



SAN MIGUEL, ECUADOR

A traveling dad finds his way home

Carlitos Daquilema's hands reveal the marks of a maker. His hardened calluses stretch over rough palms to document decades of labor. He is a builder and a father, and through an opportunity with WE Charity, he found a way to be best at both.

Carlitos Daquilema stood at a crossroads most mornings, waiting with a shovel.

Like many migrant workers, Carlitos would leave his wife and children in their rural village in Ecuador's Chimborazo province while he traveled to densely populated urban centers in search of work.

Holding his tool in hand, measuring tape attached to his belt, he'd jockey for position beside other men along the roadside of a busy intersection in cities such as Cuenca or Riobamba, nestled between the Andes Mountains. Together, the men waited for a drive-by job offer.

Carlitos had known this wandering life since he was eight, spending summers shadowing his father, moving from worksite to distant worksite to earn his own money to buy pencils and books for the upcoming school year, all the while imagining becoming an architect or engineer. But after primary school, at age 12, Carlitos was forced to drop out. There was no high school in his small community of San Miguel and the costs to travel to a school elsewhere were impossible for his family to cover. So the construction site became his classroom, and his dad, the teacher.

Carlitos stopped dreaming of professions that required higher learning, and instead followed in his father's footsteps to find work as a builder on residential or commercial job sites. Sometimes he'd get picked up early by a crew and was paid in cash. Those were the good days. On the so-so days, Carlitos would put in a full day's work but receive only a portion of the promised payment. On bad days, he would wait for hours until the sun dipped low in the sky and then go back to a rented room with empty pockets, steeling himself to return to the intersection the following day.

Back home, Carlitos was also building a family. He and his wife, Rosario, started to have children, and his earnings became even more important. Once he'd made enough money to provide for his family for one or two months, Carlitos boarded a public bus for the journey back to San Miguel, back to the isolated cluster of households in the Palmira Desert, and the poor soil and few job prospects that kept men away.

PILLAR

★ EDUCATION

Carlitos Daquilema: father, builder, provider



ABOVE: Rosario Daquilema with her daughter Maria Delfina, her fourth child and the first person in the family to graduate high school.

FACING PAGE: Carlitos in his role as WE Charity foreman on a construction site in the Amazon

Carlitos was on a rare visit home in 2008 when WE Charity held an inaugural community meeting in San Miguel to discuss the future of education for local children. The existing primary school, the one Carlitos had attended as a boy and the one his own children now attended, was too small, and there was still no high school. He went to the meeting determined that his children would have options that weren't available to him growing up.

In Ecuador's rural communities like San Miguel, limited educational opportunities and intergenerational poverty are unwelcome legacies of the hacienda system. This land estate scheme started under colonial rule in the 1530s and continued until the 1960s. It exploited Indigenous populations, stripping families like Carlitos' of their land and rights. Although no longer practiced, the system left rural Indigenous communities lacking access to clean water, health resources, viable land for crops, job opportunities and quality education.





In 2006, WE Charity began partnering with Indigenous communities in the Andes mountain range to help restore those rights and break generational cycles of poverty, by implementing its five-pillar approach to sustainable development. In partnership with the local government and community leaders, WE Charity designed a school campus for San Miguel that would not only add new classrooms to the primary school but would also include a brand-new government-funded high school.

Carlitos' youngest children had a real chance at a secondary school education, provided he and the fathers and mothers of San Miguel picked up their tools and put their hard-won construction skills to work on the most significant project ever built in their community. There is a long-standing tradition in Ecuador of people readily volunteering their time to work for the common good of everyone. While there is no equivalent word for it in English, in Kichwa (the most common Indigenous language in Ecuador), this practice of coming together is called a *minga*.

Several mingas were called. The first minga was to build the fence that would surround the future campus. Carlitos reorganized his travel to be at home. At least one representative from each of the 260 families living in San Miguel participated. Rosario joined her husband, putting her own hands to use in the construction. The mother of seven didn't want her children to repeat her life of illiteracy.

Carlitos' commitment, passion and experience stood out. WE Charity hired him as head foreman to lead the construction work and manage the mingas. This career shift ended his relentless search for work, Carlitos explains in a mixture of Spanish and Kichwa. "I no longer needed to go look in the city for a room, or find a friend, or beg someone to lend me a small room. I became more confident and hopeful."

During construction, Carlitos pored over the architect's designs and learned to read blueprints. His desire to become a construction expert was reawakened as he cut his teeth on a more complicated floor plan. The high school would be the first two-story building in the community. As WE Charity installed clean water stations at the school and built new and better latrines, a playground, a kitchen and a school garden, Carlitos was involved at every step, gaining experience and a sense of job security.

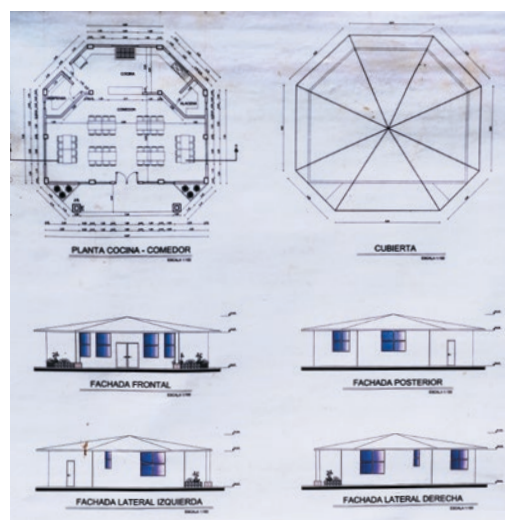
Carlitos became emotional when he thought about his journey with WE Charity. The quiet man who smiles easily now had tears in his eyes. "I remember when I finished the first set of classrooms, my daughter came home with her backpack, and she said, 'Dad, how did it happen?' And I said, 'It is for you. You have to take advantage of it.'"

FACING PAGE: Rosario participated in mingas alongside her husband, Carlitos, to help build the school for their children. She's also a farmer and raises guinea pigs, a high-protein staple in the region's diet.



Carlitos passes on his construction knowledge to his son Luis Ruben, who wants to become an electrician. Before that, he plans to be the first male in the family to graduate high school.

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On the road again

With construction underway in San Miguel, WE Charity continued its work with other Indigenous communities throughout Chimborazo. Carlitos became the go-to construction foreman and ambassador for WE Charity, on a mission to improve access to education for more would-be students. He motivated parents to volunteer in mingas by sharing the success story of San Miguel's school and worked side by side with the architect, who joked that Carlitos was going to put him out of a job. Carlitos wasn't just reading blueprints, he was helping to create them.

When WE Charity expanded to Napo province in 2013 to partner with Indigenous and rural communities living in the Amazon rainforest, Carlitos was once again away from home. This time, he wasn't leaving to find work—he was leaving *because of* his work. He loaded his tools into a canoe and traveled to communities dotting the Napo River to lead school infrastructure projects.

As Carlitos built new schools, he also rebuilt himself into the role model he had always wanted to be for his children.

TOP: San Miguel school campus welcomes primary and high school students.

ABOVE: The architect's design for a school kitchen. Carlitos keenly pores over the blueprints, thirsty to enhance his knowledge.

The San Miguel school campus was the largest project undertaken in the community. Through the partnership with WE Charity, students in the community access primary and secondary education. Parents send their children to school with confidence that they can attain a high school diploma.



“Before, I could not be in peace, but thank God I started with WE,” he shares. “I remember when I was a boy studying in my classroom and it was only a block house with a thatched roof. I always remember that when I see my children. Now they are in a nice classroom, studying year after year, and they are moving forward. That’s a joy.”

In 2015, the first cohort graduated from San Miguel High School. Years of labor and commitment were realized as young men and women became the first in their families to earn a diploma and start a new community tradition—high school graduation—that would continue year after year.

WANDA O'BRIEN



The construction site in the Los Rios community is in the Amazon rainforest. As WE Charity’s head foreman, Carlitos travels to WE Charity project sites across Ecuador to lead construction crews and organize mingas. In Los Rios, the team builds the school kitchen, new classrooms and a clean water system.





During mingas, moms and dads dedicate their time and expertise. Los Rios community president Juan Granja (above, far left), is a WE Charity advocate who believes education is the cornerstone of prosperity. “The school is a luxury for the community. With the new classrooms, the students will listen to the teachers easier and will concentrate more. They will have the desire to study.”



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