

Municipal Coordination for Child Rights in Central America



**Central American Learning Circle on
Child Rights and Local Development**

Managua, october 2015

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La Coordinación Municipal a favor de los Derechos de la Niñez en Centro América.

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FOREWORD

In December 2014, the Central American Learning Circle on Child Rights and Local Development held its 5th Seminar of Local Stakeholders in Montelimar, Nicaragua, under the slogan “Building strategic alliances to promote child rights”. During the seminar, representatives from government institutions, mayor’s offices and civil society organisations from countries in Central America shared their experiences and analysed the state of affairs regarding municipal coordination in favour of children’s rights. This document is the result of that seminar and we are publishing and disseminating it with the aim of helping improve the coordination among stakeholders committed to the achievement and exercising of child rights at the municipal level.

Central American Learning Circle.



I. BACKGROUND

The Central American Learning Circle on Child Rights and Local Development was formed in November 1999. It is a non-formal, horizontal, self-convening and self-guided arena for reflection, experience-sharing and learning.

It is made up of people from Central American countries (Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama) that participate in representation of institutions and organisations or in a personal capacity. The Circle's commitment and activities revolve around two main issues: 1) children and adolescents as rights holders, and 2) local development. Its purpose is to link both issues, thus contributing to the achievement of child rights in the municipalities of Central America.

In the search for new ways of sharing experiences and of learning with a view to realising those rights, during its 16 years of existence the Circle has called and organised five regional meetings in which representatives from more than 250 municipalities have participated, including delegations from municipal governments, children and adolescents, organisations, networks, associations and cooperation agencies.

- The First Central American Meeting was held in San Salvador, El Salvador, in February 2002 under the slogan "Children and adolescents: subjects of local development". A total of 153 people from 54 municipalities participated.
- The Second Meeting, with the slogan "Investing in children and youth: a national priority", was held in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, in December 2004 with the participation of 180 people from 44 municipalities.
- The Third Meeting took place in December 2006 in Managua, Nicaragua. It combined the two previous issues under the slogan "Child investment and participation: guarantees for local development". A total of 204 people from 51 municipalities participated, along with the vice-president of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.
- The Fourth Meeting, with the slogan "Quality of municipal investment in favour of children", was held in Retalhuleu, Guatemala, in November 2008. A total of 201 people from 65 municipalities participated.



- The Fifth Central American Meeting had the slogan “Public policies and municipal budgets: instruments for implementing child rights.” It took place in October 2010 in Puntarenas, Costa Rica, with the participation of 179 people from 69 municipalities



The Central American Learning Circle has also organised seminars of mayors and other local stakeholders, as well as internships among municipalities from different countries. The meetings, seminars and internships have provided forums in which to share and learn about the experiences of promoting, exercising and realising child rights and children’s participation in different local development processes in Central American countries.

Nowadays it is hard to find a Central American municipality that has not heard about the importance of municipal investment in children and is not doing something in that respect. An increasing number of municipalities are developing participatory processes aimed at producing a municipal policy for children in order to increase and improve the quality of their investment and more effectively organise themselves to promote children’s rights. The Central American Learning Circle has contributed to the achievement of those results.

The meetings and seminars have generated outputs such as the Central American Guide to Drawing Up a Municipal Public Policy for Children and Adolescents (August 2009), Proclamations by Municipal Governments of Central America in Favour of Children’s Rights (December 2006, November 2008 and October 2010), and Contributions for Improving Investment in Children and Child Participation in the Municipalities of Central America (July 2011), which was also produced in a child-friendly version. The experiences and lessons from the periods 1999-2007 and 1999-2012 were systematised and published in the document Child Rights and Local Development in Central America: A necessary link (May 2008 and June 2012). The present publication is the output corresponding to the Fifth Seminar held in December 2014.



II. BRIEF INTRODUCTION



The main characteristic of the local bodies for inter-institutional and multi-sectoral coordination or linkage in relation to child rights in Central American countries has been the willingness of their members to coordinate efforts around achieving a greater impact in terms of implementing child rights.

The first such bodies were established as a result of the enthusiasm surrounding the Convention on the Rights of the Child, approximately 25 years ago. They continued being set up after that, stimulated to a large extent by the national processes for the discussion and approval of national legal codes or laws on children and adolescents.

These bodies have had diverse forms of organisation and compositions. In many cases, they have consisted of three elements, with representatives from the mayor's offices or municipal corporations, social organisations, and government institutions, with a varying degree of parity among these elements. In other cases, they have brought together the social organisations and the mayor's offices, and they have also existed as social affairs commissions in the mayor's offices. These bodies have also functioned both permanently and temporarily and have had different functions, including promoting child rights, training, inter-institutional coordination, and child protection and promotion. They have only been defined by law in one country, while in others their official recognition has been provided by the municipal government and in yet others they have remained a de facto expression, a collective determination. They have also been known by different names, including municipal commissions on child and adolescent affairs (CMNAs), coordination commissions for children, and children's commissions.



III. STRENGTHS

There are certain elements in our countries that strengthen multi-sectoral and inter-institutional linkage in the promotion, defence and restoration of child rights in the local sphere. In this respect, the Central American countries have:



Although these elements were identified as strengths, it should be noted that their degree of development varies from country to country.



IV. OPPORTUNITIES

Generally speaking, the Central American countries share the following circumstances, moments or means that are favourable for local linkage in relation to child rights:



of child rights and to stimulate municipal coordination based on children's interests.

- ★ Positive child-related national legal frameworks.
- ★ A law mandating the creation of municipal commissions on child and adolescent affairs in Guatemala (the only country with such a law).
- ★ Electoral processes that can be taken advantage of to raise issues in favour of child rights and to stimulate municipal coordination based on children's interests.
- ★ Private enterprise being open to implementing programmes and projects in favour of children.
- ★ The presence in our countries of international agencies that maintain ongoing monitoring of child-related issues and have possibilities for supporting the coordination bodies.
- ★ The existence of local, national and regional networks that support child rights
- ★ The existence of the Central American Learning Circle as an arena for sharing, learning and improving.
- ★ Good practices from the different countries that we can learn from.
- ★ A political discourse that favours child rights and combining efforts.
- ★ The post-2015 agenda.



V. WEAKNESSES

Situations that limit the municipal or local coordination processes include:



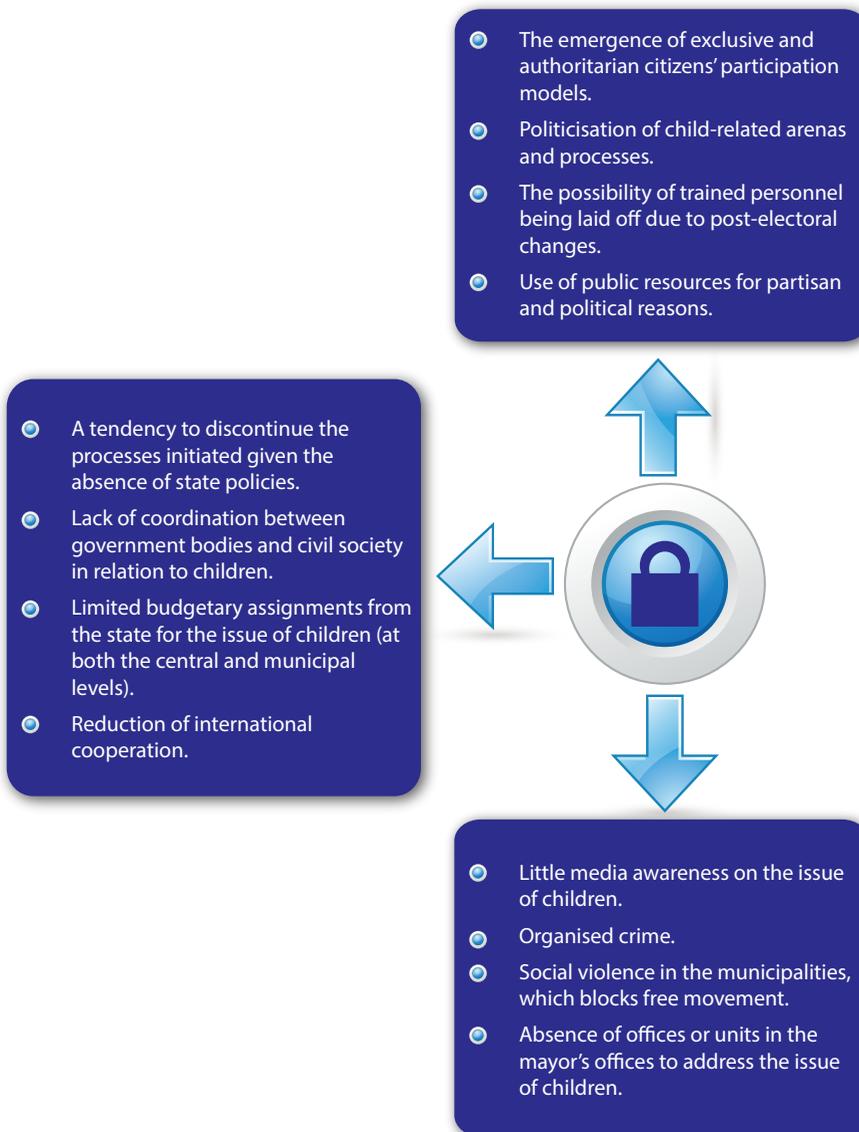
- ✎ Little interest among certain municipal governments in establishing coordination with social organisations.
- ✎ Insufficient child rights training, particularly among public servants.
- ✎ Constant turnover of human resources that have developed capacities on issues related to children, particularly in state institutions and municipal governments.

- ✎ Centralisation of decision making in the municipal offices of government institutions and in mayor's offices.
- ✎ Lack of active participation among members from municipal governments.
- ✎ The functioning and existence of coordination bodies being to a large extent dependent on funding projects.
- ✎ Failure to prioritize the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the municipal policy following its approval.



VI. THREATS

In addition to the above points, the following threats or causes of risk or harm were identified in relation to working in a coordinated way in favour of children:



VII. SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES

The social movements for child rights in Central America have developed a variety of strategies and initiatives to help realise those rights. One of the most important has been the promotion of linked and coordinated work, combining efforts and strengthening the human and financial resources. The idea is that by acting together, our voices, proposals and actions become more powerful and profound.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly establishes that the rights of the child are state obligations and at the same time the responsibility of each and every one of us. In other words, there is a shared responsibility in which different stakeholders have different functions and the municipal coordination bodies have been an expression of that.

In the years since the first municipal-level coordination bodies were set up in Central American countries, many strategies and initiatives have become good practices. It is considered necessary to expand and strengthen the following:



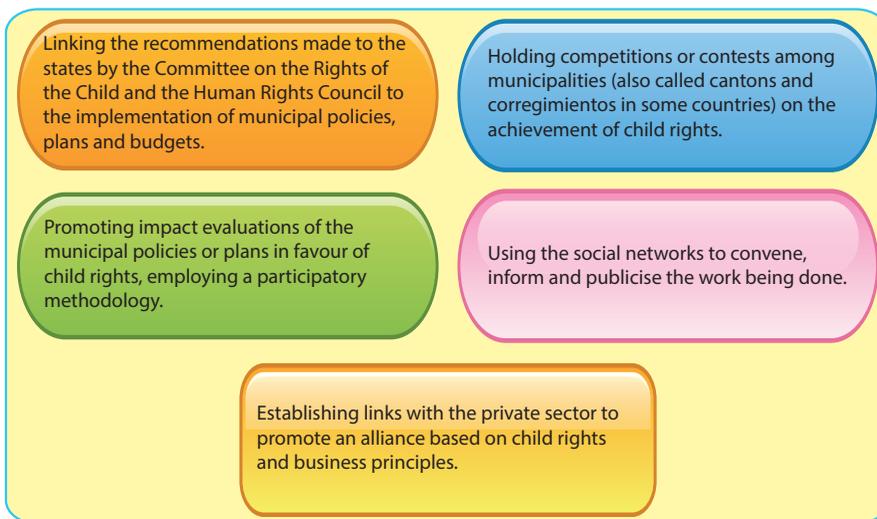
- ☺ Having coordination bodies made up of representatives from: a) the municipal government/mayor's office; b) the government institutions with a presence in the municipality (health, education, etc.); and c) civil society organisations that participate in the municipality working on the issue of children and adolescents.
- ☺ Ensuring the municipal coordination bodies have clear purposes and functions, as well as specific responsibilities for their members and directors. Some have had internal guidelines or regulations.
- ☺ Democratic practices within the coordination bodies.
- ☺ Training and awareness-building processes for the municipal authorities.
- ☺ Systematic mapping of stakeholders at the local level and inviting them to be part of the coordination body.
- ☺ Planning with long-term and operational goals that can feasibly be achieved.
- ☺ Dissemination of the legal frameworks that protect children and support the actions of social movements in favour of children.



- ☺ Contributing to the processes of drawing up municipal policies, plans and budgets, stimulating the participation of children and other key stakeholders.
- ☺ Developing monitoring and advocacy mechanisms with children's participation for the fulfilment of municipal policies and plans.
- ☺ Development of advocacy training processes.
- ☺ The use of different channels to communicate what is being done, using the voices of children based on their own experiences.
- ☺ Taking advantage of electoral periods to work with candidates and inform about the children's proposals.
- ☺ Having the official recognition of the municipal government through ordinances or equivalent instruments.
- ☺ Promoting the sharing of experiences and innovative methodologies among the region's countries.

VIII. NOVEL PROPOSALS

While highlighting the good practices, another result of the experience sharing and analysis exercise was to identify novel proposals that may only have been implemented by a few of the stakeholders, but could be of interest to everyone:



IX. BYWAY OF CONCLUSION

The municipalities of Central America have developed enriching experiences that combine intents and link efforts in favour of child rights. It is now up to us to generalise and improve them, providing a sense of continuity.

This short document should be used in a creative way according to the reality in each municipality, canton or locality.

We must always bear in mind that the coordination and complementarity of institutions and organisations—both at the national and municipal levels—are necessary conditions for the effective achievement and restitution of child rights. It also needs to be remembered that the coordination bodies are a means to an end: helping to implement child rights in Central American municipalities.

The challenges have been set!

The least the institutions and organizations can do is coordinate their work to ensure the realization of our rights!



Central American Learning Circle on Child Rights and Local Development



*Participants in the 5th. Central American Seminary of Local Stakeholders.
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