

Rights and Wrongs

Children and Young People of Santa Martha coffee plantation research the relationship between business and human rights on the plantation



Research carried out
by the team of Young
Consultants of Santa
Martha Coffee Plantation,
Yasica Sur, Matagalpa,
Nicaragua



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Part I: Who are we, where do we live and how did we come to be Consultants?



We are 13 children and young people from the community of Santa Martha. We are from 10 to 18 years old.

All of us go to school. Ten of us are at the primary school on the plantation, two of us go to the Saturday secondary school in La Lima and one goes to Santa Emilia College.

Our community, Santa Martha, is a coffee plantation in the rural district known as Yasica Sur, which is part of the Municipality of San Ramón in the Department of Matagalpa, Nicaragua.



At harvest time we all work on the plantation.



Some of us work all year round cultivating, fertilising and pruning the coffee plants.



We are also Consultants.

This started in 2006 when we worked with the Irish teachers' union INTO on the project "Sharing how we live". In this photo, the Irish teachers are visiting us on the plantation.



We contributed to the INTO's teacher's pack "School Works! Child Labour, the Right to Education and Fair Trade", which was sent to all 3,500 primary schools in the Republic of Ireland.



Then in 2007, Save the Children commissioned us to research the problem of violence against children on the plantation.



We presented our report and recommendations at a national conference "Violence Against Children: A global problem, a Nicaraguan response" in the capital city Managua in August 2007.



Now we are taking on the role of Consultants once again. We have formed a new team, with nine of the original group and four new members, to research the topic of business and human rights on our plantation.



Part II: How we did the research



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. This helped us define for ourselves what it means to be a responsible or an irresponsible businessman.

Business Responsibility on the Coffee Plantation



The irresponsible businessman violates workers' rights; for example:

- He treats his workers badly.
- He doesn't pay them their full salary.
- He doesn't give them statutory days off.
- If they need time off because of accidents at work, he doesn't pay them.
- He cheats those who can't read and write.
- If workers take produce that grows on the plantation, like oranges or bananas, he docks their wages.
- He doesn't let people gather firewood from the plantation.
- He fires them any time he wants.
- He tells the kitchen staff not to give the workers much food.
- He expects people to work for nothing when there's no money.
- When the overseers sexually harass women workers, he pays no attention.
- It doesn't bother him that there are children working who should be going to school.

The responsible businessman respects workers' rights; for example:

- He pays everyone their correct salary.
- He gives statutory holidays with pay.
- He lets workers finish at the end of their regular day's work, and allows rest times.
- He instructs the kitchen staff to give full meals to all workers.
- He doesn't tell people off for picking bananas to take home.
- He does tell off parents who make their children work instead of sending them to school.
- He lends money to those in need.
- He doesn't spray chemicals, or if he does, he makes sure the workers have proper protection.
- When there is a good harvest, he takes all the workers for a day out.



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



We agreed on the questions to ask in interviews with each group.

CESESMA helped us to prepare the interview forms:

Consultores y Consultoras de Finca Santa Martha, Yasica Sur
FORMATO DE ENTREVISTA CON NIÑOS, NIÑAS Y ADOLESCENTES

Detalles de la persona entrevistada:
 Nombre: Edad: Varón ☐ Mujer ☐ Grado que estudia:

- ¿Cómo le trata en su trabajo en la finca?
- ¿En la finca respetan su derecho a la educación? ☐ SÍ ☐ NO ☐
 ¿Por qué piensa así?
- ¿Los capataces a veces le regañan? ☐ SÍ ☐ NO ☐
 ¿Cómo y por qué?
- ¿Qué trabajos hacen los niños, niñas y adolescentes que son peligrosos o que pueden dañar su salud?
- ¿Recibe usted un pago justo por el trabajo que realiza? ☐ SÍ ☐ NO ☐
 ¿Cómo se siente sobre esto y por qué?
- ¿Está de acuerdo que los niños, niñas y adolescentes deben recibir tres tiempos de comida en los tiempos de corte? ☐ SÍ ☐ NO ☐
 ¿Por qué?
- ¿Desde qué edad piensa que un niño o una niña debe trabajar en la finca? Desde años
 ¿Por qué?
- ¿Piensa que un niño o una niña debe terminar la escuela antes de trabajar? ☐ SÍ ☐ NO ☐
 ¿Por qué?



Our agreement was that each of us would do at least five interviews with other people to find out their experiences of respect or violation of their rights.



We interviewed a total of 56 people

	Male	Female	Total
Children and young people	20	7	27
Mothers and fathers	9	13	22
Foremen and manager	7	-	7
Total	36	20	56

Then we met for a third workshop to analyse the findings of our research.



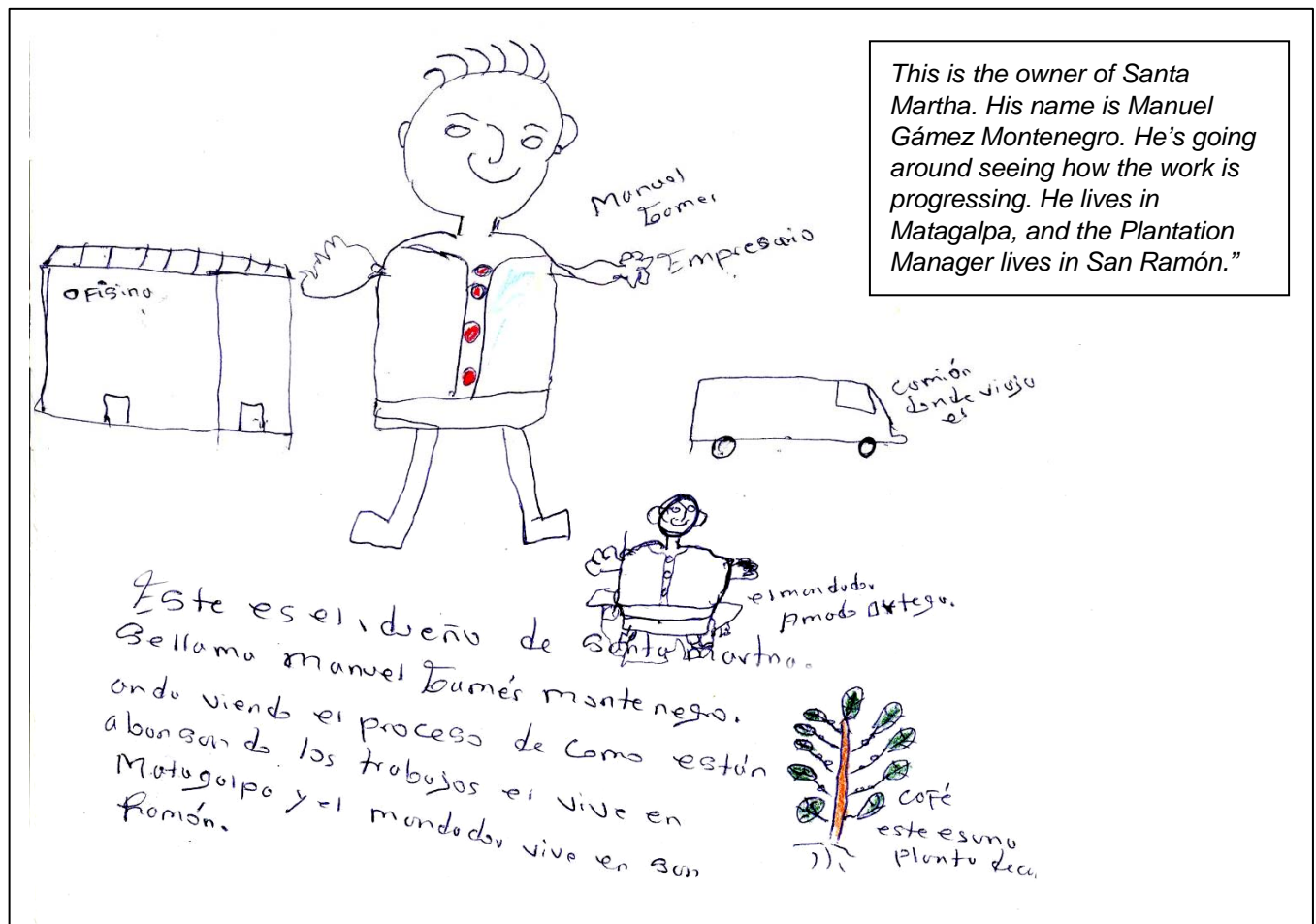
For the final workshop, we went to the CESESMA office in San Ramón town to decide on our conclusions and recommendations.



We prepared our final report and recorded a message to the young people of Ireland.



Part III: Research findings



Children and young people

- 74% of the children and young people interviewed felt they were generally treated with respect, because they did a good job and followed the overseers' instructions. However, 26% said they were not treated well. They said some overseers were mean and demanding, and told them off for any little thing. They didn't get paid, they didn't get given food and they were given the worst rows of coffee plants to pick.



"Don't pick the green ones"
"I'm checking the coffee"



"Don't cut the flower, please."

"I'm not going to cut it. I'm just making sure nobody else does."

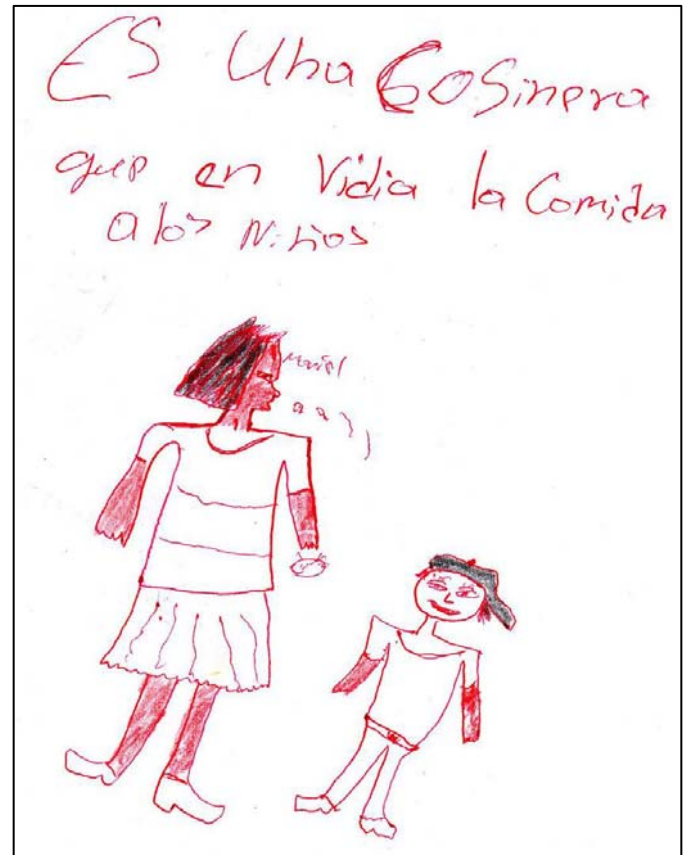
- Many children do dangerous jobs which are harmful to their health. The most common dangerous jobs on the plantation are spraying chemicals and work with machetes such as pruning the coffee plants and climbing trees to cut back the shade canopy. Although they say that in Santa Martha it is prohibited to give dangerous work to children and young people, many still do it out of need.



"You're not going because you've hardly picked anything. Look at your empty basket"

"Boss, I've been stung by the bees. I'm going."

- Although there is a primary school on the plantation, 19% say the right to education is not respected, because many parents send their children to work, and the owner does nothing about it.
- The children do not receive a salary. They work just to help their families and for food. 74% of children and young people said that this is unfair.



"This is a cook who resents giving food to the children"

- Also they don't receive a full ration of food. 93% of the kids think they should receive three meals a day, because without food they cannot work or study, and this is a violation of their rights.
- The children and young people think they should not be working, as it is important to go to school so as to develop themselves well. 96% believe children should finish school before starting work. Those who work do it out of necessity and to help their families.

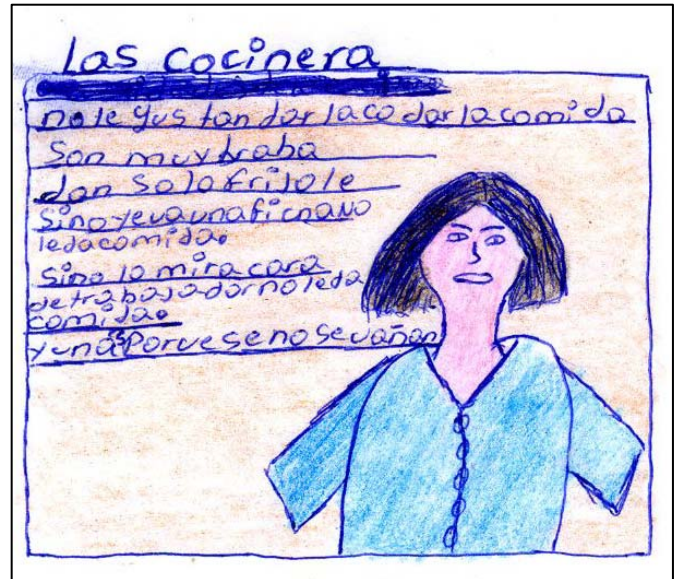
Parents



Foreman: "Don't mess with me. You knocked me over and bust my foot."

Worker: "And you threw my hat on the ground, fatty."

- 77% of the parents interviewed think the overseers and foremen do not respect workers' rights. They have to work long hours with no rest and carry heavy sacks. They are scolded and pressurised to work faster. They don't get paid for statutory holidays or for time off if they are injured. If they take time off they are unfairly penalised by losing an additional day's pay, so they have to keep working even when they are injured. Because of this they feel exploited. They say that only the favourites and family members of the overseers are treated with respect. They are threatened if they try to claim their rights.
- All the parents interviewed think they are poorly paid. They say they earn very little for the heavy work they do, and the salary isn't enough to keep their families.
- Another problem the parents feel is the lack of decent food when they are working. They say that often they do not receive a fair ration. The food is very heavy and sometimes not properly cooked; sometimes there is no food. They consider this is lack of respect for their rights as workers.



"The kitchen staff: They don't like to give out food. They are really bad-tempered. They just give you beans. If you don't have a ticket, they don't give you food. If they don't like your face, they don't give you food. Or even if you haven't had a bath."

- The parents recognise that there are children working on the plantation. They say they do it voluntarily to help their families, because otherwise they can't afford clothes, shoes and other necessities, especially the single mothers. Sometimes parents take their children out of school and send them to work. Also children and young people work in the home and care for younger brothers and sisters when their parents are working.



"Hello little girl. How are you?" "I'm fine".

- 70% of the parents interviewed say they are aware of cases of sexual abuse or harassment of women workers by plantation foremen or overseers; which includes demanding sex in exchange for work.

Overseers and Manager

- All but one of the overseers interviewed said that in Santa Martha the workers' rights are respected. However they recognise that there are problems when people get sick or have accidents and don't get paid.
- All but one of the overseers said that they have to scold the workers to get them to do a good job.
- The overseers recognise that there are many children working on the plantation. They say that their parents send them to work because of the family's economic situation, and exploit them; others have to work because they are orphans.



"It's forbidden to pick oranges, because the Manager tells people off for picking the oranges."

Part IV: Our recommendations



What should the plantation owner do to ensure that the workers' rights are respected?

- Increase the salaries. The workers have a right to a better salary.
- Provide decent healthy food to all workers, including children and young people.
- Insist that the workers send their children to school, so they can get an education and develop themselves.
- Insist that the plantation manager treats the workers well.
- Support the primary school on the plantation.
- Support the young people who go to secondary schools off the plantation.
- Respect the worker's right to time off with pay in case of illness, accident or maternity.

What should the plantation manager and overseers do to ensure that the workers' rights are respected?

- Treat the workers with respect when they check on their work.
- Don't scold the workers in an offensive way: speak to them with respect.
- Don't send children and young people to do dangerous jobs. Only allow adults to spray chemicals and make sure they wear adequate protection.

What can the plantation workers do ensure that their rights as workers are respected?

- Know and claim their rights.
- Respect their fellow workers, so their fellow-workers respect their rights.

- Respect the rules of work on the plantation: for example using adequate protection when doing dangerous jobs.
- When their rights are violated, try to negotiate a fair solution with the plantation owner and manager: for example if they don't get paid for statutory holidays, if they are sacked without pay, if their pay is cut, or if the overseers are pressurising them to work faster.
- Organise themselves to be able to claim their rights and denounce rights violations more strongly.

What can we, the children and young people who live on the plantation, do to ensure that our rights are respected?

- Treat everyone with respect.
- If the overseers treat us badly, go to our parents so they can help defend us against the overseers and manager.
- If the overseers continue to violate our rights, we can go to the Ministry of Labour.

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.

Want to read more from the Young Consultants of Santa Martha?

The work the team did in 2006 with the Irish National Teachers' Organisation can be found in the teachers' pack "*School Works! Child Labour, the Right to Education and Fair Trade*" (INTO, 2008). The complete pack, including photographs taken by the young people to document their daily lives, can be downloaded from:
www.cesesma.org/documentos_eng.htm#into

The team describe their first experience as consultants researching the problem of violence on the plantation in 2007 in their own words and pictures in *A Handbook of Children's Participation: Perspectives from Theory and Practice*. B. Percy-Smith and N. Thomas (eds). Routledge: Abingdon 2009 (pp228-229).

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A Nicaraguan coffee plantation is both a business enterprise, selling its product in the global market to make a profit, and a community of human beings, each one a holder of human rights, living in families and seeking the best life they can make for themselves. How are these two realities connected? What is the relationship between business and human rights in Nicaragua's coffee industry?

In 2009 a group of children and young people living and working on a coffee plantation in the remote mountains of northern Nicaragua formed a team of consultants to research this topic. In the course of their research they interviewed many stakeholders, including adult workers, child workers, plantation foremen and overseers and the plantation manager. They also analysed their own life experience working on the plantation from early childhood. Their research led them to explore the concept of "business responsibility" in the context of the coffee plantation, and formulate recommendations on how to ensure greater respect for the human rights of both adult and child workers.

This is their final report.



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