

Children and young people as transformative researchers in Nicaragua



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In this presentation:

- Children's Consultancy: Roots in the UK in the 1990s
- The thinking behind it
- Children's consultancy in Nicaragua, 2007 to the present
- A new version: Transformative Research by Children and Young People
- Based on all this experience, 10 guiding principles
- What have we learnt?
- And finally: The Four Transformations

Children's Consultancy: Roots in the UK in the 1990s



- Fashion for making programmes and institutions “child-friendly”, particularly in the arts, culture and recreation sectors.
- Awareness of Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC): The right to play, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
- Expert advice sought on how to make things child-friendly.

So where do we find the experts?



Children are experts on what is child-friendly and what isn't, what works for children and what doesn't, what's fun and what's boring, what makes them feel included and what makes them feel excluded.



1998

Child consultants advising the management of the new Manchester City Art Gallery on how to create a child-friendly gallery.





1998

Child consultants commissioned by British Waterways to research the educational and recreational potential of the English canal network.



1999

Child Consultants from the New-Age Traveller community in the South-West of England commissioned by The Children's Society to advise on play and recreation opportunities for traveller children.





2000

Child Consultants advise senior management at the Tower of London on how to make it less boring.



The thinking behind it...



(a) Principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- Article 3: When adults make decisions that affect children, they must do so in “the best interests of the child.”
- Article 12: Children have the right to express their opinions on all matters that affect them, and adult decision-makers must give due weight to the opinions expressed.



Combine these two principles:



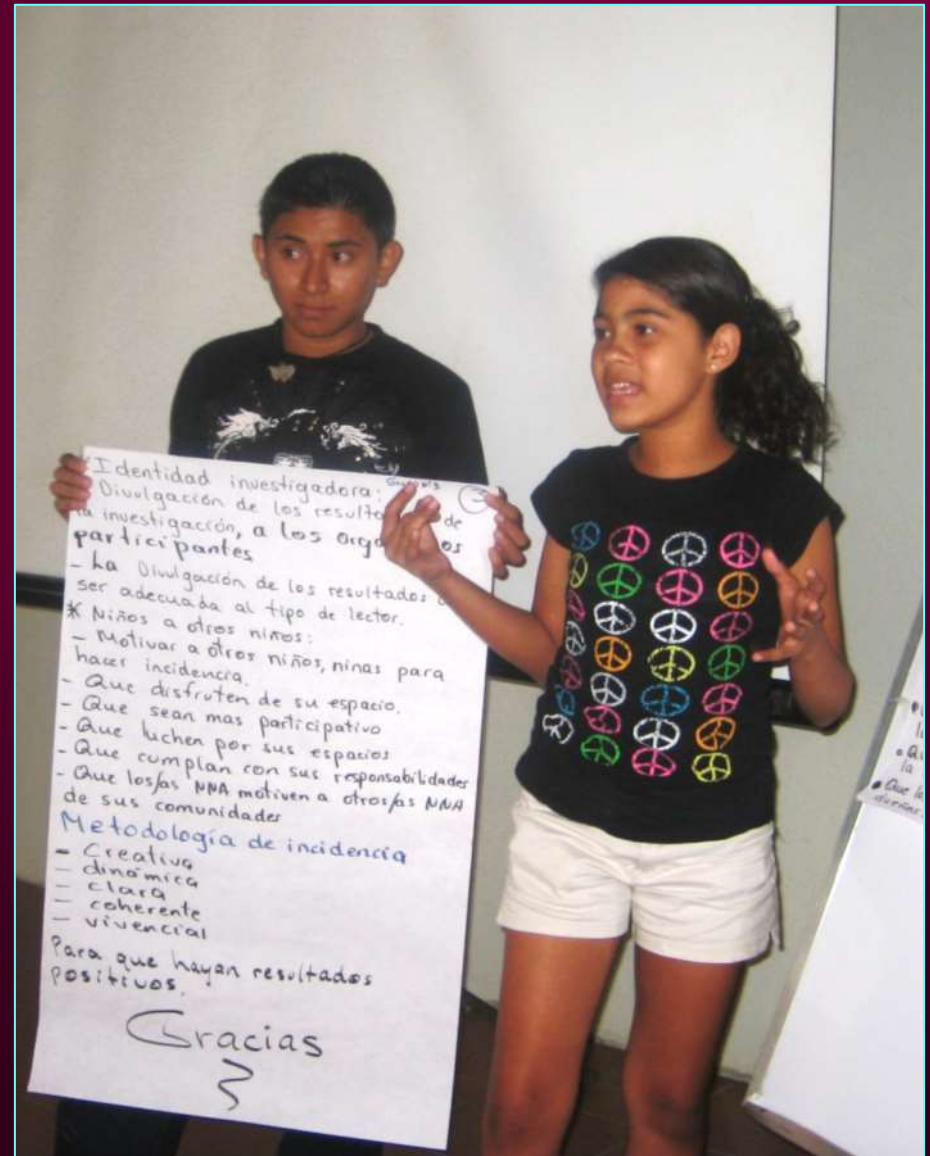
Adults making decisions that affect children must listen to the children that are affected and give due weight to what the children tell them. This is a fundamental requirement to enable the making of decisions in the best interests of the child.

(b) “Not so new” childhood studies paradigm

The “Old Paradigm” saw children as generally incapable, due to their relative lack of “cognitive development”.

The “New Paradigm” argues that:

- from a young age children have specific capabilities which make them the driving force of their own development;
- children develop through their experience of action and agency in the world around them.



Children's consultancy in Nicaragua



CESESMA: A local Nicaraguan NGO working with children and young people in the northern coffee-growing area where extreme poverty leads to extensive exploitation of child labour and related human rights violations.

CESESMA supports the empowerment of children and young people, particularly those working on coffee plantations, helping them organise and participate to defend their rights.

Starting in 2007, CESESMA adapted the UK Children's Consultancy model to work with child coffee workers in Nicaragua



Children's consultancy in Nicaragua: Some examples

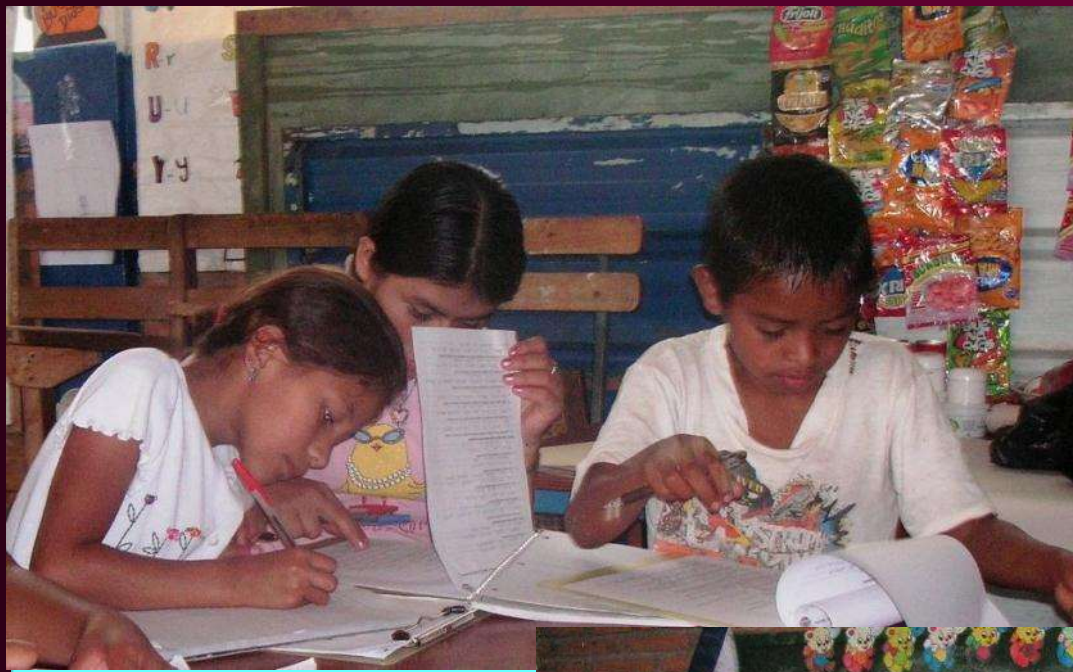
2007: Children and young people from Santa Martha coffee plantation research the problem of violence on the plantation.



Preparation

Field research





Data analysis

Drawing up
recommendations



Preparing a final report



Rehearsing the formal presentation

Journey to the national conference in the capital city, Managua



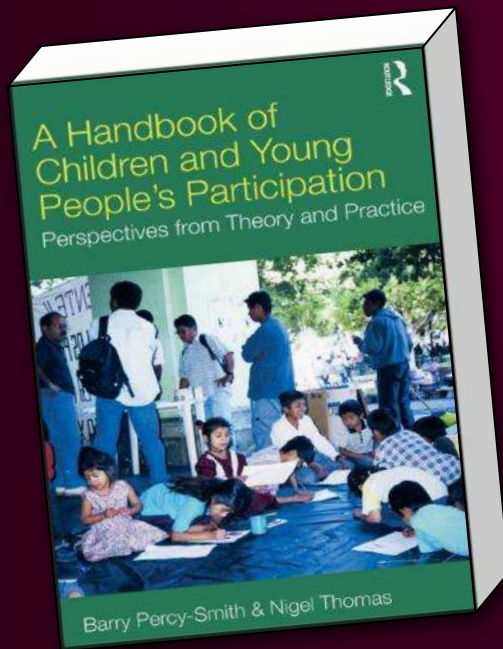


A direct challenge to the Minister
for the Family...

...and to all the conference delegates.



The following year the children retold their experience in words and pictures in “A Handbook of Children and Young People’s Participation”.



The Young Consultants of Santa Martha Coffee plantation investigate the problem of violence

We are 11 children and young people from the community of Santa Martha. Now we are from 12 to 18 years old but when we became consultants a year and a half ago we were aged from 10 to 17. We were all attending the primary school in our community and were in third to sixth grade. Now two of us are in secondary school.

Our community, Santa Martha, is a coffee plantation. It is in the area called Yasca Gur, which is part of the municipality of San Ramón in the Department of Matagalpa, Nicaragua.

During the coffee harvest we all work on the plantation. Some of us work all year round looking after the coffee plants.

This is the story of how we became consultants and presented the findings of our research at the National Conference “Violence against Children: A global problem, a Nicaraguan response” in the capital city Managua in August 2007.

To start off we had a meeting with our mums there so everyone was in agreement about the work we were going to do as consultants. The mums gave their permission and chose three of them to accompany us to Managua. At this stage we didn't really know what it meant to be a Consultant.

At the start of the first workshop we did drawings of violence we've experienced in the community. Then we showed each other our drawings and each of us talked about the different kinds of violence we had drawn.

Then we read and discussed a booklet about the “United Nations Special Report on Violence Against Children”.

Then we planned the research we were going to do with the other children from our community. We decided what questions we were going to ask in the interviews with the other kids.

The agreement was that each of us would interview at least five other kids about their experience of violence. We asked them about the violence they had experienced and the types of violence they knew about. We interviewed a total of 59 children and young people.

And this is how we became Consultants.

Then we met for a second workshop to discuss the findings of our research and agree on conclusions about the children's experience of violence in the community, in school, in the coffee fields, in the home etc.

We drew up our recommendations to reduce violence: What each group in the community should do: parents, community leaders, teachers, plantation overseers and foremen, the government, and ourselves the children and young people.

Here is Consultant Nestor interviewing Mara about how she is being mistreated.

Analysis



Preparing the final report

Presenting the findings and recommendations to a district forum of teachers and education ministry officials.



Report published by CESESMA

2009: “Children and Young People Defending our Right to Play” campaign



Action-research teams carry out an appraisal of play opportunities and limitations in their communities.



They present their findings and recommendations in both the local communities and the Municipal Children and Youth Committees.



Community festival in Samulalí



Municipal Children and Youth Committee, San Ramón

Campaign banners



"Children and young people defending our right to play, For health, learning, development, happiness and a life without violence."

These children's research has had recognition nationally in Nicaragua:



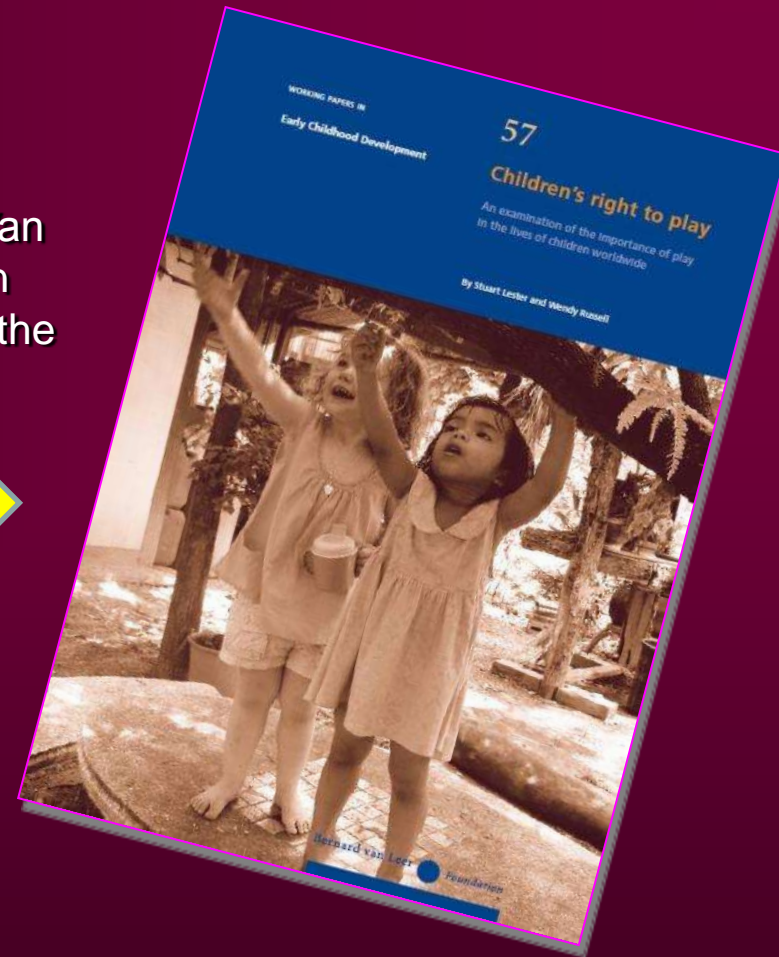
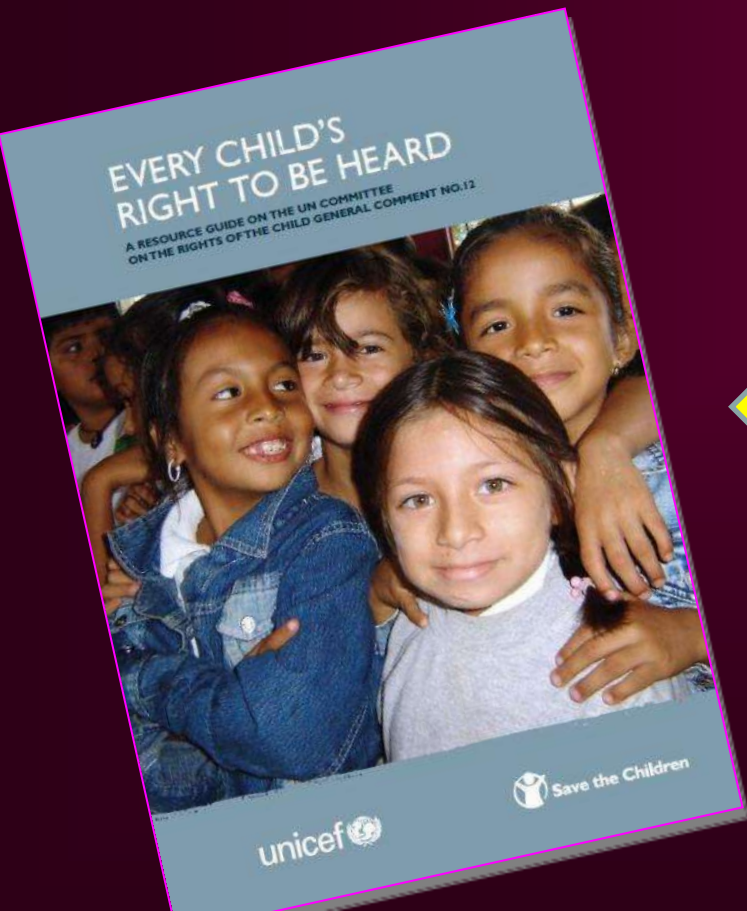
Article by the children's research team in Nicaragua's children's rights magazine "Arco Iris" (November 2009)



National newspaper feature drawing on the children's findings.
Title: "What are we playing at?"

...and globally:

As a contribution to the report “Children’s Right to Play” published by the Bernard Van Leer Foundation – which was influential in getting a UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment on Article 31.



As a case study of good practice in “*Every Child’s Right to be Heard*”, the resource guide on the UN Committee’s General Comment No 12 (UNICEF / Save the Children UK, 2011).

2009: The Santa Martha coffee plantation Young Consultants' team reforms to research the relationship between business and human rights on the plantation



Field research

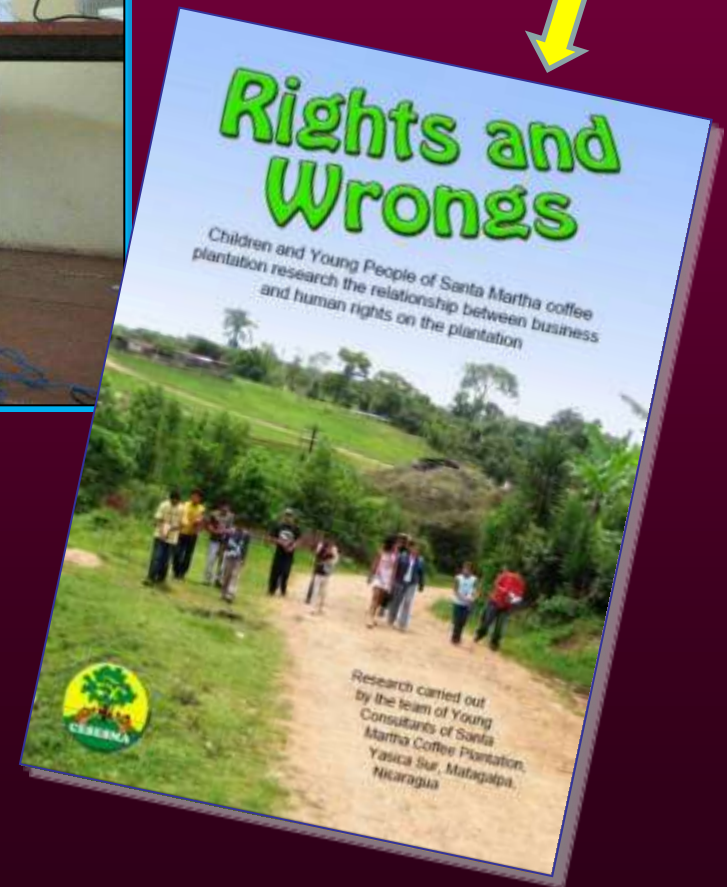
Preparing the report
and recommendations





Presentation of the findings and recommendations at a regional conference in Matagalpa

Report published by CESESMA.

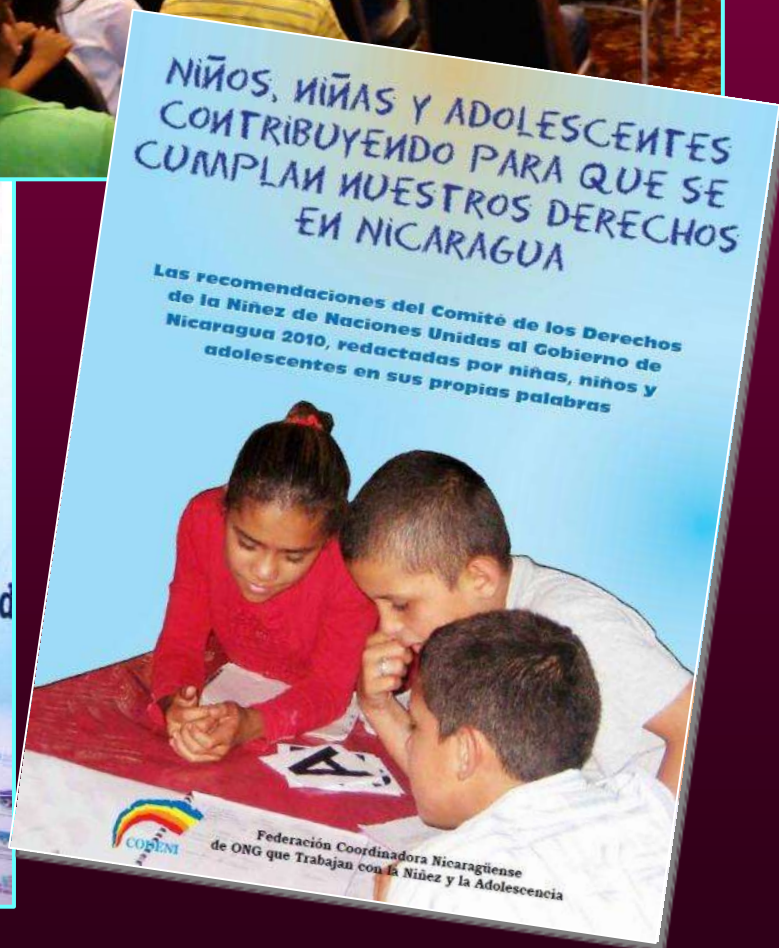


This report is also available on the website of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights as a contribution to the Committee on the Rights of the Child's forthcoming General Comment on "Children's Rights and the Business Sector"

2011: Young consultants produce a child-friendly version of the UN Committee's recommendations to the government of Nicaragua as part of a national campaign to push for compliance.



National launch of the child-friendly version, programmed and presented by children and young people in Managua, August 2012 (three weeks ago)



Two factors that limit empowerment

1. An adult tells the young consultants what topic they are going to research and they can't decide this for themselves.



2. Once they hand in their report, there is no commitment to follow-up or further action to support the young people in getting their recommendations implemented.

A new version: Transformative Research by Children and Young People

Takes the Children's Consultancy model and adds two new features:



1. The teams of young researchers decide for themselves on the topics they want to research (though there may be boundaries set due to funding or other factors beyond the facilitators' control).
2. Once they have completed their research reports, the teams are supported in developing an action plan to disseminate their findings and follow up their recommendations. The supporting organisation makes a commitment to support this process.

2011: Four teams of young researchers carry out their own self-chosen research projects

El Plomo-La Garita-Siare team

Research topic: Respect in the community, and how lack of respect leads to violence.



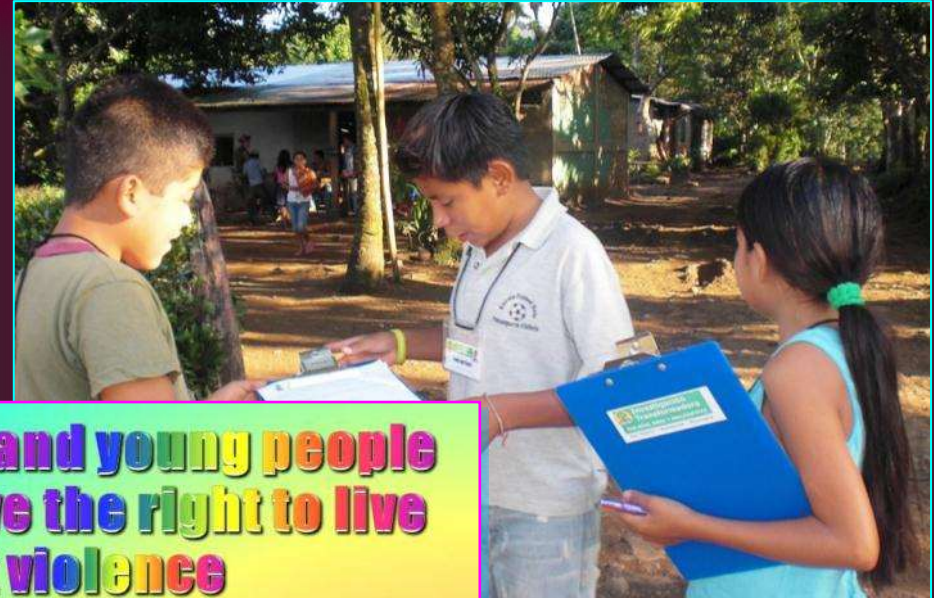
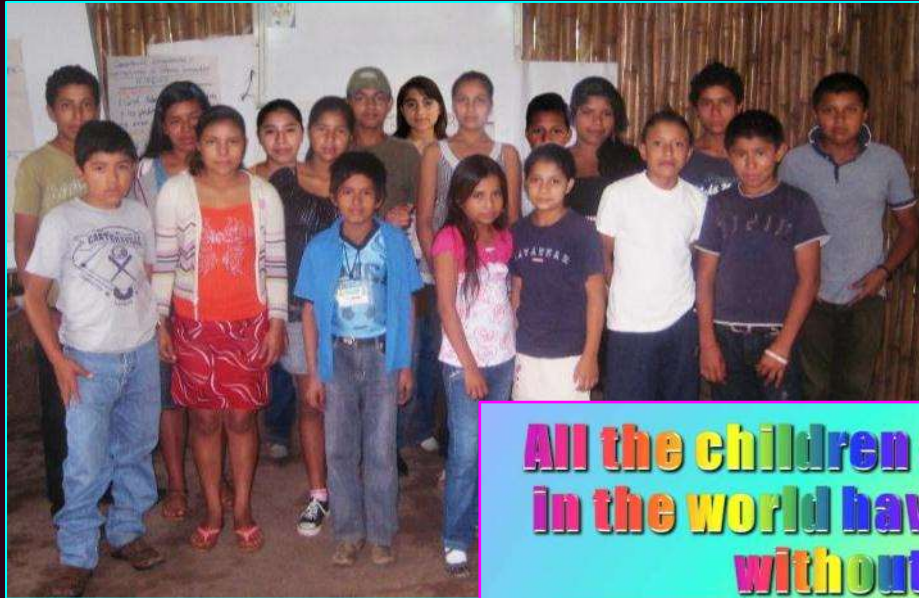
**Without respect there's no trust
or friendship and that's what
causes violence**



Young researchers investigate the concept of "respect" and how lack of respect leads to violence in families and communities.

Yasica Sur team

Research topic: The violence that children and young people suffer in the home.



**All the children and young people
in the world have the right to live
without violence**

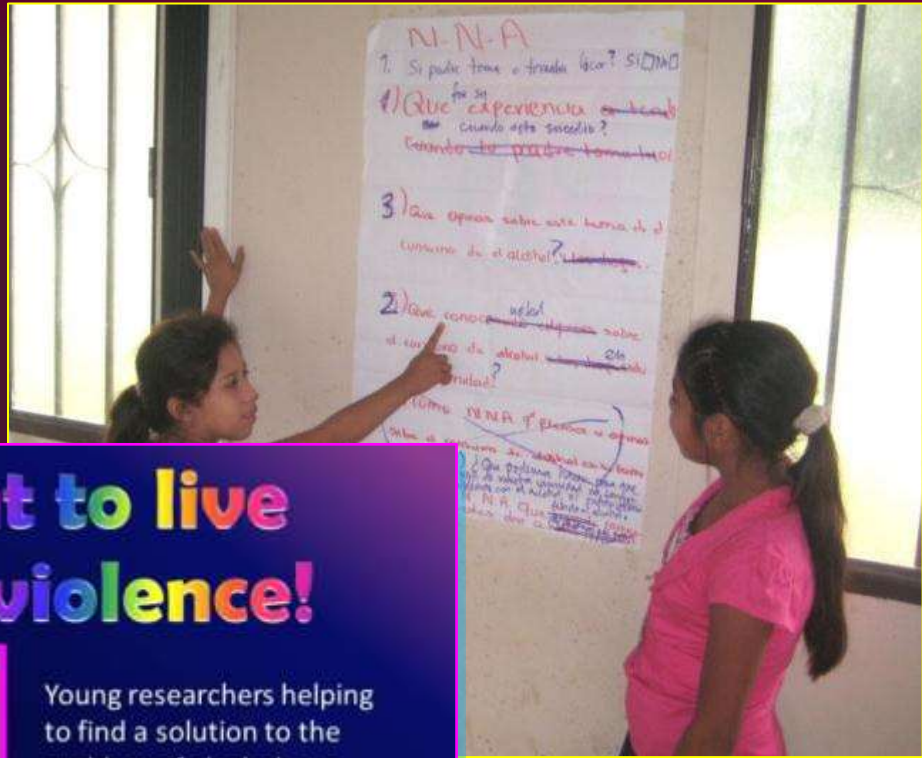
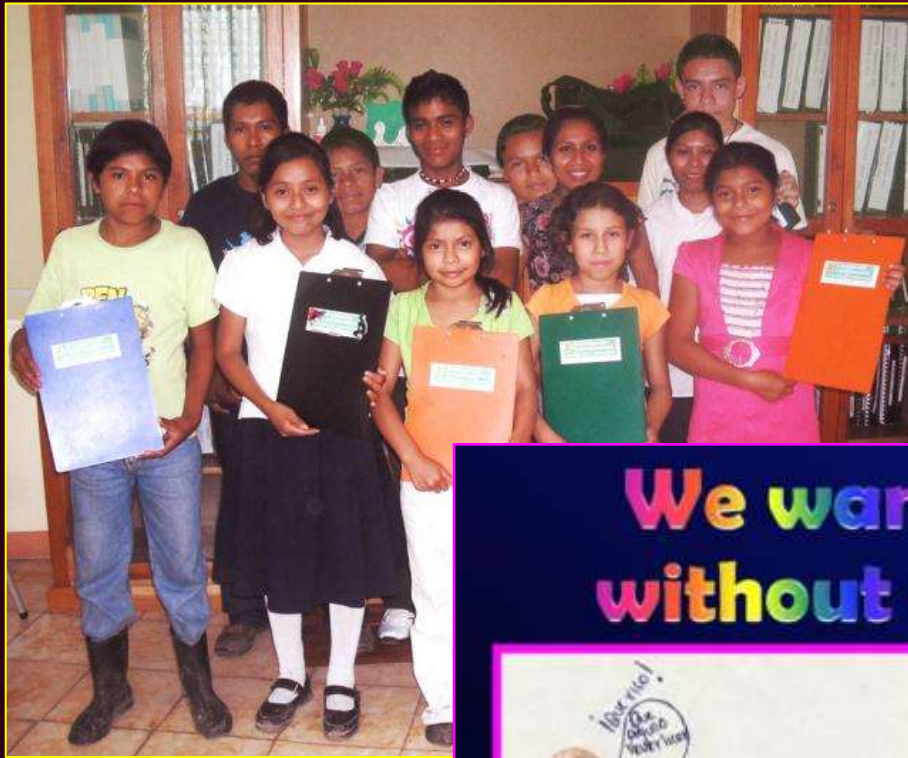


Young researchers helping to
solve the problem of violence
that children and young
people suffer in the home



Yúcul team

Research topic: Alcohol and violence in the community.



**We want to live
without violence!**



Young researchers helping
to find a solution to the
problem of alcohol as a
factor that causes violence
in our communities



Samulali team

Research topic: Parents who hit their children. Why do they do it and what are the alternatives?

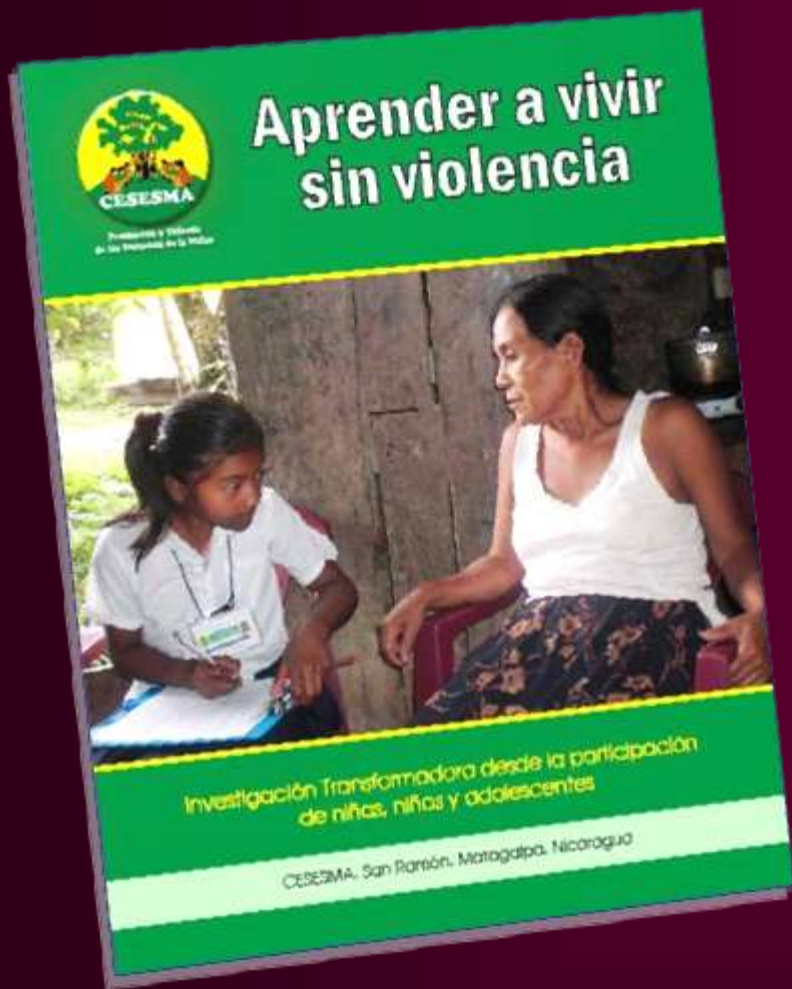


Girls and boys preventing violence in the home



Young researchers helping to solve the problem of parents who hit their children: Their attitudes, beliefs and knowledge of alternatives.

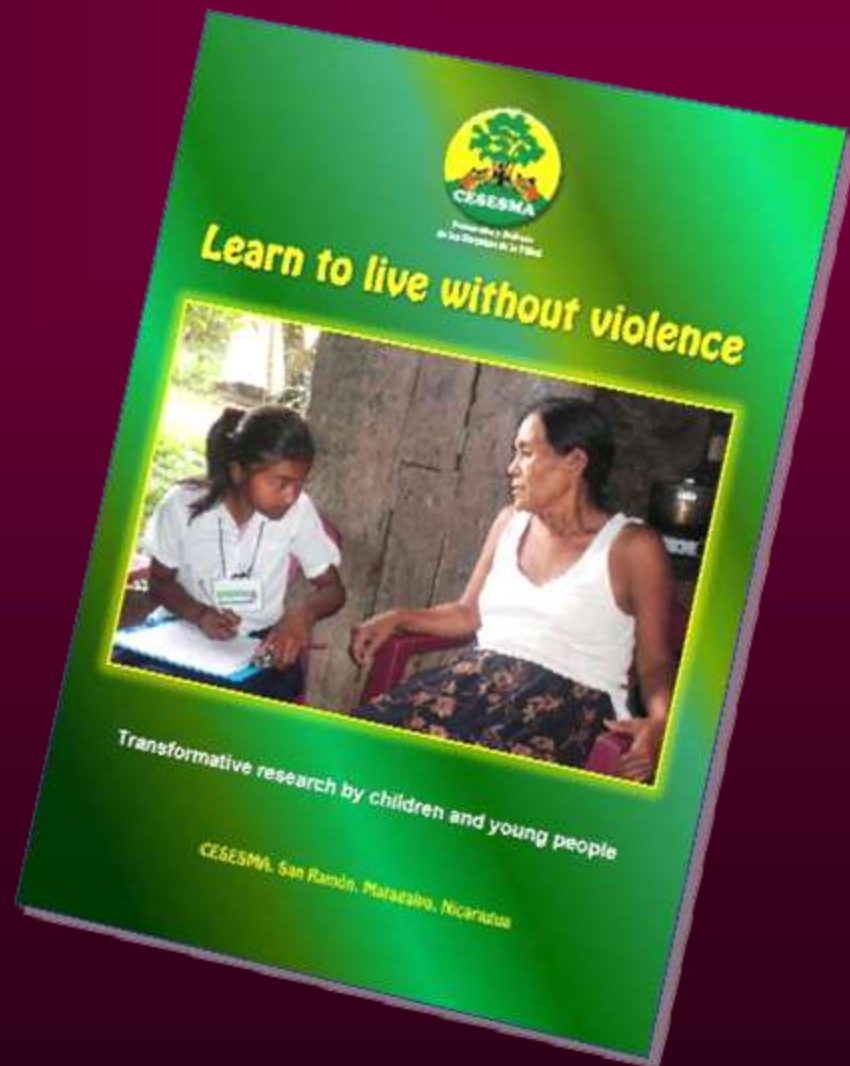




The four research reports were published in book form by CESESMA in Nicaragua in March 2012.



An English translation has been produced jointly by CESESMA and The Centre at UCLan, and will be launched on 6 September in Preston.



Based on all this experience, 10 guiding principles:



1. Founded on a human-rights-based approach.
2. The foremost experts on children's everyday lives are children themselves.
3. Children readily take on board and identify with the idea of themselves as researchers, and understand what this role implies.
4. The role of the adult is to facilitate and accompany the research process. The adult facilitator is neither a teacher nor another researcher.

5. The children themselves decide on the topic they are going to research.
6. Children and young people already have knowledge based on their own life experience. However, through research they can learn more about a topic, expanding and deepening their existing knowledge.
7. The children and young people design and plan their own research. They decide what questions they are going to ask, who they are going to ask, how, when and how many.
8. Child researchers should have access to the same level and quality of technical support as would be provided to adult researchers – provided in an appropriate way.



9. The children and young people produce their own research report in their own words. They can also design the report and select photographs and drawings to illustrate it. If a formal report prepared by adults is required this is presented separately and the two are not to be confused.



10. The organisation that supports the young researchers must make a commitment to continue to accompany and support them in drawing up and carrying out an action plan to disseminate their findings, and promote the implementation of their recommendations.

What have we learnt?

Four adult responsibilities

If children are to be successful as researchers, it is the responsibility of the adults who support them to provide four things:

1. An approach to research methodology that is both effective in the field and suited to the experience and abilities of the young researchers.
2. Quality process facilitation.
3. Technical support at least as good as what adult researchers would expect.
4. A responsible attitude to child protection, that recognises but doesn't exaggerate the risks.

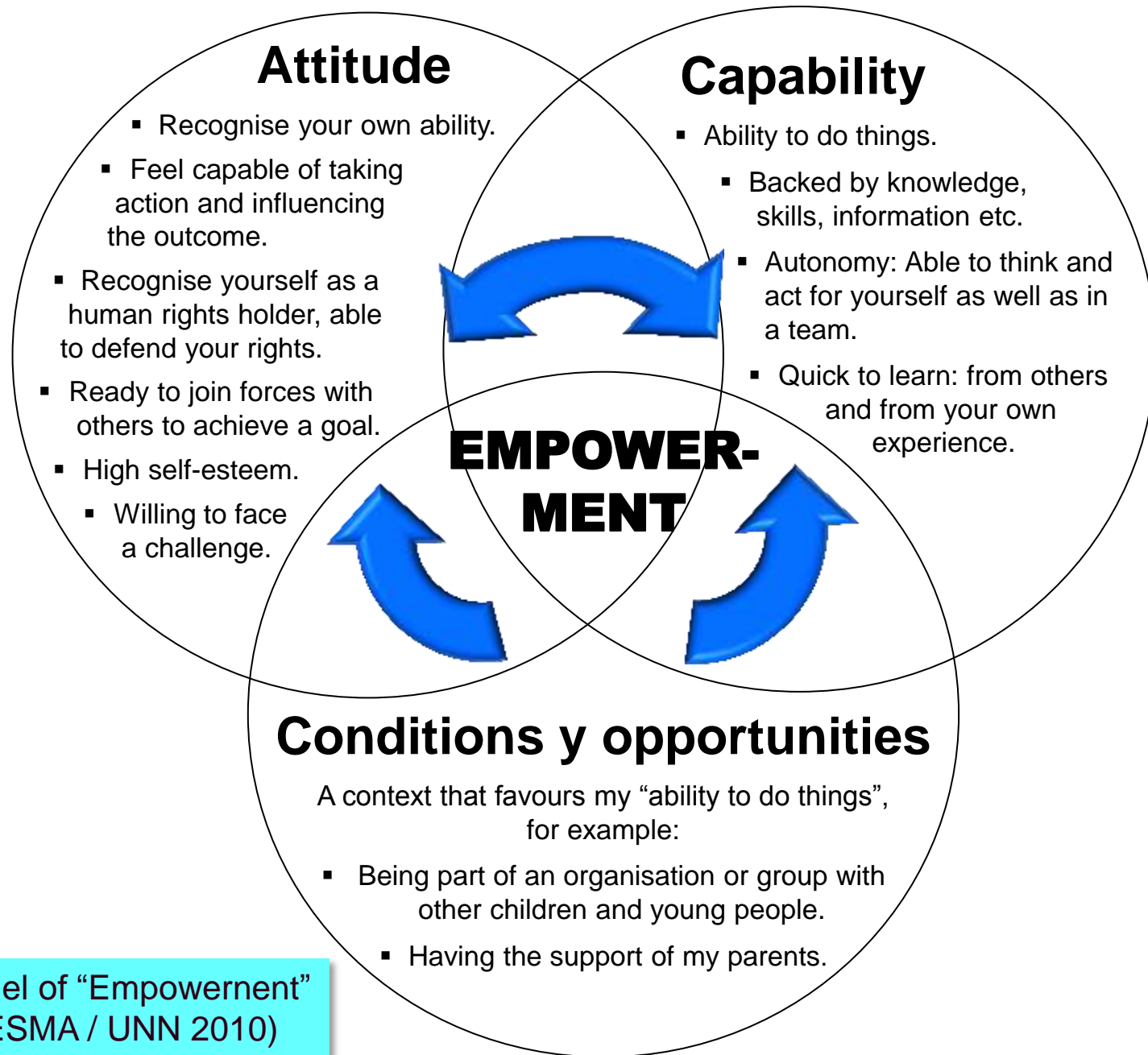


And finally: The Four Transformations

First Transformation: Empowerment of the young researchers

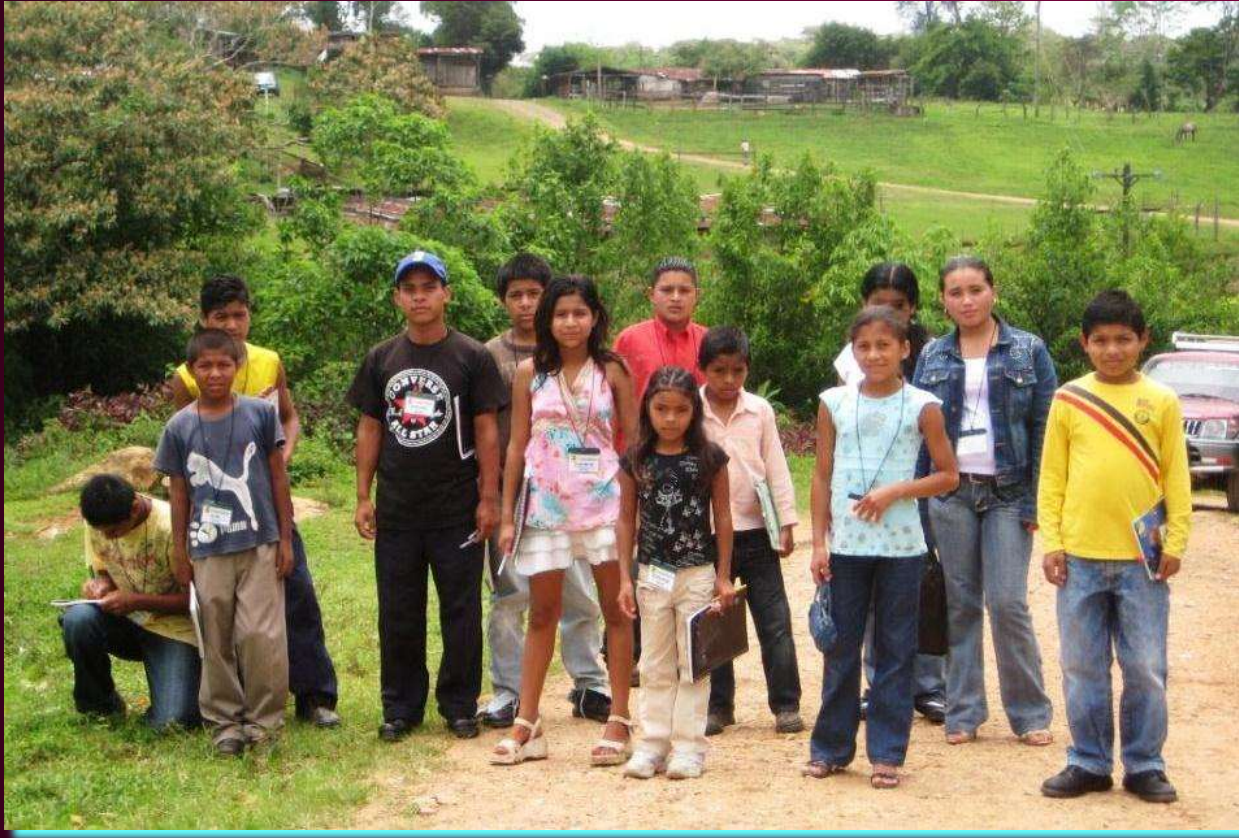


Just a moment: What do we mean by “Empowerment”?



Our model of “Empowerment”
(CESESMA / UNN 2010)

Our Transformative Research approach links and reinforces all three circles



CONDITIONS:

The act of becoming a member of a team (which also needs their parents' approval) establishes the conditions for the child or young person to start to make a difference to the problems that affect them. It affords their own space where conditions are created that will later enable them to influence decisions in adult-run spaces.

CAPABILITY:

The research process provides new knowledge and skills, and strengthens existing ones. Young researchers acquire knowledge about their research topic, and develop skills in communication, self-expression, research methods, data analysis and teamwork among others.



ATTITUDE:

The children and young people's self-recognition and belief in themselves as researchers, which in turn enables them to make a personal commitment to the team, has a powerful effect on their attitude towards themselves, in other words, it raises their self-esteem.



That's what we mean by "Empowerment": Conditions, Capability and above all "Attitude".

***Second transformation:* Transforming adult attitudes in the community and beyond**

Their parents and teachers, and the leaders of their communities, have seen what these children and young people are capable of achieving, and this has forced them to rethink old-fashioned ideas about what children can and cannot do, and recognise their potential role as drivers of change in the community.



Third transformation: Reciprocal learning transforms adult facilitators

Facilitating and supporting the young researchers has been a learning experience for the adults of the CESESMA team, generating new knowledge and skills in relation to our facilitating role, and strengthening relationships based on mutual understanding, respect and solidarity with the children and young people we work with.



Fourth transformation: Transforming society through community action

Currently the four research teams are at the stage of disseminating their findings and planning activities to promote the implementation of their recommendations, with the continuing support of CESESMA.



The true impact of their work remains to be measured. But there can be no doubt that we will soon see real transformations that contribute to building a less violent society.

FIN



Muchas gracias