



News from CESESMA

**Promoting and defending
the rights of children and young
people, through awareness-raising,
reflection and action in partnership with
rural children and young people, and
other members of the community.**

Pilot issue, November 2003

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Editorial

Welcome to the first pilot for what will eventually be a quarterly electronic newsletter from CESESMA, produced in both English and Spanish, viewable and downloadable directly from our web-site – when we finally get one. The plan is that all CESESMA's projects and programmes will be described on the web-site, and this magazine section will feature latest news and developments, and allow the children and young people themselves to talk about different aspects of the work in more depth each time.

The original idea of an English-language newsletter was to keep our supporters and friends in solidarity, mainly in Britain and Ireland, informed about what we are up to here in Matagalpa – and what we are doing with their money. But, of course, once it's available on the web, we hope it will also serve to spread the news more widely, and maybe help us to expand our support networks, attract more funds, and thus give us more security and stability in the future.

Because the web-site isn't up and running yet, this pilot issue is being sent by internet to existing friends and supporters. What we really need is your feedback and suggestions. How can we improve it? And what would you like to see in future editions? At the same time, please feel free to pass it on to anyone else you know who might be interested.

We look forward to hearing your comments.

Harry Shier
CESESMA, Matagalpa

Strategic Plan – in pictures!

After an amazing year-long process of consultation, participation, investigation, teamwork and reflection, our first ever strategic plan, for the five years 2004-2008, has finally taken shape and is ready to face the world. Typically, however, the CESESMA team was determined that the effort wouldn't end here. We had to share it with the hundreds of children and young people whose contributions helped us create it, and whose active involvement will be essential in making it happen. But how do you present a five-year strategic plan to several hundred young people from age seven upwards without boring them stiff? (If you've ever had to wade through the strategic plan of any NGO, you'll know exactly what I mean).

Creative as ever, the team came up with a child-friendly wall-poster version, and an interactive process for sharing it with groups of children and young people in the forty or more rural communities and coffee plantations where we are currently working. Between us, we carried out eighteen workshops, sharing the plan with over five hundred children and young people – and parents too.



We asked the young people what they saw as the priorities for joint work in the first year of the plan – starting in January, and they came up with some great ideas. Here is a representative selection of the young people's proposals, all taken directly from the flip-chart sheets they completed at the Strategic Plan workshops in Samulalí district.

Participation and children's rights

- They should let us participate more in decision-making in the community. We want to put forward our ideas and be involved in making decisions.
- The community should recognise and take into account the participation of children and young people. They should recognise our ability and support us so the community progresses.
- Form a girls' group in the community and join the national Girls' Forum.
- More training in the community so people know more about promotion and defense of children's rights.

- Continue teaching parents about the National Children's Rights Code.
- We can continue to achieve the defense of our rights through more training of children and young people.
- There should be more community consultation.

Environmental conservation

- Reforest the river valleys so the water doesn't keep diminishing.
- Talks about not burning off the forests and not contaminating the water sources.
- Campaign against deforestation.
- Create plant nurseries to promote reforestation and improve the environment.

Non-violence

- Workshops on non-violence.
- Provide training for the teachers, to improve their skills in conflict-resolution.
- Workshops for parents, to help them change their parenting practice, and reduce domestic violence.

Youth theatre, traditional dance and crafts

- Continue developing new plays in the youth theatre group.
- Start a new youth theatre group in our community.
- More training to ensure continuity for the work on theatre and dance.
- We'll make a commitment to teach our craft skills to other children.

Organic farming

- We, the children and young people, should continue with the organic food-growing, and we should get more support and follow-up in this area.

- We'll make a commitment to teach more about organic food-growing, and make people aware of its importance.

Community health

- Workshops on preventative health-care.
- Increase the use of natural medicine in our community. Give us training in natural medicine, and we'll make a commitment to promote it in the community.
- Talks about nutrition and community hygiene.

Basic education

- An educational process to help people finish their primary grades.



CESESMA folk-dance group in action at Finca Santa Martha, when a brigade from the UK Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign came to visit us in August.

Sustainable agriculture for community health

The coffee industry has changed the face of this part of Nicaragua. With increasing dependency on coffee-production, many of the traditional vegetable crops have gone into decline. Where they are grown, it is often accompanied by over-use of toxic pesticides, which not only poison the local children, but build up in the soil and contaminate the water-sources. As a result, many of the poorest families survive on a diet of rice, beans and tortilla, leading to vitamin deficiency and, in many cases, chronic malnutrition.

CESESMA's organic food-growing programme works with the young people to challenge this sad state of affairs. Together we've drawn up an action plan, which involves training children and young people in sustainable organic cultivation, setting up community kitchen-gardens and plant nurseries to put the new skills into practice, providing quality seeds (preserving traditional varieties, not importing genetically-modified ones), and supporting the young people in starting their own family vegetable plots. The young people learn how to plant bug-repellant plants alongside their vegetables

to reduce the need for pesticides, and how to make their own organic compost so they don't need to buy fertilizer. Some are also learning about the medicinal properties of local plants, for better health and fewer doctors' bills.



As the children and young people transform their communities, a real achievement is that the adults, who have often been slow to accept change, seem more willing to accept the new ideas that their sons and daughters are proposing. As one community leader put it, "We've learnt to care for the land, to conserve it and plant seeds with the children's participation".



Two young promotoras practise story-telling skills at a workshop in La Praga

Storytime

CESESMA's children's reading programme trains local young people to become community reading promoters. The promoters run story-telling groups, lend story-books (of which we now have a large library, thanks to our committed overseas supporters), and help children improve their reading skills. The Newsletter spoke to Eddy Muñoz, aged 14, Reading Promotor from El Quetzal coffee plantation in Laguna Verde near Matagalpa. We asked Eddy what's it like being a Community Reading Promotor?

I feel very pleased because I've had the chance to share with the children, and also with the team who do the training here at La Praga. In my community the children have been great. I've been able to work with them, have fun with them, read their favourite stories, and lend them the story-books, which motivates them to keep working with me.

It's helped me too; to develop my level of language, express myself better, and become less shy at participating in workshops and community activities. Some of the kids have asked me if I get paid for this work. I say, "No, this is voluntary work. It helps me and it helps you". I learn from them, and they learn from me.

What do the parents think of the programme?

The first time I went round signing up kids for the reading group, I had to go and talk to some of the parents, because they didn't want to let the kids go. They thought it was a waste of time reading story-books. I explained to them that it wasn't a waste of time. It was so that they could improve their language skills, learn to read more, and read better, whether it was stories or other things. The adults have changed their minds because now they can see how their children have progressed. The kids take home the books I lend them and show them to their parents. One girl said to me, "You should have seen how my mum and dad were laughing, because the story was so funny".

So, thanks to the children, the parents are reading too. I've lent books to children who don't read very well, and

they take them home so their parents will read with them. Then later they tell me how they got on with the stories, so I know that the parents are motivated too, and now they like sending their children to the reading group.

What message would you give to children who want to learn to read?

First, get moving and go to school. Then look out for reading promotores in your community. Go to them and say, "Hey, I want to read stories with you". The headstart we give them will help them in class too, above all in Spanish.

So I say "Look for your promotores and have fun reading stories!".

Girls' Network



Girls and young women aged 12 to 18 in the rural communities of Samulalí and La Dalia have started a local Girls' Network. I asked organiser Daysi Reyes, 17, to tell me about their plans:

The girls want to get together to talk about everything that's happening to them: the changes they're going through, the feelings they experience, the mistreatment they're suffering in their families and communities. We're going to run regular workshops for the group, and then pass on the knowledge in our own communities. The first workshop will be on sexual and reproductive health, for example how to manage relationships and how to use contraceptives.

Who's involved?

In Samulalí there are twelve of us, and there's another group starting in La Dalia. At the moment we're just organising locally, but the idea is to join the national girls' forum once we're properly organised in our own communities.

"The Light of Dawn"

A group of children and young people based in La Dalia, about thirty miles west of Matagalpa, have recently launched their own radio programme, provisionally entitled "La Luz del Amanecer" – the Light of Dawn – possibly because it goes out at 7.00 a.m. on a Sunday morning.

I spoke to Francis Blandón, 18, the team co-ordinator (on the left in the photo).

"Seven o'clock is actually a good time", she explained, "because the children and young people are mostly at home and can listen to the radio. Other days they're working, or they're at school and they can't tune in.

"We have a team of three main presenters: Jaucel, who's 14, Iris, who's 13, and myself. We normally meet two or three days before to plan the programme. We cover themes relevant to local children and young people like the environment, children's rights, cultural



The Radio team live on air

activities and recreation, domestic violence. We don't just talk for the whole hour. We play music, we tell jokes, we try to make it dynamic and fun. We try to play songs relevant to each week's theme.

"On Sunday mornings we get to the studio at 6.30, prepare the list of songs and pass it to the control room. Then we go into the studio to get ready for the programme. We do the whole show live. We don't pre-record anything.

"The next step is to train up a team of reporters. We have recruited a group of 38 children and young people from age 12 to 18, and we start training them in November. The idea is that children can discuss local issues and problems with the reporters, and the reporters will raise the issues publicly through the radio".

I asked Francis how she saw the future of the programme.

"First we need to raise funds to keep it going", she explained. "We have to pay for the airtime each month and the CESESMA funds are running out. We also want

to buy equipment for the team of reporters: small tape-recorders, microphones, batteries and so on. For now they're just working with notebooks and pencils.

"Eventually I'd like to see this programme on the air three days a week. These are important topics, and the kids need to be empowered with regard to their rights and responsibilities".

And so much more

The work featured in this pilot newsletter is just a fraction of what we get up to at CESESMA. There's also the basic education programme, three youth drama groups and a children's music group, campaigning work around children's rights, non-violence, free education, environmental conservation, and against water privatization. There's traditional dance and craft skills including leatherwork, sewing and knitting, macrame and furniture-making. There's national networking, with increasing participation of children and young people in regional and national initiatives. There's our involvement in the international Reflect network and the Positively Global project with partners in Europe and Africa. And we've just taken the decision to become the first member in Central America of the International Association for the Child's Right to Play. All this and more you will be able to read about in future newsletters.

How you can help

If you would like to support the work you have read about in this newsletter, there are several easy ways to send money. Drop me a line at the email address below and I'll send you details.

How to contact us

E-mail: cesesma@ibw.com.ni

Phone: + 505 612 5842, but remember we are six hours behind GMT. If you don't speak Spanish, just say to whoever answers the phone, "¿Está Harry?" (Is Harry there?), and if I am, they'll give me a shout.

Postal Address: CESESMA, Apdo. #316, Matagalpa, Nicaragua

And you can visit us at: CESESMA, Finca La Praga, Km137½ Carretera La Dalia, Matagalpa ("La Praga" Farm, Km 137½ on the road to La Dalia, Matagalpa).