

Two Mothers, One Hope

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Just two weeks ago, as part of my job with Trócaire, I travelled to a small Mayan community in Central Guatemala to meet the family that featured on this year's Trócaire Box Appeal for Lent. The family are the father, Julio; the mother, Ilma; Miriam, thirteen; Julio Jnr, eleven; Deborah, four; and baby Gloria. They are part of a tight-knit, hard-working community who are being pushed further into poverty due to the effects of climate change. During my time in this community, I couldn't help but feel an emotional connection to Ilma, knowing how closely our lives, though different, were intertwined by our roles as mothers.

Prolonged droughts on one end of the scale and erratic storms causing flooding on the other are destroying their crops and income. Ilma and Julio grow cardamon and corn to earn money for the family. They used to plant crops twice a year but now only plant once because of the extreme weather conditions. Meaning they no longer have an income from their crops, something they could rely on in the past. Miriam's local teacher in their community said she was the brightest student in her school, a school that only serves children up to the end of primary.

Going to secondary school means



Miriam has to leave her community and travel two hours by bus every day to get there, something she is happy to do, but for Ilma and Julio things are becoming worrying; their failed crop means they are struggling to afford the €5 a week for the bus that would take her there. Ilma knows the day will come when she has to choose between feeding the children or sending Miriam on the bus to school, a choice I couldn't imagine having to make as a mother.

Sadly this situation is not unique to Guatemala, this community or Ilma's family. At Trócaire, we believe that climate change is one of the greatest threats facing humanity. The deep injustice is that those who have done



the least to cause the climate crisis, and who have the least capacity to recover from its impact, are suffering most severely from it.

In so many countries around the world, storms and droughts are wiping out livelihoods; often children have to leave school permanently so they can work to help support their families. Sadly countries where people are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change are also regions where children already receive fewer years of schooling. The effects of climate change have had a disproportionate and disastrous impact on children's education in some of the world's most fragile countries.

Ilma and Julio are raising bright,

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outgoing, generous children, like all the mothers in the community. When speaking with Miriam, we asked her what she wanted to be when she grows up. Her answer didn't come immediately; eventually, she replied, 'a teacher'. As a mother, protecting your children from the realities of our world is something I now see as a privilege; Ilma doesn't have this privilege, and Miriam knows that her ambition may never become a reality, as with each storm and drought the family's ability to send her to school is threatened.

Ilma, with sadness in her eyes, said she fears that the future for her daughter will be no better; in fact, it could be worse, as climate change pushes families further into poverty.

That is why when my children asked if they could do a bun sale at the end of our street to 'get Miriam the bus to school', I was so pleased to see their empathy but also their appreciation for what we take for granted every day. When my children tell me what they want to be when they grow up, I love to tell them they can be whatever they set their heart on. It's incredibly unfair that Ilma can't tell that to Miriam when she dreams about her future.

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