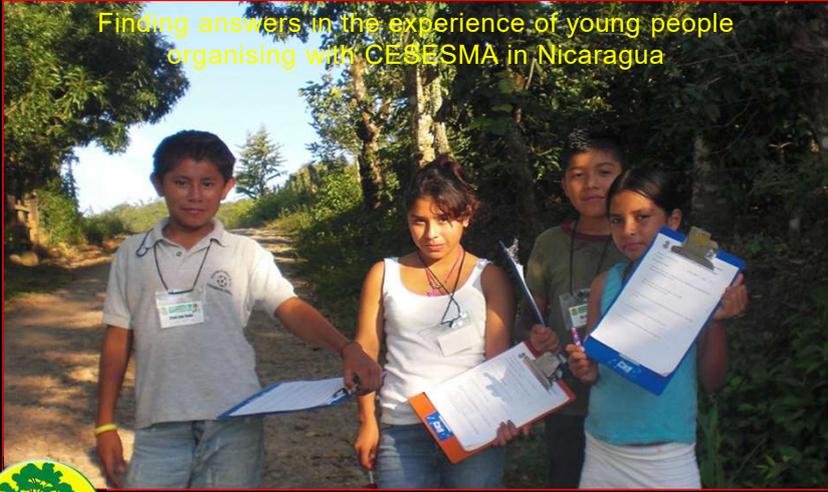


“Empowerment” of Children and Adolescents:

What is it, how does it occur, and what is the adult supporter’s role?



Finding answers in the experience of young people organising with CESESMA in Nicaragua



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Overview

1. “Empowerment”:
Meaningless buzz-word
or useful model?
2. CESESMA’s version of
Empowerment
3. Yong people’s stories of
empowerment 2017.
4. Taking it forward...



“Empowerment”: Meaningless buzz-word or useful model?



Empowerment is found in diverse literatures...

- Feminist studies, women's rights
- Workplace psychology
- Management studies
- Health promotion
- Community development
- International Development / Development Studies.

The Word “*empowerment*” is found abundantly in children's studies and children's rights studies, but there is seldom any discussion of what it means.

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“Words that once spoke of politics and power have come to be reconfigured in the service of today's one-size-fits-all development recipes, spun into an apoliticised form that everyone can agree with.”

(Cornwall and Brock, 2005)

“Nice-sounding words are, after all, there for the taking, and the nicer they sound, the more useful they are for those seeking to establish their moral authority.”

(Cornwall and Brock, 2005)

“Claims that children conducting research themselves empowers them may have been made without sufficiently thorough conceptualisations of what such empowerment involves and how it happens. Such claims and assumptions also need to be more firmly based on empirical evidence”.

(Kim, 2015)

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“Defining empowerment: Perspectives from international development organisations”



Hennink, Kiiti, Pillinger y Jayakaran. 2012.



They interviewed representatives of 49 NGOs who claimed to be practising “empowerment”, asking about:

1. Definitions of empowerment;
2. Projects or activities they feel support empowerment;
3. How they measure empowerment and the indicators used.

(It turned out hardly any had tried to measure empowerment, so this yielded very little, and they focused more on 1 and 2).

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Findings:

There was no consensus on either the definition or the characteristics of empowerment, but analysis of the 49 interviews suggested:

“Empowerment” occurs at three levels:

1. **Individual:** Empowerment of the person;
2. **Community level:** Empowerment of a community or village;
3. **Organisational.**

(But in the discourse of the NGOs, this mainly referred to how a group or organisation comes to be empowered thanks to the intervention of outside development support.



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NGOs practised Empowerment in five domains:

- Health domain;
- Political domain;
- Economic domain;
- Natural resource domain;
- Spiritual domain.

(this only appears in the discourses of faith-based NGOs, where it refers to strengthening of religious commitment, adoption of faith-based values etc.)



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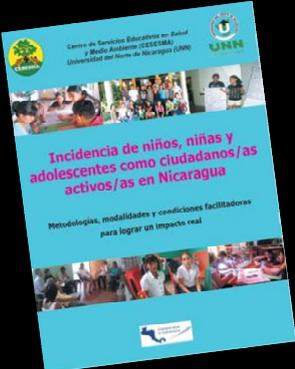
They identified 6 “Mechanisms of Empowerment”

Mechanism	Definition
Knowledge	Access to education, training and information from formal or other sources.
Agency	Capacity to act independently and make choices: 3 components:
(a) Self-identity	(a) Self-confidence and self-efficacy to set and achieve goals.
(b) Decision-making	(b) Ability to make informed decisions that are recognised and respected.
(c) Effecting change	(c) Belief in own ability to take action to effect change based on own goals.
Opportunity structure	Existence of an enabling environment of social, political, institutional and community support to foster individual and community development.
Capacity-building	Harness community capacity to provide or advocate for services or self governance, and to seek accountability from government service provision agencies.
Resources	Access to physical and financial resources, or skills for seeking resources, to develop communities.
Sustainability	Ability of communities to develop and support initiatives towards long-term sustainability.

(Hennink et al, 2012)

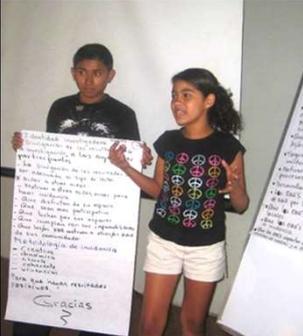
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CESESMA's version of Empowerment

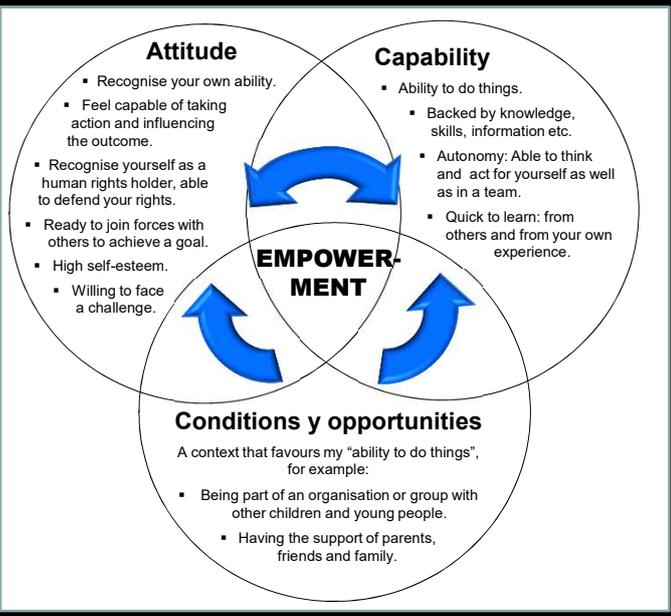


Emerged in joint research project with the University of the North of Nicaragua, "Children and young people as active Citizens influencing public policy in Nicaragua", 2009-2010.

Funded by Irish Aid as part of the "Active Citizenship in Central America" research programme.



Empowerment



English version from Shier (2015)

We mapped the young people's accounts on to the existing CESESMA model of Empowerment

Attitudes and self-esteem

Capability and knowledge

Conditions and opportunities

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1. First circle: Capability and Knowledge

Attitudes and self-esteem

Capability and knowledge

Conditions and opportunities

Capability, skills

- Participation;
- Communication;
- Negotiation;
- Decision-making;
- Teaching (sharing knowledge with others);
- Learning from experience (critical reflection);
- Expressing opinions;
- Thinking, having ideas;
- Exercising leadership;
- To keep on learning (self-directed).

Strategies and influencing mechanisms

- Promotoría (community education activism):
 - Prevention of violence;
 - Reading promotion;
 - Masculinities;
 - Theatre;
 - Women's rights/Girls' and young women's network;
 - Reporting rights violations;
 - Agro-ecology (sustainable agriculture).
- Promotion and defence of human rights;
- Community appraisal, problem analysis and transformation;
- Proposals, demands, lobbying etc.;
- Communication, use of media;
- Meetings, sharing experience.

All this is backed up by:
Knowledge and information:

Areas most mentioned were:

- Violence;
- Human rights (children's rights, women's rights);
- Gender (masculinity, "machismo").



2. Second circle: Conditions and opportunities

- **Support from one's family, above all father and mother.**
(If this is not given from the start, the struggle to win it is central to the empowerment process).
- **The role of CESEMA**
 - Joining in processes, getting organised with other kids.
 - The opportunity to become a Promotor/a;
 - Opportunity to participate in workshops and trainings.
 - Help with transport and logistics.
- **Support from friends, from the community**
- **Support from school, from one's teachers.**

3. Third circle: Attitudes and self-esteem (sense of who I am)

- Self-esteem;
- Confidence in oneself;
- Sense of security in oneself;
- Recognise yourself as a rights-holder;
- Attitude of "Yes I can";
- Inner strength to confront and overcome obstacles;
- Willingness, commitment;
- Love for what I do, desire to share it with others;
- Positivity;
- Setting an example to others.



All of this validates the existing CESEMA model of empowerment, and also helps us to reflect further on it...

Taking it forward...

Re-thinking the adult role

Attitudes and self-esteem



Self esteem, self belief, self-confidence, belief in equality, respect for diversity, will and drive to make a difference, sense of solidarity, commitment to teamwork

These things grow within a person; I can't give them to you.

What kinds of processes can I facilitate that might help them grow?

Capability and knowledge



We can help with knowledge and skills.

Conditions and opportunities



We can help establish conditions and create opportunities.

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Conclusions:

- These findings can help us understand the concept of empowerment in relation to children and adolescents.
- Adult facilitators have a key role, not just in helping children build their own capacity, but in establishing conditions and creating opportunities. These are things adults can provide directly to young people.
- However, much of what we call "empowerment" is an internal process, through which self-belief, self-confidence, motivation, critical thinking, initiative, perseverance and solidarity take shape within the person. This process can be supported, but cannot be given or directed.
- Thus adults can do much of what is required in order for empowerment to occur in children and adolescents, but we cannot empower them.



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...and finally ...

Three things I've learnt about "doing empowerment":

1. Empowerment is not a zero-sum game. I can't "empower" you by giving you some of my power...

...and you won't become empowered by accepting it. Empowerment is a process, not a gift.

2. Some of what is done in the name of empowerment is really a disguised form of social control.



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3. Much of what is done with good intentions builds more dependence than real empowerment: dependence on adults for facilitation, mediation, organisation, resources, places to meet, access to decision-makers etc.



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What I want to do now:

- 1. Repeat this experience across different cultures; find out how far the concept of empowerment is universalisable.
- 2. Develop and test a set of indicators for child and adolescent empowerment.



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