



Until we are all equal



# Storytelling That Inspires Dreams

The **Read to Empower** project in Honduras introduces children to the power of stories to open minds, spark curiosity and build lifelong friendships.



## Project facts

**WHAT:** The Read to Empower project was launched in 2014 to nurture a love of reading in children and adolescents in Honduras. The project also trains teachers and educators on how to create inclusive, gender-sensitive spaces and counter negative gender stereotypes. This report highlights activities from Phase IV of the project, which started in 2017 and ended in June 2023, and also shares outcomes from Phases V and VI, which are ongoing.

**HOW:**

- Build and equip accessible libraries and safe spaces for children
- Establish 46 libraries, including 43 school libraries, five public libraries and one school community library
- Train local staff on library management and inclusivity
- Improve literacy and reading habits through the creation of literary programs and art clubs
- Support reading encouragement strategies, including reading journals, reading bags, “traveling backpacks” and mobile libraries

**WHERE:** Lempira department of Honduras, with expansion to departments of Intibucá and Santa Barbara in Phase VI



**78%**  
of children  
surveyed read up to  
**50 books per year!**  
(From phase IV survey  
of 180 students.  
For more survey results,  
see page 7.)

A student tells stories through art.

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Despite considerable challenges, the Read to Empower project has “powered” on!

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Highlights from three phases speak to the positive changes the project is helping make happen.

### 8 Stories of Change

In this report, you’ll meet remarkable young readers like Carmen, who felt a sense of belonging for the first time when she started going to the library. Elsi and Alex share how their moms, who are helping build the libraries, inspire them. Yessica and Genesis talk about the life-changing influence of the work you support. Reading inspired Maria to create beautiful underwater worlds in her imagination and paintings. And Zoila loves three things: her family, her goat and the Read to Empower library.

ON THE COVER  
Illustrations the  
children created for  
their book *Leer Me  
Dio Alas (Reading  
Gave Me Wings)*



# The First Word

A library is more than a building with books in it. It's a place where children can learn, feel hopeful and dream.

"This isn't just another project about the number of books in the library," says Darwin Amador, a Plan International Honduras staff member. "It's about the children who learn to read and their families who join them. It's about children who wake up early to read and know how to talk about the things they love. It's about changing the person they become."

Everyone appreciates that reading is important, if not essential, to childhood development. It teaches children about the world and their place in it, while giving them room to imagine experiences beyond their own. That's what the Read to Empower libraries in Honduras are making possible – children, families and entire communities are applying their creativity and transforming their visions of themselves and their futures.

In this report, you'll meet young readers like Genesis, who talks about the lessons she learned about kindness and being true to herself after reading *Happy Fierce*. Elsi says her confidence blossomed after joining the Storytelling Club, and Carmen shares how the library is a place and space where she doesn't feel isolated in her wheelchair.

“Imagination has no limits. It's a new world we are putting in their hands.”

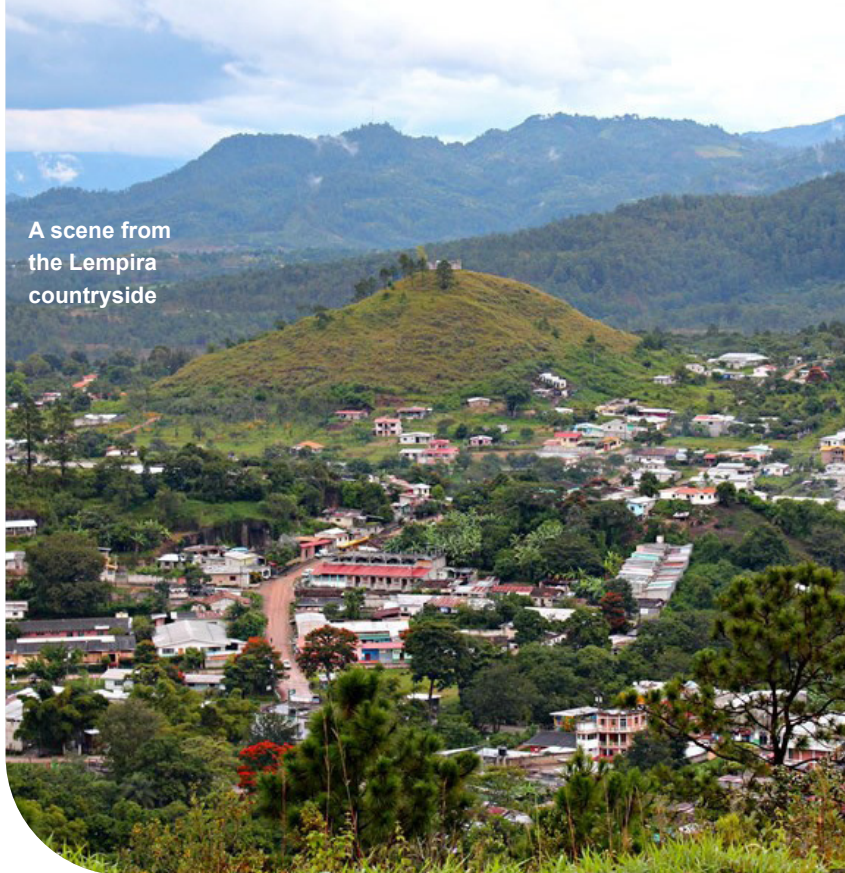
– Darwin Amador,  
Plan International Honduras  
staff member

Yessica fondly recalls the time she spent reading books in Read to Empower libraries and how that shaped her view of her role in society. "I learned that women are not only good for washing clothes and dishes. We can do important things, have power and live a better life," she says.

Today, the 22-year-old law student advocates for the libraries with city officials and parents. "The libraries made us different children because we could learn on our own and in our own way," she says. "I tell them to trust children, because we have opinions and we want to express them."

Darwin (wearing black hat) with other members of the Plan team at a library in Santa Barbara





A scene from the Lempira countryside

# The Situation

In the departments of Lempira, Intibucá and Santa Barbara, books and activities that teach children to assert their rights can change the course of their futures.



The books we read have the power to shape how we understand our reality and what we believe is possible. The Read to Empower project is bolstering education in Honduras by promoting literacy, equipping schools and training teachers, and building community investment in reading and education.

Education in Honduras has significant gaps and inequalities. Forty-five per cent of schools in Honduras have only one or two teachers, and when last tested, students in Honduras scored lower than the averages for Latin American and Caribbean countries in reading, math and science in standardized testing.

The Read to Empower project is also tackling issues of violence and inequality by incorporating lessons about children's rights, particularly those of girls and adolescents. This includes education on protection and participation to promote peace and tolerance.

High rates of adolescent pregnancy threaten many girls' education. Between 2015 and 2022, nationally, 8,000 girls paused or ended their education due to pregnancy. In the Lempira department, 929 adolescent pregnancies were reported between January and June of 2023; that accounts for 26% of all pregnancies registered in the region.

The decision to launch the school year in Lempira with a celebration at a Read to Empower library, with the participation of all library directors, was a symbolic and powerful message that reflects the critical role the project plays in these communities. It was a reflection that this is a priority project for the Departmental Directorate of Education, and it fundamentally showcased the heart of this project, which is to create a culture of reading in spaces that are welcoming and accessible for everyone.

**PHASE V**  
**27,374**  
**children have been reached through the project**



# The Rundown



Here are some of the highlights and achievements from the Read to Empower project.

## Libraries on the go!

- ▶ The libraries are spaces where children and their families can read for pleasure and participate in arts activities and community events.
- ▶ Painting, mime, film and theatre clubs in all libraries can bring children out of their shells and help them explore topics like girls' rights.
- ▶ Plan International project staff have made numerous visits to monitor library activities and conduct surveys related to readership, borrowing habits and satisfaction levels.
- ▶ Adults and children alike were surveyed about the way they use the libraries and the effectiveness of the libraries and their common areas, as well as reading habits and participation in creative clubs and community events.

### PHASE V

• **128** schools were visited **197** times by mobile libraries.

• **762** art kits were distributed to **254** artistic clubs.

## Sustainability

### PHASE V

|              |   |             |   |
|--------------|---|-------------|---|
| <b>10</b>    | media outlets have covered the project, earning it national visibility. [TARGET: 7]   | <b>7</b>    | project team members have received library-science training. [TARGET: 7]  |
| <b>36</b>    | resource-management plans have been created for libraries. [TARGET: 36]   | <b>64</b>   | sustainability goals have been achieved, including agreements, addendums and letters of understanding with the Ministry of Education, the DDEL and CEDs. [TARGET: 11] |
| <b>10</b>    | mayors have expressed interest in providing investment in resources and operations for a future phase.  | <b>64.9</b> | per cent of adolescent girls in artistic and reading clubs report a high level of leadership skills. [TARGET: 60%]  |
| <b>33</b>    | Educational development councils (CEDs) committed to supporting, managing and sustaining the school libraries (a declaration made in the presence of the Departmental Directorate of Education of Lempira [DDEL], municipal directors of education and municipal authorities). [TARGET: 33] |             |   |
|              |   |             | <b>PHASE VI</b>   |
|              |   | <b>10</b>   | municipal governments have signed agreements to ensure counterpart financial resources for implementing libraries. [TARGET: 10]                                       |
| <b>447</b>   | students have been taught mentoring and peer-training skills. [TARGET: 496]   | <b>23</b>   | parents are supporting artistic club coordinators trained in library methodologies. [SO FAR: 23; TARGET: 109]   |
| <b>1,060</b> | students have learned from these peer mentors. [TARGET: 1,038]  |             |   |



|           | Infrastructure   |               | Reach  |            | Activities   |
|-----------|--|---------------|--|------------|--|
|           | <b>PHASE IV</b>  |               | <b>PHASE IV</b>  |            | <b>PHASE IV</b>  |
| <b>15</b> | school libraries were built and equipped with furniture and books. [TARGET: 15]  | <b>27,374</b> | students have been reached by the project. In addition, an estimated 10,950 family members are also reading books taken home by students. [TARGET: 33,101] | <b>81</b>  | per cent of children were satisfied with their participation in reading and art clubs. [SURVEY OF 180 STUDENTS]            |
| <b>1</b>  | community library was built, furnished and equipped with supplies. [TARGET: 1]   | <b>120</b>    | teachers have been trained on reading animation techniques. [TARGET: 400]  | <b>34</b>  | <b>PHASE V</b><br>theatre clubs participated in the Lempira Theatre Festival.  |
| <b>28</b> | computers were distributed. [TARGET: 28]   | <b>9,079</b>  | students from schools with Read to Empower libraries visit the library. [TARGET: 6,423]  | <b>3</b>   | books have been published showcasing stories and drawings created by children who attend library activities. [TARGET: 3]   |
| <b>60</b> | tablets were provided to libraries. [TARGET: 60]   |               | <b>PHASE VI</b>  | <b>128</b> | schools have been visited by mobile libraries 197 times. [TARGET: 78 schools, 108 times]                                   |
|           | <b>PHASE V</b>   |               | students from school networks are expected to borrow books from mobile libraries or participate in "traveling backpack" events. [TARGET ONLY]              | <b>762</b> | art kits have been delivered to 254 art clubs. [TARGET: 288 kits, 254 clubs]   |
| <b>4</b>  | Reading spaces have been created, with training offered to children, teachers and parents who participate in the Reading Encouragement club. [TARGET: 4] | <b>2,516</b>  | students from schools with Read to Empower libraries are expected to visit the library. [TARGET ONLY]  | <b>109</b> | <b>PHASE VI</b><br>parents are supporting artistic club coordinators to be trained in library methodologies. [TARGET ONLY] |
|           | <b>PHASE VI</b>  |               |  |            |  |
| <b>3</b>  | libraries have been inaugurated and fully equipped. [TARGET: 11]   | <b>1,941</b>  |  |            |  |
| <b>3</b>  | libraries each received 804 books. [TARGET: 11]  |               |  |            |  |
| <b>8</b>  | more libraries (five school libraries and three public libraries) are in the finalization process.   |               |  |            |  |

The libraries are places where children meet to talk about the books they love.





## Reading Culture

31,624

### PHASE V

books have been delivered to 33 school libraries, two public libraries, one community library and four mini libraries. [TARGETS: 33 schools, two public libraries, one community library, four mini libraries]

7

project team members have received library-science training.

48.6

per cent of teachers have adequate practical knowledge of reading promotion techniques and strategies. (At the beginning of the project, only 5.7% did.) [TARGET: 80%]

### PHASE VI

2,821

family members of students are expected to read library books at home. [TARGET ONLY]

2,516

students are expected to borrow books from a mobile library or participate in a "traveling backpack" event. [TARGET ONLY]

### PHASE IV Survey of 180 students

50

per cent of parents read with their children at home.

78

per cent of children read up to 50 books a year!

32

per cent of children said their parents motivated them to read, and 30.6% said teachers also encouraged them to read.

59

per cent of children said they know more words now.

47

per cent said their reading and writing skills have improved.

57

per cent felt they could express themselves better.

18

per cent said they were now better spellers.

### Gender transformation: Beyond expectations

Before becoming involved in library activities, many girls said they had expected to take on traditional roles in their family and community when they left school. However, developing their reading skills and participating in art classes gave them the confidence to imagine a different future. Here's what these students had to say about how the project helped change how they view themselves and others.

- ▶ **75%** believe that boys and girls are equally intelligent and deserve the same opportunities.
- ▶ Only **4%** said the most important thing for girls is to get married and have children.
- ▶ **96%** believe that girls have the right to study and fulfill their dreams.
- ▶ **68%** said they learned about their rights in the library.
- ▶ **48%** said they now know about child protection.
- ▶ **51%** know how to report abusive situations.
- ▶ **15** gender-equality workshops were held with teachers.



Children from an art club paint a mural at a new library in Intibucá.



A STORY OF CHANGE

# Character Development

Carmen discovered a place for herself in the world thanks to the books that inspire her.

**Carmen and her mother, Mérida, spend time together in the library reading, talking about books and making friends.**



Carmen loves to read books about princesses in faraway lands. She reads about adventurers and immerses herself in the worlds she discovers in the books at the Read to Empower library nearest to where she lives in Intibucá. She reads books about girls who, like her, go to school, spend time with friends and have families they care about.

Carmen's books help her examine and understand the world around her, a world that doesn't always have space for girls like her – girls in wheelchairs who aren't necessarily represented in the books she reads. Even so, the library brings her closer to envisioning a future for herself in a way that only books can – waking up her imagination and inspiring her to look beyond the day-to-day.

Carmen's father pushes her wheelchair for 45 minutes to bring her from their home to the library. He then goes to work to support the family while Carmen's mother, Mérida, supervises the library visits and encourages her daughter to read and socialize as much as possible.



"Carmen is a gift of life to me," says Mérida, a former Plan International sponsored child. "She makes me happy and proud. I come here to watch her develop. When I see her, I think about what a great person she will be when she grows up and how far she will go. I want her to go far. I want her to surpass me!"

Thanks to the library, Carmen can develop greater reading comprehension, practise her social skills and meet new people. This is possible because the library is designed to be accessible to students who use wheelchairs or mobility devices, creating an atmosphere where no one feels excluded.

With this safe space in her community, made accessible with children like her in mind, Carmen can now comfortably enter a place where she feels supported, respected and free. At the library, Carmen does more than just read books; she spends time around children her age, takes part in the community, expresses herself through art and joins singalongs and group events.

The Read to Empower project has built and cultivated a space where Carmen is welcomed and celebrated – a space where she can join other children her age in play, learning and connection.

A STORY OF CHANGE

# Libraries Built With Love

The friendships that develop among Plan staff, teachers and students nurture a sense of community.

The Read to Empower project isn't just a job for the staff at Plan International in Honduras. Employees often travel more than two hours to get to the libraries, because they appreciate the importance of literature and art in children's lives.

They also know how critical it is to a child's early development to spend time in a welcoming and inspiring space. In areas of the country where safety is a daily concern, a library is a safe space where children and community members can meet, share time together and feel a sense of hope.

"When children spend time in the library, it's changing their lives," says Darwin Amador, one of these staff members. "This isn't just about having a building with four walls. It's about having a place to dream. The library is where we all come together to create community."

Without a doubt, Amador feels passionate about the project's success. He speaks about the children and the programs with devotion and a sense of awe. He talks about his fellow teachers, who have become his friends, with great respect.



"The teachers and administrators also form a community of their own and become a part of the larger community," he says. "It's more than just numbers for us. Our hearts and minds are affected by the changes we feel."

Amador's words and approach to the project are important reminders that a library offers so much more than books and chairs – it is an extension and reflection of the entire community. "These libraries are built with love," Amador says proudly.

**Amador (top right) and other Plan staff attend a mime club presentation at a new school library in Santa Barbara.**

“Children are changing their lives. This isn't just about having a building with four walls. It's about having a place to dream.”

– Darwin Amador,  
Plan International Honduras staff member



PHASE VI  
STORIES OF CHANGE

# Mother Mentors

Two students share how their moms' work in the libraries inspires them.



Elsi wants to be a community leader like her mother.

**ELSI:** Just after sunrise, Elsi wakes to find her mother preparing for another busy day. Her mother is the president of the school development council in her community, leading the construction of the first Read to Empower library in Intibucá.

"Presidents are usually men, but my mommy is a president," says Elsi. "I see my mommy talking and people listening to her. I want to be like her!"

In Elsi's case, she wants to become a doctor so she can take care of people in her community. "To be a good doctor, I must be a good student and read a lot," she says. "My classmates and I are happy to know that soon we will have our library with lots of books."

Elsi's teachers have encouraged her to join the Storytelling Club at the library to build her confidence in speaking in front of others. "I want other people to understand what I say and speak without embarrassment so I can talk to many people and tell them about the books I read," she says. "When I saw the libraries



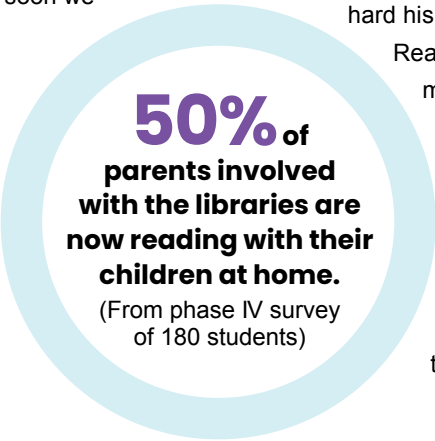
Alex wants to be a soccer player one day.

in Lempira and those children talking, playing and making art, I wanted to do it too." Elsi then stops talking and runs to her mom to give her a hug.

**ALEX:** Like many boys his age, Alex loves playing soccer with his friends. He dreams of becoming a professional player and moving beyond the challenges he and others face in his country. "I know it's a difficult dream, but it's not impossible," he says.

Where does that determination come from? Sure, soccer players like Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo inspire him, but his real hero is his mom. Alex says he has seen how hard his mother has worked with others to build the Read to Empower library in Santa Barbara. She's a member of the school development council, which is leading the project.

When he needs proof that dreams do come true, he walks by the library and reminds himself that it used to be a vacant piece of land. "Now there is a library, thanks to my mom and my friends' moms. Because of her, I know to get through tough times."





Zoila says she loves her family, the Read to Empower library and her goat. “My family makes me happy, the library makes me happy, and my goat makes me happy,” says the nine-year-old.

“I’m going to be a veterinarian, so I read books about animals and nature. I like books that have lots of colours and are full of trees, mountains and beautiful places. There are times when I read and my goat accompanies me. She stares at the book as if she understands what it says,” Zoila says with a laugh.

*Zoila, centre with her goat, is joined by her friends, who also love Zoila’s goat and the library!*







# Storytime Adventures

This children’s book is a passport into their richly layered dreams.



Young readers wrote stories and painted illustrations to accompany them. Their work was published in *El Árbol de los Libros* (*The Tree of Books*).



## The Brilliant Library

By Hector, 10

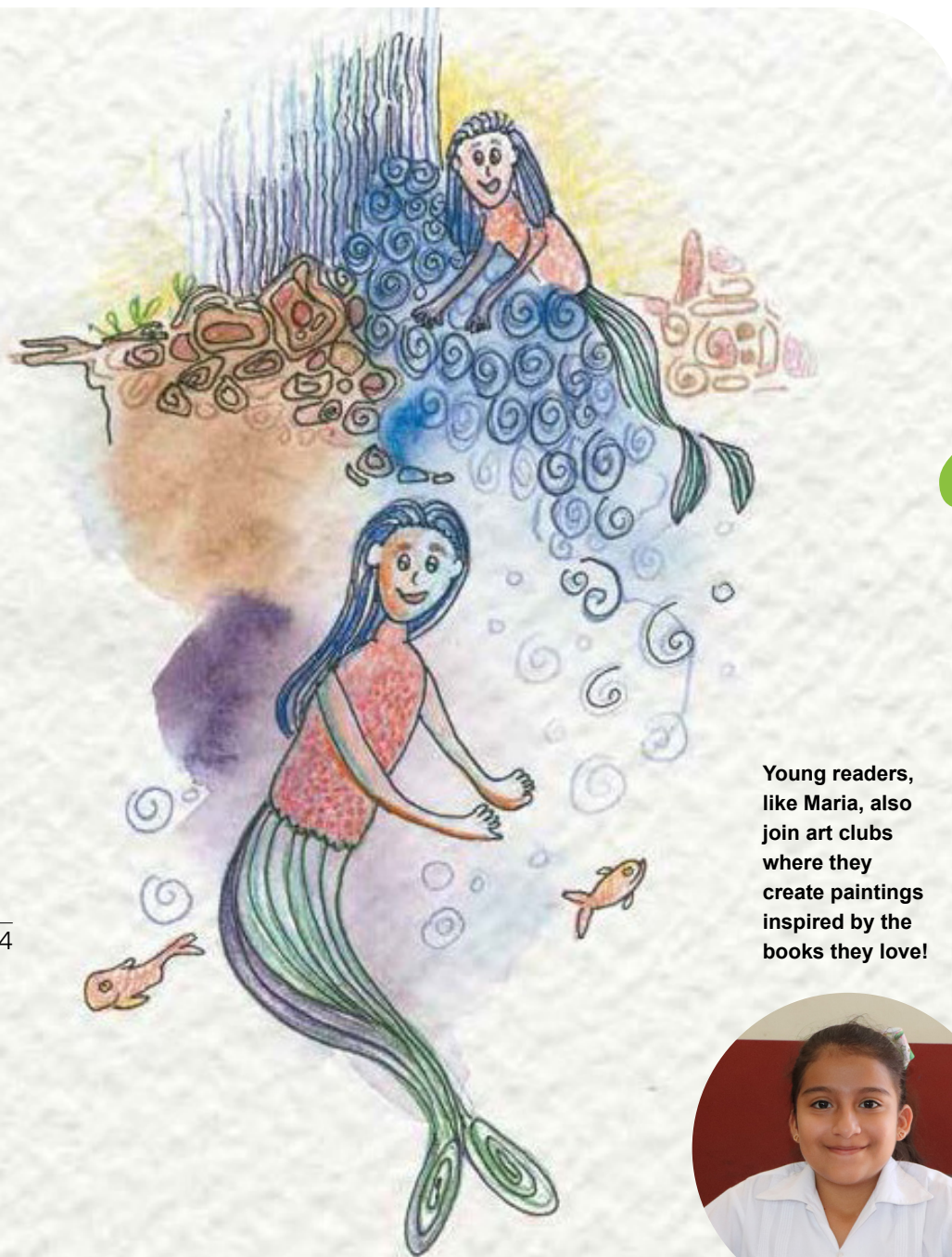
Once upon a time there was a little boy who was very sad because he didn't go to school.

One day, he saw a light shining on himself, and went closer to see what that light was.

When he arrived at the place, he saw a house full of books. It was a very nice and bright library.

Since then, the boy visits the library every day and reads many books.





Young readers, like Maria, also join art clubs where they create paintings inspired by the books they love!



## A Sea of Words

When you can bring to life the scenes you imagine in books, it's pure magic.

“My favorite stories are those of adventure and those of princesses. My favorite princess is the Little Mermaid, because she ventured into the unknown, into new possibilities.

“My community has no sea nearby, but I saw beautiful images of the ocean in the books, the blue that merged with the clearest blue in the sky. Only ships could break that boundary between sea and sky. My favourite thing to paint is landscapes inspired by the sea. Last week, I started reading a novel about an elderly fisherman who goes out to the sea to fish. He caught a fish so big that it didn't fit in his little sailboat, so he had to carry it like that in the water.

“I've always wanted to see the sea, and I finally got the chance when our family went to Roatan. I loved the white sand, the sun and the crystal-clear water where you see the fish swimming between your toes!

“Being there, with the salty air, reminded me of Ariel [the Little Mermaid], the old man from the novel and everything I've read about oceans. It made me think that the sea must be like a library: How many stories remain to be discovered? Sitting on the beach, I waited for the sirens from the stories to appear until I turned into one!”

– Maria, 10

PHASES V & VI  
STORIES OF CHANGE

# Meet Two Change Makers

## Life in Lempira without the Read to Empower library? Simply unimaginable!

**YESSICA:** Yessica holds the third-highest-ranking position on her local council. As the municipal secretary, this 22-year-old takes every opportunity to champion the community's involvement in supporting the Read to Empower libraries. That's because the library changed her life.

"I have the library in my heart!" she says. "Every day, I draw on what I learned there. I keep reading. I keep dreaming."

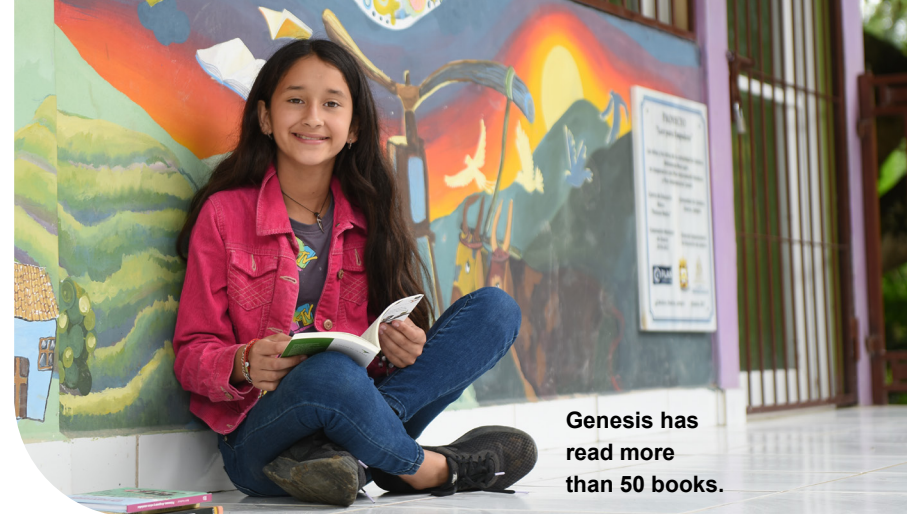
When she recalls her childhood, Yessica says going to the library is her fondest memory. "My life changed forever with the library. There, I discovered that I was valuable as a child and that poverty was hard but could be broken. Reading and acting in the theatre took away my fears. Even today, it surprises me how I went from being a fearful and quiet girl to an extrovert!"

Yessica is also studying to be a lawyer – a goal she wouldn't have imagined as a child. "I always ask myself how my life would be if I had not had the opportunity to read in a library. Maybe I would be fine, but the truth is that I would never have been here now. And I'm very happy."

**GENESIS:** It takes Genesis a nanosecond to share the titles of two of her favourite books. "I like *Happy Fierce* and *The Voice of the Tree*," she says. "*Happy Fierce* is the story of a wolf who wanted to be kind



**Yessica's journey from quiet child to extrovert who wants to change the world started in a Read to Empower library.**



**Genesis has read more than 50 books.**

and loving. He wanted to play, but the other wolves forced him to be angry. In the end, he was able to be kind. I learned that people can't be how you want them to be; you must respect them. *The Voice of the Tree* is about a tree that gives advice about the good and bad things in the world."

And what advice does Genesis have for others? "Keep reading!" The 12-year-old says she's smart, but books make her smarter and braver. "The books I read about women helped me a lot because women are not valued here," she explains. "My mom tells me that I can succeed in life, and my sister says that since she reads books about animals in this library, she wants to be a veterinarian. I read a book about a woman who went out in the world, even though people criticized her and said she shouldn't. I think the message from the book is that women can do many things. We can be professionals, we can earn our own money, and we can get out of poverty."





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**The Read to Empower project creates spaces where children can meet friends, fall in love with storytelling and imagine the futures they'd like to have.**

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## About Plan International Canada

Plan International Canada is a member of a global organization dedicated to advancing children's rights and equality for girls. Plan International has been building powerful partnerships with and for children for over 85 years and is now active in more than 80 countries. We stand with children, especially girls, wherever they are oppressed, exploited, left behind or not equally valued. We're determined optimists, and we will continue to persevere **until we are all equal**.