



WELL READ

The Read to Empower project in Honduras



ON PAGE: Girls participate in one of the animated reading programs at a local Read to Empower Library.

COVER: A Read to Empower library user.



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THE FIRST WORD



Read to Empower Library art classes inspire creativity.

New Chapter

The Read to Empower Library project is a wonderful story with rich characters and inspiring tales.

DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST BOOK YOU EVER READ?

Concepción does. “It was *The Little Blue Pig*,” recalls the 14-year Read to Empower Library fan. “I loved the cover; we’re always told that covers are important.” That was all it took to intrigue her. Once she turned to the first page, Concepción learned about kindness and generosity through the little pig and its search for someone to give a beautiful flower to. And since picking up that first book, she has gone on to read 174 more.

Being able to read changes a person. For Concepción, it has expanded her world view and allowed her to learn about key issues affecting her health and well-being. “I read a book about

adolescent pregnancy and learned that it’s important to talk to your parents and that you have to be old enough to have sex or a partner,” she candidly shares.

Engaging on such topics has also transformed Concepción’s self-esteem. It has helped her, as a young woman, see what’s possible. “I know how much I’ve changed,” she shares. “Before, I didn’t read; I was shy, I was afraid and I didn’t talk. Now I feel motivated because I learned that being a girl or a woman doesn’t stop us from succeeding. I want to propose that more parents come to the Read to Empower Library to learn about these issues and see all the future that lies here.”



Your support is why young women like Concepción can experience the world with confidence and curiosity. Read on to discover how the Read to Empower Library project has inspired adolescents, especially girls, over the past six months.

The Scene

HONDURAS IS THE SECOND LARGEST COUNTRY IN CENTRAL AMERICA.

It is known for its beautiful landscapes and hospitable culture. When it comes to education, the country is working toward providing its citizens with high-quality schooling, but economic and social challenges are presenting roadblocks to making this a reality.

In our last update on work done in phase 4 and phase 5 (which continues until December 2023), we highlighted the challenges the team faced because of political shifts, a tanking economy and disruptions to children's schooling due to families migrating in search of better opportunities.

Unfortunately, these obstacles continued into 2022. Rising fuel prices were seen throughout most of the year, which worsened Honduras's already fragile economic state. And in January, the country saw a change in government. This affected the education system, as a new minister of education was brought in and many teachers – especially those in temporary positions – had their contracts cancelled. All of this had a trickle-down effect on schooling in the department of Lempira, which saw nine of its 10 ministers replaced during this shift.

The Plan International Honduras team had to be strategic and intentional to ensure that these political and economic forces didn't affect the project's continuity.

Perhaps the most pressing issue that affected student learning emerged during the tail end of COVID-19, when students attempted to return to in-person learning. At the start of 2022, Honduras was

the only country in Latin America that hadn't returned to in-person schooling.

This is a major setback in a country where only 16.6% of the population has steady access to the internet. And although national plans were made to reopen all schools in February 2022, only 70% of rural schools returned to in-person classrooms on a part-time basis by March 2022, while many urban schools – particularly those that lacked adequate sanitation and biosecurity measures – remained closed.

Although these issues presented challenges that the Plan International Canada and Honduras teams had to navigate, they only heightened the need to invest in early education. Otherwise, the two million children who are outside the formal education system may never return to school.

The commitment among the teams to advance childhood education during this period therefore increased. We maintained proactive and transparent communication with new educational authorities to ensure that we gained their strategic buy-in. A book of children's stories, poems and theatre was published, designed and printed. A reading animation day was carried out to motivate children's use of the libraries and train teachers on key library activities.

And despite the challenges of COVID-19, many of the Read to Empower libraries are now functioning autonomously thanks to children, teachers and caregivers seeing their value and being committed to carrying out their activities. We can't wait to see what results the latter months of 2022 will bring!



Children participating in a group art project.

THE RUNDOWN

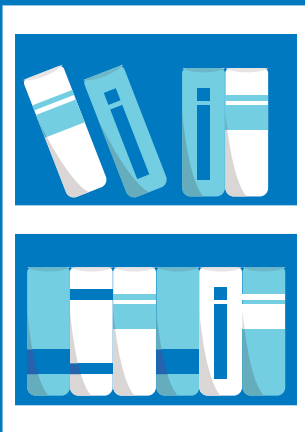
Want to learn which impacts emerged from the first half of 2022?
Read on to see some key highlights from **Phase 4**.

1 BOOK

was produced by children and adolescents on local history, literature and art

16 LIBRARIES

were equipped with tables, chairs, shelves, a computer and audio visual equipment



1 READING ANIMATION

Reading animations encourage children to use libraries and train teachers on library activities and strategies, including the travelling backpack, mobile library, art clubs and more

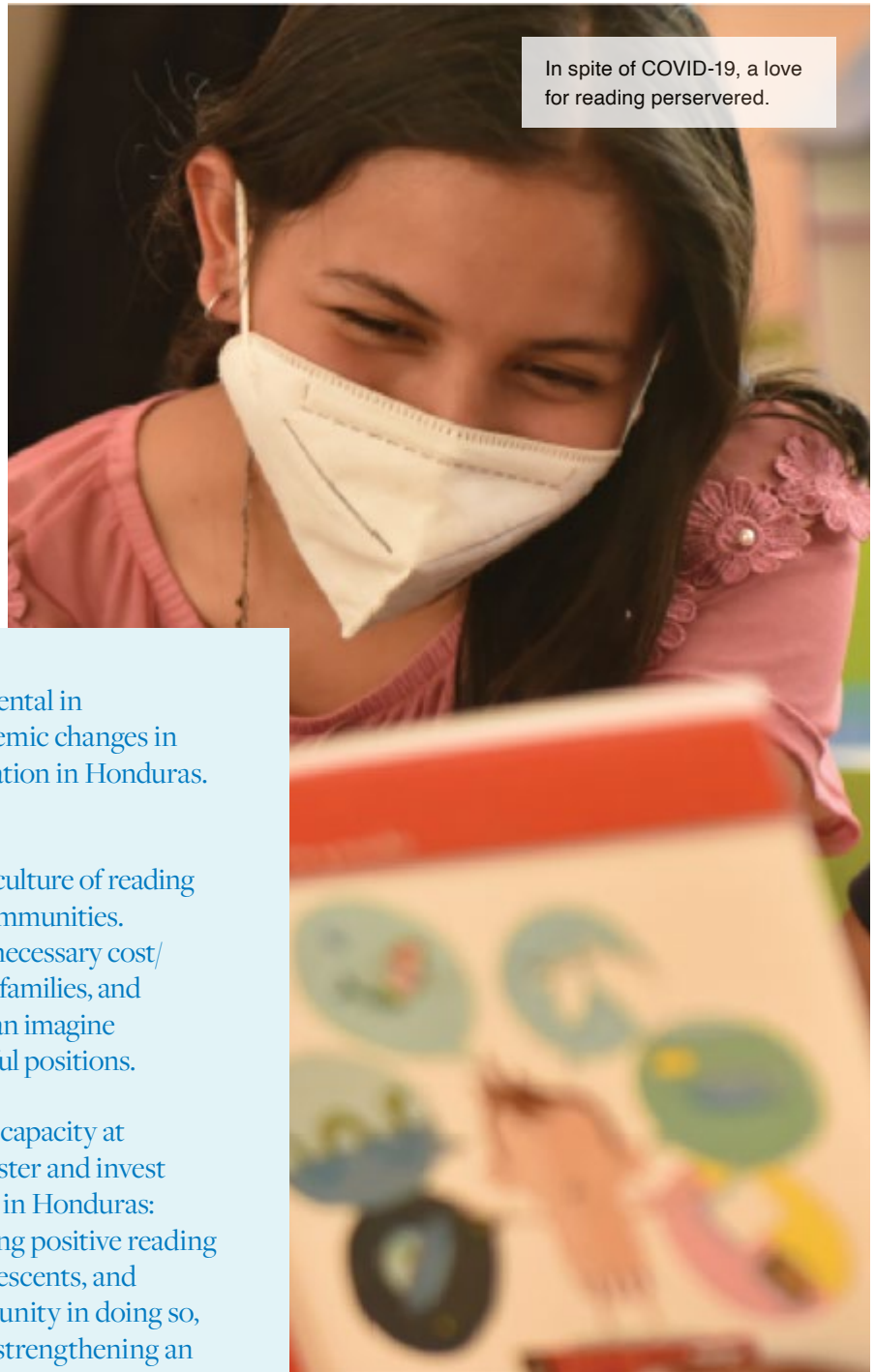
6 LIBRARIES

conducted 11 travelling backpack programs in 11 communities, reaching 332 girls and 305 boys

+ 3 road signs were updated to make the libraries more visible

BUILDING UPGRADES

We upgraded the Talgua library with an inclusive access ramp. The Matasano's sidewalk was improved and at El Sitio the retaining wall and drainage issues were addressed. Finally, at Lagunas de Pederal we built a retaining wall to protect the land in front of the library



In spite of COVID-19, a love for reading persevered.

These impacts are fundamental in contributing to larger, systemic changes in student learning and education in Honduras. Just some of these include:

NORMS SHIFTING: A culture of reading is being strengthened in communities. Education is also seen as a necessary cost/smart investment amongst families, and children (especially girls) can imagine themselves in more powerful positions.

GREATER BUY-IN and capacity at the community levels to foster and invest in a strong reading culture in Honduras: Supporting and empowering positive reading habits in children and adolescents, and involving the whole community in doing so, the project contributed to strengthening an inclusive environment and upholding the importance of education for girls and boys.

GREATER AGENCY and independence for young women due to strengthened confidence and critical thought.

THE RUNDOWN

Here are some of the topline achievements and activities to date for **Phase 5** of the project.

447 TRAININGS

were held for teachers, parents and children on techniques and strategies for library management, reading engagement and art activities

20 LIBRARIES

were renovated with air conditioning, audio systems, bookcases, tables and computers



22 SCHOOL LIBRARIES

were equipped with puppet club kits, including materials such as face paint and brushes

+ 33 visits to school libraries to train teachers on how to create reading and art clubs

COMMUNITY EVENTS

The Public Library of Gracias was integrated into community life by holding more than 70 activities including talks, book presentations, children's theatre presentations and more

DEVELOPMENT COUNCILS

School development councils (moms, dads, caregivers, teachers and school principals) updated their management and sustainability plans to support activities and maintain the libraries post-project.

+ 62 teachers and school officials were trained on how to create inclusive and safe spaces, especially for girls



IN BOTH PHASES THESE WERE THE PRIORITY TASKS:

The teams encouraged transparent communication with key authorities, including Lempira's departmental director of education, to gain the strategic buy-in of the libraries amidst the recent change in government.

With the return to hybrid classes, there was an average increase of 102.7 books borrowed per library between January and July 2022 (376.3) compared to the period from July to December 2021 (273.6).

The pandemic has demonstrated that libraries can function autonomously, thanks to communities being fully committed to implementing the library model.

READING ROCKSTARS

Some Read to Empower champion readers share the books they love.



ANYELI

Age:
12

Number of books read:
138

Topics learned about:
Sexual and reproductive health and respect for peers

Favourite read:
The Tupi Rabbit series

Why Anyeli loves libraries:
“The library helped me discover new knowledge and it also has helped me be able to talk better and to use beautiful words.”



GÉNESIS

Age:
11

Number of books read:
63

Topics learned about:
Self-protection, recycling and conservation and animals

Favourite read:
Animal World

Why Génesis loves libraries:
“It's a nice place to be with my friends or alone. I like how they teach us to protect ourselves from harm.”



CONCEPCIÓN

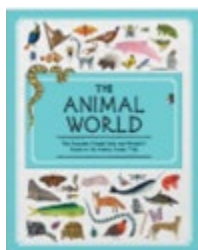
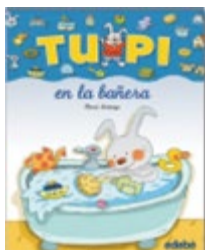
Age:
14

Number of books read:
175

Topics learned about:
Child protection, animals and women's empowerment

Favourite read:
The Little Blue Pig

Why Concepción loves libraries:
“I learned that being a girl doesn't stop you from succeeding. The books about inspiring women made me feel proud.”





PLAY TIME

Yadira and Ulises are two of the creative minds behind the Read to Empower's success.

ULISES ALVARADO AND YADIRA HERNÁNDEZ have worked at Plan International for 12 and five years respectively. Both are involved in the Read to Empower project. Yadira is a reading facilitator while Ulises is a film and photography facilitator. We chatted with them about what they love about the project and their dreams going forward.

What makes the project unique?

(U) "It has a children's perspective and a friendly community approach that is unique to each setting."

(Y) "The photographs reflect the joy and the essence of this beautiful project. I am proud to capture their creativity, happiness and the sense of pride they feel belonging to a club, and being part of something very important."

What motivates you to continue during difficult times?

(U) "My love for the project. It changes children's lives and the community. The community also takes ownership for its success. It's not just a project; it's part of everyone's life. It has also changed my life. It's made me love simple things."

What is a favourite moment for you from the project?

(U) "I have witnessed the moment when children first have access to books. It is wonderful to see how their confidence grows!"

(Y) "One of my favourite memories is when I accompanied the children in the Read to Empower Children's Film Club to the Icaro Central American Film Festival. I could really feel

their excitement and joy when they were on stage receiving recognition for their work. Their success inspires others in the community to want to change their behaviour as well."

What's your proudest moment and what's your hope for the future?

(Y) "I am proud of the children because they [have] developed the habit of reading. It's become a part of their lives. They read for pleasure, they lend books and they always carry books in their reading bags to read and share at home. My greatest hope is that Read to Empower will one day reach every corner of my country. When I tell my friends about the activities I do in my job, they are amazed at how wonderful these libraries are."

Story of change

The theatre program sparks joy, plenty of laughs and good friendships.



A theatre class brings words to life off the page.



A STORYBOOK ADVENTURE

Meet Ellen, the fastest little reader in town!

ELLEN LIVES IN LENCA AND IS KNOWN FOR HER PRECOCIOUS READING ABILITIES. The nine-year-old estimates that she's read at least 100 books and counting!

"At school, I read in the library. When I'm home, I read under a tree or while lying in bed. I like reading as much as chicken soup, watermelon and rice with chili (my favourite foods)."

That's saying something!

Watch Ellen's award-winning reading



Her teacher noticed Ellen's talent a few years ago and asked the

then seven-year-old if she wanted to enter the Reading at Home national contest. It's a popular national reading event organized by the government of Honduras.

To enter, Ellen and her teacher recorded her reading an excerpt from *The Sky is Falling*. It was sent off to the judges at her school to see if she would make it to the next round.

That was only the first round she had to pass. From there, her recording went to municipal and national judges. Needless to say, it was a rigorous and prestigious contest.

Ellen's submission won every stage of the competition. The judges said that "Ellen is a girl who reads very quickly. Her tone is perfect. She also takes the right breaks to add emotion."

After she won, Ellen was congratulated by Honduras' first lady, the minister of education, the departmental director of education, her town's mayor and her teachers.

The reading competition boosted Ellen's confidence and helped her discover a new purpose: One day, she hopes to use her education to help children who are facing poverty. Her mom says that she knows that her daughter's education gives her a better chance of earning a living when she is older.

"As a mother, I feel grateful for the Read to Empower Library because my little girl has been transformed here," she says. "Reading is her passion. Although we have little schooling, we understand that access to the library, school and education are opportunities to get out of poverty."



Thank you!

Thank you for providing opportunities to hundreds of students in Honduras! We look forward to continuing to work together to reach even more girls and adolescents in the final months of 2022 and beyond. This includes completing a methodological guide on how to implement the Read to Empower Library model, printing books of impact stories, convening new municipal mayors to report the progress, achievements and challenges of the Read to Empower project, and carrying out field visits to exchange further knowledge on library activities and strategies.

QUOTES THAT WE LOVED FROM YOUR READ TO EMPOWER FANS, CONCEPCIÓN, ANYELI, ELLEN & GENESIS (OPPOSITE PAGE)

“I think that little by little the pandemic will pass and we will be able to do plays, mime, storytelling and drawing classes again. This ugly time has to end.” – Concepción

“I am sure that if I have the opportunity to continue studying I will do well because I have read and will continue reading. I like it and it makes me imagine.” – Anyeli

“I’ve read over a 100 books. I started reading very small books and now I read big books. I feel that the main character is me, and I get to know many worlds.” – Ellen



“

I was in the second grade when they opened the library. I could read a little, but it was in the library where my tongue was unraveled. Now I'm not bored in this school anymore.”

– Génesis, Read to Empower project participant



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