY

Artisan groups participate in entrepreneurship training and create beautiful handmade jewellery at WE's Women's Empowerment Center in Ecuador. With each bead and stitch, participants build better lives, enabling them to send their children to school, feed them what they need to grow up strong and healthy and perhaps even start their own businesses.

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### LEARN MORE

**For more info on WE Villages projects in Ecuador or WE's international development work please visit:**

*<http://we.org/we-villages/where-we-work/ecuador/> or email [info@we.org](mailto:info@we.org)*