

Transformative Action Research with and from the Participation of Children and Young People

A step-by-step methodological guide
from CESESMA in Nicaragua



Children from Santa Martha Coffee Plantation



Promoción y Defensa
de los Derechos de la Niñez.



Acknowledgements

The guide was developed with the participation of young women and men from rural communities in the municipality of San Ramón, department of Matagalpa, Nicaragua.

The development and validation process was made possible with the sponsorship of Terre des Hommes, Germany as part of the project "INTERPAZ: Promoting a culture of peace with gender equality and equity for children and young people in Latin America". The project is carried out by organisations in four countries: "*Ação Educativa*" in Brazil, "*Corporación Amiga Joven*" in Colombia, "*Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen*" in El Salvador and "CESESMA: Promoting and Defending Children's Rights" in Nicaragua.

It is co-financed by Terre des Hommes Germany and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).



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Table of contents.

1. Introduction	6
2. Theoretical-Conceptual Perspective	7
2.1 Transformative Action Research methodology	7
2.2 The human rights approach	7
2.3 Gender focus	7
2.4 Children and young people as the leading experts in the action-research process	8
2.5 Children and young people are capable and competent	8
2.6 The protagonist and leadership role of children and young people	8
2.7 Children and young people put forward recommendations and action plans	8
3. Guiding Principles of Transformative Action Research	9
4. Methodological steps in Transformative Action Research	11
4.1 Identification and selection of children and young people to form a research team	11
4.2 Organisational preconditions for convening a research team of children and young people	11
With parents, guardians or carers	11
With children and young people:	12
With teachers and headteachers:	12
The organisation: educators and promoters who facilitate and accompany the research process:	12
4.3 Role of accompanying facilitators/educators	12
4.4 Building the research team	13
4.5 Choosing the research topic	14
First stage: Acknowledge boundaries	14
Second stage: Brainstorm a long list	14
Third stage: Prioritise a short-list	14
Fourth stage: Vote to determine preferences	14
Fifth stage: Review preferences and decide by consensus	14
4.6 Using children's drawings to encourage team reflection on the topic	15
4.7 Design the research	16
Identifying the research question: What are we trying to find out?	16
Identifying research stakeholders	17
Agreeing on the type of instruments to be applied	17
4.8 Design and development of the research instruments	17
Defining the questions to be integrated into the research instruments	17
Validation and preparation of the instruments to be applied	18
4.9 Preparations for field research	18
Organisational arrangements	18
Protection practices or measures	18
4.10 Preparation of young researchers	19
Methodological aspects.	19
Ethical aspects.	19
Risk of abuse or mistreatment.	19
4.11 Field research.	20

4.12 Data management and analysis	21
4.13 Reaching a consensus on conclusions	22
4.14 Formulating recommendations.	23
4.15 Writing the report	23
4.16 Drawing up an action plan	24
4.17 Actions to disseminate findings	24
Dissemination and socialisation actions	24
Mobilisation actions to promote the implementation of recommendations or proposals	25
4.18 Evaluation of the Transformative Action Research process.	25
Reference documents	26
Other references	27
Appendices.	28
Appendix A: Voting with cups and beans	28
Appendix B: Example of a young researchers' interview format	29

1. Introduction

This guide was developed within the framework of the project *INTERPAZ: Promoting a culture of peace with gender equality and equity for children and young people in Latin America*. The project is implemented by organisations in four countries: “*Ação Educativa*” in Brazil, “*Corporación Amiga Joven*” in Colombia, “*Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen*” in El Salvador and “CESESMA: Promoting and Defending Children’s Rights” in Nicaragua.

The project's educational activities contribute to promoting a “Culture of Peace” with a gender focus and the participation of children and young people. Through these educational processes, it actively involves citizens who are aware of the problems that affect them and of the conditions that, because they are men or women, generate oppression, discrimination and inequality. Thus it strengthens their capacities, abilities, and skills, so that they can be protagonistas (pro-active agents) capable of making changes in themselves and their environments.

The development of this guide was preceded by a review and analysis of CESESMA’s previous practice in this area: “*Systematic Review of Experiences of Transformative Action-Research with the Participation of Children and Young People*” (CESESMA, 2022). It takes into account the evolution of the Transformative Action Research methodology and incorporates the lessons learnt at each stage. Both the original review and the creation of this guide were made possible with the participation of children and young people as protagonists of the experiences.

The development of the methodology of Transformative Action Research is a key aspect of CESESMA's primary strategy, “Training and development of young community education activists”.¹ These are children and young people who take active roles, acquiring knowledge and sharing their learning, thus developing leadership roles in the community, learning and applying practical approaches that enable them to solve problems that impact their lives, families and contexts and impede the exercise of their human rights: for example, problems associated with education, the environment, gender violence, recreation and sexuality.

Although the experiences analysed were specific to the experiences of children and young people from rural communities in Nicaragua, in writing this guide we have broadened its focus so that the methodology can be implemented in other countries and contexts by children and young people undertaking Transformative Action Research, as well as by promoters and educators from supporting organisations with a role of facilitation, accompaniment and follow-up.

The guidance offered in this book can be modified to suit different countries, research topics, and contexts, such as rural or urban areas, and emergencies such as natural disasters, health emergencies, civil conflict, or social crises. It can also be adapted to take account of relevant aspects of ethnicity, origin, gender, and age in different contexts. In every context, however, it is vital to adopt and implement protocols and measures to protect children and young people, and mitigate the risks they may face.

In this guide, therefore, you will find both the essential prerequisites and the practical step-by-step processes to carry out Transformative Action Research with children and young people.

¹ At the centre of CESESMA’s strategy is the training and support of young community education activists (*promotores* and *promotoras* in Spanish). Promotores/as, typically aged 12–18, are young people trained to run out-of-school learning groups with younger children in their communities. This gives them a leadership role and a platform for active organisation and engagement in community development activities, and direct action in defence of children’s rights, through which they influence political processes at different levels. (Shier, 2010, p. 217)

2. Theoretical-Conceptual Perspective

2.1 Transformative Action Research methodology

The methodology of Transformative Action Research presented here is based on CESESMA's institutional strategy of training and development of young community education activists (promotores/as). A novel aspect is that the children and young people, "were encouraged to reflect on the problems that affected their communities and identify areas where they felt there were possibilities for change driven by research evidence. Through this process of reflection, they reached a consensus on the topics they wanted to research." (Shier, 2015, p.211)

From 2007 to 2015, CESESMA facilitated and accompanied the development of approximately twelve such research experiences. The first projects were based on the methodology known as "Children's Consultancy" which originated in the United Kingdom some years previously. (Shier, 2015).

By implementing and validating the methodology, the original approach was strengthened, building on the experiences of children and young people in the north of Nicaragua. As a result, in 2012, a new approach was established: Transformative Action Research with and from the participation of children and young people.

These Transformative Action Research processes are led by children and young people between the ages of 8 and 18. Through this process, they participate in various educational activities to acquire knowledge of human rights, environment, education, sexuality, violence prevention, and participation. The methodology can generate social and political impact, as it can be applied to investigate relevant issues that can be positioned in public debate. Historically, adults have allowed many of the problems faced in their communities to become "normalised"; however, children and young people continue to experience the negative impact these have on their lives and environments.

2.2 The human rights approach

The methodology of Transformative Research is based on a human rights approach; above all, the fundamental principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989): The right of the child to be heard and to have his or her views taken into account in decisions which affect them (Article 12), without discrimination (Article 2), so that decisions are always made in their best interest (Article 3).

CESESMA defined its human rights approach in its 2016-2021 Strategic Plan, which states:

Priority is given to strengthening people's capacities, skills and potential to express their opinions, create, innovate, propose, transcend and make decisions that enable them to transform or undertake changes at personal, family and community levels. CESESMA recognises that each person is a rights-holder, and respects their integrity, individuality and privacy. The opportunities thus generated contribute to promoting, claiming, defending, demanding and fulfilling their rights. (CESESMA, 2016)

2.3 Gender focus

CESESMA is committed to incorporating a generational and gender perspective both within the organisation and in its wider work. Moreover, it takes concrete action to raise awareness of gender differences by making discrimination and inequality visible, considering the lived reality of girls and young women, boys and young men.

We promote the participation of children and young people in analysing the gender situation in their communities, and insist that their voices are heard in developing proposals for plans, strategies

and projects. Facilitating analysis, discussion, and critical thinking in this way leads to greater awareness of inequalities related to gender identity, gender assignment and gender roles.

For CESESMA, integrating a gender perspective means focusing attention on women's practical and strategic needs in the planning and implementation of educational activities. To achieve this, it promotes the exercise of leadership by children and young people to address and identify alternative responses to their practical and strategic demands as a requirement of their rights.

2.4 Children and young people as the leading experts in the action-research process

Based on their experiences and what they perceive in their family, school and community environments, we believe that children and young people are the leading experts on matters affecting their daily reality, and the different aspects that positively or negatively impact their lives.

They know their needs, desires, goals, dreams, capacities, fears, and difficulties, as well as the families, communities, neighbourhoods or cities where they live, the work they do and the problems they face. Making good decisions in children's best interest requires input, proposals, and recommendations from these same experts. Children and young people, therefore, can provide expert inputs on what is most appropriate and acceptable for their overall well-being, and so propose relevant concrete actions.

2.5 Children and young people are capable and competent

It is further proposed that children and young people can assume the role of researchers with a high level of effectiveness, as long as there is knowledgeable and committed facilitations, and a methodological approach adapted to the researchers' age, characteristics and experiences. Likewise, it is important to provide the same level of technical and methodological support that any team of researchers needs to carry out their work, including IT support, such as providing cameras, computers, digital projectors, telephones, phone chargers and applications. Moreover, the support has to be adapted to the conditions of diverse neighbourhoods, communities and cities.

2.6 The protagonist and leadership role of children and young people

It is essential to highlight that children and young people play a leading (protagonist) role in Transformative Action Research processes. In other words, they are the ones who choose, prioritise, and define the topics to be investigated, as well as the stakeholders to be involved through surveys and interviews. They also analyse the information, prepare the report, make recommendations and propose action plans. Their adult supporters facilitate and accompany the process to ensure ethical research practice at every stage.

2.7 Children and young people put forward recommendations and action plans

The methodology of Transformative Action Research has excellent potential for social and political impact, as it enables children and young people to research topics of interest based on their own experiences. It thus generates recommendations to the relevant stakeholders linked to the problems, intending to influence changes in their environments, with concrete actions to be implemented in the different contexts. It also strengthens children and young people's knowledge of their rights, so they can claim these in order to defend and promote them.

3. Guiding Principles of Transformative Action Research

1. It is based on a human rights approach, recognising children and young people's capacities without making a distinction based on age, while also recognising the evolution of their capacity with age and experience. In particular it recognises the capacity of children and young people to apply critical thinking in analysing problems.
2. It applies a gender focus that takes into account the conditions and interests of the participants.
3. Participation is voluntary and inclusive for all children and young people.
4. The leading experts on the daily lives of children and young people are themselves.
5. Children and young people can readily take on board and identify with the idea of themselves as researchers, and understand what this role entails.
6. The role of the adult is to accompany, provide an environment based on trust, protection, safety, and security, and facilitate the process. It is not a role of teacher, nor is the adult another researcher.
7. Children and young people determine the topic they want to research. The role of adults is to facilitate a process of reflection and choice so that the children and young people make the final decision. However, CESESMA's experience suggests that adults may set boundaries, e.g. noting limitations due to the need to finance the research process. In such cases it is appropriate to explain to the children and young people that these constraints also apply to adult researchers, as they too have to find financial support to make their work possible.
8. It is crucial to provide a level of technical support and resources similar to those which adult researchers would typically expect (though it is understood that the way in which this support is provided must be tailored to the age and experience of the children and young people involved).
9. Children and young people already have knowledge based on their experiences. However, through a process of Transformative Action Research, they can learn more about a topic, expanding and enriching their knowledge.
10. Children and young people plan the research and decide on the research questions according to the research topic. They also decide who the relevant stakeholders are, and how and when they will carry out the process.
11. Children and young people write their report in their own words. If a report by accompanying adults is required, it is submitted separately in consultation with the young researchers.
12. The organisation accompanying the process should commit to continuing to offer support and accompaniment to the young researchers during the formulation and implementation of an Action Plan, through which the children and young people can disseminate their research findings and promote the implementation of their recommendations.

13. Transformative Action Research recognises the capacities of children and young people to investigate a problem and generate recommendations based on their experiences. This process should take account of the range of skills they possess, such as drawing, playing, active reading, theatre and more.
14. Children and young people as researchers can promote follow-up actions that highlight the issue being investigated, and propose solutions in public debates to bring about change.



Young researchers from El Tuma-La Dalia present their research findings to an international audience of adult experts

4. Methodological steps in Transformative Action Research

The methodology of Transformative Action Research is flexible and can be adapted to different interest groups, contexts and themes, allowing the exploration of a wide range of issues. This approach has great potential when the necessary conditions are created, and adequate technical and methodological support are provided.

Considering the guiding principles mentioned in the previous section, Transformative Action Research requires an ordered methodological process. The following sections outline the steps to be followed, based on the Transformative Action Research projects facilitated by CESESMA over the last ten years.

4.1 Identification and selection of children and young people to form a research team

This step requires formulating clear and transparent criteria to prevent discrimination, and promote fairness and opportunities for equal participation. The basic criteria for becoming part of a research team include interest and motivation to participate, some previous awareness of human rights, and the informed consent of both the young person and their parent or guardian.

To promote equity and equality, it is necessary to identify the specific factors that generate exclusion and inequality in your country, neighbourhood, village, territory or community. These factors may include age, class, skin colour, ethnicity, language, rurality, different abilities, gender origins and identities. Once the factors contributing to exclusion and discrimination have been recognised, the necessary measures to address and overcome them must be defined and implemented.

For example, it is important to consider measures to ensure that children and young people with disabilities are aware of the opportunity to participate, and adequate resources must be in place to promote, enable and facilitate their participation. Also, in many cultural contexts, girls face barriers to participation as they are expected to take on caregiving roles or domestic responsibilities. At the same time, boys and young men may face different obstacles to their availability, such as farm work, which need to be taken into account.

4.2 Organisational preconditions for convening a research team of children and young people

With parents, guardians or carers

- Parents, guardians and carers must be informed about the research process, including the research topic, how it will be carried out, and where it will occur. In addition, they must also be told who will participate, the educators/facilitators who will accompany the process, and the protective measures that will be implemented. Only when they have this information, are parents in a position to give their full support, and informed consent.
- Protection measures include avoiding meeting alone with children and always having an additional accompanying adult present. In addition, children should never be belittled or mistreated. Adults must avoid imposing decisions by manipulation or abuse of power. There must be informed consent for taking of photographs or any kind of recording. The methods of maintaining communication must be agreed; for example, if adult facilitators are to have access to participants' mobile phone numbers, this can only be under specific agreed conditions.
- It is valuable, where possible, to convene a meeting with parents, guardians and carers to provide them with information about the process, respond to any concerns, and so strengthen their commitment to and support their children's participation.

With children and young people:

- Share the research proposal with children and young people so they can decide on their participation, considering the principle of informed voluntary engagement.
- Clarify any doubts they may have about the process and timing.

With teachers and headteachers:

- If young researchers will be absent from school, this needs to be negotiated with the schools, including both the child's class or form teacher and the headteacher/principal of the school. Permission should be formally requested for any school absence, and care should be taken that any necessary absence does not negatively affect their progress in school.

The organisation: educators and promoters who facilitate and accompany the research process:

- A suitable, safe, and adequately-equipped meeting place needs to be identified; preferably a location that can provide chairs, tables and teaching resources. At the very least, it is essential to find a space where children and young people will be safe and secure, and treated with respect.
- Propose a timetable of activities, considering the school calendar, or other schedules according to the context. Depending on the context, consider specific seasonal risks, such as river crossings in the rainy season, and the main activities carried out by children and young people in a specific setting (for example seasonal work during the coffee harvest in the north of Nicaragua).
- Ensure logistics, including materials, equipment, food and travel.
- Take into account the socio-cultural, political and economic context, and threats such as natural disasters, pandemics and health crises, conflict and political unrest etc.
- It is usually appropriate to hold meetings face-to-face when the conditions allow it. However, in times of emergencies, when facing social, political, natural, and health phenomena that generate isolation, risk, threats or vulnerabilities, processes can be carried out virtually. The virtual processes can be facilitated through telephones or other virtual communication platforms, taking into account measures to protect children and young people; for example, having the contact numbers of their parents, guardians, or carers, planning calls, and avoiding saving or publishing photos, whilst ensuring that the participants' integrity is not at risk.
- If it is intended to publish a report, article, or other product in print or online, it is necessary to ensure the informed consent of both children and young people and their parents or guardians before activities begin. The informed consent must specifically include permission to take photos, record videos or spoken testimony, and include these in published products.
- Only when the necessary conditions are in place, should the research team be convened to begin its activities.

4.3 Role of accompanying facilitators/educators

In CESESMA's model, the Transformative Action Research process may be supported and accompanied by two kinds of facilitators:

- (a) Members of CESESMA's professional adult team (referred to as "educators");
- (b) Young Community Education Activists ("promotores" and "promotoras") (see note 1 on page 6)

Both must be adequately prepared to undertake the facilitation role, which also includes accompaniment and follow-up throughout the research process. More specifically:

- **Facilitation:** Managing and structuring the process through which the young researchers choose the topic to be investigated, determine the research questions, create their data-gathering

instruments (e.g. interview formats), identify the different stakeholders to be approached; then later analyse the data collected, develop their conclusions and recommendations, prepare their report and formulate an action plan.

- **Accompaniment:** While the young researchers take the lead in the data gathering process and implementing their dissemination strategy, their adult supporters must be present to ensure safety and security, and provide additional support where needed.
- **Follow-up:** Adult supporters are usually called on to help implement actions included in the action plan and other actions resulting from the dissemination process.

The different stages of the process are considered in more detail below.

4.4 Building the research team

- Build a team and create an atmosphere of safety, trust and empathy between children, young people and the adult facilitators.
- Establish an identity as young researchers by recognising their abilities, their relevant experience, and their knowledge of their own reality.
- Reflect with them on the following questions:
 - What does "Research" mean?
 - What does a researcher do?
 - How is it possible for us to be researchers?
 - What could be the end product of a research process involving children and young people?
- Discuss and agree on how team members want to be together. Suggested questions to encourage this discussion include:
 - What do I need from this group to ensure a successful research process?
 - What do I bring to the group to help achieve the proposed outcome?
 - What do I need from the adults who facilitate and accompany the process?

Such discussions, and the resulting agreements, are essential, as in different contexts various dimensions of difference can lead to prejudice, discrimination or exclusion as the process continues. An example of group solidarity is respect for opinions through attentive listening, support and collaboration, which encourages individuals to ask for support when needed, and so strengthens the teamwork. These practices should be applied throughout the research process.

- A good step is to take an individual photo of each team member and make individual photo identity cards, proclaiming their role as Transformative Action Researchers. If the photos are taken at the first meeting, the ID cards can be given to each team member during the second meeting, so that everyone has their official credentials before starting the data-collection phase.²
- In all of the above, the learning pace of children and young people participating in the process must be considered, so they can form a cohesive and united team, taking advantage of the strength of teamwork.

² This suggestion is based on CESESMA's experience, where the young researchers carry out their project in a rural community where they are already known and easily identified, and therefore the risk of harm due to strangers discovering their identity is negligible. Being recognised and accredited as researchers in this way boosts their self-esteem and confidence. This approach may not be appropriate in every context.

4.5 Choosing the research topic

Once the research team has been formed, young researchers choose a research topic through a process organised in five stages as detailed below:

First stage: Acknowledge boundaries

- While this approach can be applied in projects with a research topic already defined, it is more valuable for children and young people to take a leading role and decide on their own research topic based on their interests and realities.
- In CESESMA's experience, there have been projects in which agreements with donors limited research to issues of *education*, *participation*, and *violence prevention*. Within these limitations, however, there is a huge range of possibilities, and we found it valuable to take advantage of this, giving the young researchers the opportunity to identify their own specific areas of interest, without further restricting their options.

Second stage: Brainstorm a long list

- Through the brainstorming technique, the team generates an extensive preliminary list of issues and concerns that are relevant to their lives, their families and communities (under the general umbrella of pre-determined boundaries, if any, as mentioned above).

Third stage: Prioritise a short-list

- Considering the long list of issues generated through brainstorming, the team narrows this down, to reach a consensus on the problems of most concern, and choosing those issues where they consider they can have an impact through the construction of new knowledge, proposals and recommendations (i.e. research). It is suggested that around five problems are prioritised.³
- The prioritisation of research topics should integrate a children's rights and a gender perspective. Participants should ask themselves, "Who in our community is most affected by this issue, and why?".

Fourth stage: Vote to determine preferences

- The shortlist of priority issues can be voted on using the "pots and beans" technique (seeds, grains of corn, or stones can also be used depending on the resources available in the environment). [See Appendix A for full instructions for this activity].

Fifth stage: Review preferences and decide by consensus

- Considering the results of the voting, a final discussion is held to reach a team consensus on the topic to be investigated.
- Often the topic with the most votes (i.e. beans) is chosen, but there are exceptions to this rule, as, during the final discussion, the team may reach a consensus that the second option, or even the third, is a better choice. (For example, in one of CESESMA's experiences, a team of young researchers realised that their first choice affected only a small group of children in the community. In contrast, their second choice affected the whole population, so in the end, they chose their second option as their research topic).
- We always emphasise that "The beans do not make the final decision"; the young researchers must make the final decision themselves.

³ A good way to do this is using "Traffic Light Ordering": Cut up the long list of ideas so that each idea is on a separate slip of paper (or write them all out again if time). On the floor or table create three areas identified by the colours of a traffic light. Allocate the slips of paper as follows: green area for great ideas that definitely deserve to be worked on further; yellow for ideas that might be worth working on, but their value is uncertain; and red for ideas considered not worth taking any further.

4.6 Using children's drawings to encourage team reflection on the topic

The experiences and knowledge that children and young people already have about the research topic are shared through the technique of sharing drawings. The following steps are recommended:

- Give a blank sheet of paper to each participant, and place a good supply of crayons or felt-tips for drawing in the centre of the room.
- Ask each participant to draw a picture representing a real-life situation related to the research topic. It is preferable if they can draw and share something from their own experience, but if they do not want to do this there is no obligation, and they can draw something they have seen, heard of, or know from real life in their community, school or neighbourhood. However, they are encouraged to draw something based on actual events, not something made up. They can add words or phrases to explain what is happening in the drawing if they wish.
- When everyone has completed their drawing, have them all sit in a circle. They are asked, each in turn, to share their drawing, describing what they have drawn, and why they chose it.
- The facilitator may write some emerging themes and ideas on a board or flip-chart. This also allows the facilitator to identify participants' level of knowledge about the research topic and key aspects to explore further.
- After the sharing of the drawings, the group reflects on what can be learned from them, thus extending and consolidating their existing knowledge of the research topic.
- Given that the young researchers are already involved in educational processes and have prior knowledge, their drawings help to clarify the extent of their knowledge, and the limits of their current understanding of on the research topic. Should incorrect information, myths or taboos about the research topic surface, this is an opportunity for the facilitator to share complementary information to expose these. (For example, in one of CESESMA's experiences, where young people chose a topic related to sex and sexuality, the group identified that some consider this a "vulgar" topic, which was likely to limit them during data collection and analysis).
- The children and young people analyse their research topic from a children's rights and a gender perspective. That is, they consider how girls and young women face this problem, and how boys and young men experience it, how this compares to the situation of adults, and how they manage such relations.
- Once the drawings are completed and shared, participants can be asked how they like the idea of saving their drawings to use in the design of the final report. It is important to note, however, that the drawings are the intellectual property of their creators and, therefore, can only be used with their voluntary informed consent. (In CESESMA's experience, young researchers are generally enthusiastic about this suggestion, and in many cases the original drawings made by participating children and young people have been used to enhance published reports).



Young researcher from Santa Martha shares her drawing of a scene from her school



Drawing by a girl aged 11 from a rural community in Matagalpa.

4.7 Design the research

Identifying the research question: What are we trying to find out?

- After reflecting on and analysing the issue, the next step is for the young researchers to ask themselves: "What do we want to know about the research topic?" In other words, what will be the key question that the research will seek to answer?
- The formulation of a good research question requires some effort, and is best facilitated by an adult with some experience of research design and methodology. However, the young researchers must play the leading role, and ultimately define their own research question.
- the mayor's office, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the police, the judiciary, or other local or national organisations.
- In each situation, the stakeholders to be included in the research are identified according to the young researchers' analysis of the issue or problem, the key research questions, and the - information to be obtained.

Identifying research stakeholders

- Once the underpinning research question has been defined, the young researchers must ask themselves; "What information needs to be collected to answer this question, and who has that information?" This involves defining the stakeholders who will become the research subjects. These may be other children and young people, parents, and/or teachers and community leaders. The list may also include key informants with specific roles, responsibilities, and competencies relating to the research problem; for example, officials from state agencies such as the mayor's office, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the police, the judiciary, or other local or national organisations.
- In each situation, the stakeholders to be included in the research are identified according to the young researchers' analysis of the issue or problem, the key research questions, and the information to be obtained.

Agreeing on the type of instruments to be applied

- The next step is to decide the best way to gather the information needed from the different stakeholders involved.
- At this stage young researchers can be introduced to a range of alternative data-gathering methods such as surveys, in-depth interviews, observation or focus groups. Whilst in theory they can use any of these methods, or a combination, in CESESMA's experience it is important to think ahead and consider the challenge of data analysis. Therefore teams of young researchers usually opt for conducting brief individual interviews, using a simplified format which enables them to easily note down their interviewees' spoken responses.
- If the young researchers propose to interview or survey various stakeholder groups, such as children, parents, teachers, and community leaders, a separate interview format with appropriate questions for each group will be required.

4.8 Design and development of the research instruments

Defining the questions to be integrated into the research instruments

In this section, it is assumed that the young researchers have decided to collect their research data through individual interviews. If they are using a different approach to data-gathering, the following instructions should be adapted accordingly.

Note also that this process should be conducted separately in respect for each stakeholder group. For example, if the young researchers have decided they should interview children, parents and teachers, they should repeat the process to develop a separate question list and interview format for each of these groups. To save time, the team can be divided into sub-teams, each of which can work simultaneously with a facilitator to develop an interview format for one stakeholder group.

- This stage can begin with a brainstorming session, through which the young researchers can easily generate a long list of questions relating to the research topic. From this long list, the specific questions to be included in the final interview format must be selected.
- If the questions initially proposed can be answered with a "Yes" or "No", suggest changing these to open questions that require a fuller answer; or alternatively follow up with a supplementary question that asks the respondent to expand or explain their initial answer.
- Above all, the questions must be asked in appropriate language, in simple and appropriate terms adapted for each group.
- Sometimes children and young people propose too many questions, forgetting that they will have to analyse the data collected. Even if there are good questions, to make the data analysis

more manageable it is better to eliminate some of them and agree on a short final list that directly targets the research question.

- Some proposed questions may be worded in a way that could cause discomfort to an interviewee. For example, questions such as "Is anyone in your family an alcoholic?", or "Is there violence in your home?", may upset participants so that they refuse to answer. Therefore questions need to be worded to encourage people to share information, without generating fear and losing their trust. The role of facilitation and accompaniment plays an important part in this.

Validation and preparation of the instruments to be applied

- After agreeing the final questions among the research team, it is appropriate to carry out a small pilot, i.e. to test and validate the instrument with a few people who will not be part of the research.
- The adults facilitating and accompanying the process should undertake to prepare the interview formats for the different stakeholders in printed form. Ensure that this includes the questions as they were agreed by the young researchers, and that a sufficient quantity of each format is printed off, according to the proposed total number of interviewees in each stakeholder group [see Appendix B for an example of an interview format].
- In emergency contexts, such as natural disasters, health emergencies or other types of emergencies, the questions and research instruments can be adapted to be applied in virtual mode, where the young researcher connects with the interviewee by telephone or internet link. The main recommendation here is to ensure that both researcher and interviewee are in a safe environment that allows them to answer the questions.

4.9 Preparations for field research

Organisational arrangements

- Children and young people should agree on how they will organise themselves to conduct interviews or other data-gathering activities.
- Specific commitments should be agreed, considering the time, resources and opportunities available to the young researchers. For example, they can organise themselves to work in pairs and agree that each pair will conduct ten interviews during the afternoons after school before the next workshop date.

Protection practices or measures

- These arrangements should include safety and security measures for the young researchers, and it is the responsibility of the facilitator/accompanier to ensure that everyone understands and agrees to comply with the agreed measures, and that these are implemented for their safety.
- If the accompanying and facilitating organisation has a safeguarding (child protection) policy or practice guidelines, these should be shared so they can be referred to and followed during the process (CESESMA 2012).
- If the organisation does not have a child safeguarding policy or guidelines, the necessary measures must be agreed upon and put in place to protect the children and young people who carry out the research.
- Child safeguarding guidelines should include:
 - Children and young people should always be accompanied. Sometimes the adult accompanier must maintain a distance to ensure the confidentiality of the interview. However, it is essential to observe what is happening and be attentive, so as to intervene when necessary.

- Always ensure the researcher and interviewee are in an appropriate place, in conditions that provide adequate security.
- The accompanier should be on standby to terminate the interview at any time if the interviewee seems unhappy, insecure or emotional. The same applies if a young researcher does not feel well for any reason.
- It is recommended that any organisation that does not have a child protection or safeguarding policy and guidelines should seek to develop and adopt these at the earliest opportunity.

4.10 Preparation of young researchers

Methodological aspects.

- Facilitators can provide additional information on the research topic.
- Facilitators should discuss with the team strategies that young researchers can implement if problems or concerns arise during the course of the research. It is a good idea to work on case studies of possible scenarios, and discuss, "What would you do if this situation occurred while you were carrying out research in the community?".
- Young researchers should also practise introducing themselves to individuals they want to interview, explaining the purpose of the research, that participation in the interview is voluntary, and that they can terminate the interview at any time without negative consequences of any kind. They must also explain to potential interviewees that their names will not be disclosed, and that the research findings will be used for educational purposes.
- At the same time, they can practice ways to encourage quieter and more reserved individuals to feel more willing and confident to talk.
- Young researchers can prepare for these situations using role-play technique ("sociodrama" in Spanish), where they act out situations where it is necessary to terminate an interview, for example if an interviewee gets upset. The team can then reflect on how the situation was managed and how it turned out.

Ethical aspects.

- As some research topics can generate emotions in the researchers or research participants, prior preparation is required on how to deal with these. For example, if the research topic is related to violence, it will stir emotions, and facilitators need to be prepared to intervene and offer support or third-party referral.
- If an interviewee expresses sadness or anger, cries or is silent in response to a question, the young researcher should pause, tell them to remain calm, and ask for help from the accompanying adult so support can be provided.
- Children and young people often express their emotions as they tell their stories, so it is essential to explain that the information they share will be used ethically and responsibly.
- Confidentiality: In case of situations where interviewees disclose personal lived experiences, the situation should be handled confidentially. Also, if the integrity or life of the interviewee is at risk, the interviewee is consulted or informed about the steps to be taken to seek support. In these cases, the accompanying adults can suggest the measures to be implemented.

Risk of abuse or mistreatment.

- Notwithstanding the above, if a researcher or accompanying adult observes something that leads her or him to believe that a child or young person is at risk of sexual abuse or mistreatment, action must be taken to ensure their protection. The facilitating organisation's protection policy should include rules on how to act in such situations. Consent should be sought to seek help from a supportive adult.

4.11 Field research.

- According to the plan that has been drawn up, the young researchers then conduct their data-gathering activities in the field, usually in their own communities, neighbourhoods and schools. An adult accompanier should accompany them during this stage to ensure their safety.
- In addition, the support of parents can be requested to provide another level of accompaniment, so as to ensure security and protection during the field research period. In providing this accompaniment, it is important to ensure that there is no control, manipulation or surveillance by other individuals in the environment where the research takes place.
- It may be necessary to offer encouragement to motivate young researchers and reaffirm their self-confidence, helping them to feel safe and secure, to master the use of their research instruments, and to communicate confidently with adults. Some may need reassurance to see themselves as capable of undertaking the research process, and be ready to carry out interviews and surveys with children and adults in the community.
- Photographs of the ongoing process should only be taken with the permission and consent of the people involved. However, if informed consent is obtained, photographs can be a valuable resource when preparing and presenting reports. Although children and young people can take photographs, it may be more appropriate for an accompanying adult to do so, as it is their responsibility to ensure that informed consent for their use is obtained and recorded.



Young researcher interviewing a classmate in San Francisco, La Dalia



4.12 Data management and analysis

- This stage is particularly important in the research process, since many adults still believe that children and young people do not have the capacity for analysis, and should depend on adults to make decisions for them. In facilitating young researchers through this stage of the process, we are helping to dispel this myth.
- There are several ways to make it easier for children and young researchers to organise and analyse their research data. The following is the method that CESESMA has implemented in many research projects with good results. It can, however, be adapted to suit different situations.
- Note that the exact details depend on the number of researchers, the number of interviews each team member conducts and the number of questions in the interview instrument. For convenience, in this example, it is assumed that there is a team of twelve researchers working in six pairs and that each pair has completed ten interviews of six questions each (sixty interviews in total). However, the steps in the process can be adjusted to different numbers.
- The moment of data analysis is a critical moment for children and young people, as they reaffirm the impact of the issues on their lives and the lives of other children and young people, and their contribution should be valued.

The recommended step-by-step process is as follows:

1. Before starting this work, it is worth mentioning to the participants that data analysis is the most challenging (and least fun) task in the research process. Also, explain that even professional researchers say this is hard work that requires much concentration, and that the path ahead is easier and more fun once this task is completed (i.e. encourage them to persevere and complete the task by the end of the planned session).
2. The team is divided into three groups, A, B and C, with two pairs and one facilitator per group.
3. Given that each pair has ten interview sheets, these are numbered from #1 to #10.
4. The facilitator of each group takes a flipchart and titles it "Question 1".
5. In each group, the first pair reads answer 1 from sheet #1.

6. The second pair then reads their answer 1 from sheet #1.
7. In the meantime, the facilitator summarises the answers on the flipchart.
8. It should be noted that if several individuals give the same answer, it is not necessary to rewrite it, and it can be indicated as repeated by an asterisk (*).
9. These steps are repeated with answer 1 from sheet #2.
10. Then answer 1 from sheet #3.
11. This process is repeated until you have read all the answers to question 1 on your all sheets, from sheet #1 to sheet #10.
12. The facilitator takes a new flipchart and titles it "Question 2".
13. Repeat the previous steps to summarise all the answers from all the sheets to question 2.
14. Then, they can move on to questions 3, 4, 5 and 6, always starting with a new flipchart for each question.

At the end of this step, we are left with eighteen flipcharts, with all sixty answers to each question summarised on three flipcharts.



4.13 Reaching a consensus on conclusions

Following the guidance from the previous step:

1. Group A takes the six flipcharts with the answers to questions 1 and 2.
2. Group B takes the six flipcharts with the answers to questions 3 and 4.
3. Group C takes the six flipcharts with the answers to questions 5 and 6.
4. Each group places the three flipcharts corresponding to their first question on the board or wall.
5. To save time, it is suggested that an adult reads all the answers aloud, guiding the group to pay close attention to see what conclusions emerge from the reading.
6. A new flipchart is placed on the board, and the group is asked what the conclusions of this reading might be.
7. The facilitator helps them reach an agreement and write a concluding paragraph (or two).
8. The facilitator also ensures that conclusions emerge from the accumulated data and that no new opinions are introduced at this stage.
9. Each group repeats this process with the other question allocated to them.

4.14 Formulating recommendations.

Generally, the first part of the report is drafted before recommendations are made. This allows the young researchers to reflect further on their findings and conclusions before adding their recommendations to complete the report.

A good way to structure the recommendations is to draw up specific recommendations directed to each stakeholder group. An example of this is shown below.

Recommendations
What children should do:
1.
2.
3.
What parents should do:
1.
2.
3.
What the police, leaders, and teachers should do:
1.
2.
3.
Etc.

4.15 Writing the report

- The young researchers prepare their report according to the resources and conditions available to them. Everyone participates in the writing of the report and the presentation of the findings and conclusions.
- If they are available, digital tools such as PowerPoint are helpful, as they allow true participation, collaboration and shared decision-making in the drafting and writing process. Using this technology, the young researchers can see their report taking shape on the screen, which means they can all contribute, not just to the wording of the report, but to the way it is designed and illustrated.
- At this stage, the adults' role is to be the technician, supporting the technical aspects of the process, often by working the computer keyboard.
- Reports typically include the following "chapters":
 - The young research team introduce themselves;
 - A statement of their chosen research topic, and the key question(s) being investigated;
 - A description of the research methodology, including the number of participants who were interviewed or otherwise involved, and the stakeholder groups they represented;
 - A summary of the findings;
 - Conclusions;
 - Recommendations.
- Reports may also be illustrated with drawings and photos chosen by the children and young people themselves.

4.16 Drawing up an action plan

- After finalising their report, the research team needs to draw up an Action Plan. This has two purposes:
 1. To ensure that the research report, with its findings, conclusions and recommendations, is shared widely and becomes well-known, first in the local context (village, neighbourhood, school or community), and then more widely.
 2. To propose actions to follow up on the investigation; in particular, to ensure that the recommendations are taken into account and implemented by the responsible individuals and entities.
- It is suggested that, in order to establish conditions for the successful implementation of their Action Plan, the research team should carry out a "ROLA Analysis" of their communities. This means identifying:
 1. The **Resources** available in the community.
 2. The **Opportunities** that exist to promote the research recommendations.
 3. The **Limitations** they will have to overcome.
 4. Any **Threats** that may limit the implementation of recommendations (in Spanish, "*Amenazas*" – hence "ROLA").
- The Action Plan is then drawn up, which involves defining:
 1. **Objectives:** What do you intend to achieve with the plan?
 2. **Spheres of influence:** Starting from their own family, school, community or neighbourhood, and extending to potential for national or international impact.
 3. **Actions for impact:** The actions proposed to achieve the objectives, considering possible actions in each of the different spheres of influence.
- The plan can include elements that children and young people can do independently, such as giving talks on their research findings in their school or community, or disseminating messages on-line through social media. It can also include actions that require support from the accompanying organisation, such as requesting a hearing before the Municipal Children and Youth Commission to present their recommendations, going to the media to conduct radio and television interviews, or presenting at a regional or national conference.
- Therefore, the accompanying organisation must commit itself to continue its accompaniment during the follow-up phase in order to promote the implementation of the Action Plan.

4.17 Actions to disseminate findings

Dissemination and socialisation actions

- In their Plan of Action, the young researchers may propose methods and actions for dissemination of their research. This may be done in collaboration with the facilitating organisation. Such actions may include:
 - Meetings, discussions and exchanges with other children and young people;
 - Meetings with the staff of the organisations to share the findings;
 - Publication of newsletters, articles in magazines, summaries of presentations, forums, publications, videos, documentaries, reports, scientific articles, or others.

Mobilisation actions to promote the implementation of recommendations or proposals

- Presentation of findings directly to decision-makers in state organisations and institutions, depending on the research topic and country contexts.
- Participation in seminars, meetings, conferences and other exchanges.
- Use of social media to communicate the recommendations arising from the research. It is left to the team's creativity and initiative to use social media in their own context.

4.18 Evaluation of the Transformative Action Research process.

- Participatory evaluation is carried out throughout the process, especially at the end of each stage. In addition, the young researchers are informally asked to provide retrospective feedback on their experience of the activities to improve their subsequent experiences.
- Upon completion of the transformative action research project, a final evaluation is carried out.



Young researcher from San Francisco, La Dalia, interviews classmates

Reference documents

This table lists the Transformative Action Research projects facilitated by CESESMA from 2007-2013, that were reviewed and systematically analysed to provide the background for this guide.

The right-hand column contains links to reports of these projects available on-line. Most are only available in Spanish, but those available in English are highlighted.

Experiences of Transformative Action Research	Related documents and resources
The Young Consultants from Finca Santa Martha researching the problem of violence (2007)	Report by the Santa Martha consultants (CESESMA). https://www.harryshier.net/documentos/CESESMA-NNA_Consultores_de_Santa_Martha.pdf ENGLISH: https://www.harryshier.net/documentos/CESESMA-Young_Consultants_of_Santa_Martha.pdf
Perceptions of violence against children and young people in rural communities of San Ramón, Matagalpa (2008)	Report: Analysis of perceptions of violence against children and young people in fifteen rural communities (CESESMA) https://www.harryshier.net/documentos/CESESMA-percepciones_de_violencia.pdf
Children and young people defending our right to play (2009)	Article: Defending our right to play (Arco Iris Magazine) https://www.harryshier.net/documentos/Defendiendo_nuestro_derecho_a_jugar-Arcolris36.pdf Children's play as a human right: From the local to the global (Rayuela Magazine) https://www.harryshier.net/docs/CESESMA-El_juego_infantil.pdf ENGLISH: https://www.harryshier.net/documentos/CESESMA-righttoplay.pdf
Santa Martha's children consultants investigate the relationship between business and human rights on the farm (2009).	"Respect our rights" report (CESESMA) https://www.harryshier.net/documentos/CESESMA-Respete_nuestros_derechos.pdf ENGLISH: https://www.harryshier.net/documentos/CESESMA-Rights_and_wrongs.pdf
Study on the problem of violence against children and young people in the sector of Samulalí, Matagalpa (2009).	Children's Consultancy Report (CESESMA) https://www.harryshier.net/documentos/CESESMA-informe_violencia.pdf
Children and young people consultants investigate Environmental Education in seven rural schools (2010)	Final Report on Environmental Education Consultancies (available from CESESMA).

(Continued over...)

Experiences of Transformative Action Research	Related documents and resources
Impact of children and young people as active citizens in Nicaragua (2010)	Report: "Impact of children and young people" (UNN/ CESESMA). https://www.harryshier.net/docs/CESESMA-Incidencia_de_NNA.pdf Child-friendly version: Our Voice Matters (CESESMA) https://www.harryshier.net/docs/CESESMA-Nuestra_voz_vale.pdf Article: Impact of children and young people as active citizens in Nicaragua (Rayuela Magazine) https://www.harryshier.net/documentos/CESESMA-UNN-Incidencia_de_NNA_como_ciudadanos_activos.pdf ENGLISH: https://www.harryshier.net/docs/Shier_et_al-How_cyp_influence_policy-makers.pdf
Rural girls' and boys' perceptions of sexual and reproductive rights	Report: We learned that sexuality is thinking, acting, and feeling (CESESMA) https://www.harryshier.net/documentos/CESESMA-Aprendimos_que_la_sexualidad.pdf
Learning to live without violence: Transformative research with the participation of children and young people.	Book: Learn to Live Without Violence (CESESMA) https://www.harryshier.net/docs/CESESMA-Aprender_a_vivir_sin_violencia.pdf ENGLISH: https://www.harryshier.net/docs/CESESMA-Learn_to_live_without_violence.pdf
Children and young people contributing to the fulfilment of our rights in Nicaragua	Friendly Version of UN Recommendations (CODENI) https://www.harryshier.net/docs/CODENI-Version_Amigable.pdf User-friendly version: Facilitation Guide (CODENI) https://www.harryshier.net/docs/CODENI-Version_Amigable_Guia.pdf
Human rights at school: Perceptions from Nicaraguan children and young people.	Learning from children and young people researchers (Rayuela Magazine) https://www.harryshier.net/docs/NNA_Investigadores-Aprendiendo_de_NNA_investigadores.pdf ENGLISH: https://www.harryshier.net/docs/Shier-Childrens_Rights_in_School.pdf

Other references

CESESMA. (2012). *Normativa de Protección hacia Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes*. CESESMA.
http://www.cesesma.org/documentos/CESESMA-normativa_de_proteccion.pdf

CESESMA. (2016). *Plan Estratégico 2016-21*. CESESMA.

CESESMA. (2022). *Sistematización de experiencias de Investigación-Acción Transformadora con participación de niñas, niños, mujeres y hombres adolescentes*. San Ramón, CESESMA.

Shier, H. (2010). 'Pathways to Participation' revisited: Learning from Nicaragua's child coffee workers. In N. Thomas & B. Percy-Smith (Eds.), *A Handbook of Children and Young People's Participation: Perspectives from Theory and Practice* (pp. 215–227). Routledge.
https://www.harryshier.net/docs/Shier-Pathways_to_Participation_Revisited_Handbook.pdf

Shier, H. (2015). Children as researchers in Nicaragua: Children's consultancy to transformative research. *Global Studies of Childhood*, 5(2), 206–219.
https://www.harryshier.net/docs/Shier-Children_as_researchers_in_Nicaragua.pdf

United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. United Nations.

Appendices.

Appendix A: Voting with cups and beans

This technique can be used in many situations to help children and young people prioritise, value or choose between various options or elements.

Time: 60 minutes

Resources:

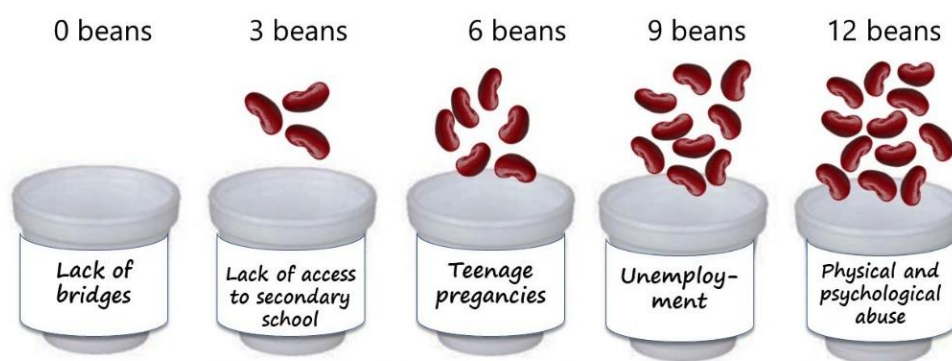
- At least nine yoghurt pots (or similar), preferably with lids.
- Paper
- Adhesive tape
- About 50 beans (or stones, seeds, buttons or similar items from the surroundings).

Preparation of resources:

- If the cups have lids, pierce the centre of each lid to make a hole big enough to introduce a bean.
- The paper and tape are used to make the labels for the cups.

Steps to follow:

- Introduce the activity and explain how the exercise will be carried out.
- Children and young people are asked to brainstorm the main issues that affect them.
- They are then asked to prioritise the five problems that affect them most, reflecting on how they affect other children and young people, the number of people affected, and whether they think the problem is within reach of being solved.
- Once the top five problems are identified, they are written clearly on cards, and one card is attached to each pot.
- Each participant is then given three beans (can be more: children can decide on what is best).
- Each participant places beans in the pots that represent their preferred options. It is up to them whether they place one bean in each of three pots, two in one pot and one in another, or all three beans in one pot.
- When everyone has voted, the beans in each cup are counted. Participants can do this in pairs, so each count is checked by a second person to ensure it is done transparently.
- Write the five options on a flip-chart sheet, then next to each one, write the total number of beans in the respective pot.
- Ask participants to identify the order of preference; the pot with most beans being first preference etc.
- Considering the results of the voting, a final discussion is held to reach a team consensus on the topic to be investigated. Be sure to emphasise that “The beans do not make the final decision; the young researchers must make this decision themselves”.



Exemplary illustration of a vote with cups and beans

Appendix B: Example of a young researchers' interview format

In every case, the questions on the form are drafted and decided on by the young researchers themselves.

Illustration of interview format:

Equipo de Investigación
Formato de entrevista a niñas, niños, mujeres y hombres adolescentes.
(En edades comprendidas entre 10 a 17 años de edad)

Detalles de la persona entrevistada:
Comunidad: _____ Masculino: ☐ Femenino: ☐
Edad: ☐ Grado o año que estudia: ☐

1. ¿Qué conoce usted sobre la práctica de consumo de alcohol en su comunidad?

2. ¿Qué piensa usted sobre la práctica de consumo de alcohol por algunos hombres en su comunidad?

3. ¿Cómo afecta la práctica de consumo de alcohol por parte de algunos hombres?
A ellos mismo: _____
A niñas y niños: _____
A la familia: _____
A la escuela: _____
A la comunidad: _____

4. ¿Cómo se siente usted cuando conoce de personas que consumen alcohol?

5. ¿Qué ha hecho usted cuando conoce de una situación que causa daño y se da por el consumo de alcohol?

6. ¿Qué recomendaría usted a las personas que consumen alcohol?

7. ¿Qué puede hacer para proteger a niñas, niños, mujeres y hombres adolescentes ante riesgos generados por el consumo de alcohol?

Muchas Gracias!!!

English translation of the questions:

1. What do you know about the practice of alcohol consumption in your community?
2. What do you think about the practice of alcohol consumption by some men in your community?
3. What affects the practice of alcohol consumption by some men have...
 - On themselves?
 - On their children?
 - On their family?
 - On the school?
 - On the community?
4. How do you feel when you meet people who consume alcohol?
5. What do you feel when you know of a situation that causes harm due to alcohol consumption?
6. What advice would you give to people who consume alcohol?
7. What can be done to protect children and young people from the risks posed by alcohol consumption?

CESESMA's mission:

To 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.

CESESMA's vision:

Children and adolescents with their families living in secure environments, with equality, equity and respect; with opportunities for an integrated education; capable of organising themselves and influencing those around them to promote and defend their rights and contribute to the development of their communities.



This publication is supported by Terre des Hommes, Germany and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

 **terre des hommes**
Apoyo a la Niñez

