

# Sponsor Child Visit in Loreto, Peru with Plan International

## Contributing to the Community – A Rewarding Experience

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*Written by: Claudia van't Hullenaar, Sponsor of a Child in Peru through Plan International Germany*

During my last visit to Peru in July-August 2022, I had the opportunity to visit the child I sponsor through [Plan International Germany](#) in a community in the department of Loreto in Peru.

Plan International is a development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls.

I have been involved in a children's sponsorship programme for well over a decade when I sponsored a boy, Fabian, in Peru. I formerly visited Fabian several times in one of the human settlements of Lima, Peru's capital with 10 million inhabitants. The project work in the Lima area where Fabian lives now has been completed. Sustainable improvements were achieved in the core areas of work such as education, health, basic services and compliance with children's rights, and the community can now carry out the projects on their own. I wrote an insight report of an earlier visit to Fabian's community back in 2013 to show how Plan works with the members of the community and local authorities and what impact it has. There was no need for an interpreter for communication, as I speak Spanish. That report in English can be accessed [here](#).

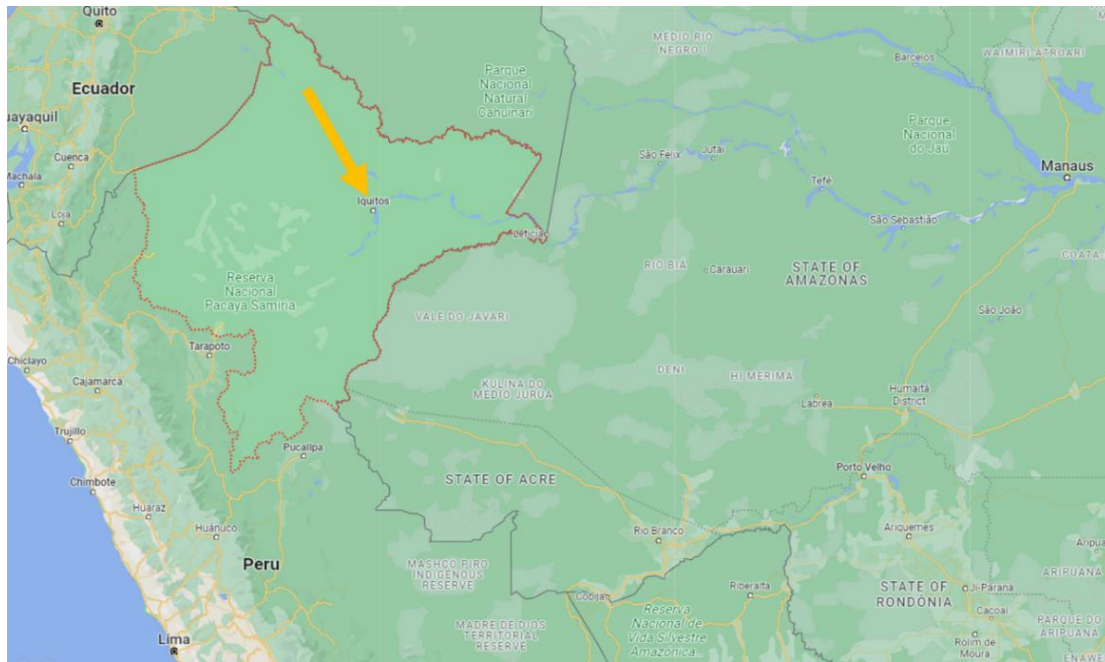
Now I would visit my new sponsor child Jesús, a toddler, for the first time. For me it was a return after decades to Loreto, which is Peru's largest state located northwest in the remote area of the vast Amazon Rainforest region. However, it was my first time coming to Iquitos, capital of this state. I was planning a trip into the rainforest, so I took the opportunity to plan my sponsor child visit and learn about the work of [Plan International Peru](#) in Loreto, and obtain a personal impression of the organisation's work here.



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To give some geographical perspective, Loreto is one of the most sparsely populated regions and the capital can only be reached by air and river, there is no road. Loreto is home to one of the most biodiverse areas on Earth.



Plan International’s work in Peru addresses early child development, education, empowerment of girls and children, adolescents, women and communities, and employability for young people in particular women to make vital changes that tackle the root causes of discrimination against girls, exclusion, and vulnerability, in particular teen pregnancy, achievement of economic autonomy in a traditionally male-dominated society, and risk management and adaptation to climate change.

Plan’s Loreto Programme Unit is relatively new (green zone in image right), and they coordinated my visit with my sponsored child, his family and the communities. I was the first child sponsor visiting the Loreto Programme Unit.



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When we were about to land in the capital, I was in awe about the endless green carpet surrounding the city from above, and from this image memories rose from my childhood years.



Because of its location this region is particularly vulnerable to effects of the changing climate. There is also an enormous gap that exists between men and women which is reflected in the high rates of sexual violence, femicide, high school drop-out rates for girls and in the huge gender pay gap.

Plan International Loreto works to end these inequalities.



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While being in Iquitos, also known as gateway to the jungle, I learned quickly about the diverse, interesting facets and specific vibe of the jungle town, but also problematic faces of Iquitos. Garbage thrown on many streets throughout Iquitos until it is being picked up, is a regular situation as in many Peruvian cities. A felt sense of hectic, and the noise pollution made by the noisiest type of vehicle in the city, the moto-taxi, I feel, is a cause for trouble on the mind besides that is a serious environmental problem.



On the day of our visit, we first had an introductory presentation at the Plan office about Plan International Peru and the projects implemented in Loreto, extended by protection and biosafety protocol briefings at that time of the trip. We also met some of the staff of the communications teams and teams who take care of the sponsorships from all over the world.



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Soon after, we left to the districts with large human settlement areas where many people live in great poverty and unemployment is very high.



Problems are in the infrastructure like no running water in many cases, frequent power failures, and unpaved roads, which make it hard to move forward in rainy seasons or after intense rainfalls. This district is only one affected by the rural exodus caused partly by the flood zones around Iquitos which caused and causes high immigration rates in the region of Iquitos. Indifference to personal, family, and neighborhood resources is also common in the area, in particular the poorer ones.



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We met my sponsor child Jesús and his mom Adriana and some family members in the community hall. Jesús mom had prepared a welcome poster for me and had bought some local fruits to share with us. This welcoming gesture of hospitality and warm welcome touched me.



Jesús is still very young and shy. My son Enmanuel engaged with the young children, played with him, and his uncle of almost the same age (!) and a friend. They did the jumping rope and played toddler soccer. They ran so much that they all had wet t-shirts, ended up laughing, and having lots of fun.



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During this time, I had the opportunity to spend a couple of hours with them and speak with Jesús' mother Adriana.

We shared about each other's lives, and I asked a lot of questions.

I noticed that my dedicated and deep listening to her opened her up and we developed an appreciation for each other.

I was so inspired to see what a forward thinking, resourceful and loving person with many ideas she is. She is also very clear about what she desires for her son's future and education and for herself.

Finally, Jesús was open to contact and first touchpoints.

Reluctantly, yet curious, "Hmmmhhmmm...".



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Soon after, we started playing with not much words yet with children’s language, movements, laughs, openness, playing, and simply having fun.



As in my former visits to sponsor child family’s, I realised again how important it is for organisation’s like Plan International to have the community support and engagement.

Persons like Adriana actively participate in the betterment of their own lives. They recognize the opportunity given to co-shape and change their situation, particularly being a woman in this still very patriarchic environment.





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I was very happy to have had the chance to visit and that it all turned out as imagined. Our visit is a way of showing interest, appreciation and care for their lives and situations. That is what makes these visits so rewarding as well.

After this first bonding and enriching stay, it was time to say good-bye.



We continued to another nearby community to learn about other Plan sponsorship projects.

Here we met with two women volunteers of the area, who told us about their experience since Plan International arrived at the area and about the project Youth Economic Empowerment and how young people in the area have been benefitting from this project.



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I was impressed with Paola, a changemaker and strong community leader, so passionate and full of energy, with a clear vision and preparedness to bring about change with concrete ideas of what needs to be done. Her energy to drive the things forward in her community was contagious.



To conclude our day-visit in the outskirts, we made a tour around another Plan sponsorship district and received more details of what had been done so far with Plan's support.

One of the visible implementations of practical help, were the various loudspeakers, that were donated during the pandemic time to offer support to children's continued education. At that time, onsite classes were suspended and the only way to have classes was remotely, so the loudspeakers were connected to the radio station that broadcasted the classes, and in this way, children could further their education.

What a great idea how to reach young people in these areas through this initiative.



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It was a very enriching day! Not only did we learn so much, I had the opportunity of having a real lived experience and remembering again why it matters to support programs that help develop and increase social justice and equity.

As mentioned, this was not my first visit to such an underdeveloped area, yet I must say, connecting with people's lives and livelihoods, spending time there, talking with people, seeing with my very eyes, and gaining a personal impression, is an additional way for me of taking action for change.

By sharing my story, I not only want to acknowledge the privilege I have, to be able to visit my sponsor child, his family and these communities but also raise awareness about the different realities for people in the global south through this article.



As a mother, I am grateful that my son Enmanuel, now a young man, accompanied me again on such a meaningful visit as he did in the earlier years to see Fabian in Lima. It is an invaluable way of expanding our own horizons. It reminds us that there is a whole other world where and how our fellow human brothers and sisters live and relate. It deepens our understanding on the realities and concerns beyond our own in the western world.



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Through my authentic interest and presence, I can show them care and that they are valued. It helps me develop more compassion and I know that the time I spend with them, witness and listen, is important to the sponsored child's family, and other community members. I was inspired by their stories and established new relationships and experienced wonderful people and true changemakers!

As the day came slowly to an end, I expressed how impressed I was with the caring, committed and responsible local Plan International Loreto team, united in one vision for the children, boys and girls, female and male adolescents, men and in particular women.

"This was our first visit from a sponsor that we received at the Loreto Programs Unit and it motivates us to continue working with the commitment we made to our Loreto children. The visits of Plan International sponsors have great meaning and value for the girls, boys and families who welcome them", said Ivonne Cuzcano, Local Sponsorship Coordinator PU Loreto.

After my various stops in several places in the Amazon region, I have seen there is a lot to do.

I believe we must strengthen agents of change and amplify them. And my wish is that in some way I can participate in that, support them, and inspire others to do so as well.



I also want to take the opportunity and appreciate, and thank for the work of organisations like Plan International, and others, who do important work to improve people's lives, in particular those of children, young people and women.

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At the same time, listening, and witnessing, is something that can be done in our communities at home and thus being a light for others.



Translation: “We are the only owners of our future.”

As I said it before at my first sponsored child community visit almost ten years ago, this visit was a very rewarding experience that really matters, and I would recommend it to anyone.

I know I will be back.

*Written by: Claudia van't Hullenaar, Sponsor of a Child in Peru through Plan International Germany - October 2022*

*Photo Credits: Claudia van't Hullenaar, Plan International Peru Loreto Programme Unit, Google Maps*

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