



How children and young people influence policy-makers: Lessons from Nicaragua



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This presentation

1. About CESESMA's work with children in the coffee plantations of northern Nicaragua.
2. Our research project to find out how children can influence public policy.
3. A summary of our findings.



Nicaragua

Belfast

Bregenz



Matagalpa: Tropical, rural, mountainous



Coffee is grown in the forests, protected by the partial shade of the forest canopy.



Much of it is still produced on large feudally-run plantations in the mountains like this one, Santa Martha



Harvesting coffee is highly labour-intensive. During the harvest period (November to February) many thousands of children work all day every day picking coffee



Living conditions are very basic These are typical family homes



The basic diet is rice, beans and maize-flour tortillas.

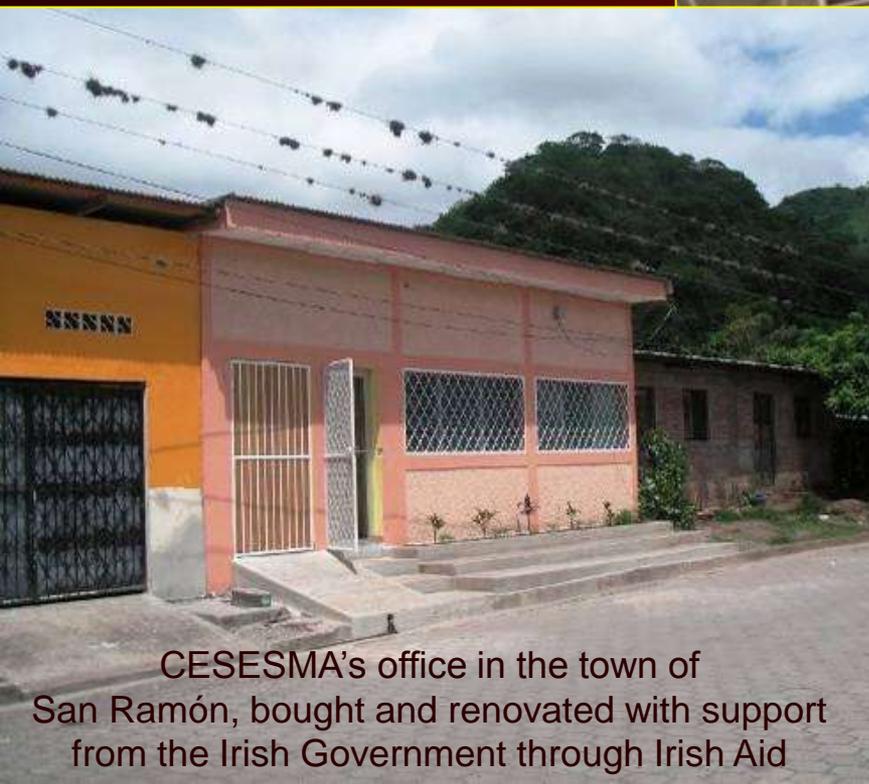


Primary schools exist in most communities, but are under-resourced, poorly staffed, and often in bad repair



There are no secondary schools in rural areas





CESESMA, the Centre for Education in Health and Environment, is a local voluntary organisation based in San Ramón.

Of the 30 staff, all but two are Nicaraguan and most are local people.

CESESMA's office in the town of San Ramón, bought and renovated with support from the Irish Government through Irish Aid



Our Mission

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.





Our vision is of:

Children and young people and their families with greater self-esteem, living without violence; with opportunities for an integrated education; taking control of their own development; capable of organising themselves and influencing those around them to defend their rights and contribute to the social, environmental, economic and cultural development of their community.



Five strategic objectives

1. To contribute to the promotion and defense of children and young people's rights.





2. To strengthen the participation and organisation of children and young people, enabling them to act effectively in local and national decision-making forums.



3. To contribute to food security and sovereignty and the preservation of the natural environment.





4. To contribute to improving interpersonal relations, in family, school and community, in order to reduce violence.

5. To promote alternative learning opportunities in schools and communities, based on the interests of children and young people.



Our Research Project: Children and Young People as Active Citizens in Nicaragua: How to achieve real policy impact.

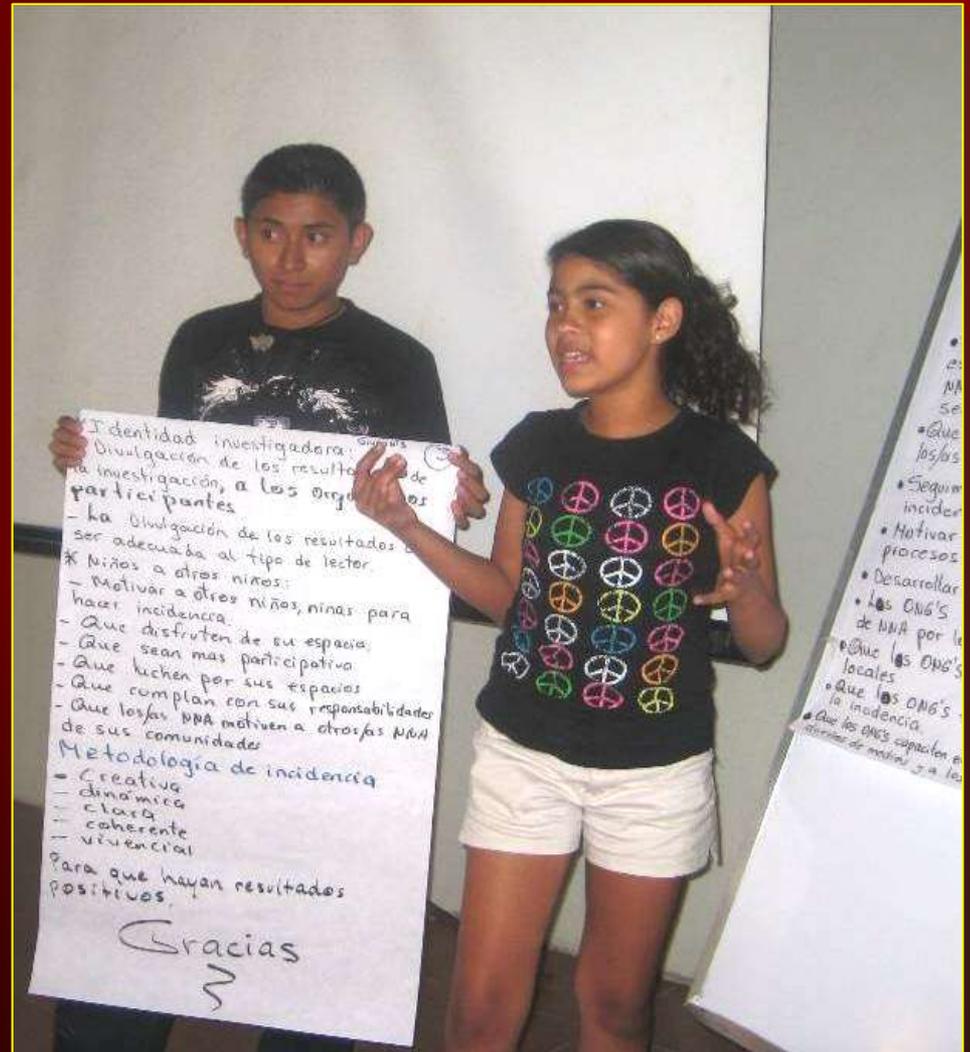
Research Partners: CESESMA and the University of the North of Nicaragua UNN.

(Research carried out in 2010, funded by Irish Aid)



We wanted answers to four questions:

1. What factors increase children and young people's chances of achieving policy impact?
2. What ways of organising help children and young people achieve policy impact?
3. How can adult helpers/facilitators help increase children and young people's policy impact?
4. What are the main problems faced by children and young people seeking to impact public policy?

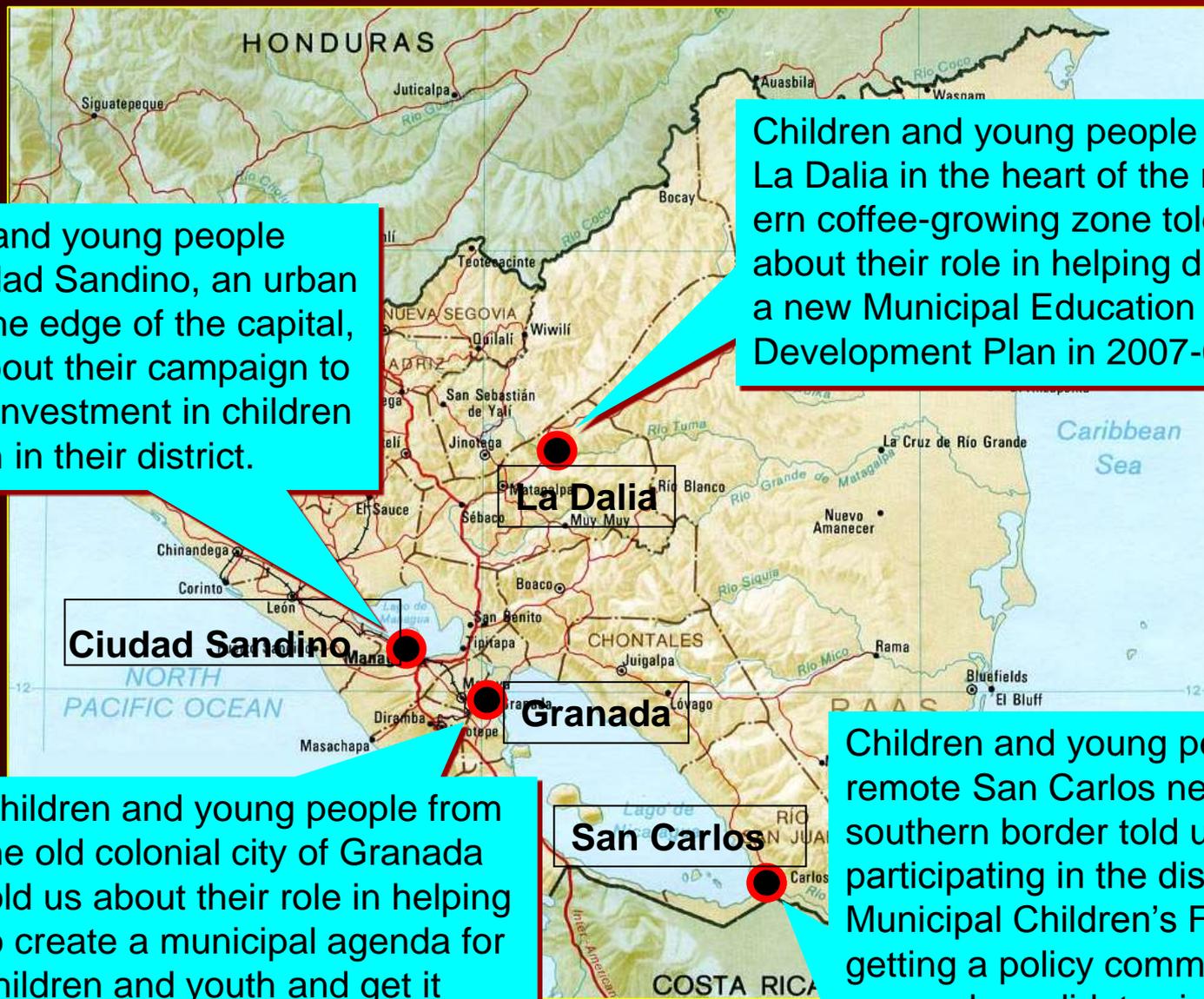


How we did the research

1. Through a survey, we identified ten cases throughout Nicaragua where there was firm evidence that children and young people's efforts had influenced public policy decisions that affected them and their communities.



2. We selected four contrasting case studies, from different parts of the country:



Children and young people from Ciudad Sandino, an urban area on the edge of the capital, told us about their campaign to increase investment in children and youth in their district.

Children and young people from La Dalia in the heart of the northern coffee-growing zone told us about their role in helping draw up a new Municipal Education Development Plan in 2007-08.

Children and young people from the old colonial city of Granada told us about their role in helping to create a municipal agenda for children and youth and get it adopted by the city council.

Children and young people from remote San Carlos near the southern border told us about participating in the district's first Municipal Children's Forum, and getting a policy commitment from mayoral candidates in the 2008 local elections.





2. We investigated these four case studies through:

- Focus groups of children and young people who had participated in the experience.
- Focus groups of adult professionals who had helped facilitate the processes.
- Interviews with key decision-makers, e.g. town mayors, in the four local authorities who confirmed that their policy decisions were influenced by the young people's proposals.

3. Two-day residential bringing together children and adults from all four areas to consider the findings and jointly formulate recommendations.





← Some key findings from our report



A. Children and young people organising as active citizens

1. Children and young people are more likely to impact policy decisions when they are campaigning on issues that they identify as important, not just responding to consultations.

Consultations are important, especially when planned and carried out by the children and young people themselves, but they are just part of the process, not the whole of it.



2. Children and young people can then form action groups around issues they want to work on with a strong collective sense of identity and purpose.

3. Children and young people need their own organisational spaces (i.e. spaces where they make the decisions, though often facilitated by adults), which they can use as springboards to approach adult decision-makers with confidence and knowledge of the issues.



4. Existing structures such as Schools Councils can be an important part of change-making in schools, but often they themselves will need to change:
 - Become more democratic, more open and inclusive;
 - More empowered to take real decisions;
 - In control of their own agenda and self-organisation;
 - Able to influence matters of resources and budgets;
 - Better dialogue with teaching staff and management.





5. Supportive adults should encourage children and young people to organise for themselves, support autonomy and gradually diminish dependence on adults.

6. Children and young people value networking and sharing experiences with young people from different schools and communities (also different countries if there are enough resources).



Fermanagh Youth Council from Northern Ireland visits CESESMA, August 2009





7. Children and young people are capable of leadership. Young leaders with good organisational and communication skills play an important role in taking forward children's ideas and proposals to influence policy-makers.

8. Understanding, support (and, ideally, involvement) of parents and wider family is important for children and young people to become effective as active citizens.



B. Preparation and training



9. Children and young people's effectiveness as change-makers is increased when they get training, learning what it means to be an active citizen and the skills they need to put this into practice, and thus become empowered to act.

10. Children and young people want active citizenship training to be fun, active, participative, and built on their real-life experience. They don't mind working hard on a project if they see a worthwhile result, but they want adult facilitators who know how to combine work and play.





11. Children and young people can share skills and knowledge through peer education, child-to-child.

12. Before offering training to the children and young people, the adults who are going to facilitate the process need to be trained. Children and young people themselves can play an important part in training adults in facilitation skills.



13. There needs to be a relationship of confidence and mutual respect with adult facilitators. Kids need to know that adults will listen and take on board what they say, even when the children are saying things the adults don't want to hear.





14. Children and adults can share responsibility for identifying factors that discriminate and exclude some kids, and working out how to overcome these.

C. How to impact policy processes

15. Children and young people need access to the people and places where the real decisions are being made. Supportive adults can help them negotiate this.





16. Children and young people need to be involved, not just in making initial decisions, but also in monitoring and follow-up to ensure politicians keep their promises and proposed changes are put into practice.





17. If children and young people are involved in change-making, they should be kept informed at every stage.

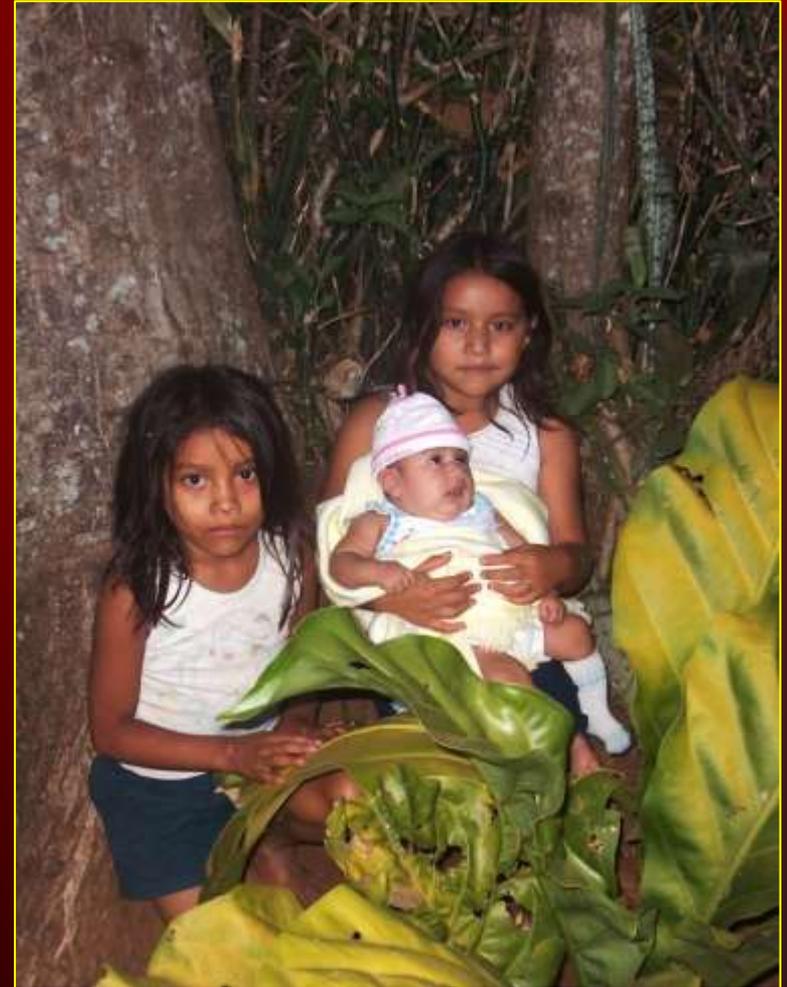
D. The three biggest challenges

1. *Adultism*

CESESMA's definition of "adultism":

"A belief system based on the idea that the adult human being is in some sense superior to the child or of greater worth, and thus the child, by default, inferior or of lesser worth. The term also describes social structures, practices and behaviours based on these beliefs.

These beliefs find support in a persistent view of the child as an object, and not a human rights holder. This construction of the child as an object can be found in both its traditional form, which views the child as property of his or her parents and a source of cheap labour, and in a more modern manifestation where the child is treated as an object of social interventions 'in its best interests' without being given the chance to express an opinion or to have his or her specific needs recognised and taken into account."





2. “Asistencialismo” (dependency)

An approach based on giving (or hoping to receive) aid or assistance, is the antithesis of a human-rights-based approach.



3. *Lack of accountability and lack of follow-up*

- Authorities showed little sense of accountability to children and young people for fulfilling their obligations or implementing agreements.
- They had no concept of themselves as duty-bearers in relation to children and young people's rights.
- In the face of this difficulty, children were not supported in developing adequate follow-up strategies to monitor duty-bearers' commitments and demand that agreements were kept.



I hope that reflecting on these findings from Nicaragua can help us think about how to promote real participation throughout Europe and beyond.



For more information...

Full report in Spanish: CESESMA/UNN (2010) *“Incidencia de niños, niñas y adolescentes como ciudadanos/as activos/as en Nicaragua”*.

Child-friendly version: Matamoros et al. (2011) *“¡Nuestra voz vale!”* (also in Spanish).

Summary article in Spanish in Mexican journal *“Rayuela”* #7: Shier et al. (2012) *Incidencia de niños, niñas y adolescentes como ciudadanos activos en Nicaragua*.

Article in English in UK journal *“Children & Society”* 28(1): Shier et al. (2014) *How children and young people influence policy-makers*.

For these and many more publications go to the CESESMA website (English, Spanish and French):

www.cesesma.org

And Harry Shier’s website (English and Spanish):

www.harryshier.comxa.com



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FIN

DAS
ENDE



*Vielen Dank
Thanks for listening
Gracias por escuchar*

