



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 Yasica Sur, which is part of the municipality of San Ramón in the Department of Matagalpa, Nicaragua.



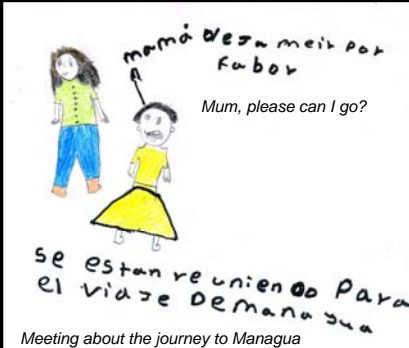
During the coffee harvest we all work on the plantation.

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.



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.



And this is how we became Consultants.

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.

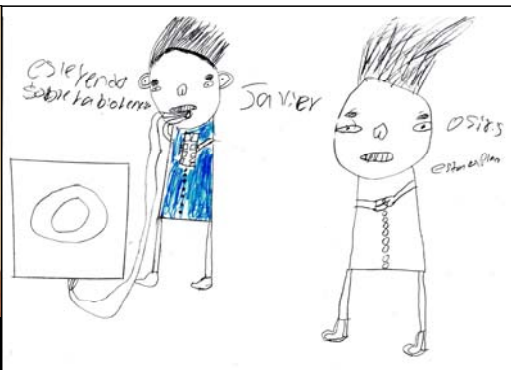


We drew up our recommendations to reduce violence: What each group in the community should do: parents, community leaders, teachers, plantation overseers and foremen, the government, and ourselves the children and young people.





In the last workshop we went to the CESESMA office in San Ramón to put together our final report.



We practised the presentation we were going to do in Managua with the computer and projector. Each of us took a turn to practise our part using the microphone. Then we made plans for the journey to Managua.

The day of the journey we met in Santa Martha. Richard, the driver, took us as far as La Praga in the pick-up truck. There we changed to the minibus.



We had lunch in Matagalpa town. We arrived in Managua in the afternoon and went to look at the Crowne Plaza Convention Centre where we were going to make our presentation the next day. We had dinner and slept in a hotel

The next morning we got up and had breakfast.



Then we went to the national conference.



We did our presentation; each one took the microphone to read their part.



Here we are, reading our parts about violence

Then Arlen presented three questions on cards to the Minister for the Family. The questions asked her what she was going to do to reduce violence against children.



Later we gave the same three cards, of different colours, to everyone. Then we collected the cards to make a display of the commitments that the adults had made with the children and young people of Nicaragua.

We closed off the side doors so when the adults left the conference hall they saw the commitments they had made in writing.



We slept another night in the hotel in Managua and the next day we went home to Santa Martha. A couple of weeks later we had an evaluation meeting to think about the experience. Here are our reflections about the experience of being Consultants.

What did we learn from the experience?



We learnt to do things that adults do, like being Consultants. We learnt to speak in public without being embarrassed. We learnt how we can all help to reduce violence, and who we can turn to for help. We learnt that we are all equal: nobody is bigger than me. And we learnt about how people live in the capital, for example eating with knives and forks.

Did the adults take us seriously?



We think they did, because they gave us the opportunity to do our presentation, and the adults were paying attention when we made the presentation. Even the Minister for the Family took us into account, because she accepted the three cards and answered our questions. Also our parents let us participate in the workshops and go to Managua. Although the people at the conference in Managua took us seriously, we realise that the problem of violence continues in Santa Martha. There's a lot of work still to do to eliminate violence in Santa Martha.



What would we say to those adults who say that children can't be Consultants because they don't know anything and will be manipulated by the adults?

We would tell them they are very much mistaken, because we can too. They should stop abusing their power and give us the space. Put us to the test and they'll see if we can or not.



How did we feel when it was all over?

Happy because of all the new things we saw and all the things we learnt, and because we had contributed to the reduction of violence. Sad because it was over and we weren't going to meet again.

Our message to other children and young people who want to be consultants:

They should join the groups that CESESMA runs. They should speak out about those who violate their rights. Tell the truth and don't be scared.

- Axel**
- Roberto**
- Nestor**
- Osiris Junior**
- Jorling**
- Arlen**
- Brenda**
- Scarlech**
- Brenda Yadira**
- Ervin**
- Jossabeth**