

# Dissemination and beyond: Case studies of child researchers in Nicaragua and Ireland



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## In this presentation:

- About CESESMA
- Examples of child researchers' dissemination and advocacy activities
  - Young consultants of Santa Martha 2007
  - Defending our right to play action-research team 2009
  - Young consultants of Santa Martha in action again 2009
  - La Dalia young researchers 2013
  - Playboard Young Researchers Team, Belfast 2013
  - Yucul young researchers investigate the problem of alcohol (and appear on national TV) 2011.
- Some final reflections

## Where is Nicaragua?



# CESESMA: Nicaragua's child coffee-workers organising and participating to defend their rights



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



**CESESMA** is a local NGO working with children and young people in the northern coffee-growing area on Nicaragua, where extreme poverty leads to extensive exploitation of child labour and related human rights violations.





Since 2007, CESESMA has supported children and young people from the coffee plantations taking on the role of social researchers.

The aim of these projects has been first and foremost as preparation for advocacy for social and/or political change.



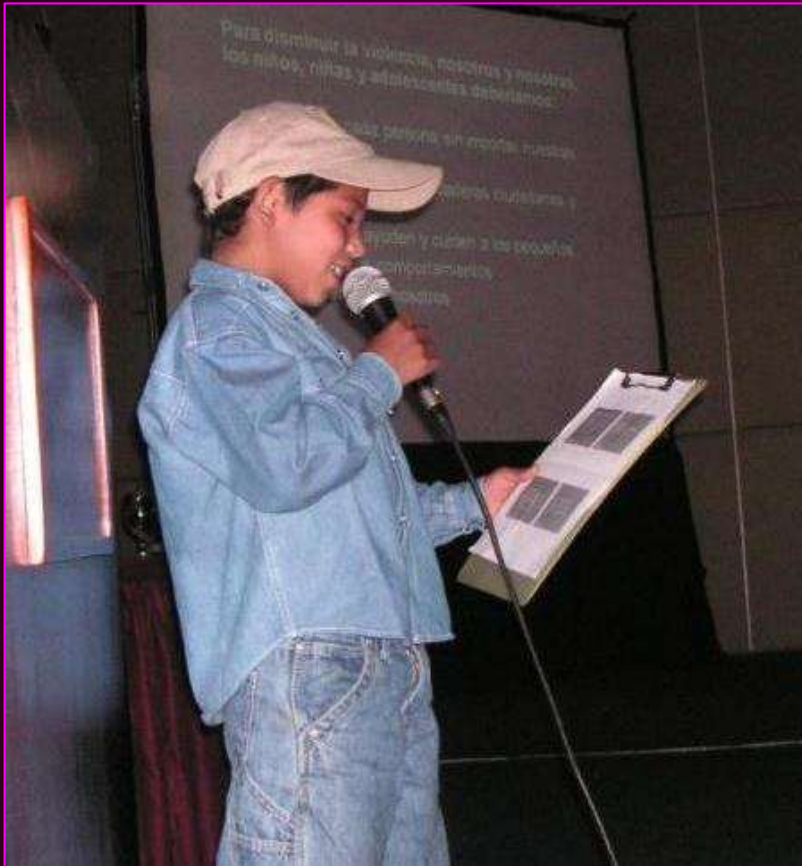
The idea that child researchers are also contributing to the advancement of human knowledge in the academic sense came later.



## Some examples of dissemination and advocacy activities:

2007: Children and young people from Santa Martha coffee plantation research the problem of violence on the plantation, and make the keynote presentation at a national conference on prevention of violence to children.

*Axel, age 10, presents the team's findings to the conference. ▼*



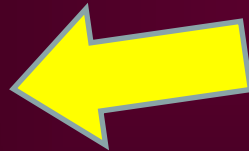
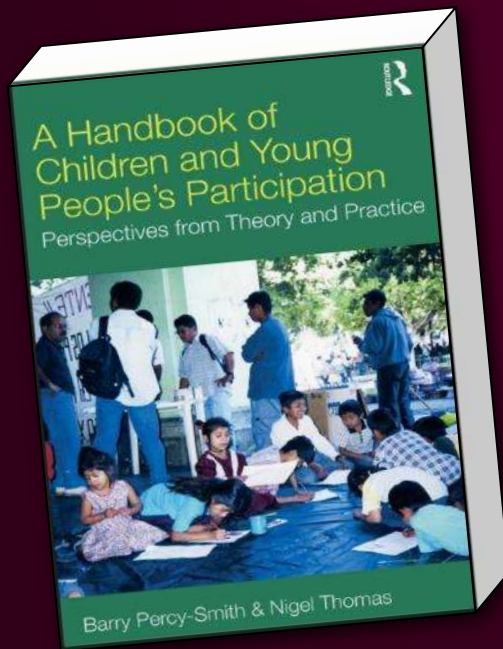
*Arlen, age 10, gives a direct challenge to the Minister for Children and Families ... ►*



*..then to all the conference participants. ▼*



The following year the children retold their experience in “*A Handbook of Children and Young People’s Participation*” (Percy-Smith and Thomas [Eds] 2010)



## 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 Yasicá Sur, 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.

Meeting about the journey to Managua

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.

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

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.



## 2009: "Children and Young People Defending our Right to Play" campaign

Children's action-research teams carried out an appraisal of play opportunities and limitations in their communities.





They presented their findings and recommendations, first to their local communities, and then to the Municipal Children and Youth Committees.

*Community festival  
in Samuláí*



*Municipal Children and Youth Committees: San Ramón...*



*and Matagalpa*





They got banners made to promote their message: *“Children and young people defending our right to play, For health, learning, development, happiness and a life without violence.”*



They got permission to hang them in the main street in town and the main road through their village.

*Outside the primary school in San Ramón:*



*Street parade in Matagalpa City*



They wrote an article about their research for Nicaragua's children's rights magazine "Arco Iris"...



Meanwhile "Playwords" magazine in the UK ran regular campaign updates for two years...

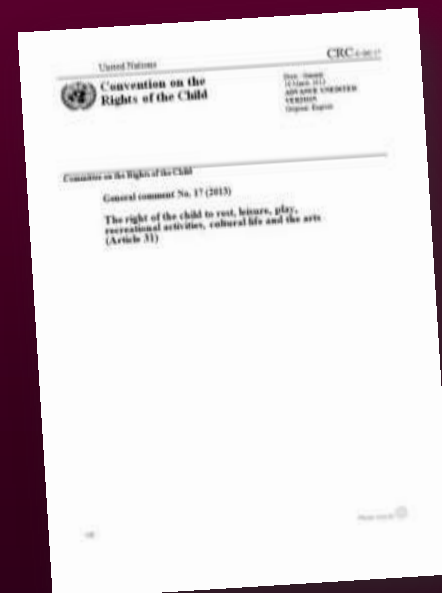


...which was then reproduced in Latin America's leading children's rights journal "Rayuela".

...and their work was cited in the Bernard Van Leer Foundation's "Children's Right to Play" (Russell and Lester 2010),



...which was critical in finally securing...



...the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No 17 on the right to rest, leisure, play, cultural life and the arts.



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



**The responsible  
plantation owner**



**The irresponsible  
plantation owner**

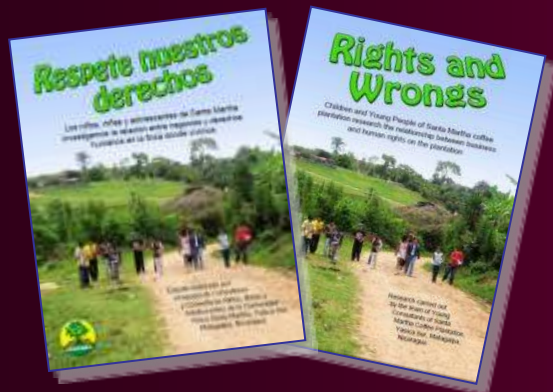


**vs.**

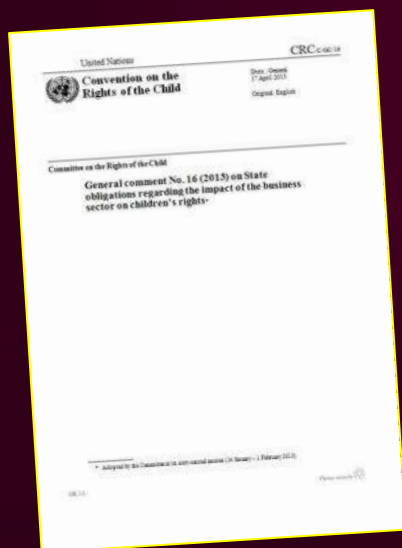


*Young researchers present their findings at a regional conference in Matagalpa*

Report published by CESESMA  
in the original Spanish



and an English translation

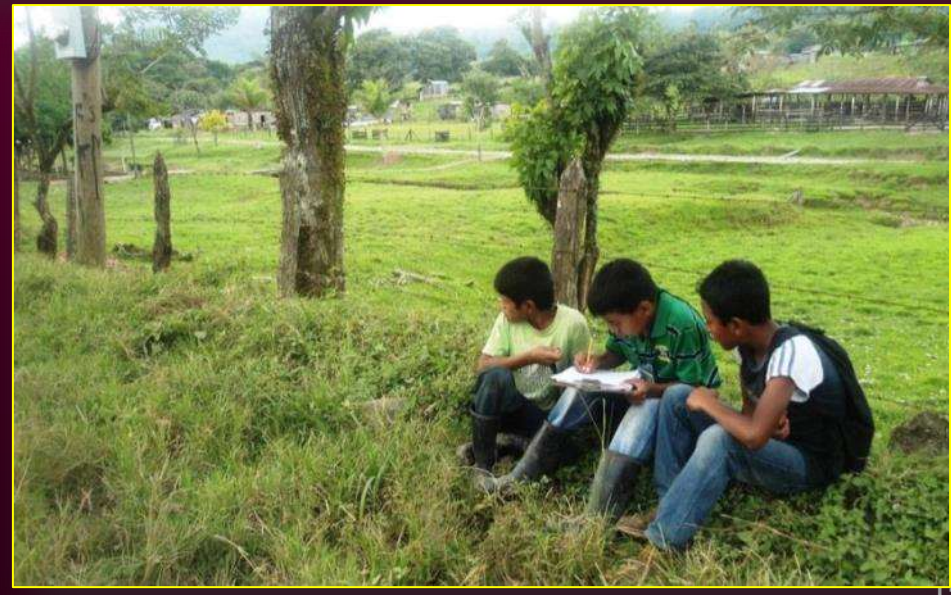


The report was sent to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and published on the website of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights as a contribution to CRC General Comment No. 16 on Children's Rights and the Business Sector.

Of over 20 submissions on this topic published on the UN High Commission website, this was the only one written and researched by children themselves.



*2013: A team of young researchers (ages 9-16) from La Dalia investigate children's perceptions of human rights in school*





They analysed their data, drew conclusions, formulated recommendations for action and produced a final report, which they also designed and illustrated.



Then they had the opportunity to present their report to a gathering of the entire international leadership of Save the Children in Latin America and the Caribbean, who happened to be on a field visit to our area at the time.



They were able to get written feedback from the Save the Children experts.  
Here is one comment:

“I thought it was very interesting the eloquence and clarity with which the children presented their findings. Although they were reading, it was obvious that they felt very comfortable with their results, and without a doubt they really knew their research. You could tell that the children were the owners and the authors of the process and its results.”

*Elizabeth Bocaletti, Regional Health and M&E Advisor for Latin America and the Caribbean region, Save the Children USA*



And, like the Right to Play action group before them, this team got their report published in the Latin American children's rights journal *Rayuela*.



2013: To prove this doesn't only happen in Nicaragua, an example from Belfast...

A team of young researchers investigated the right to play in Northern Ireland, producing a report and recommendations to coincide with the launch of the CRC General Comment No 17 on the Right to Play.



They presented their report at the national conference “Driving the Play Agenda” in Belfast on October 2013.



Playboard published their report in print and online.



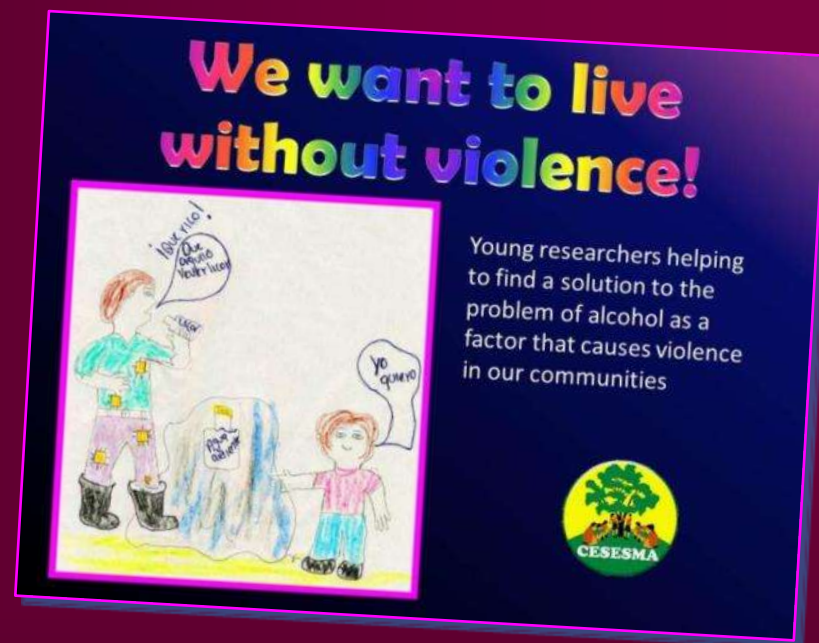


2011: A team of young researchers (ages 9-19) from Yucul investigate the problem of alcohol as a factor that causes violence in their community.

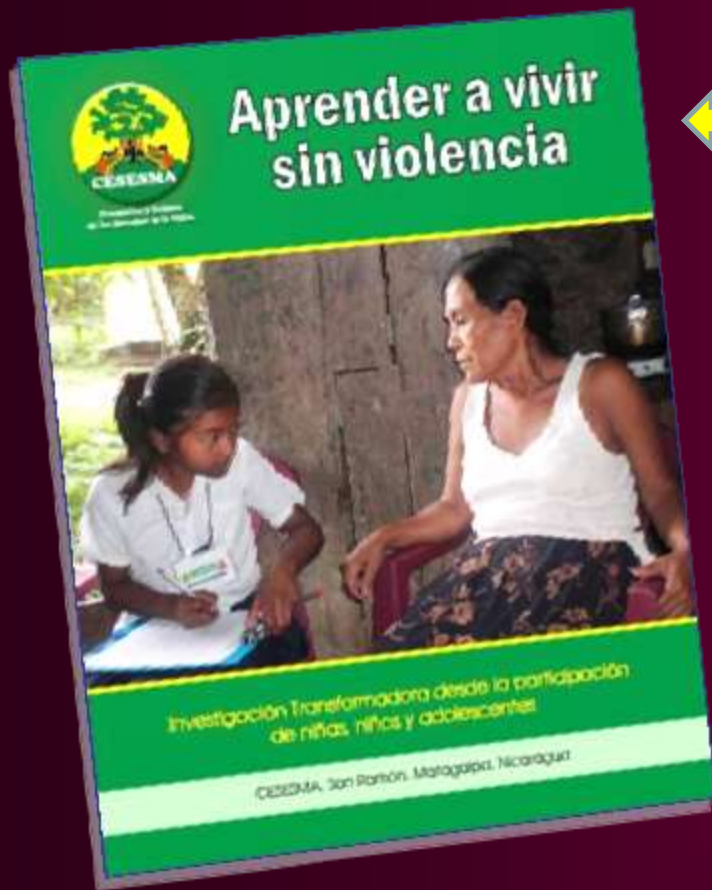


## *Research impact*

- Findings used by CESESMA in “Reconstructing masculinity” programme with young men’s groups.
- Young researchers presented their findings to the government’s newly-formed “Family Life and Security Commission”. The Commission decided to make the alcohol problem a top priority for local action.
- Local government and party officials said they had been aware for the issue for years, but it wasn’t till the children came forward with their research that they felt forced to act on it.
- The local police have taken action; confiscated illegal liquor and closed down at least two unlicensed cantinas. The local authority and police have ensured no new liquor licenses are granted in the Yúcul area.

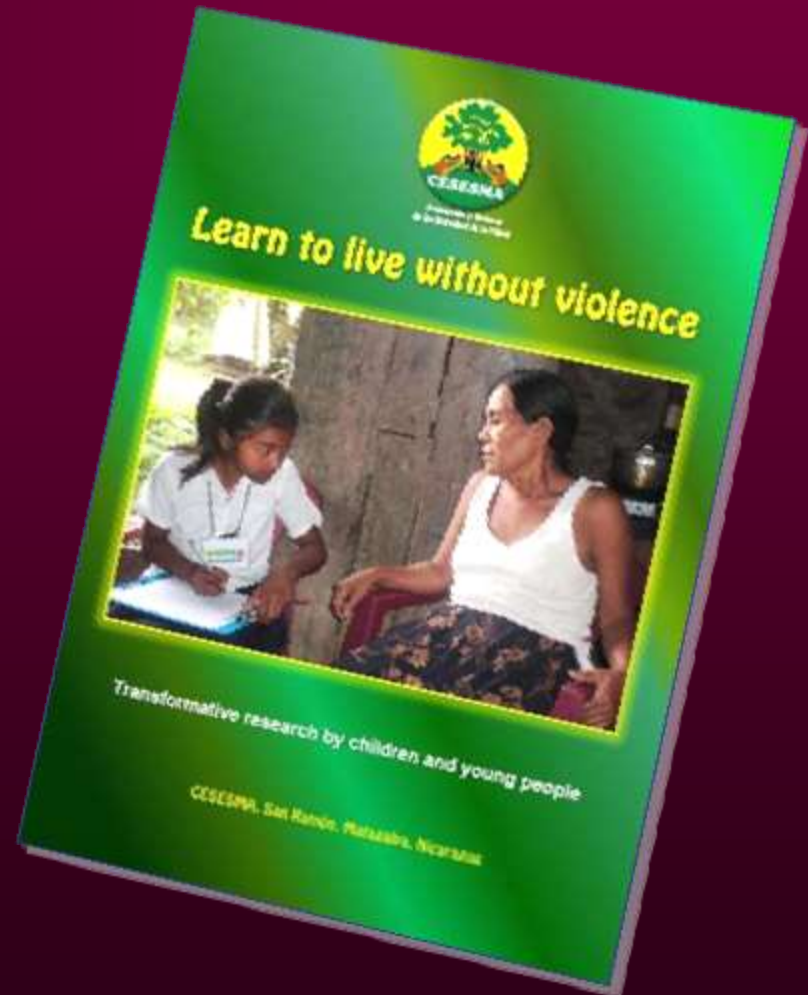






← Their report was compiled with reports from other teams of child researchers, and published in book form by CESESMA in Nicaragua.

An English translation was published jointly by CESESMA and The Centre for Children and Young People's Participation at the University of Central Lancashire.



## Channel 2 Nicaragua evening news, November 2011



In the original Powerpoint, this slide was linked to a video clip. You can watch the clip on *YouTube* as part of a talk I gave to young people at the “*Different voices in global conversations*” children and young people's conference at the University of Central Lancaster, Preston, England in September 2012.

Go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXBGlatxPhc>



# Some final reflections

## 1. Names and naming



- Nicaraguan children are always clear that they want to be identified by name as the authors of their research and put themselves in the public view to promote and advocate. CESESMA is happy to support them. Risks are assessed but few are found.



- Belfast children were equally happy to be identified by name and get up on stage. But adults were concerned about this, and considered it a problem – though not able to specify any actual risks that it might involve.

- Does empowerment involve saying, “This is me. Recognise me. Listen to me”, or is it safer to keep yourself hidden?



## 2. Citizenship



- Nicaraguan children think it is obvious to include themselves among the stakeholders who should take action on the problems they investigate, and make action plans to achieve this.
- In Belfast this was considered dubious: children should not be “responsible-ised” for social problems.
- Should we protect children from having to take any responsibility, or encourage them to take on an “active citizen” role (which by its nature implies responsibility)?



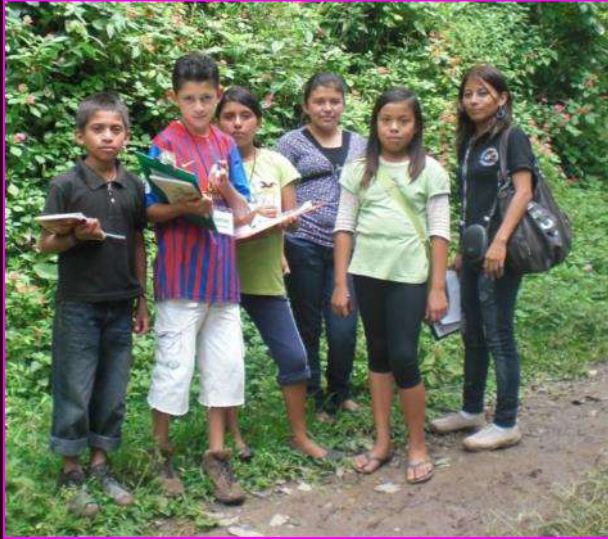
### 3. Follow-up

- Lack of resources and institutional support for advocacy and follow-up action is stopping child researchers from converting their research findings into real policy impact.
- Should child-led research always lead to advocacy and action? Who is responsible?
- How can we support children better in going “beyond dissemination” to achieve real social impact?



## 4. Monitoring and measuring impact

In all these instances of children as researches, there is evidence of a real, sustained impact. In CESESMA we talk about “The Four Transformations”



*First Transformation:*  
Empowerment of the  
young researchers

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



*Third transformation:*  
Reciprocal learning  
transforms adult facilitators

*Fourth transformation:*  
Transforming society  
through community action





BUT the evidence is largely anecdotal or based on our perceptions and informal discussion.

How do we demonstrate the causal sequence:



Children research  
social issues



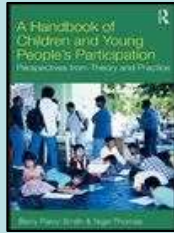
Leads to advocacy and  
social action



Leads to significant social  
or political change

We need to learn how to research the effects  
of children's research and advocacy.

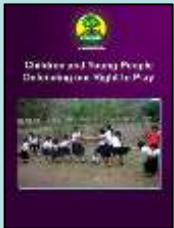
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