

# Children's rights and social justice

Case studies from Nicaragua  
as a resource for students  
and teachers





# Children's rights and social Justice: Case Studies from Nicaragua

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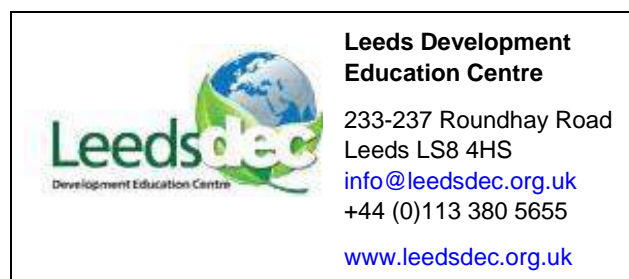
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## Children's rights and social Justice: Case Studies from Nicaragua

### Introduction

The eight case studies in this volume were written as part of the “*Education for Social Justice*” project coordinated by Leeds Development Education Centre. This project aimed to help make development education an embedded cross-curricular theme in European education policies, and in so doing help create a climate across Europe where young people felt enthusiastic about taking action for a fairer world. The project involved schools in Slovenia, Portugal, Latvia, Estonia and Bulgaria as well as the UK.

An important aspect of the project was its focus on action, and specifically on encouraging children and young people to get involved in action for social justice. As the project newsletter explains:

*“One of the key elements in creating change is to engage the next generation of decision-makers in active support for social change. Young people are often motivated by their ideals to take action, so the project will train and support teachers to deliver exciting lessons which make connections to live issues. This project will support the development of school communities where there is a strong ethos for Social Justice, providing teachers with materials and methodologies to inspire young people and giving students the confidence and the tools they need to make their actions successful and thus enthuse their peers.”*

To support this process, Leeds DEC asked partners in Nicaragua, Ghana and Cape Verde to provide case studies that could be used as educational resources. The case studies were to focus on social justice issues in each country, and the idea was to personalise each issue by telling the true story of an individual or group. As well as describing the problems people faced, the case studies described the actions they took to address the issues, and gave suggestions for the kind of actions that young people in northern countries could take to address similar issues in their own countries. In this way, northern young people's actions would be informed by the experiences of young people from the global South.

With support from Leeds DEC, the team from CESESMA in Nicaragua produced the eight case studies that make up this volume. They were piloted as classroom resources by the ESJ project partner schools, and are available in their original format on the project's website.\*

For this booklet, the eight original case studies have been given a new format, combining text and photos, and providing updated links to additional on-line resources. In a few cases, new information has been added to bring the stories up to date. As CESESMA's work focuses on children's rights, we also show how the social justice issues addressed correspond to specific human rights guaranteed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The eight case studies have a common format. Each starts with an introduction to the issue the story deals with. It then tells the true story of one or two particular children or young people who had to face the problem and decided to take action. As far as possible the stories are told by the young people in their own words. In some cases they had already written down or recorded their stories, and in others they gave interviews especially for these case studies. Each case study then has a section called “Action for change” which describes more fully what the young people did and what happened as a result. Then there is a section on “Ideas for action in other countries”. This includes both actions to support the young people featured in the case study (like buying Fair Trade coffee), and ideas on how to identify related

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\* <http://uk.educationforsocialjustice.org/mod/resource/view.php?id=18>

problems that affect your own community and take action on these too. At the end of each case study there are links to additional resources on-line. Whether you are an educator or a student (or both), how you use these case studies is up to you.

Finally, in reading and using the case studies, you should know that Osiris, Damaris, Jennifer, Yenderling, Mileidy, Jessica, Darling, Pablo and Rodolfo are real people who have opted to use their real names. They have had the chance to consider the possible risks of being identified in this way and the option of using a false name, but they have decided not to do so as they are proud of their achievements and choose not to disguise their identity. In the other two case studies (the young scavengers of La Chureca and the campaign against illegal alcohol) real names have been changed or removed to protect the young people involved.

## The case studies on the map



## Background on Nicaragua



The flag of Nicaragua

### Basic facts

**Area:** 130,373 km<sup>2</sup> (50,193 sq. mi)

**Population:** 6,071,045 (2012 census)

#### Ethnic make-up:

- 72% Mestizo (meaning of mixed indigenous and European, sometimes also African heritage)
- 14% White (majority being of Western European ancestry)
- 5% indigenous native American
- 9% African-American (mainly descendants of West-African people brought to Central America by British slave traders in 16th-19th centuries)

This means that while people of purely indigenous descent are a minority, more than three quarters of Nicaraguans have indigenous inheritance.

**Capital** (and largest city): Managua

**Government:** Presidential republic

**Gross National Income per capita:** US\$1,650  
(World Bank 2012)

Nicaragua is in Central America (see map) and also forms part of Latin America (but not to be confused with South America which is somewhere else). It is bordered on the north by Honduras and to the south by Costa Rica. Its western coastline is on the Pacific Ocean and the east is the Caribbean Sea. Nicaragua is the largest but most sparsely populated country of Central America. Most of the population lives on the western (Pacific) side of the country. The Eastern side still contains a large amount of tropical rainforest in the care of small indigenous communities. The Caribbean coast has a unique African-Caribbean culture distinct from the rest of the country.

### Language

About 97% of Nicaraguans speak Spanish, the country's official language. The indigenous Miskito and Mayangna languages are still spoken in the remote forests of the north-east. Nicaraguan creole, which is a Caribbean patois with English vocabulary and West-African grammar, similar to Jamaican, is spoken in the African-Caribbean communities of the Caribbean coast.

### Climate

Nicaragua is a tropical country lying 11 - 15 degrees north of the equator. There are only two seasons: the hot rainy season from May to October, and the hot dry season from November to April. In lowland areas in the rainy season temperatures are typically 27°-32°, and in the dry season 30°-35°. However, in the northern mountain area the temperatures are cooler. In most of the country there is little or no rain in the dry season and the land becomes parched and burnt, but in the east there is rain all year round, permitting a tropical rainforest climate.

## History

### Before the Spanish invasion

The first settlers probably came to Nicaragua from the north many thousands of years ago. Unlike their Mayan neighbours, the first Nicaraguans were tribal peoples who didn't leave any striking monuments or written history; however their culture and language were probably influenced by the Aztec and the Mayan kingdoms to the north.

### Spanish Colonisation



The Spanish colonial empire expanded into Nicaragua in the early sixteenth century when the conquistadors came into contact with a number of indigenous groups. Although Chief Diriangén (pictured) led his people in a strong resistance struggle, still remembered in song and legend, the Nicaraguan tribes were often at war with one another and didn't unite to repel the invaders. This made it easy for the well-armed

Spanish to colonise the country and add it to their growing American empire.

### Independence

Spain withdrew from Central America in 1821, when Nicaragua and four other Central American states declared their independence on 15th September (now Independence Day in Nicaragua). They initially joined the Mexican empire but broke away in 1823 and formed the United Provinces of Central America. Nicaragua left the union in 1838 and became an independent republic.

### The United States and Nicaragua

In 1857, after less than twenty years of independence, a US adventurer, William Walker, invaded the country and declared himself president. Although Walker was soon overthrown and executed, the USA established control over the Nicaraguan economy, sent military forces to crush a popular uprising and maintained both military and economic control until the 1980s. In the 1920s and 30s Augusto Sandino (pictured) led a popular military campaign against US imperialism that made him a national hero.



### The Somoza dictatorship

Following the assassination of Sandino in 1934, Nicaragua was plunged into forty years of repression and violence as the US-backed dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza took hold. Somoza, who had ordered the assassination of Sandino, was himself assassinated in 1956 and was succeeded as president first by his son Luis, and then by another son, Anastasio Somoza Debayle. The Somoza family ruled Nicaragua with an iron fist, exiling opponents and amassing a vast fortune; diverting to their own bank accounts much of the international aid sent to the country when an earthquake destroyed Managua in 1972.



## The Sandinista revolution



In 1961, inspired by the Cuban revolution, Carlos Fonseca (pictured), Tomás Borge and Silvio Mayorga founded the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN). The FSLN launched a military offensive in 1979, and after months of fierce fighting Somoza fled the country and the Sandinistas assumed power under the leadership of Daniel Ortega. The new revolutionary government was

immensely popular and gave priority to the basic economic and social needs of the people. In 1980 a National Literacy Crusade took 100,000 volunteers into the countryside, giving people the opportunity to learn to read and write. In less than a year the illiteracy rate fell from 50% to 13%. Free education became available as schools were built throughout the country. Medical students and nurses taught people how to build latrines and to clean wells, infant mortality was halved and polio eradicated.

## The Contra War and the overthrow of the revolution

Attempts to redistribute land and wealth unleashed a hostile response from the United States under Ronald Reagan, who suspended US aid and imposed crippling sanctions. The US government also financed, trained and armed a terrorist group known as the 'Contras', spending over \$300m to support them in a sustained campaign to overthrow the Sandinista revolution. This caused a vicious civil war which claimed the lives of 50,000 people. Although the World Court ruled that the US war against Nicaragua was in violation of international law, the US refused to accept the jurisdiction of the Court or to pay to repair the estimated £12 billion damage to the country's infrastructure. The sheer scale of death and destruction destroyed the Nicaraguan economy and weakened support for the Sandinistas.

## The neo-liberal period 1990-2006

Eleven years of revolution ended when Violeta Barrios de Chamorro led an anti-Sandinista coalition to a narrow victory in the 1990 elections, creating the first in a succession of pro-USA neo-liberal governments, who began to dismantle the achievements of the revolution. Radical economic reforms, including cuts in spending on health and education, the removal of food subsidies and the loss of agricultural credit, led to rocketing unemployment and pushed many thousands into poverty.

## The New Sandinistas, 2006 to the present

In 2006, with the governing liberals split by corruption scandals, Daniel Ortega (pictured) was reelected president. His popularity was scarcely dented by his step-daughter Zoilamérica Narvaez's earlier accusation of child sex abuse, as he was able to use political immunity to avoid facing the charges against him. Unlike the revolutionary 1980s, the new Sandinista Government adopted a moderate socialism with a mixed economy, and programmes to regenerate the rural economy, encourage sustainable development and support poor farmers.



## Economy

### Nicaragua's development deficit

Nicaragua is the second poorest country in the Western hemisphere; in the whole of the Americas, only Haiti has a lower per capita GDP. In the past, Nicaragua's efforts to develop a viable economy were consistently thwarted by war, dictatorship, economic imperialism, unfair global markets and natural disasters. Both earthquakes and hurricanes have repeatedly destroyed much of the country's infrastructure and production capacity in the past decades, notably major earthquakes in 1972 and 1978, and hurricane Mitch in 1998. Incompetent and corrupt governments also consistently hindered development.

### Agriculture

Nicaragua is primarily an agricultural country with agriculture making up around 60% of its total exports. The main export crop is coffee, grown in the central northern mountains, followed by beef, tobacco, bananas and sugar. Besides production of cash-crops for export there is subsistence-farming and local food production, mainly rice, maize, beans, yuca (casava), tropical fruits, poultry and dairy products.

### Tourism

Tourism is the second major earner. Originally centred on the beaches and historic colonial cities, there is a growing "ecotourism" sector linked to environmental protection issues and the Fair Trade coffee sector.

### Industry

Industry is less important, and in the past two decades has been focused on the "maquilas". These are foreign-owned sweatshops set up with government tax-breaks to take advantage of Nicaragua's extreme poverty and resulting supply of cheap labour. They mainly produce cheap clothing and footwear for export. Many people, mainly women, travel from their homes in remote rural areas to find work in the maquilas.

### The illegal economy

In remote areas in the East the shadow or illegal economy predominates, with illegal logging of tropical hardwoods and drug trafficking (as a staging-point between South America and the USA) the biggest sources of income. Human trafficking for sexual exploitation is also a growing concern.

### Migration

Nicaragua experiences high levels of economic migration, formerly to the USA, now mainly to neighbouring Costa Rica. Many families without employment survive on remittances sent by family members working in these countries, equivalent to roughly 15% of Nicaragua's Gross Domestic Product. Whilst this helps to keep the economy afloat, it means that value is being added to other countries' economies and not to Nicaragua's. This level of migration also weakens social cohesion and family networks in rural areas.

### Foreign Aid

In the past Nicaragua's economy has been heavily dependent on development aid from foreign governments, development agencies and charities. However as the Nicaraguan economy develops, this dependence on aid is reducing. Nicaragua's alliance with socialist Venezuela and the other countries of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) has provided a new source of external support.

### For more information:

Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign: <http://www.nicaraguasc.org.uk>  
 Nicaragua Network: <http://www.nicanet.org/>  
 Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicaragua>

## About CESESMA



community. CESESMA currently has a team of 30, made up of 28 Nicaraguans (mainly local people), 1 Irish and 1 Swiss. Many of our current community education workers were themselves once child participants in our programmes.



**CESESMA**, the Centre for Education in Health and Environment, is an independent non-government organisation working with children and young people in the coffee-growing area of northern Nicaragua, where dependence on coffee production leads to a high incidence of child labour and the associated social problems. Although we depend on overseas support and solidarity to fund our work, we are self-governing and independent of any external agency. Based in the small town of San Ramón in the Department of Matagalpa, we work in five of the rural districts with the greatest dependence on coffee production and thus the greatest incidence of child labour.

### Our Mission

Contribute to the promotion and defense children and young people's rights through processes of learning and empowerment in rural schools and communities, in partnership with children and young people and other members of the community

### Our vision

Children and young people and their families with greater self-esteem, living without violence; with opportunities for an integrated education; taking control of their own development; capable of organising themselves and influencing those around them to defend their rights and contribute to the social, environmental, economic and cultural development of their community.

### An alternative vision of rural community education

Established in 1992, and formally constituted in 1998, CESESMA is developing a new approach to community education, responding to the real needs of children and young people working in Nicaragua's coffee zone. It is founded on the rights established in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Nicaragua in 1990.

Our approach supports children and young people in developing new skills and capacities which enable them to move from reflection and analysis to the search for solutions, and planning of joint community action to confront and transform their challenging and exploitative situation. They are thus empowered to take on an active role working for change in the

### Strategic objectives

Based on the mission and vision above, CESESMA has adopted a five-year strategic plan with six strategic objectives:

1. To contribute to the promotion and defense of children and young people's rights.
2. To strengthen the participation and organisation of children and young people, enabling them to act effectively in local and national decision-making forums.
3. To contribute to food security and sovereignty and the preservation of the natural environment.
4. To contribute to improving interpersonal relations, in family, school and community, in order to reduce violence.
5. To promote alternative learning opportunities in schools and communities, based on the interests of children and young people.
6. To build capacity within the team for the management of social change, thus enabling effective political and social intervention

### Action for change

These goals are pursued through coordinated programmes of activities, with clearly defined outcomes and indicators of success set out in the strategic plan.

Central to this programme is a network of young community education activists (*Promotores* and *Promotoras* in Spanish). These are young people, generally aged 12 to 18, who, through participation in activities with CESESMA, are empowered to take on a leadership role in their communities, working with groups of younger children on a range of informal educational activities. These currently include youth theatre, a sustainable organic agriculture programme, a children's radio project and a children's reading programme.





Alongside these activities the young people develop their communication and organising skills, and also awareness of key issues such as environmental conservation, community development, children's rights, non-violence and gender equality. Their community education work gives them a platform for active organisation and engagement in community development activities, and direct action in defense of children's rights, through which they influence political processes at different levels. CESESMA's project teams actively support these young people and, in this way, a multiplier effect is achieved, bringing large numbers of children into education and gradually reducing their involvement in exploitative child labour.

We support a rural girls' network, enabling girls and young women to develop their awareness and capacities, and work together in defense of their rights as women; and an "exploring masculinities" project, helping young men play a part in combating gender inequality and gender-based violence.

To maintain an integrated approach to the work and build community solidarity, we also work closely with adults: parents, teachers, government officials, and community leaders, both traditional and elected.

We are active in national networking, promoting children's rights, campaigning against exploitative child labour, against violence and child-abuse, and for access to quality education for all. We support the active participation of children and young people in regional, national, and even international initiatives.



## Financial support and solidarity

CESESMA receives financial support from development agencies and solidarity groups in different countries. Currently Save the Children Nicaragua is our biggest funder (with support from Norway, Canada and the USA) followed by Trócaire from Ireland. You can see the complete list of funders and the projects they fund on our website.



## The Friends of CESESMA charity

We have a growing number of friends and supporters in Britain and Ireland, North and South, with whom we keep in touch via our web-site. But sending donations out to CESESMA in Nicaragua has never been straightforward, so in 2008 we launched the Friends of CESESMA charity. "Friends of CESESMA" is a UK charity formed as a limited company with its office in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Administration costs are minimal, guaranteeing maximum benefit for CESESMA's work in Nicaragua.

If you would like to support CESESMA's work, information on how to make a donation is on our web-site at:

[www.cesesma.org/amigos\\_eng.htm](http://www.cesesma.org/amigos_eng.htm)  
or e-mail: [harry@cesesma.org](mailto:harry@cesesma.org)

## Contact CESESMA


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 [www.cesesma.org](http://www.cesesma.org)

The CESESMA web site is in Spanish, English and French. Visit us and send us your comments. There's a new site, in Spanish only, at [www.cesesma.net](http://www.cesesma.net)

 + 505 2772 5660 (we are 6 hours behind GMT)



## Case study 1: Child coffee plantation workers researching workers' rights on the plantation

<b>Location:</b>	Yasica Sur, San Ramón, Matagalpa
<b>Social justice issues addressed:</b>	Child labour Rights of working children Fair Trade
<b>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:</b>	Art. 12: Right to be heard Art. 32: Fair treatment at work Art. 28/29: Right to quality education

### The issue



Some of the world's finest coffee is grown in the remote mountains of northern Nicaragua. As coffee is one of Nicaragua's biggest export earners, over the years this area has come to depend on the coffee industry to provide employment. Other crops have declined and less food is grown.

Some coffee is grown by small farmers who are organised in cooperatives. They are able to sell some of their top quality coffee in the Fair Trade market, where they get a better price which helps them support their families. However most of the coffee is grown on large plantations belonging to a landlord, who is often a foreigner or a foreign-owned company, and may live far away. Entire communities of people live on these plantations, where everything belongs to the landlord: the land, the houses, and even the oranges and bananas that grow wild in the forest.

Families are completely dependent on the landlord for their homes, for work, and food to survive. It's the same for all: everyone, including the children, has to work if they want to eat, and the coffee plantation is the only work available. The big plantations can't sell Fair Trade coffee. They sell their produce on the globalised coffee market. When the price falls, as it did in 2000-2003, many are left with no work, and without work, there's no food.

Nicaragua has laws against child labour, but the plantation owners and managers easily get around these. Children work alongside older family members but are not registered or recognised as part of the workforce. This means they receive no payment for their labour, as on payday the small amount they earn is handed over to an adult relative so the children's work can be hidden from the authorities.

This can be dangerous work; handling razor-sharp machetes, inhaling poisonous chemical pesticides, and suffering abuse at the hands of foremen and supervisors, not to mention the snakes, scorpions, wasps and mosquitoes that live in the plantations.



*Santa Martha Coffee Plantation*

Some of the big plantations have their own primary schools, but many don't, and there are no secondary schools in rural areas. Most children are able to start primary school, but because of the need to work, many drop out and don't return. Some struggle on, but even if they complete their primary school, there is no secondary school to go to, unless they can afford to travel to a faraway town every week. Without a decent education, there is little chance of getting away from the coffee plantation and making a better life. The consequence is a cycle of dependency, hunger and destitution in these remote mountain communities.

### Osiris' story

Santa Martha is a typical Nicaraguan coffee plantation, remote and isolated in the mountains in an area called Yasica Sur, 20 km east of San Ramón. The owner is a wealthy businessman who lives far away in the capital city and has a manager to run the plantation for him. In the centre of the plantation is a village of about 600 people, half of them children and teenagers, all of whom depend on the plantation for work and survival. There is a primary school on the plantation, but the nearest secondary school is miles away.

Osiris told her story to local NGO CESESMA in August 2009:

*"My name is Osiris Zamora Sevilla; I'm twelve years old and I live on the Santa Martha coffee plantation. I have eight brothers and sisters and I'm in Year 6 at the school on the*



plantation. My parents are separated and I live with my mum, my stepfather and my brothers and sisters.

The house where we live belongs to the plantation. It's partly made of wooden planks and partly of bricks but it's in bad condition and the roof leaks. We only have one bedroom and there are eleven of us. We have four beds, so I share with my three sisters. Some have to sleep on the floor.



Osiris picking coffee

My mum works on the plantation picking coffee or looking after the coffee plants, but now there's no work here so she's gone to Estelí to work on a tobacco farm, so I stayed to look after my brothers and sisters.

During the week I go to school in the mornings. After school, if it's not harvest time I help my mum with the housework. At harvest time I go to pick coffee. When it's a bad harvest I pick about one sack each day. When it's good I can pick two. I started picking coffee when I was six. They don't give me the money I earn. They give it to my mum.

When she gets paid, if there's enough money we buy a pair of shoes. But we can't buy shoes for everyone; we just buy for one of us, and that's how it goes. If the work goes well, at the end of every fortnight one of us gets a pair of shoes.

What I'd like to do is continue at school, get good results and help my brothers and sisters. I've learnt that education is important, because my mum sometimes has work and sometimes she doesn't, and when I go to school if she just has enough to buy food, she can't give me money for schoolbooks."

Supported by CESESMA and with the backing of Irish development agency Trócaire, Osiris and twelve school friends formed an action research team which they called "The Young Consultants of Santa Martha" and set out to investigate the problem of human rights on the plantation. Santa Martha is run as a business by the owner and plantation manager, but it is also a community of people with human rights to defend. Osiris continues the story:

"We formed a team to research the topic of business and human rights on our plantation. At the start of the first workshop we all did drawings to show some of the human rights violations we have experienced here on the plantation. Then we showed our drawings to the group and each of us talked about the different violations of human rights. We discussed the idea of 'business responsibility', and the different ways plantation owners respect or violate the rights of their workers.



The Santa Martha Young Researchers Team

In the second workshop, we planned our research with the children and young people, adult workers (like our parents), foremen and overseers of Santa Martha Plantation. We interviewed a total of 56 people



Osiris interviewing the plantation manager

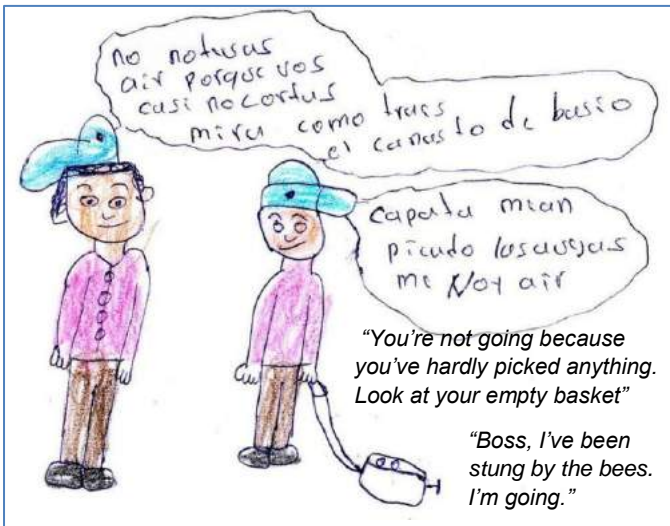
Then we met for a third workshop to analyse the findings of our research. For the final workshop, we went to the CESESMA office in San Ramón town to decide on our conclusions and recommendations. We prepared our final report and recorded a message to the young people of Ireland."

### Action for change

The Young Consultants team planned and carried out their own research. They interviewed 27 children and 22 adult workers on the plantation, as well as the plantation manager and 6 foremen and supervisors. They analysed the results and put together a report on their findings which included:

- 74% of the children and young people interviewed felt they were generally treated with respect. However, 26% said they were not treated well. They didn't get paid, they didn't get given food and they were given the worst rows of coffee plants to pick.
- Many children did dangerous jobs which were harmful to their health. The most common dangerous jobs on the plantation were spraying chemicals and work with machetes such as pruning the coffee plants and climbing trees to cut back the overhanging branches. Although they said that in Santa Martha it was prohibited to give dangerous work to children and young people, many still did it out of need.





Drawing from the young researchers' report

- special programmes to provide educational and play activities at harvest time, so child workers are not overworked or exploited.



Osiris presenting the research findings at the regional conference

- Although there is a primary school on the plantation, 19% said the right to education was not respected, because many parents sent their children to work, and the owner did nothing about it.
- The children did not receive a salary. They worked just to help their families and for food. 74% of children and young people said that this is unfair.
- All the parents interviewed thought they are poorly paid. They said they earned very little for the heavy work they did, and the salary wasn't enough to keep their families.
- The parents recognised that there were children working on the plantation. They said they did it voluntarily to help their families, because otherwise they couldn't afford clothes, shoes and other necessities, especially the single mothers.
- 70% of the parents interviewed said they were aware of cases of sexual abuse or harassment of girls and women workers by plantation foremen or overseers; which included demanding sex in exchange for work.

The Young Consultants drew up a long list of recommendations for change, to the owners and managers, to the adult workers, and to the children and young people who work on the plantation.

They presented their report to a community meeting on the plantation, and then to a regional conference on education and child labour held in the provincial capital Matagalpa. Among those who listened to the recommendations were senior officials from the Ministries of Education, Labour, and Health, as well as local mayors and NGO leaders. They also sent the report to Trócaire in Ireland, so it could be used in Development Education programmes with Irish young people and help to promote Fair Trade.

The Santa Martha Young Consultants' work has contributed to real changes on the coffee plantations in their area. They can't claim that all children's rights are now respected, but recent improvements include:

- fewer children and young people doing dangerous jobs such as spraying chemicals;
- more children and young people completing the school year before they go off to pick coffee, and so progressing with their education;
- better protection for children and young people who report violence or sexual harassment at work on the plantations;

### Ideas for action in other countries

At the end of their report, the Young Consultants' team added these recommendations for young people in other countries where Nicaraguan coffee is bought and drunk:

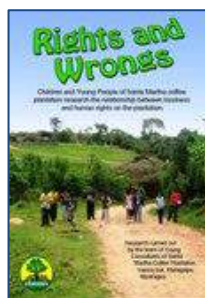
*"What should people from other countries who buy Nicaraguan coffee do to ensure that the rights of the workers who produce it are respected?"*

- *Pay a fair price for their coffee; for example, buying coffee with the Fair Trade mark.*
- *Find out about the people who produce the coffee and act in solidarity with them.*
- *Promote Fair Trade in their country, and solidarity with the coffee producers."*



The Young Consultants also sent their report to the United National Committee on the Rights of the Child to help them produce international guidelines about respecting children's rights in the business sector (see below).

### Additional resources on-line



The Young Consultants' report *"Rights and Wrongs"* is available in English from: [www.cesema.org/documentos/CESEMA-Rights\\_and\\_wrongs.pdf](http://www.cesema.org/documentos/CESEMA-Rights_and_wrongs.pdf)

The United National Committee on the Rights of the Child's guidelines on business responsibility for children's rights (*"General Comment No 16"*) is available from: [www.unicef.org/csr/css/CRC-C-GC-16\\_en.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/csr/css/CRC-C-GC-16_en.pdf)



*"You, your rights and business"*, a child-friendly workbook from Save the children is at: <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/sites/default/files/documents/7256.pdf>

More about Fair trade" at: [www.fairtrade.net/](http://www.fairtrade.net/)

## Case study 2: Children and young people campaigning for a local council agenda for children and youth

<b>Location:</b>	San Carlos, Río San Juan
<b>Social justice issue:</b>	Local democracy Children's citizenship and right to be heard Equity and fairness in public spending.
<b>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:</b>	Art. 12: Right to be heard Art. 24: Right to adequate health care Art. 28/29: Right to quality education Art. 31: Right to play, leisure and recreation

### The issue

Nicaragua is not that different from most countries when it comes to children and young people's ability to influence public policy. In most of the world, the main way people can influence government policy is by voting in elections, and as this right is denied to children and young people they are easily excluded (although Nicaragua is more advanced than most countries on this issue as it is one of the few countries in the world where the voting age is 16).

At the same time, all children have the right to be heard; that is they have the right to express their opinions on all matters that affect them, including public policy matters, and their opinions must be given due weight by politicians and decision-makers (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12).

### Damaris and Jennifer's story



*Jennifer Matamoros Cruz and Damaris del Socorro Aguilar Pineda (aged 13 and 14 when interviewed in August 2010), San Carlos, Río San Juan, Nicaragua*

*"Our experiences started in 2008 when the River Foundation [a local NGO] came to our school to help the children elect representatives so we could have a say in local authority plans and policies. We learnt about political advocacy, and at the same time we showed the adults how capable we were. We were elected to represent our school.*

*Several weeks later we met to look at the needs of our communities. To do this we had to consult with the children and young people in the neighbouring villages. There were a lot of people participating and it took us several days, but it didn't end there as we went on to draw up a document where we included all these local needs.*



*Jennifer speaking to the media*

Because the right to vote is denied them, if children and young people want to have a say on policy matters, they have to do it by other means: by organising themselves as active citizens and advocating directly to make sure their voices are heard by politicians and decision-makers. However this is not easy. In much of the world, centuries-old cultures of silencing children's voices have left children and young people disempowered. Many children and young people just haven't had the chance to develop self-advocacy skills, or to assume the role of active citizens.

They have the right to be heard and taken seriously, but what do they have to do to make this right a reality?



*San Carlos on the San Juan River*



So there had been several meetings with the children at the different local schools, and as the local elections were coming up, that's when we held the municipal children's forum where we invited all the candidates standing for Mayor and presented our proposal document to them. Lots of people came from the surrounding villages, and we put forward our demands. These included improving the town park, footpaths in good condition and a local radio or TV programme for children and young people.

Our main achievement was that all the candidates for Mayor signed an agreement where they pledged themselves to respond to the demands we had put forward in the Municipal Forum. Over the past two years we've started to see the results."



Children's advocacy workshop in San Carlos

Because of their success as local advocates for children and young people, in 2010 Jennifer and Damaris and their group were invited to participate in a research project being carried out by NGO CESESMA and the University of the North of Nicaragua to find out how children and young people can be more successful in influencing public policy in Nicaragua. They continue the story:



Damaris at the research seminar in Matagalpa

"The most important moment for us was when we were invited to a two-day seminar in Matagalpa on how children and young people influence public policy. We felt very happy to share our experience with the other kids there. They heard about our experience and we learnt about the experiences of the other groups. As well as sharing experiences we shared friendship. It was very interesting and we felt we had shared something very valuable.

Working together with adults was interesting because we worked in a way that age didn't matter, and this was very important because we felt we were being treated as regular people, till at some points it felt like we were the adults and the adults were the children. This seemed to us like a good way for children and adults to work together.

Another big moment for us was the national forum in Managua where the results of the research were presented. In a way this was even more important because there were a lot of important people there and we believe that we were some of them. Being there we felt very pleased with ourselves because we had played the lead role in the whole process.

We believe it is important for children and young people to be able to influence public policy, because in this way we can make our voice heard on any matter. We have learnt how important it is to value our rights, and for all children and young people to know what it means to be a citizen in spite of being a child."



Damaris speaking at the national forum in Managua

### Action for change

As Jennifer and Damaris mentioned, they and their group got organised and, after consulting lots of children and young people in San Carlos and the surrounding villages, drew up a document containing all the changes they wanted their local council to make to improve things for local children. They cleverly took advantage of the coming local elections to get all the mayoral candidates together in a public forum, and so got them to sign an agreement promising to respond to the needs the group had identified.

Of course it wasn't all quite so easy. After the elections, although they had the support of the new Mayor, some council officials were still not prepared to take them seriously, and the Mayor was always busy with other priorities. However, they persevered and gradually started to see results. There have been many improvements in the town including the park, and a new pre-school centre. One of the lessons learned is that when dealing with politicians a signed agreement is not enough. You have to keep at them and make them take you seriously if you want to see real results.

As for the demand for a local radio or television programme for children and young people; finally, impressed by Jennifer and Damaris's capability and commitment, the local TV station gave them regular air-time where they can make sure all the children and young people of San Carlos get to know and defend their rights.



Children organising in San Carlos

**Additional resources on-line**



“Children and Young people exercising citizenship: Our experience of political advocacy”. Article in Spanish written by Jennifer and Damaris in Nicaragua’s children’s rights magazine *Arco Iris* (Rainbow), No 38, December 2010. [www.codeni.org.ni/cdoc?idcdoc=80&idctg=6](http://www.codeni.org.ni/cdoc?idcdoc=80&idctg=6)



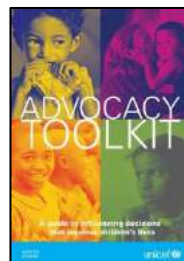
“Children and young people as active citizens influencing policy in Nicaragua” (CESESMA/UNN 2010). This is the final report of the research project that Jennifer and Damaris participated in. It is in Spanish, but has lots of pictures of children and young people involved in advocacy and research: [www.cesesma.org/documentos/CESESMA-Incidencia\\_de\\_NNA.pdf](http://www.cesesma.org/documentos/CESESMA-Incidencia_de_NNA.pdf)



“¡Nuestra Voz Vale!” (Our voice counts!) (CESESMA 2011). Also in Spanish, this is a child-friendly summary of the report. In the first part, Damaris and Jennifer’s story is retold in comic-book form. [www.cesesma.org/documentos/CESESMA-nuestra\\_voz\\_vale.pdf](http://www.cesesma.org/documentos/CESESMA-nuestra_voz_vale.pdf)



There is also an article in English (aimed at adults): “How Children and Young People Influence Policy-Makers: Lessons from Nicaragua” (Shier et al, 2014: *Children & Society* 28/1, 1-14) that summarises this research at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1099-0860.2012.00443.x/abstract>



“Advocacy toolkit: A guide to influencing decisions that improve children’s lives” (UNICEF 2010) [http://www.unicef.org/evaluation/files/Advocacy\\_Toolkit.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/evaluation/files/Advocacy_Toolkit.pdf)

**Ideas for action in other countries**

If children and young people want to have a say on public policy matters, which is their human right, since they don’t have the right to vote, they have to do it by other means. As Damaris and Jennifer’s story shows, this may be by organising themselves as active citizens and advocating directly to ensure their voices are heard by politicians and decision-makers.

What children and young people’s needs are being ignored by politicians and decision-makers in your country? Taking Damaris and Jennifer’s experience as a starting point, you could choose a priority issue and organise a step by step campaign to make sure decision-makers hear children and young people’s opinions and give an acceptable answer.



## Case study 3: Nicaragua's indigenous children defending their right to play

<b>Location:</b>	Samulalí, Matagalpa
<b>Social justice issue:</b>	Children's rights, specifically the right to play, leisure and recreation
<b>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:</b>	Art. 31: Right to play, leisure and recreation Art. 2: No discrimination Art. 12: Right to be heard

### The issue

Although northern Nicaragua is a fertile and productive region, the country's tortured history, weak infrastructure and vulnerability to natural disasters have all conspired to prevent the rural people escaping from poverty. Extreme poverty and dependence on coffee production mean that from as young as six or seven years old children are made to work on a coffee plantation, a family small-holding, in the home, or often all three.



Although most children start school, almost all of them drop out early, while some have no opportunity to go to school at all. Their parents' expectation that they will work from a young age to help support the family leaves them with little chance of a decent education and few alternatives in life (see Case Study No. 1 for more on child labour in Nicaragua). It also leaves them with hardly any opportunity to play.

Being allowed to play is essential for children's healthy development the world over. Children themselves know this, as they feel the negative effects when they don't have a chance to play. Adult experts have also done research on children's play and shown the many ways that playing contributes to children's wellbeing and their normal healthy development.

And play is not only essential for development, it is also a human right guaranteed in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which says:

### Article 31

1. States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

### Yenderling's story



Yenderling  
Gonzalez  
(age 14)

Samulalí is a remote rural area in the Department of Matagalpa in northern Nicaragua. Though a lot of coffee is grown in Samulalí, the climate is too dry to produce the best coffee so people also survive by subsistence farming, growing maize and beans to feed their families. Samulalí is an indigenous community; that is the people of Samulalí are direct descendants of the Matagalpa tribe who have lived in this area for thousands of years, and though nowadays they all speak Spanish, they have mixed little with the European people who came to Nicaragua since the Spanish conquest.

Yenderling González was aged 14 when she told her story to local NGO CESESMA in March 2011:

*"What stops us from playing in our community is the way the adults criticise us. Parents say 'You have to do your chores first', or, 'It's your job to look after the little ones'.*

*Also a lot of kids work on farms and coffee plantations and they come home worn out, so they don't get to play. At harvest time the kids work all day and there's no time to play.*



Henry carrying water

*We formed an action-research team and met at the training centre in Samulalí village. We learnt that we have a right to play; about having the freedom to play, and that this is for girls just the same as boys. We talked about how to defend this right to play. We all did drawings of children playing, or of children who were sad because they couldn't play.*

*Then we did research into children's play in our community. We interviewed our grandparents, parents, neighbours and others in the community. We discovered traditional games with songs and rhymes we didn't know before. The kids decided we should recover these games that are our own traditions.*



Action-research team at work in Samulalí

*Although we all have the same right to play, we discovered that in our community boys have more opportunities than girls. They say that girls are weak and passive and boys are strong and aggressive, and people here think this is how we should play. But we know that no-one has more right to play than anyone else and we should all be equal."*

## Action for change



Yenderling and colleagues presenting their findings at a community assembly in Samulalí

Yenderling and her team presented their report first at a community assembly in their village of Samulalí. Their recommendations included:

- We are defending children's right to play, and we want all children, boys and girls, to be able to play freely and have fun together.
- There should be more research into the topic of children's play.
- Our parents must respect our right to play.
- There should be campaigns and talks to defend the right to play.
- From our community we want to take our campaign to the District Children and Youth Committee.
- We want to start a national and international campaign.

A partner organisation in England offered to meet the cost of making two giant banners promoting the right to play, one for Samulalí village and the other for Matagalpa city.



The team's campaign banner, which says "Children and young people defending our right to play, for health, education, development, happiness and a life without violence".



Next the children wrote to the District Children and Youth Committee in Matagalpa saying they would like to present their report to the Committee. They received an invitation and elected six of the team, including Yenderling, to go to the committee meeting in Matagalpa town and present their report. The Committee agreed to help circulate the findings of the report to all organisations working with children in the district, and got permission from the Mayor's office to hang the children's banner in the main street. However, what most excited the children was when the Chief of Police offered to make a donation of sports equipment to their group.



Yenderling and colleagues put their recommendations to the District Children and Youth Committee in Matagalpa.

Finally they were invited to write about their campaign in Nicaragua's children's rights magazine *Arco Iris* (Rainbow). In their article the team wrote this summary of why they believe the right to play is important:

"Play is important to us:

1. For rest, relaxation and recreation.
2. To have fun and feel good, with joy and excitement.
3. For healthy development, and the growth of our body and mind.
4. For physical and emotional health.
5. For our creativity and imagination: to create, invent and dream.
6. To be able to communicate and share with confidence and not feel shy.
7. To experiment, learn and develop new skills.
8. To relate to one another with friendship, equality and respect: boys and girls, big and small.
9. To have a space for ourselves where our opinion matters.
10. And because it is our right: We must defend it and make it a reality."

The article appeared in the November 2009 issue and you can see the full article (in Spanish) in the additional resources on-line.

Yenderling and her team's hard work seems to have paid off. The child's right to play is now firmly on the agenda in

Nicaragua. Major voluntary organisations like World Vision are campaigning on this issue, as well as smaller ones like CESESMA. Even the government is talking about the right to play and recreation in its programmes and policies. Though it's hard to prove, we believe that the report produced by the child campaigners and the publicity they got had a big influence.

### Ideas for action in other countries

Adults denying children their right to play is not just a problem in Nicaragua, but all over the world. In 2010, the International Play Association held a global consultation on children's right to play, consulting both children and adult experts in eight countries around the world. Their report found over a hundred important and repeated violations of the right to play, and not only in poor countries but in better-off countries too. Some of the most serious infringements of the right to play around the world were the same ones found by Yenderling and her team; that is, the negative attitudes of parents and other adults, the need for children to work, and discrimination against girls, who are denied the freedom to play that's allowed to boys.



Selling enchiladas, San Ramón

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child was so concerned at these findings that they decided they would have to send instructions to all the world's governments, reminding them of the importance of the right to play and explaining what they need to do to protect this right (in UN-speak this is known as a "General Comment").

It took nearly two years to write it, and the United Nations General Comment on the Right to Play finally came out in February 2013. We know from talking to insiders that the Committee was aware of the Nicaraguan children's work, and took their ideas on board in drafting it. It has been sent to all the world's governments, but some of them don't seem to have read it yet, or if they have, they aren't taking it seriously enough.

Here are some things children and young people in any country can do:

1. Get hold of the General Comment and find out what your government is supposed to be doing to ensure all children in your country have the right to play (you don't have to read the whole thing; there are child-friendly versions available – see the online resources below).
2. To find out more, download and read the report of the IPA Global Consultation. The summary report is only 20 pages.

3. Research the right to play like Yenderling and her team did. Find out what is stopping children from enjoying their right to play in your area, and which children are most affected.
4. Share your findings with your school and community. Help adults, especially parents, teachers, town councillors etc. to understand the importance of play for children's development and that it is also a human right.
5. Write to your government, asking if they've read the General Comment, and what they're planning to do about it (and don't let them fob you off; keep writing till you're satisfied with the reply).
6. When you buy products like tea, coffee or chocolate, look for the "Fair Trade" mark. Children of Fair Trade producers aren't usually so overburdened with work, and so have more of a chance to play (see Case Study No. 1 for more information on this).



The Nicaraguan Children's "Defending our right to play" campaign as it happened, 2009-2011: A compilation of campaign progress reports from Playwords magazine:

[www.harryshier.comxa.com/docs/Shier-Right\\_to\\_play\\_campaign.pdf](http://www.harryshier.comxa.com/docs/Shier-Right_to_play_campaign.pdf)



IPA Global Consultation Report Summary: Children's Right to Play:

[www.harryshier.comxa.com/docs/IPA\\_Global\\_Report\\_summary.pdf](http://www.harryshier.comxa.com/docs/IPA_Global_Report_summary.pdf)



The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment on the right to play (original UN version and a summary available here):

[www.playwales.org.uk/eng/generalcomment](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/generalcomment)

**Additional resources on-line**



Samulali children's action-research team report in English:

[www.harryshier.comxa.com/docs/RighttoPlay-Samulali\\_report\\_English.pdf](http://www.harryshier.comxa.com/docs/RighttoPlay-Samulali_report_English.pdf)



Child-friendly version of the General Comment produced by a team of young researchers (ages 8-13) in Northern Ireland:

[www.playboard.org/publications/playboard-promotional-materials/](http://www.playboard.org/publications/playboard-promotional-materials/)



Samulali children's magazine article in Spanish:

[www.cesema.org/documentos/Defendiendo\\_nuestro\\_derecho\\_a\\_jugar-Arcolris36.pdf](http://www.cesema.org/documentos/Defendiendo_nuestro_derecho_a_jugar-Arcolris36.pdf)



"Advocating for Play Advocacy toolkit" (Playboard 2012)

[www.playboard.org/Uploads/document/2301201211231357483148.pdf](http://www.playboard.org/Uploads/document/2301201211231357483148.pdf)



Magazine article: The Right to Play in Nicaragua (Shier. 2009. Playwords 37, 12-15):

[www.harryshier.comxa.com/docs/Shier-Right\\_to\\_Play\\_in\\_Nicaragua.pdf](http://www.harryshier.comxa.com/docs/Shier-Right_to_Play_in_Nicaragua.pdf)



## Case study 4: Children and young people using community theatre to raise awareness and help prevent family violence

<b>Location:</b>	La Lima, San Ramón and La Dalia, Matagalpa
<b>Social justice issue addressed:</b>	Domestic violence Gender equality Child abuse Poverty
<b>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:</b>	Art. 12: Right to be heard Art. 13: Freedom of expression Art. 2: No discrimination Art. 9: Protection from abuse and mistreatment

### The issue

Nicaragua is said to be one of the least violent countries in Latin America. We don't have the armed street gangs that terrorise our neighbour countries to the north, nor the horrific level of drug-related violence found in Mexico or Colombia. The last of the guerilla bands hiding out in the mountains were rounded up and disarmed years ago. However this gives a false impression, for in Nicaragua violence turns inwards, and becomes a family matter. Violence against children and young people in particular is so common that many regard it as normal.

Violence is a reality for most children and young people in Nicaragua, and is exercised against them in various ways, some open and some hidden. Violence is used to control their behaviour and to abuse their sexuality. The worst cases result in severe physical and emotional damage, sometimes death. Family violence leaves not only physical marks such as cuts and bruises, but also psychological wounds that cause lifelong emotional scars.

*because people don't know what to do or where to go for help and so they keep quiet. A few cases have been reported to the authorities, but this hasn't had the desired result as the aggressors remain at liberty and continue causing more suffering. Some of the traditional leaders believe that such things shouldn't be reported, as it only causes further harm to the community."*

("Appraisal of perceptions of violence towards children and young people in fifteen rural communities of San Ramón, Matagalpa", CESESMA 2008)

After examining Nicaragua's latest children's rights report, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed its deep concern:

*"The Committee is deeply concerned at the high level of child abuse and neglect, including sexual abuse, and domestic and gender-based violence ... as reported to the Police Women and Children's Units".*

("Concluding Observations: Nicaragua", UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2010)

Rape and sexual abuse of girls is a particular problem in Nicaragua. As a recent report from Amnesty International tells us:

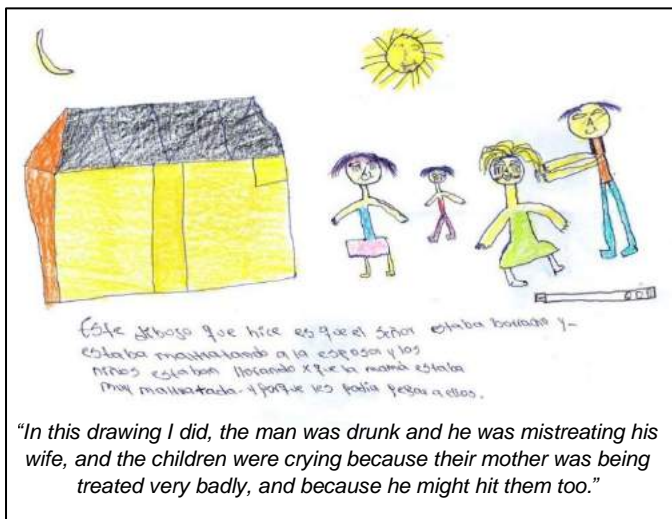
*"Rape and sexual abuse are widespread in Nicaragua, and the majority of victims are young. Police analysis of rape reports over the 10-year period from 1998 to 2008 recorded 14,377 cases. More than two thirds of reports (9,695 cases) involved girls under the age of 17. The police report concluded: 'The fact that the majority of victims are minors affects society, the culture and the economy on much more than just an individual level. The impact is such that it has become a national problem'."*

("Listen to their voices and act: Stop the rape and sexual abuse of girls in Nicaragua", Amnesty International 2010)

However, as the CESESMA report quoted above tells us, the cases reported to the police are just the tip of the iceberg. The children and young people of Nicaragua live in a violent environment that, sadly, is a characteristic of national life.

### Action for change

In Nicaragua, 19th October has been declared the National Day of Action against Violence to Children and Young People, and every year on this date there is a national festival to raise awareness of the problem and to recognise the many actions, large and small, that people are taking to help prevent violence against children and young people.



"In this drawing I did, the man was drunk and he was mistreating his wife, and the children were crying because their mother was being treated very badly, and because he might hit them too."

Family violence drawn by a child from La Lima

There are no reliable statistics, as most cases are not reported. But those working in the community see the effects of this huge hidden problem. In 2008 local NGO CESESMA surveyed people's perceptions of violence in fifteen rural communities in the North of Nicaragua, and found that:

*"In most communities there is violence and the most prevalent is domestic or family violence. There are situations of sexual abuse which have been hidden*

The festival is sponsored by Save the Children, with support from many other organisations, local authorities and government ministries.

The 2010 Festival was held in the town of La Dalia, in the heart of the coffee-growing region in the north of Nicaragua; the first time the festival had been held outside the capital city. This allowed many rural children to take part, including coffee-plantation workers, and others who lived a long way from the capital.



On the way to the festival

The event started with a vehicle cavalcade, as groups from all over the north of Nicaragua converged on La Dalia, followed by a street parade with banners and bands, led by "The Dragon of Violence". The dragon was created by a girls' group from the village of Samulalí to symbolise the monster of violence stalking the rural communities, and the need to control and tame it so it would stop hurting children and young people.



The dragon of violence leads the festival parade

The main festival event took place in the town's covered sports stadium. There were stalls run by local and national organisations, with arts and crafts, games, competitions, exhibitions and displays all on the theme of preventing violence. On the main stage, after the inevitable speeches, there was a programme of theatre, music and cultural activities on the same theme. One of the highlights was a children's theatre group from the village of La Lima.

### Mileidy and Jessica's story

CESESMA is a local educational organisation working with children and young people in the coffee-growing region. Among other activities, CESESMA supports children and young people using drama and theatre to raise awareness of problems in the community (especially the ones nobody likes to talk about like

family violence), and encourage people to get together and do something positive about them.



Los Colibrís present "Blows to the Soul" at the festival (Mileidy in the centre)

The children's theatre group "Los Colibrís" (the hummingbirds) was formed in La Lima in 2007, and has written and performed several original plays since then. This extract from a recent article in the International Journal of Children's Rights gives an idea of how they do it:

*"The process would be: Forming a group, exploring some of the issues in the community. At the moment, we have a project around children's participation in prevention of violence, and children are choosing aspects of this that they feel are relevant to work on; telling stories about things that happened, about real life. They decide how much they want to share, and sometimes this can get quite heavy, because children who are suffering violence may want to actually talk about this for the first time, and they may want to bring this into the play. Once lots of ideas are shared, you start putting together a storyline, using not one person's story but a made-up story that involves several people's realities sewn together to make a storyline so that, when you present it, nobody's being pinpointed. So then it's improvising scenes, putting those scenes together; eventually they come up with a text which they learn off by heart so that they can present the play, and then they have a play ready for presentation."*

("Children's Participation in Educational Projects and Sustainable Design - Comparing the UK and Nicaraguan Contexts: An Interview with Harry Shier" by Andrea Wheeler, *International Journal of Children's Rights*, Vol. 18/3. 2010)

"Los Colibrís" were invited to present their play "Blows to the Soul" at the Festival in La Dalia in October 2010. Group members Mileidy and Jessica Blandón (cousins, both aged 14) told their story to CESESMA in April 2011 (you can see Jessica and Mileidy on stage in the photos):

*"The message of 'Blows to the Soul' is, don't mistreat your children, either physically or psychologically, and that parents shouldn't hit their children or use any kind of physical punishment. There are quite a few children in La Lima who suffer the kind of violence that happens in our play; their parents beat them with sticks and abuse them verbally. We know of one family where they punish the children by not giving them anything to eat."*





Los Colibrís present "Blows to the Soul" at the festival (Jessica in the centre)

*In the days before the festival we rehearsed almost every day, practising our characters, the choruses, and the frozen images. Then came the day of the festival and we had a great time and it was a lot of fun. The best thing was that they gave us a meal before we went on stage, and then again afterwards.*

*Acting in front of such a huge crowd was an amazing experience for us. It was exciting and very emotional. But we weren't nervous because we had performed this play before to other people. Because of the size of the venue and the big crowd, we had to perform with microphones, which was fun as we had never used them before (at one point I dropped it but I paid no attention; I just picked it up and carried on).*

*We are sure our play helped to prevent violence against children because there were a lot of different organisations that work with children there that day, and also the media, and they were paying attention to our message, so this must have had an effect."*



Los Colibrís present "Blows to the Soul" at the festival

## Ideas for action in other countries

### Using theatre and other media to raise awareness

Mileidy and Jessica's experience shows that children's theatre can be a powerful medium to get messages across to people. Children and young people in many countries use theatre to raise awareness of social justice issues, both those that affect their own country and global issues affecting children in other

countries. As "Los Colibrís" have shown, theatre is particularly useful to get people discussing the issues they prefer to keep quiet about, like domestic violence.

Theatre is a powerful medium, but there are many others you can use, depending on the resources you can get hold of. When it comes to getting a message across to people, both modern global youth culture and your own local culture and traditions can be rich sources of inspiration and ideas. Other media children and young people have used in Nicaragua include film-making, photography, folk-music, rap/reggaeton, contemporary dance, poetry, journalism (writing articles for newspapers and magazines), mural-painting and banner-making.

### The UN Special Report on Violence against Children

The United Nations has published a special report on violence against children, with recommendations for all the world's governments to follow. In preparing for the Festival against Violence, Nicaraguan children used a child-friendly version of these recommendations, as the official report is too long and not much fun. Both the original report and a child-friendly version are included in the additional on-line resources below. Learning about this report, making your own child-friendly version of the recommendations in your own language, and publicising it widely in schools and other places where children meet would be a useful practical project and help get more children and young people involved in action against violence.

### Additional resources on-line

There's a gallery of photos of the festival from Save the Children Nicaragua at:

[www.savethechildren.org.ni/index.php?option=com\\_phocagallery&view=category&id=2%3Aiv-feria-festival-&Itemid=28](http://www.savethechildren.org.ni/index.php?option=com_phocagallery&view=category&id=2%3Aiv-feria-festival-&Itemid=28)



Amnesty International report on violence against children in Nicaragua

[www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR43/008/2010](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR43/008/2010)



UN Study on Violence against Children

[www.unviolencestudy.org/](http://www.unviolencestudy.org/)



Child-friendly version

[www.unicef.org/ceecis/sgsvac-cyp.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/sgsvac-cyp.pdf)



Handbook of activities for children

[www.unicef.org/violencestudy/pdf/Our%20Right%20to%20be%20Protected%20from%20Violence.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/violencestudy/pdf/Our%20Right%20to%20be%20Protected%20from%20Violence.pdf)

There are more child-friendly resources on the website of the UN Special Representative on Violence Against Children at:

<http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/children-corner/materials>

## Case study 5: Child scavengers using local radio to promote social justice

<b>Location:</b>	La Chureca, Acahualinca (the largest open rubbish dump in Latin America, just outside the centre of Managua the capital city).
<b>Social justice issue addressed:</b>	Child labour Environmental contamination Rights of working children, especially education Discrimination
<b>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:</b>	Art. 12: Right to be heard Art. 32: Fair treatment at work Art. 28/29: Right to quality education Art. 9: Protection from abuse and mistreatment

### The issue

“La Chureca” (the Dump) in Nicaragua’s capital city Managua is the biggest open rubbish dump in Latin America; a hellish landscape covering 42 hectares, listed as one of the “20 Horrors of the Modern World” in a 2007 Spanish magazine survey. It is a world of pestilence, a vast breeding-ground for flies, rats and disease-carrying parasites in its piles of rotting food, burning rubbish and oceans of plastic bags.



Managua produces 1,200 tons of rubbish every day, and most of it is dumped in La Chureca. It contaminates all the surrounding area and has poisoned the water of the neighbouring Lake Xolotlán (a.k.a. Lake Managua).

Though it seems like a medieval vision of hell, La Chureca is a modern-day reality, and is both home and workplace to some two thousand families of scavengers. Boys and girls, some as young as five, spend their days searching through the piles of stinking rubbish for items that can be collected and sold for reuse or recycling. Many work barefoot, protecting their faces with masks made of rags, using home-made metal harpoons to stab and retrieve sellable items such as bottles, cans and plastic containers. A recent health study showed that most have dangerous levels of lead and mercury in their bodies.



Few of the child scavengers of La Chureca go to school. Many of them start primary school, but the local schools have little to offer them, so most of them drop out early. Earning money to help their family survive seems more important than getting an education.

### Action for change

Many organisations work in the area around La Chureca trying to help its people get a better life. However they face an uphill struggle, as this extract from an article by local student and journalist William Grigsby Vergara shows:



"In 1992, the organisation Dos Generaciones (DG) launched a social project in La Chureca, with the ambitious idea of eradicating child labor in the dump and getting the children of La Chureca to go to school and stay there. The project also sought to improve domestic relations; many families are headed by single women who have a lot of children and temporary partners who abuse them. It didn't take DG long to realize that there was a problem: if the children didn't go out looking for garbage, family income declined. And worse yet costs increased if they went to school – for uniforms, pencils, notebooks. DG tried to work with the families to ensure that they wouldn't take the children out of school and talked with the teachers to get them to accept the children even if they arrived dirty, and even if their behavior towards their classmates was difficult. These children were accustomed to violent, competitive work.

Little by little, DG realized it wasn't accomplishing much. The situation of the children, their families and the neighborhood in general was much more complex than they had grasped. Mario Chamorro, DG's coordinator, recalls, 'We were just putting band-aids over the children's problem, but to solve it we first had to solve the deeper problems of the families and try to improve conditions in the community.'

Once convinced that the dump was a needed source of work for Acahualinca's residents, DG reconsidered its whole approach. Today, it goes about its work very differently. 'We understood that it's not enough to focus on the child workers. We're now interested in their comprehensive development. It's not enough that they go to school; we have to prevent violence, care for their health and find economic alternatives to working in the garbage' says Chamorro."



The topics they have covered include children's rights, alternatives to drugs, HIV-AIDS and discrimination. Here's a short extract from the programme on discrimination (translated from the original Spanish):

*"Hi! We welcome you to spend three minutes of hope with the young people of La Chureca. (...Music fades ...)*

*"Discrimination is horrible. Some people feel good about mistreating others. Fights over racial differences have been increasing lately. This is all due to discrimination."*

*"Some people who have money think they're better than those who don't, and try to humiliate them and discriminate against them. But these people are ignorant, because we suffer and feel hurt just like them; we're human beings, we have a heart."*

*"God made everyone equal, but some people are different due to the colour of our skin; some are rich and some are poor. Sometimes I think we need to fight against discrimination. I wonder why people do it, if we are all equal, black and white, rich and poor."*

*"Not everyone has the same tastes, but sometimes people criticise us because they don't like the way we dress, perhaps because we don't dress the same as them. We all have our defects, but also our wit and intelligence, but all of us, male and female, have the same rights."*

*Sometimes people discriminate against us because we're poor, or because of where we live. I think discrimination is a sickness in society. The people who do it think it's fine, but in the end it's really horrible and damages other people. It's a bad defect – really bad."*

*"No to discrimination - everybody happy!" (...Music fades in again...)*

*"Thanks for listening and we hope you'll share with us in our next programme."*

And an extract from the programme on children's rights:

*"Hi! We welcome you to spend three minutes of hope with the young people of La Chureca. (...Music fades ...) Let's talk about the topic of children's rights."*

*"Some people think we're ignorant, but we know about our rights and that's a good start. Everybody – young people, children and old people – need to value our rights. But what are our rights? The right to life, the right to a name and a family, the right to a home."*

*"As a young person I value my rights and I think we need to teach all children about their rights. Parents need to tell their children they have rights so they can have a better life."*



### Erica and Jonathan's story

One group of La Chureca children who have decided to take action to improve things is the children's radio team called "Three minutes with La Chureca". Erica and Jonathan, two of the founder members of the team, got the chance to go on a three-day intensive course on how to make public service radio announcements, supported by a US-based charity called "Americas Association for the Care of Children". On the course they learnt to write scripts, make recordings and edit these into three-minute radio programmes. They took their shows to Radio Ya, one of the most popular radio stations in Managua, who agreed to broadcast them and encouraged them to make more. There are now fourteen boys and girls in the team.



*"We need to talk about our right to a better world: a world without violence, without discrimination, where children are treated with love and tenderness." (Music fades in again...)*

*"We hope you find this reflection helpful. Thanks for listening and we hope you'll share with us in our next programme."*



### Ideas for action in other countries

#### Safe disposal and recycling of waste

Do you know how the waste material generated in your home or your school is disposed of? It's probably loaded into a lorry and taken away, but where does it go to, and what happens to it? What is done to avoid contamination of the areas around the disposal sites, and how much waste is reused and recycled in your community? There are probably lots of labels and messages about recycling, but how much recycling is really being done? If you can't get answers to these questions, or if the answers you find are not satisfactory, organise a campaign to get the responsible authorities to take action.



#### Using local radio and other media

The children of La Chureca used the medium of radio, as this is still one of the most important media for social messages in countries like Nicaragua where few people have smartphones or Facebook. What are the most important social media where you live? Many people use these just to chat and gossip, but you can also use them to campaign on the social justice issues that you are concerned about – just like the La Chureca children used local radio.

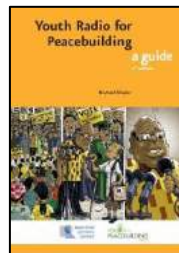
### Solidarity with working children

One of the problems faced by the organisations that wanted to help the children of La Chureca was that at first they didn't really understand the many problems the children faced. You can see this in the interview with Mario Chamorro quoted above. If you want to help child workers around the world get a better life, it's important first to learn about their lives, and above all to listen to what they themselves have to say. For example some adult organisations such as the International Labour Organisation (part of the United Nations) want to ban child labour; but if you listen to the child workers, most of them say they want to keep working, at least until someone provides decent jobs and decent salaries for their parents, if they have any. They want to be treated fairly at work, and they want to be able to go to school and not be discriminated against. A good project is to learn more about the reality of child labour by listening to the voices of child workers. This is the only way to find out how to help child workers fight for their rights and get the respect they deserve.



### Additional resources on-line

- "The 'New' Chureca: From Garbage to Human Dignity"; article in English by William Grigsby Vergara from *Envío* magazine, Number 321, April 2008. <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/3749>
- Recordings of some of the children's radio spots in Spanish can be found at: <http://www.aaccchildren.net/lachureca>
- "Media Activities and Good Ideas, by with and for Children" (MAGIC): Great UNICEF-run website with all the resources you could possibly need to get your message across using both old and new media: <http://www.unicef.org/magic/>



And if your particular interest is radio:

*"Youth radio for peacebuilding – A guide"*  
(Radio for peacebuilding Africa, 2006)

[http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/rfpa/pdf/manual\\_03\\_EN\\_color.pdf](http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/rfpa/pdf/manual_03_EN_color.pdf)



*"Linking generations through radio: A toolkit from Africa for radio with children and youth"*  
(UNESCO, 2013)

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002238/223828e.pdf>



## Case study 6: Children organise to demand action on UN recommendations on children's rights

<b>Location:</b>	Matagalpa
<b>Social justice issue addressed:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education and culture</li> <li>Family life</li> <li>Health and wellbeing</li> <li>Rights of disabled children</li> <li>Prevention of violence</li> <li>Juvenile justice</li> <li>Migration</li> <li>Child labour and economic exploitation</li> </ul>
<b>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:</b>	This case study relates to the implementation of the Convention in general, covering virtually all the articles, 1 to 54.

### The issue

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely ratified international treaty in the history of the world. Of the 193 UN member states, only Somalia and the USA have not ratified it. The Convention is therefore the most important guarantee for the protection of children's rights throughout the world.

Every government that ratifies the Convention is called a "State Party" to the Convention and undertakes to send a report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child every five years on how well they are doing at protecting children's rights in their country and fulfilling their duties under the Convention.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child is an international committee of experts that meets in Geneva, Switzerland, to examine all the reports. They also question representatives of the governments, and of children's organisations in each country, to get a more accurate view of the situation.



Committee on the Rights of the Child HQ in Geneva

Once they've studied all the evidence they produce a final report on each country which they call "Concluding Observations". In this report, as well as recognising the progress each country has made in the past five years, they make a long list of recommendations on what the government needs to do to fulfill its responsibilities and guarantee the rights of children and young people in their country.

### Action for change

The government of Nicaragua sent its fourth report to the UN Committee in 2009 and it was examined in September 2010. For the first time ever a young person, 16 year-old Carmen Delgadillo, went to Geneva with the Nicaraguan voluntary organisation representatives to help make sure the Committee heard about the true situation of children's rights in Nicaragua.



The Committee examining reports in Geneva



Carmen Delgadillo of the 2010 Nicaraguan delegation.

When the Committee produced its "Concluding Observations" in October 2010, they included 97 recommendations of things the Nicaraguan government would have to do to fulfill its obligations under the UN Convention.

Almost a year went by and there was no sign that the government intended to do anything about it; it looked like they weren't taking the report seriously. To make matters worse, the "Concluding Observations" document was written in complicated language that even most adults couldn't understand, let alone the children and young people who were most affected by it. It was time to take action!

## Darling and Pablo's story



Darling



Pablo

Some of the local organisations working with children got together and helped organise three teams of child consultants to produce a "child-friendly" version of the recommendations. Darling from La Dalia and Pablo from Yúcul were among the forty young people involved. They explained the challenge they accepted:

*"The Committee sent its Concluding Observations in October 2010. They include 97 recommendations to promote and defend the human rights of Nicaraguan children and young people. To make sure these recommendations are acted on everyone has to take action. The government won't do everything on its own.*

*The problem is that the official document of the Concluding Observations is too complicated and boring. It will be hard for children and young people to understand it.*

*We are children and young people from San Ramón, Tuma-La Dalia and Matagalpa. We took on the job of writing a new easier-to-understand version of the recommendations, so that all the children and young people of our country can play their part in pushing for the recommendations to be implemented. This way we can all contribute to the promotion and defense of our rights"*



Darling and team at work on the child-friendly version

They also described how they set about their task:

*"First we learnt about the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and how it looks at the countries' reports and makes its recommendations. Then we worked in small groups studying all the recommendations to identify any*

*difficult words and rewrite them in a way that was easier to understand. We also talked about how we wanted the design and style of our child-friendly version, and did drawings to illustrate it. Then we had a final meeting with all three teams to discuss the draft version and make improvements for the final version."*



Pablo and friends at work

At the end of their new child-friendly version, the young people added their own suggestions about what should be the next steps to get the recommendations implemented:

1. Give every child and young person a copy of this document.
2. Do talks or workshops in schools and community groups.
3. Run cultural activities on this topic: Write songs and poems about the recommendations.
4. Get in touch with the media: radio, TV and newspapers. Get invited on programmes and do interviews.
5. Liaise with local community organisations like the Citizens Power Committees.
6. Organise marches in our areas so everyone knows about the recommendations.
7. Organise a municipal forum and invite the Mayor and District Council so they know about the recommendations.
8. Design and make posters and banners. Print our message on T-shirts."

When the new version was ready, the Nicaraguan Coordinating Committee of NGOs working with Children and Young People (CODENI) published it, and the team elected representatives to present it to the government and the media at an official launch in the capital city, Managua.



The launch event in Managua



## Ideas for action in other countries

Unless you happen to live in the USA or Somalia, your government is a "State Party" to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and has to send a report to the Committee every five years. After each report is submitted, your government receives the Committee's "Concluding Observations" with its list of recommendations of all the things it needs to do to meet its obligations and guarantee children and young people's rights in your country.

### Has your government fulfilled its obligations, and if not, what can you do about it?

First of all you need to get a copy of the Committee's last set of Concluding Observations to your government. They are all available online. The original documents are long and complicated and not a fun read, so you should also find out if anyone has done a simplified or child-friendly version. If not, why not think about doing your own, or joining with other interested groups to do it like the Nicaraguan children?

Once you know what's in the recommendations, you can go through them and decide if the government is taking its responsibilities seriously. You'll probably find loads of things the government hasn't done and doesn't want to do. Rather than waste energy tackling all of them at once, select one or two recommendations that you feel are really important and campaign on these.

- Write to government ministers or officials responsible. Ask them if they are aware of this recommendation and what they are doing about it.
- If you are not satisfied with the reply, you can contact the traditional media (radio, TV, newspapers) and/or start a campaign in the new media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc.). See the Nicaraguan children's suggestions above for more campaign ideas.



The full team at their final meeting (can you spot Darling and Pablo?)

## Preparing for the next report

In many countries the official government reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child are very one-sided and cover up the government's failures. Because of this, it is common for voluntary organisations (also known as Civil Society Organisations) to get together and produce alternative reports. The UN Committee welcomes alternative reports and pays a lot of attention to them.

- Find out when your country's next report is due, and whether there are plans to produce an alternative report. If there are, find out which organisation is coordinating this and who is involved.
- Identify the infringements of children's rights that most concern you where you live. Research this and put together your own report, then send this to whoever is coordinating your country's alternative report to the UN Committee.
- If, like Nicaragua, your country is going to send one or more young people to Geneva to help present the report, find out how they are being selected and how one of your group can be a candidate (and if you feel that the selection process is undemocratic, complain loudly to the people responsible – and the media if necessary).

You never know; you might end up going to Geneva to discuss your government's children's rights record with the UN Committee!

## Additional resources on-line

There's plenty of information on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the Child Rights International Network (CRIN) website:

<http://crin.org/en/guides/introduction-childrens-rights>



"Children and young people making a contribution so that our rights are complied with in Nicaragua" (CODENI, Nicaragua, 2012): The recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to the Government of Nicaragua 2010, rewritten by children and young people in their own words (Spanish only):

[http://www.cesema.org/documentos/CODENI-Version\\_Amigable.pdf](http://www.cesema.org/documentos/CODENI-Version_Amigable.pdf)



"Children as change agents: Guidelines for child participation in periodic reporting on the Convention on the Rights of the Child" (World Vision, 2007).

[http://rightsofchildren.ca/wp-content/uploads/Guidelines\\_for\\_Child\\_Participation\\_in\\_CRC\\_Reporting.pdf](http://rightsofchildren.ca/wp-content/uploads/Guidelines_for_Child_Participation_in_CRC_Reporting.pdf)

There are lots of child-friendly versions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the child on-line. Try these:

- [http://www.unicef.org/magic/media/documents/what\\_rights\\_flyer\\_english.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/magic/media/documents/what_rights_flyer_english.pdf)
- [http://www.unicef.org/rightsite/files/rights\\_leaflet.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/rightsite/files/rights_leaflet.pdf)
- [http://crin.org/docs/UNCRC\\_CFversion2002\\_UNICEF.pdf](http://crin.org/docs/UNCRC_CFversion2002_UNICEF.pdf)
- [http://www.niccy.org/downloads/2013/publications/NICCY\\_42\\_Rights\\_Guide\\_final\\_Sept\\_13.pdf](http://www.niccy.org/downloads/2013/publications/NICCY_42_Rights_Guide_final_Sept_13.pdf)

## Case study 7: Children organise to put an end to illegal sale of alcohol and the damage it causes to families and communities

<b>Location:</b>	Yúcul, San Ramón
<b>Social justice issue addressed:</b>	Health and wellbeing Prevention of violence Family life
<b>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:</b>	Art. 9: Protection from abuse and mistreatment Art. 12: Right to be heard Art. 28/29: Right to quality education Art. 33: Protection from drugs.

### The issue

The consumption of alcohol is legal in most countries, and it is true that it can be used as a relatively harmless recreational drug. However, it is also a dangerous drug and its misuse leads to illness, violence, child poverty and other social problems. In some parts of the world, misuse of alcohol is a particular problem for indigenous communities, where it is linked to their histories of colonialism and exploitation by foreign invaders over the centuries.



In Nicaragua, for example, misuse of alcohol is a major problem. Whilst laws exist to limit and control the sale of alcoholic drinks, in remote indigenous areas the forces of "law and order" do not exist, and locally-made spirits, known as "guaro" are cheap and easy to obtain. There is no control over where and when alcohol is sold, or to whom. Often it is the powerful people in a community who make money from the sale of alcohol, which makes it difficult for ordinary people to do anything about it; in fact they may put their lives and their families at risk if they openly challenge powerful guaro merchants.

### The Yúcul Young Researchers' story \*



In 2011, a group of children and young people from the community of Yúcul in northern Nicaragua, supported by local NGO CESESMA, decided it was time to speak out. After discussing various social problems that affected their community they agreed that the misuse of alcohol was the number one problem and set out to do something about it.

The first thing they did was to research the problem. They interviewed people in their community to find out how the problem of alcohol misuse was affecting them.



\* Because of the issue explored in this case study, we will not name any individual member of the team as we have with the other case studies. It was all a team effort.



They interviewed children, teenagers, young adults, parents and community leaders; 37 people in all. Then three of them took a bus into town and interviewed the Police Captain.



When they got back they analysed all the interviews and put together a report on the scale of the problem. They found that:

- 65% of children said that their fathers drank guaro, and that this made them sad and depressed as it led to violence and problems at home. They also said this had a bad effect on their school work.
- They said a particular problem was that there were local bars or "cantinas" right next to the school that were open all day, and that they were often hassled by drunks on the way to and from school.
- 61% of mothers interviewed said that their partner or another household member drank guaro and half of them had suffered violence or abuse as a result, as had their children. Others said they had been humiliated or threatened and so had their children. One said she had barely escaped being killed by her drunken partner.
- The community leaders said that in many poor families all the money went on guaro, and that the drinkers were the cause of constant fights and bad feelings in the community. They said it was impossible to reason with alcoholics and they wouldn't listen to advice.
- The Police Captain said the police had identified misuse of alcohol as one of the biggest factors that contributed to the high level of family violence. He mentioned at least one murder where alcohol was a key factor. He said the police recognised it was important to deal with the problem. He claimed they had had some success in closing down illegal cantinas and were making regular visits to check on sales of guaro in the rural communities.

### Action for change

When their report was finished, the team met again to draw up an action plan. Some of the young people wanted to confront the cantina owners directly and try and close them down, but others wisely suggested this might be dangerous, and that they needed to think of different tactics. In the end they put together a comprehensive action plan which included:

#### In the local community:

- Present our report at a public meeting in the Community Centre.
- Talk to children who have an alcoholic in the family and try to help them.

- Encourage the leaders to discuss the alcohol problem in community meetings.

#### At school:

- Organise an activity day to share our research project with teachers and students.
- Use drama to raise awareness of the effects of alcohol in the family.
- Have a cultural event with poems, dance, posters and banners.
- Paint a mural with a message on this topic.
- Encourage more research.
- Encourage parents to accompany children to school and pick them up afterwards so they don't get hassled by drunks.

#### In the district:

- Organise a municipal forum on the subject.
- Organise a campaign and a protest march with banners.
- Community theatre.
- Hold a public opinion poll on the topic.
- Broadcast messages on local radio.
- Lobby the council to prohibit all sales of alcohol within 200 metres of a school.

#### National and international

- Go to the National Assembly (parliament) and speak to our Deputies (MPs).
- Use the Internet to share information.

When Nicaragua's most influential television station, Canal 2, heard about the young researchers' work, they sent a TV news crew to find out more. The young researchers' story was seen on the main evening news.



A scene from the Canal 2 TV news story (with English subtitles added)

The team's work has inspired adults to take action:

- They presented their findings to a new "Family life and Security Commission". The Commission decided to make the alcohol problem a top priority for local action. Local government and party officials said they had been aware for the issue for years, but it wasn't till the children came forward with their research that they felt forced to act on it.
- The local police also took action; they confiscated illegal liquor and closed down at least two unlicensed cantinas.

- The local authority and police have ensured no new liquor licenses are granted in the Yúcul area.

When the team members were asked to evaluate the experience, these were some of their comments:

*"This was good work, and it's important how we were able to organise ourselves and carry out this whole process."*

*"I felt proud (to be a researcher), but at the same time I was a bit frightened because I didn't know if the community was going to support me".*

*"We've been researching topics of real importance to our community. Though we didn't see it this way before, now we have information on a topic that affects us. In my community there's a lot of mistreatment of children and I think this kind of research is a good way to help these children."*

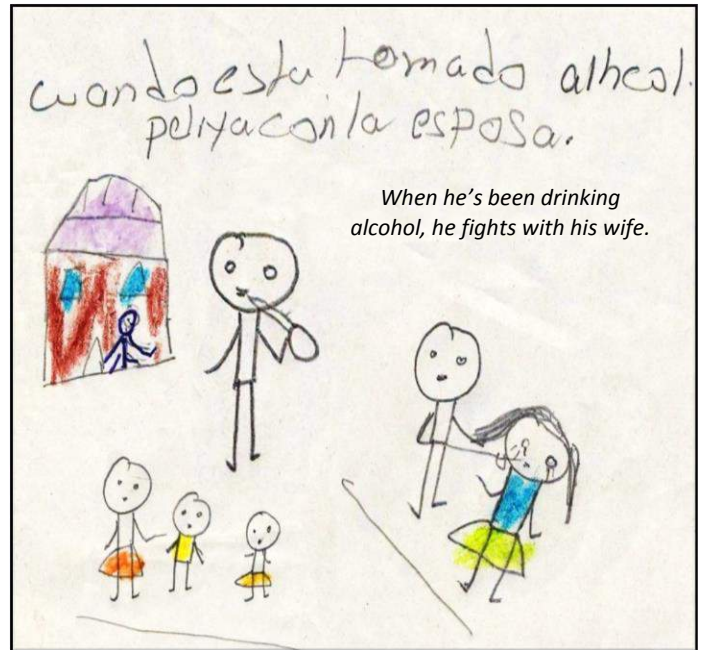


**Ideas for action in other countries**

For the children and young people of Yúcul, alcohol misuse was the big problem they decided to tackle. What are the big problems where you live? The Yúcul children made a long list of problems and discussed their priorities before they made their final decision.

Once they had decided on the problem to tackle, the first thing they did was to research it. This is an important step for children and young people anywhere who want to change things. Generally adults will find a way to ignore young people's proposals, or will just give a token response, so it is important that when children and young people present their proposals to adult decision-makers, they are backed by solid research. If

you do this, the adults can't say, "You kids don't know what you're talking about. Leave it to the grown-ups". If you can make a strong case backed by good research, it's harder for the people in power to ignore it or dismiss it as "Just a bunch of kids complaining".



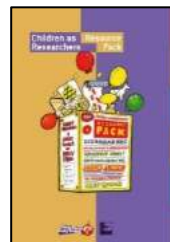
*When he's been drinking alcohol, he fights with his wife.*

**Additional resources on-line**



*"Learn to live without violence"* (CESESMA and the Centre for Children and Young People's Participation at the University of Central Lancashire, 2012): CESESMA published the Yúcul young researchers' report in this book, now available in English.

[http://harryshier.comxa.com/docs/CESESMA-Learn\\_to\\_live\\_without\\_violence.pdf](http://harryshier.comxa.com/docs/CESESMA-Learn_to_live_without_violence.pdf)



*"Children as researchers resource pack"* (Funky Dragon, 2011): Guidebook on how children can set up and run their own research project.

<http://www.funkydragon.org/>

See also the resources on children doing research in Case Study 1, and on prevention of violence against children in Case study 4.



## Case study 8: Young people organise to stop illegal logging and prevent the environmental damage caused by deforestation

<b>Location:</b>	Samulalí, Matagalpa
<b>Social justice issue addressed:</b>	Deforestation: environmental degradation Responsible use of natural resources Corruption
<b>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:</b>	Art. 12: Right to be heard Article 29: Right to environmental education

### The issue



It's well known that tropical forests are the "green lungs" that let the world breathe, helping to keep carbon dioxide under control and producing oxygen. In countries like Nicaragua they are also a vital part of the local ecosystem, helping to control erosion and maintain humidity and water levels in the soil, which in turn permits irrigation of crops on which local communities depend. Sustainable agriculture means conserving a balance of farmland and forest. If the forests disappear, the water disappears and then the arable soil disappears and there's no more food.

There are two principal causes of deforestation. One is the clearing of forests to create additional land for farming, and the other is commercial logging; that is cutting down trees to make a profit selling the valuable hardwood timber. Both are serious problems in Nicaragua.



Nicaragua has laws against uncontrolled logging and clearance of forests, and a Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources that is supposed to monitor the forests and prevent deforestation. However, the Ministry doesn't have the resources to employ enough inspectors, and much of the illegal

activity takes place in remote areas where no inspector is ever likely to set foot. Commercial logging is meant to be strictly controlled, and loggers need a license from the local authorities, which is supposed to ensure sustainable management of the forests. However, where there's a lot of money to be made, there is the risk of corruption. Wealthy landowners are able to bribe officials for licenses to cut down trees without regard for sustainability. In the case of Samulalí, featured in this case study, they get a permit to cut a few trees legally, then secretly fell dozens when the authorities aren't looking (which they never are). This kind of logging is difficult to stop, as the loggers have legal permits, but either they have acquired these by bribing officials or they are illegally exceeding their logging quotas.



### Rodolfo's story



Samulalí in northern Nicaragua is an area that has been plagued by deforestation. The indigenous people of Samulalí need the forests to maintain their way of life. Without the forests their rivers dry up and their fields become dry and barren.



A group of young people, supported by local NGO CESESMA, formed an environmental action group to try to do something about the problem. Their first task was to collect photographic and video evidence of trees being felled where they were desperately needed to conserve the environment. Then they had to take this evidence to the authorities and demand a response.

Rodolfo, one of the leaders of the group, was interviewed about his experience:

*"We're looking out for the rights of the people of this community, and it's a real problem for us the amount of deforestation that's going on, and the damage that's being done to the environment as a consequence, and what could happen in the future if we don't stop it. We're looking at serious environmental problems here. We need the authorities to support us; to support the community."*

*We had several meetings with the authorities. At the first meeting we had a problem because the people from the Environment Ministry didn't show up. So then we went to the district Environmental Committee and it was there that we were able to put forward the problems we were facing in the community with the trees being cut down. Some of the community leaders are giving logging permits, but people are cutting too much. The leaders give a permit to cut one tree, and the landowners cut ten behind their backs."*

### Action for change

On the basis of the information that Rodolfo and his friends collected, the local authority arranged an inspection of the forests in Samulalí, and confirmed the evidence of illegal logging.



Photo taken by Rodolfo and his team in Samulalí

They used this evidence to bring prosecutions against two of the biggest landowners, who each received a \$500 fine. The landowners could probably afford it, but the action taken by the authorities sent an important message throughout the district, and provided a disincentive to the illegal loggers. It also encouraged local people such as Rodolfo and his group, knowing that the authorities would take their reports seriously. And so they continue to listen for the sound of chain-saws, and report cases of trees being felled where they shouldn't be.



Children on a march for the environment in La Dalia. The banner says, "When burning and logging increase the water disappears" (it rhymes in Spanish).

### Ideas for action in other countries

#### Be aware of forests and deforestation

Raise awareness of the huge global problem of deforestation. If more people are aware, there won't be such a demand for unsustainably-produced wood that damages the environment.



In general wood is good. It is a natural human-friendly resource that, unlike plastic, can be produced in a sustainable way. The trouble is, because of greed and corruption, it is often produced in unsustainable and very harmful ways, as shown in Rodolfo's story.

So if you need something made of wood:

- See if you can find a second-hand one, or one made of recycled wood, or even repair a broken one, rather than buying a new wood product.
- Buy products made of locally-grown wood rather than imported, as this is more likely to be produced in sustainable forests, and won't have travelled so far (depends what country you're in, of course).
- Avoid products made of tropical hardwoods as this kind of wood is hardly ever produced in a sustainable way. The trees can take up to a hundred years to grow, and once felled are rarely replaced.



- If you need to buy imported wood products, look for a "Forest Stewardship Council" label. As long as this is genuine, it guarantees sustainable production.
- But beware; many wood products carry labels that claim they are sustainable or eco-friendly, which are just there to fool you. If you don't recognise the label, you can always check it out on-line; see the online resources below.

**What are the risks to the environment where you live?**

The young people from Samulalí campaigned on an environmental issue that affected them directly. What are the specific risks to the environment where you live?

If you identify a real and urgent risk to the environment in your community, you can organise to do something about it like the young people in Samulalí did. For example:

- Collect convincing, incontrovertible evidence of the damage being done (photos, videos, expert testimony etc.).
- Find out which authority is responsible for dealing with the issue and what they are doing about it (you may be able to do this on-line, but you can always phone or write to them).
- Plan your Campaign. There are lots of campaign strategies to choose from: using the media, online networking, marches and demonstrations, petitions, direct action, letter-writing campaigns, posters, banners, badges, T-shirts etc.

Take care: Environmental damage usually occurs because somebody rich and powerful is making money out of it. This person has a lot to lose and so can be dangerous. Think through the risks and be prepared before planning any action that might anger the rich and powerful.

**Additional resources on-line**



"Rainforest Activity Pack" (Rainforest Foundation, 2012):

<http://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/files/Rainforest-Action-Pack-in-house-print.pdf>

Information on "Illegal logging" from WWF at:

[http://wwf.panda.org/about\\_our\\_earth/about\\_forests/deforestation/forest\\_illegal\\_logging/](http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/about_forests/deforestation/forest_illegal_logging/)

- The Forest Stewardship Council has lots of information and also activity ideas for children and young people: <http://www.fsc-uk.org/educational-resources.32.htm>
- An index of eco-labels on wood and forest products is at: [http://www.ecolabelindex.com/ecolabels/?st=category,forest\\_products\\_paper](http://www.ecolabelindex.com/ecolabels/?st=category,forest_products_paper)
- "Grown in Britain" campaign, to encourage people to choose locally grown, sustainably produced wood products: <http://www.growninbritain.org/>

# Children's rights and social justice

Case studies from Nicaragua as a resource for students and teachers



The eight case studies in this volume tell the true stories of children and young people in Nicaragua organising and taking action on social justice issues in their communities to defend their own and other children's human rights.

They were written as part of the "Education for Social Justice" project coordinated by Leeds Development Education Centre. This project aimed to help make Development Education an embedded cross-curricular theme in European education policies, and in so doing help create a climate across Europe where young people felt enthusiastic about taking action for a fairer world.

An important aspect of the project was its focus on encouraging children and young people to get involved in action for social justice. Learning about and discussing the Nicaraguan children's experiences presented here can be a starting point for this process.



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