



How OFELIA is creating systemic change through libraries in rural communities

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OFELIA's mission

Starting from the creation of rural libraries, we envision an economically, social and environmentally sustainable change, which can be extended to many surrounding communities thanks to the scalability of projects. Most importantly, this mindset shift shall not come at the expense of local culture; a physical and digital archive combined with a more aware population is the perfect recipe to protect people, particularly indigenous knowledge from external exploitation and to pass it on to future generations.

The goal of our actions goes beyond simple education: all project beneficiaries must understand the true variety of opportunities for self-fulfillment and community development, because only in this way they will be citizens of the world.

Areas of Intervention and Progress Indicators

OFELIA's programs focus on priority areas that together drive systemic change:

Area of Intervention	Examples of Progress Measures
Education	Number of active users, literacy improvement rates, classes delivered, and changes in reading habits.
Access to Information	Variety of materials available, number of books borrowed, and workshops on information literacy.
Digital Inclusion	Number of devices deployed, access to online content, frequency of resource updates.
Youth & Women Entrepreneurship	STEM workshops, mentorship programs, and new local businesses or start-ups created.
Partnerships & Resource Mobilization	Internal and external resources mobilized, institutional collaborations established.
Community Mobilization & Policy Engagement	Participation in local governance, policy changes inspired by library programs.

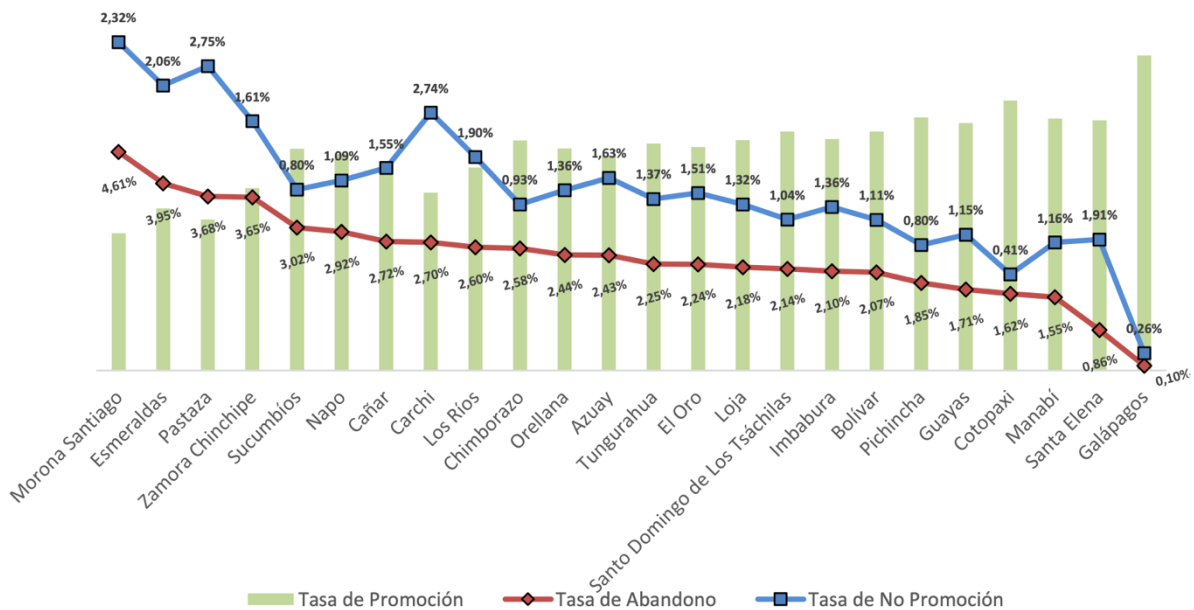
OFELIA works in close partnership with public institutions, local governments, international organizations, NGOs, and academic institutions to ensure both local ownership and long-term sustainability.

Education in rural contexts

In an ever-changing, increasingly complex world, education remains the cornerstone of empowerment for individuals and communities. Although huge progresses were made in the diffusion of information - mainly thanks to the internet –, there is still a multitude of rural communities which cannot access the same learning resources as their urban and suburban counterparts. Furthermore, in developing countries these communities are exposed to major issues such as deteriorating school infrastructure, teacher shortages, and poor quality of teaching.

Take the case of Ecuador, a country where OFELIA already operates. According to the latest official data from the Ministry of Education, the worst performing provinces in terms of promotion and dropout rate are all located in the Amazon Region. The only exception is the Esmeraldas district, which is also a particularly rural area populated by Afro-Ecuadorian and Indigenous communities.

On the contrary, more urbanized regions such as Pichincha, Guayas and Manabí all show the highest schooling numbers.



Fuente: Portal Datos Abiertos - MINEDUC

This example serves to show the level of educational inequality between urban and more remote areas, an issue that extends almost globally and which is often addressed superficially, either by giving funds directly to the locals or by supplying them with educational material which they are not prepared to exploit properly.

OFELIA's approach is different: we focus on building capacity, infrastructure, and ownership so that change become lasting and self-sustaining.



2. Defining Systemic Change

To thrive in the long term, rural communities need to go through **systemic change**: this means deep and enduring transformation in their structures, behaviors, relationships, and values. This type of change involves all ecosystem actors, such as readers, educators & facilitators, families, micro-entrepreneurs, service providers, the broader community, local businesses, local governments, churches, and other social forces.

For change to become systemic, one-time interventions are not enough. OFELIA's projects go beyond addressing education or poverty alone. Other than just libraries, they build interdependent initiatives from within the community to strengthen social and economic networks. Young people and women are trained in entrepreneurship and are introduced to an international network of potential partners, investors, and export markets.

All libraries are interconnected, facilitating the exchange of knowledge, best practices, continuous modernization of library materials, and improved distribution of financial resources to ensure sustainability. The methodology aims to transform lives by fostering a love for learning, nurturing personal and collective development, and promoting a culture of collaboration and empowerment as foundations for long-term progress.

3. Our modus operandi

OFELIA's projects last from four to six years and, combining, infrastructure development, continuous training of educators and monitoring of results, while also constantly updating resources available; these include both books displayed in the library and e-learning materials.

Considering the growing importance of digital literacy and the complexity of providing online and offline educational resources in many rural communities, OFELIA has partnered with Beekee, a Swiss startup specialized in digital learning for low-resource contexts. The main product of interest in this collaboration is the Beekee Box, a pocket-sized device that can store a multitude of digital contents, easily accessible from any device without the need for internet connection.

Furthermore, Beekee provides a library management system (Collection) and a centralized Learning Management System (Moodle) for OFELIA, enabling the organization's staff to:

- monitor the library's activities at any time;
- frequently update learning materials and methodologies;
- track learning impact across all locations.

Together with the realization of libraries and their equipment, OFELIA also commits to training local educators for the use of new teaching resources; at the same time, it works on involving the community as a whole in the change process by promoting a learning and reading culture, so that all people can exploit the material available in the way that best fits them.

In the longer term, when approaching project maturity, the community should not only be more literate, but also economically educated, autonomous in handling finances and fully capable of preserving indigenous knowledge.



4. Targeted impact

The impact of rural libraries has been studied in many different contexts: a particularly virtuous case is that of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), an NGO which has established over 2,300 *Gonokendra Pathagar* (Union Libraries) throughout Bangladesh in the last 30 years, with a total membership of more than 10 million people.

The extended coverage achieved by BRAC is a great example of how scalable and impactful rural libraries can be: they are simple structures which can serve multiple purposes and, most importantly, can attract people of different age, gender and social class. Furthermore, equipment costs can be slashed with smart mechanisms such as book rotations with other libraries and schools, or even with spontaneous donations of materials from community members.

With regard to digital resources, modern systems such as those developed by Beekee make it a lot easier and cheaper to store offline-accessible large databases in a sustainable and space efficient manner.

As already mentioned, the hardware is complemented by advanced Learning Management Systems that enable the coordinating organization to update resources and monitor progress at any time, in a centralized way. It should be noted that, beyond the collaboration with Beekee, OFELIA has also developed an e-learning platform independently, which contains the methodology for the creating of rural libraries.

For these reasons, OFELIA strongly believes in the potential of rural libraries: despite its young age, the organization has already launched projects in Venezuela, Ecuador, Cameroon and Switzerland.

Some of these have already shown tangible impact; the community of Canaima (VE) has responded positively to the intervention, and educators are already undergoing training. This project is also expected to have very positive spillovers on other villages of the Amazonian region.

Another initiative is that in Le Grand-Saconnex, a highly multicultural Swiss community with 152 nationalities, which will have a long-awaited library and meeting point by 2027, thanks to OFELIA's swift action in mobilizing partners and developing an architectural plan.

With our projects, we aim to achieve impact on four different levels: in the first years the aim is to witness tangible improvements in education, digitalization and overall engagement with the library (Direct Service Impact), while also involving external actors in value creation (Extended DSI). In the longer term we expect an internalization of the change undergone; this should spark a shift to a forward-looking mindset, leaving the community with full awareness of external opportunities and an increased confidence in its own means once the project has reached maturity.

The impact targeted is not only of different size but also of different scope: communities will benefit from the presence of a library from an educational, social and most importantly economical point of view.



The table below summarizes the degrees of change and suggests possible indicators of progress.

Type of impact	Definition	Metrics
Direct Service Impact (DSI)	Immediate and tangible effects of establishing libraries on the communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education: number of users, increased literacy rates, classes delivered, changes in reading habits. - Access to information: variety of material available, books borrowed, workshops delivered on info literacy. - Digital inclusion: update rate of digital resources, access to online content, computers and tablets deployed. - Youth engagement: after-school activities, STEM workshops, mentorship programs.
Expanded DSI	Broader immediate effects of the library.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impact on schools: number of schools using library services and spaces, refresher courses delivered to teachers. - Geographical reach: number of users from nearby villages, % of population served (by age, gender, social status), support from local institutions, n. of educators also operating in near/remote communities.
Systemic Change	Long-term, sustained transformation in community structures, behaviors and values.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mobilized resources: financial resources directed to the project, library enlargements, frequency of renewal of learning materials. - Education: decrease in dropout rates, increase in promotions, number of people going to university. - Community growth: modernization of local governance practices, active community participation to municipal decisions, enhanced sense of belonging. - Economic progress: GDP Growth, new partnerships with institutions and companies, development of entrepreneurial culture, increase in tertiary jobs.
Paradigm Shift	Change in community horizons and underlying assumptions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reproduction of the project in nearby areas; - Development of new infrastructure to back up economic growth; - Spread of learning materials in foreign languages; - Integration of the new learning methods in local schools.

5. Conclusions

OFELIA's work demonstrates that libraries can be catalysts of systemic change—spaces where education, innovation, and cultural heritage intersect to build stronger, more equitable societies.

By bridging traditional and digital knowledge, empowering women and youth, and nurturing local leadership, we are helping communities evolve from dependence to autonomy, and from isolation to connection.

The library, once a quiet place of books, is now a hub of life, learning, and lasting transformation.