

Contributions to Improve Investment in Children and Adolescents and Children's Participation in the Municipalities of Central America



**Central American Learning Circle on Children's Rights and Local Development
July, 2011**



The initial release version of this document was produced during the III Central American Meeting, which was held in Managua, in December 2006. It was enhanced with inputs generated during the IV Central American Meeting that took place in Retalhuleu, Guatemala, in November, 2008. Finally, it was validated in the period before the V Central American Meeting, and approved while its development, in October 2010



V CENTRAL AMERICAN MEETING ON THE
RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT
“Public Policies and Municipal Budgets:
Tools for Compliance of Rights of Children and Adolescents”

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I.

BACKGROUND



Children's Council in Pueblo Nuevo, Nicaragua.

The Central American Learning Circle on Children's Rights and Local Development was created in November 1999 and it is a non-formal, horizontal, self-steering and self-guided space for reflection, sharing and learning.

This space is integrated by people from the Central American countries. They participate on their own will or on behalf of institutions and organizations. The Circle's commitment includes two main issues: 1) Children and adolescents as subjects of rights, and 2) local development. Their goal is to establish a bond between both issues as a way to contribute in the fulfillment of the Rights of Children in municipalities of Central America.



By searching new ways of sharing and learning to fulfill children's rights, the Circle has summoned and organized five Meetings in the last eight years. Those Meetings have had participation of more than 200 municipalities, with delegations from municipal governments, girls, boys, and adolescents, organizations, networks, associations and cooperation agencies:



The First Central American Meeting, under the theme "Children and Adolescents, subjects of local development" was held in San Salvador, El Salvador, in February 2002. There was participation of 153 people from 54 municipalities.



The Second Meeting "Investment in Children and Youth: a national priority", took place in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, in December 2004. 180 people from 44 municipalities participated.



The Third Meeting was a combination of the two preceding subjects and its theme was: "Investment and Participation of Children and Adolescents, Assurance for Local Development". It was conducted in Managua, in December 2006, and 204 people from 51 municipalities participated (The Meeting was also attended by the Vice-Chairman of the Rights of the Child Committee).



The IV Meeting "Quality of Municipal Investment for Children and Adolescents" was performed in Retalhuleu, Guatemala, in November 2008. 201 people from 65 municipalities participated.



The V Central American Meeting took place in October 2010, in Puntarenas, Costa Rica. Its theme was: "Public Policies and Municipal Budgets: Tools for Compliance of Rights of Children and Adolescents". The Meeting had a participation of 179 people from 69 municipalities.

Also, the Central American Learning Circle has organized Seminars for Mayors, and internships among municipalities.

The Meetings, Seminars, and Internships have been factual forums of sharing and learning on the experiences of promoting, exercising and the fulfillment of the rights of children and adolescents in a diversity of processes of Circle local development in Central American countries. At the present



time, most of the municipalities have expressed the significance of municipal investment in children and adolescents. Increasingly, municipalities carry out participatory processes aimed to have its Municipal Policy for Children. This, with the purpose of augmenting and improving the quality of their investment, and to organize themselves in an effective way to promote the Rights of Children.

The Meetings and Seminars have elaborated documents, such as: **“Central American Guide to build a Public Policy of Children and Adolescents”** (August 2009); Pronouncements of the Municipal Governments of Central America for the Rights of Children (Dec. 2006, Nov. 2008 and Oct. 2010); and the document: **“Contributions to improve investment in children and adolescents, and children participation in the Central American municipalities”** (Dec. 2006). Experiences and learning of the period 1999-2007 were presented in the form of a systematization with the title **“Rights of Children and Local Development in Central America: a necessary bond”** (May 2008).



Adolescents and youth during the Fifth Central American Meeting, October 2010



II.

INTRODUCTION



Boys and Girls during the Third Central American Meeting, December 2006

The III Central American Meeting on Children's Rights and Local Development held in Managua in 2006, was an opportunity for children and adolescents, representatives from municipal governments and a diversity of organizations to share and reflect on the advancements and difficulties found to ensure children's participation in the municipal sphere, and improve investment for the accomplishment of their rights. As a result of that analysis was produced the initial version of the document "Contributions to improve investment in children and adolescence and children's participation in municipalities of Central America".



All of these years the municipalities from Central America have not been still: there is a growing number of them that has municipal public policies of children, with plans, projects and budgets to assure the rights of children. Meanwhile, boys and girls have exercised the right to participation by multiplying their ways of expression, and demand to be taken in account in municipal decisions that affect their present and their future.

The Central American Learning Circle on Rights of Children and Adolescents and Local Development considered it was necessary go over again on the document prepared in December 2006 and validate it during the second semester of 2010. In this regard, children and adolescents, municipal authorities, and Municipal Commissions of Children of Children from 82 Nicaraguan municipalities provided inputs for its validation, which has allowed as a result, along with inputs from 69 municipalities during the V Central American Meeting, the production of this document.

This document consists of two main topics which we have been concerned about throughout the five Meetings and that are more relevant than ever: municipal investment in children and adolescents, and participation of children and adolescents in local development.

Regarding municipal investment, our reflection is on the need for it to be meaningful, with quality and quantity, and from the perspective of children's human rights. Also, we address the most important areas where this investment is aimed, as well as to overcome the weak aspects. Emphasis is given to the value of development of local capacities, the relationship between local and national investment, the importance of social control and transparency. A list of criteria to improve quality on investment is proposed.

In terms of child participation we can recognize multiple experiences, ways and topics that it develops. We also present the factors that obstruct it; the relationship between children's participation and municipal investment, the progresses, and challenge for accountability. The document proposes criteria for the improvement of quality participation of girls, boys and adolescents in the Central American municipalities.



The shared experiences- both positive and negative, and acquired learning lead us to affirm that the combination of the criteria or guidelines and their adaptation to our particular realities in our countries and municipalities give us a major thrust in the process of building citizenship and accomplishment of the Rights of Children and Adolescents in the region.

We present these results with the aim of motivating discussions among the municipal governments, among children and adolescents, organizations, networks and municipal associations, international cooperation organizations and central governments. The recognition of the significant advances achieved and difficulties we face must commit us to take these guidelines as challenges we need to face and work ahead.



III Central American Meeting, December 2006



III.

MUNICIPAL INVESTMENT IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS



A moment of the IV Meeting

The topic on rights of children and adolescents has increased its space within the municipal agendas in the most recent years. The Central American Meetings have been suitable ways for sharing and learning from experiences related to investment and participation of this sector in the decisions making of the living situation of communities and municipalities.



In the recent years we have seen important advances in the assignation of resources aimed to facilitate conditions for the accomplishment of the rights of children and adolescents. Nevertheless, the Central American municipalities that are in working in those efforts are not the majority yet, and there is lack of information about such efforts. It would be necessary to prepare a study providing an updated general overview of the region that would contribute to measure the dimension of the faced advancements and difficulties.

Important efforts have been made in designing local policies that institutionalize investment in children and adolescents, some of them have legal support. An increasing number of municipalities have explicit commitment in their municipal development plans, and plans, budgets and projects in municipal investment for the fulfillment of the rights of children and adolescents. Municipal Policies of Children have proved to be one of the best ways of articulation between objectives, strategies and resources of the municipality. And, at the same time, they become an essential tool for resources management.

The municipal work experience has taught us that direct municipal investment in children and adolescents includes investment involving economic, materials or human resources provided by municipalities. But also comprises the willpower rendered in supporting actions; the creation of participative spaces and consultation, and the establishment of conditions conducive to their integral development. We consider direct investment in children and adolescents when they are the center of motivation or main reason for it. Or when the direct beneficial owners of the investment are children and adolescents¹.

Areas of investment that have been identified

The priorities on municipal investment have focused in a variety of issues, such as:

- ➡ Early, Preschool and Elementary Education.
- ➡ Health and Nutrition.

1 . "La Inversión Municipal en Niñez y Adolescencia. Periodo 2005-2008, Nicaragua"/ Managua. Agosto 2010. Pag. 14



- ➡ Spaces for participation.
- ➡ Social communication with participation of children and adolescents.
- ➡ Recreation, culture and sport.
- ➡ Income generation and employment for mothers and fathers.
- ➡ Training and vocational training
- ➡ Research on the situation of children, adolescents and youth.
- ➡ Security and special protection, highlighting: Steps to abolition of child labor, social and sexual violence against children.
- ➡ Birth registration of children and adolescents.
- ➡ Water and Sanity.
- ➡ Environment.
- ➡ Disasters, Mitigation and Care.
- ➡ Housing.
- ➡ Especial Protection to Disabled Children.
- ➡ Attention to indigenous children and ethnic populations.
- ➡ Human Trafficking Prevention.
- ➡ Children of women in prison.
- ➡ Migratory children.

Difficulties to overcome so that investment becomes an active, conscious and effective process in the Central American Municipalities.

Although in the latest years investment in children and adolescents has increased and is more visible, still, there is a high number of municipalities where this is a symbolic process facing the following difficulties:

- ☹ Poor investment and often not in connection with priorities and with the rights of children and adolescents. In many cases investment is done on the perception of municipality officers and decision makers.
- ☹ It is necessary to count on updated information on children and adolescents' situation so that would advise the decision making in an accurate way.



- ☹ There is lack of accurate mechanisms of control and audit to avoid inappropriate and discretionary management of resources, political patronage and corruption.
- ☹ Advances have been made, however, there is lack of an evaluation and monitoring system that qualify and quantify investment.
- ☹ Only a few municipalities have delegates to support processes related to actual requirements of municipalities.
- ☹ Municipalities have a weak revenue system which does not add to the increasing of their own funds.
- ☹ Most of the municipalities lack a strategic plan to guide clear, efficient, and effective investment.
- ☹ Continuity of processes and strengthening of advances aligned with changes of governments. The absence of actual public policies does not contribute to the consolidation of local institutions.
- ☹ Structures and methodologies are very rigid for the preparation of municipal budget, and they are not connected to national budgets.
- ☹ Many municipalities still lack sensitivity and willingness among authorities to accomplish the rights of children and adolescents.
- ☹ Greater coordination is required from civil society to demand a sustained investment in children and adolescents.

Development of local capacities, a matter of accumulation

Capabilities have been developed gradually in Central American municipalities to improve resource management. This has not been a traditional role taken for granted by local governments. In this regard, we have seen improvements in the technical capacity and some legal conditions for the allocation of greater budgeting addressed to children and adolescents. There are already municipalities that have planning and management offices. In some of them exist offices of children and adolescent which support and increasing capacities. Nevertheless, there is still lack of more harmonization with central governments and that municipalities know clearly their priorities for managing of resources aimed to children and adolescents.



On the other hand, in so many cases, staff is appointed because parties interests without applying service law careers, which takes to the continuous loosing of qualified personnel.

A challenge for us is to improve the creative capacity with technical resources for the preparation of projects that are coherent to the needs of children and adolescents.

The managing of resources can improve by taking the following into account:

- 😊 Effective citizenship participation
- 😊 Training with emphasis on economic aspects and location of resources
- 😊 Strengthen of inter-institutional articulation, and local coordination and organization.
- 😊 Taking up positive experiences of other municipalities.
- 😊 Improvement of legal instruments that give autonomy to municipalities to decide on their resources.
- 😊 Development of awareness among local stakeholders.
- 😊 Improvement of credibility of local governments.
- 😊 Strengthen the capacity of social control and audit in civil society organizations, children and adolescents, as well as capacity for accountability by municipal governments.
- 😊 Strengthen the capacity of negotiating with international cooperation and private enterprise to promote social responsibility of enterprises.
- 😊 Formulation, implementation, evaluation and socialization of advances on Municipal Public Policies.
- 😊 Publicize laws, plans and municipal policies



Relationship local investment – national investment

National resources help to increase local investment in children and adolescents, therefore, disagreements between local and municipal governments slow down the work and affect the results. At the same time, priority is given to infrastructure while minimizing social area and own demands of children and adolescents.

Social control and transparency of investment in children and adolescents

Some mechanisms of social control have been identified in some municipalities. Those mechanisms improve transparency in the municipal management and particularly, investment in children and adolescents. Some experiences in that path are preparation of municipal budgets in a participative way, social auditing, decentralized management of resources by communities, opening of new spaces for citizenship participation, effective entities for consultation, conducting of councils and election of children's governments. A number of these experiences of social participation for advocacy and control of local resources are sustained on legal frames. This also allows the inter-institutional coordination and with social organizations in some countries.

These participation processes for social control are still incipient, they might improve as organizations and children and adolescent's participation is strengthened.

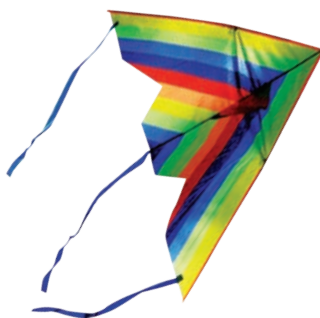
Also, legal frames are likely to improvement in each country, institutionalization of local social auditing, territorial consultations of results, dissemination of results, access to public information and inviting people to actively participate in these processes.



Criteria to improve quality of municipal investment in children and adolescents

- Decisions making are consulted with children and adolescents.
- Respect opinions of children and adolescents.
- Transparency in the management of resources and implementation of mechanisms of social control with children and adolescents participation.
- Planning at short, medium and long term based on the demands and rights, to assure a direct investment in the sector.
- Planned investment with clear goals and based on updated information.
- Institutionalization of investment in a Municipal Public Policy of Children and Adolescents, focused on children's rights.
- Progressive increasing of direct investment in children and adolescents from all available funds by Municipal Governments.
- Monitoring and evaluation based on indicators, with participation of population, especially children and adolescents.
- Appointments of delegates and/or municipal offices to support processes related to children and adolescents.
- Policies, projects, plans and budgets have continuity regardless of changes in governments.

Resources and abilities in the municipalities must be further decentralized and spread out.





IV.

CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE MUNICIPAL SPHERE

Main expressions of participation of children and adolescents that were identified



IV Central American Meeting,
November 2008.

More Central American municipalities get involved in children and adolescents participation initiatives on municipal issues, which are expressed in the following experiences:

- Councils, cabinets and children congresses where they present their proposals to municipal authorities.
- Spaces of discussion as municipal councils of girls, boys and adolescents, children's parliaments, friendly groups and networks to identify their demands and the developing of proposals.



- 🗣️ Commission of Children in municipal governments.
- 🗣️ Forums, Workshops and training programs organized by girls and boys.
- 🗣️ Networks of inter-municipal networks, as spaces to promote sharing and learning.
- 🗣️ Networks for searching funds for activities of their interest.
- 🗣️ Communicator's networks supported by Mayors' offices and other social organizations that publicize their demands and rights.
- 🗣️ Juvenile networks for training and literacy processes in rural communities.
- 🗣️ Organization and functioning of groups of interest (culture, theater, singing, artistic in general), supported by municipalities and social organizations.
- 🗣️ Cultural movements, sports and ecological.
- 🗣️ Processes for preparation of Public Policies.
- 🗣️ Representation of children and adolescents in municipal development committee.
- 🗣️ Integration of children in festival and public fairs.

Critical issues to supersede in order to assure a genuine participation of children and adolescents from the Central American municipalities

Today, participation is a valid right only for a small portion of children and adolescents population in Central America. There are municipalities where there is no initiative at all, and others where even they real, they face the following difficulties:

- 😞 Little investment and attention from municipalities to create participation spaces of children and adolescents.
- 😞 Scarce will from local authorities to fulfill commitments undertaken before the sector.
- 😞 Little participation of children and adolescents in the municipal planning.
- 😞 Adults's prejudices on the different ways of organization of children and adolescents that often are considered as threatening towards established authority.



- ☹ Manipulation from adults on the proposals of children and adolescents, including party supporters.
- ☹ Paternalistic vision of municipal governments, organizations of adults and cooperation agencies working con children and adolescents.
- ☹ Participation spaces limited to organized groups of children and adolescents.

Level of development achieved

In general, the level achieved by the participation initiatives of children and adolescents is consultation and expression of opinions. The formulation of proposals and incidence of children and adolescents on issues of their interest is just starting to arise.

The sustainability of initiatives of children and adolescents participation, at first, must be founded in their best interest. Besides, some initiatives are not sustainable because they exclusively depend on external funding. Another factor making a negative influence is the economic situation of families, which obligates children and adolescents to work for survival, sacrificing the possibility to contribute in consultation processes and construction of municipal proposals.

In the best scenario demands and proposals of children and adolescents have been object of follow up by the group that makes the proposal, and by some social organizations accompanying children and adolescents. In this matter, we are not doing a good job either.



Challenges to broaden and strengthen participation of children and adolescents:

A challenge to strengthen the participation of children and adolescents is to conceive it as a fundamental right. Participation should create construction of citizenship. Strengthening of systematic participation processes is required. Also, the municipal budgets to support these activities. Furthermore, it is required to count on strategies for the relief of children and adolescents leadership.

Municipalities should play a more active role for the participation of children and adolescents, supporting initiatives without discrimination of any kind.

In general, follow up to demands and proposals of children and adolescents is weak and there are cases where does not exist because the following reasons:

- ☹ Little interest and weak organization on the side of the claimers.
- ☹ The Participation spaces are not formalized; nor are they sufficiently recognized by local governments.
- ☹ The Participation of children and adolescents is discretionary and often depends on the will of the Major. Also, when there are natural changes of government, often the work is discontinued.
- ☹ Participation is not systematic, it is circumstantial.
- ☹ Reduced budgets to support the organization and children participation.
- ☹ Prejudices and lack of trust of adults in the proposals presented by children and adolescents.
- ☹ People who are representing or acting as delegates to meet with children and adolescents are not decision makers, so issues discussed are not answered.
- ☹ There are not sufficient processes for technical training that follow up projects of children and adolescents.



Children's Participation and Municipal Budget

Great efforts have been made to promote the accomplishment of the right to participation of children and adolescents. Particularly, giving inputs to municipal plans and budgets. The most important results of these actions are:

- 😊 Greater accomplishment of their demands.
- 😊 Opinions of children and adolescents are heard.
- 😊 Higher input in the decision making.
- 😊 Children and adolescents feel appropriated of their participation spaces.
- 😊 Agreements and commitments are undertaken by municipal authorities,
- 😊 Carry out projects to benefit children and adolescents. Investment to improve infrastructure of interest for the sector.
- 😊 Increased visibility of the spaces for participation of children and adolescents in municipal management.
- 😊 Public policies approved and being implemented in an increasing number of municipalities.

Accountability to children and adolescents: advances and challenges

Some of the factors that have contributed to start accountability to children and adolescents by municipalities are:

- 💡 Demands of organizations led by children and adolescents.
- 💡 Explicit commitments of municipalities to report and accountability.
- 💡 Greater access and increasing responsibility of municipal governments towards children and adolescents.
- 💡 Adults are a little more confident of the responsibility and capacities of children and adolescents.
- 💡 There are municipal councils led and comprised by children and adolescents.



However, there are also factors that have obstructed this practice, some of them are:

- Lack of records of information and little access to it. Many municipal governments do not know yet how much they invest in children.
- Absence or insufficient communication between the municipalities and organized groups.
- Bad practices and weak systems of management systems / financial.
- Exclusion because political preferences in municipalities.
- Inadequate mechanisms of communication for populations of ethnical groups and indigenous communities.
- Weak organization of children and youth groups.
- The predominance of adult participation and input within municipal governments which do not allow the recognition of children and adolescents as social subjects with rights.

It is demonstrated that a key factor for the effective accountability to children and adolescents is the predisposition that municipalities might present when listening their concerns, opinions and demands.

At the same time, it is clear that the interest of many decision makers can increase according to the viability of the proposals stated.



Contributing criteria to improve children and adolescents participation in the Central American Municipalities

- Accomplishment of laws that protect and contribute to the development of children and adolescents.
- Accomplishment of commitments made to children and adolescents by municipal governments.
- Empowerment to children and adolescents on their rights and on their capacity to influence decisions making.
- Recognition of the diverse ways of organization of children and adolescents, both formal and non-formal.
- Access to timely and relevant information.
- Public acknowledgment of children and adolescents' rights, appealing and motivating campaigns which would contribute to children and adolescents participation.
- Organization of groups of children and adolescents with clear objectives, and lines of actions well defined.
- Establishment of alliances among groups of children and adolescents and with adults' organizations.
- Permanent strengthening of creative communication capacities with groups of children and adolescents.
- Design and implementation of friendly methodologies to work with children and adolescents.
- Use of an adequate language with different ages of children and adolescents, culture and social contexts.
- Renewal of strategies of children and adolescents leadership.



A few conclusive thoughts

In summary, we affirm that municipal investment in children and adolescents, and the exercise of the right to participation are ways to accomplish their rights in integral manner. In short time, Central American municipalities have witnessed enriching experiences in relation to both aspects. We must broaden, deepen and improve them. We need to give a sense of continuity and a more clear focus on the human rights of children and adolescents. That is the aim of these contributions.

The challenges are posed.



More and more, children and adolescents exercise their right to participate. Children's Council, Boaco, Nicaragua.

Contributions to Improve Investment in Children and Adolescents
and Children's Participation in the Municipalities of Central America



Mayors, NGOs, and girls and boys from Guatemala during the V Central American Meeting





V Central American Meeting. Puntarenas, Costa Rica

For more than eleven years, the Central American Learning Circle on Children's Rights and Local Development has stimulated the connection, sharing and learning among stakeholders from the Central American municipalities.



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