

2010-2012

Changing Communities through Children:

A CASE STUDY OF THE COLOMBIA PROTECTING
EARLY CHILDHOOD FROM VIOLENCE PROJECT



"THE FACE OF VIOLENCE IN COLOMBIA HAS CHANGED. THIS IS AFFECTING THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF ORDINARY FAMILIES AND CHILDREN. YET, THERE ARE IMPORTANT OPPORTUNITIES BECAUSE COMMUNITIES WANT TO END THIS VIOLENCE. LOCAL AUTHORITIES ARE MAKING CONSISTENT EFFORTS TO DEVELOP ACTIONS THAT COULD TRANSLATE INTO NEW POSSIBILITIES."

– MARTA ARANGO, CENTRO INTERNACIONAL DE EDUCACION Y DESARROLLO HUMANO (CINDE) FOUNDER

Colombia faces a daunting child protection challenge in which a longstanding history of civil, political and drug related conflict has resulted in deep social, community and family related violence against children, ranging from narco trafficking, gangs and armed groups to domestic and sexualized violence.

Parents and caregivers are key change agents to preventing violence against young children and this change must begin from the "inside out" at the personal level. Strong mother (and father) to child attachment through positive parenting nurtures empathy and positive relationships among family members, brings community mothers together, and strengthens kinship ties among extended families and other caring adults living in communities experiencing violence. Parents, however, need strong support systems and are not the only protectors of children.

Teachers, community leaders, child care and protection professionals also play important protective roles in communities. They are often the "social accountability threads" that link the interconnected elements of formal (e.g. schools) and non-formal protective systems (e.g. parent support networks) to prevent and to provide appropriate care for children who have experienced violence, exploitation and abuse. This link is especially critical in vulnerable communities where formal government systems are unfamiliar, not trusted, or unable to function due to human security and other challenges.



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Project: At a Glance

Learn about the purpose, objectives and key results of the Colombia Protecting Early Childhood from Violence project



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Participant Profiles

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Charting the Path Forward

Reflect on lessons and opportunities to protect young children from violence in Colombia



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Partners for Protection
Find out more about the diverse organizations involved in this project

Bringing many hearts, heads and hands together is critical to breaking the cycle of violence linking formal and non formal social actors and creating innovative child protection systems that span prevention, early intervention and crisis management systems.

This is taking place in a country that has a legal framework for children and adolescents based in the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) within an integral protection approach. Specifically, these improvements are grounded in the CRC (1989), Colombia's *Código de la Infancia y la Adolescencia* (2006) and innovative government social protection policies for vulnerable young children and their families such as *Cero a Siempre* (Zero to Always) and *Buen Comienzo* (Good Start) which set out policy and programming guidelines for promoting the care, protection and well being for boys and girls in different aspects across their lifespan.

Tools are needed that can link formal and non-formal systems in building human empathy, creating evidence based indicators for local protection planning and empowering vulnerable families and communities to work with government child protection actors as agents of change to help young children reach their full potential and to build resilient communities.



"WE KNOW HOW TO IDENTIFY SITUATIONS IN WHICH THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN ARE ABUSED. WE NEED TO SHARE OUR EXPERIENCES WITH OTHERS. WE MUST SET A GOOD EXAMPLE."

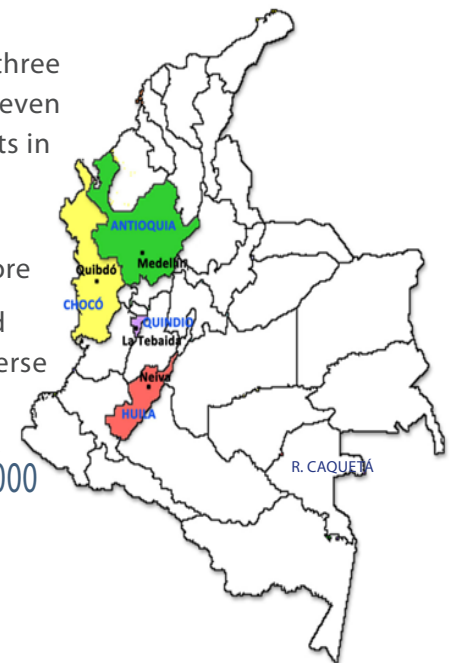
PARENT PARTICIPANT

Project: At a Glance

Working through the lived experience of young children (aged 0-6 years), the Colombia Protecting Early Childhood from Violence (CPECV) project partners with government institutions, universities, non-governmental organizations, Indigenous organizations, daycares, schools, families and youth to improve the programs and policies designed to protect young children.

A network of more than 20 partners, including three implementing agencies, piloted the project in seven diverse community sites across five Departments in Colombia.

Since 2010, the project has directly involved more than 2,000 participants in research, training and collaborative activities. In turn, a broad and diverse spectrum of parents, community "promotoras" (facilitators), community leaders, educators and administrators have influenced more than 200,000 people to help strengthen Colombia's child protection, safety and well being services.



Objective 1

INCREASE THE CARING CAPACITY OF FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES AND INSTITUTIONS to foster empathy and good parenting to create a better environment for protecting children from the diverse effects of violence.



More than 1,400 participants including mothers, youth, community leaders, early childhood educators and child care centres were involved in the training program.

The project explored diverse training and awareness raising approaches: home-to-home family visits, adolescents and youth working with pre-school students, and mothers working on service learning projects to implement training projects, as well as organizing family-focused street festivals.

It also developed innovative community-based violence prevention and early intervention programs such as community monitoring committees, mothers and parents support networks, youth-led early intervention support for vulnerable young parents, and community creative expression of well being and joy as a means of reclaiming community space dominated by gang and criminal activities.

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Partners engaged a cross-section of 243 stakeholders (mothers, community leaders, children, youth) through a mapping project to develop community-based indicators on risk and protective factors. A cohort of 225 adolescents and youth were involved in a survey to understand their perspectives on risk and protective factors of violence in their communities.

To promote interactive learning, partners created a board game focused on different types of violence and protection approaches within families, communities and schools. Also, youth programs for monitoring violence against their younger siblings were implemented.

Project indicators, risk tracking mapping tools and other local monitoring approaches were integrated into local social protection strategies such as *Buen Comienzo* and *Cero a Siempre* to bolster community engagement in prevention and early intervention dimensions of the protection spectrum. These strategies are proving essential to assisting governments to better understand the unique aspects of violence in different regions of Colombia as well as to develop more effective, responsive and sustainable “bottom up” solutions to linking formal and non-formal protection systems.



YOUTH SURVEY TEAM ANALYZES RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS OF VIOLENCE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

Objective 2

CREATE EFFECTIVE LOCAL WAYS TO MONITOR AND EVALUATE protection violations (e.g. abuse, neglect) to build a stronger spectrum of protection systems for vulnerable young children.

"KNOWING THE RISKY PLACES HELPS THE CHILDREN TO GROW AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE — FREE FROM ANY KIND OF VIOLENCE — AND TO PROTECT THEM FROM BAD PEOPLE OR EVIL WAYS." PARENT PARTICIPANT

Unique Features of the Project

- Started from understanding the present and historical realities of Colombian children, families and communities
- Involved a diverse range of stakeholders from formal and non-formal sectors to build a strong child protection system: children, community leaders, private sector, government, academia, among others
- Tapped into the collective strengths of children and their communities in addressing significant challenges related to local violence
- Generated local risk and protection indicators to inform municipal, national and international child protection indicators
- Built a strong network of local and international organizations with relevant expertise
- Engaged diverse pilot site locations – urban, rural, semi-urban – experiencing different situations of conflict
- Adapted programming to target different actors and goals

BUSINESS INVESTING IN COMMUNITY

Most companies understand that they have a role to play in the areas where they do business – especially when young children and local communities are facing significant challenges. Since 2011, project partners have been building relationships with the private sector to educate, build awareness and collaborate with businesses to prevent violence and protect children.

This has led to roundtable discussions and spin-off projects with business associations and energy companies—including the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Canacol Energy and Pacific Rubiales Energy among others—about how to focus their efforts to improve the lives of young people while investing in Colombia.



Objective 3

ENABLE INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS at the local, municipal, department and national level to strengthen cooperation among institutions and agencies involved in Colombia's child protection system.



Through “bottom up”, evidence informed interventions to support targeted training, workshops and conferences, the project has involved more than 175 professionals, including early childhood educators and municipal officials. In particular, partners have established a relationship with the Municipality of Medellín's *Buen Comienzo* program—an early childhood program reaching 100,000 mothers and children and 28,000 education agents.

Key aspects of this training include an emphasis on:

- understanding child and family-centred evidence on risk and protection
- guiding innovative inter-sectoral solutions such as community protection committees
- implementing youth-led early intervention and monitoring
- supporting an inter-sectoral approach (protection, education, health, private sector) through policy round tables, etc.

Participant Profiles

The project brought many people together to protect young children—both as potential *victims* and as possible *perpetrators* of violence. In particular, the partners targeted six key stakeholder groups related to child protection: state agencies, municipal governments, childcare centres and community leaders, mothers, and adolescents/youth.



1. CHILDREN: CITIZENS OF CHANGE

Colombia's youngest citizens are agents of change to prevent violence in their communities. In many cases, babies and young children participated in training sessions alongside their mothers. Children starting school were involved in programming – including games, songs, and role playing – to explore issues of violence. Adolescents and youth also demonstrated a strong interest and capacity to both mentor younger children and to engage local institutions (e.g. schools, libraries). They were involved in the project as researchers, protection monitors, teachers, artists, and as parents themselves. For example, adolescents created a puppet show to raise awareness among young children on their rights to protection.



YOUTH PREPARED A PHOTO GALLERY AT THE SAN JAVIER LIBRARY TO SHOWCASE PHOTOS ON THEMES OF CONCERN TO THEM: BOREDOM, BULLYING IN SCHOOLS, EDUCATION ON SAFE SEX, VIEWS ON GIRLS AND BOYS, AMONG OTHERS



Protecting Children through Education: Priscilla's Story

After her positive experience as a workshop trainee, 19-year old Priscilla Benitez Durango is now becoming a *promotora* (community facilitator). She believes that the *promotora* are critical to providing youth with the tools they need to prevent community violence. In particular, she identifies the importance of using dialogue as a way of resolving conflicts and helping youth to become good parents in the future.

Priscilla was also active in analyzing results from a survey conducted with more than 200 adolescents in Comuna 13 – a community affected with high levels of violence in Medellin. She learned about the value of involving youth to find solutions to their problems. Her dream in the future: "Through workshops, I want young people to become more aware that there is a better tomorrow. Comuna 13 can be the community that educates and enforces rights."

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"WE HAVE GAINED CONFIDENCE IN OUR CAPACITY. WE ARE NO LONGER JUST MOTHERS WAITING ON CHILDREN AND LOOKING AFTER HUSBANDS. WE HAVE BECOME LEADERS FOR OUR COMMUNITY, AN EXAMPLE FOR OTHER PARENTS IN THE CHILDREN'S CENTRE WHERE WE SEND OUR CHILDREN."

PARENT PARTICIPANT

2. PARENTS ARE PIVOTAL PROTECTORS

Parents – especially mothers – are the most important nurturers, advocates and protectors of young children. Given this role, partners engaged close to 800 parents in the project. Parents helped to identify essential factors to protect young children including good parenting skills, housing, supportive neighbours and access to safe play areas. These factors will help families and institutions to monitor and prevent violence against children. Parents also participated in curriculum focused on understanding rights and child development, recognizing different forms of violence, as well as how to develop and implement action plans to create changes at local and national levels.

After the training, parents have started to:

- Recognize their role in human rights protection systems
- Gain a new sense of empowerment
- Improve family and community relationships
- Understand signs of abuse in children
- Use more positive approaches to discipline children
- Initiate a process of reporting violence against children
- Share their training experiences with other parents
- Serve on local community protection monitoring committees



MOTHERS APPLY LEARNING INTO ACTION

As part of the training curriculum, mothers in Galan are creating action plans to prevent violence in their community.

Mothers have proposed to:

- Establish joint commitments between municipal secretaries and community action plans
- Link parents identified in the kindergartens and schools to drug rehabilitation programs
- Recover park and recreation sites for children and young people to use
- Ensure community representatives actively participate on relevant municipal working committees

Child care Centres Help to Reduce Violence

In Quibdo (Choco), Directors from 11 child care centers participated in the CPECV training. Due to the hands-on and action-oriented nature of the intensive curriculum, the Directors are now integrating the skills, knowledge and learning directly into their child care centre programming.

As a result, child care centers have identified the need for young children to be more aware of their rights and to strengthen the work with families. One Director explained: “Interacting with parents benefits us because we can establish a better relationship with the child.” In response, child care centers now conduct home visits to get to know the child’s home reality and to share information on preventative measures with parents. Evaluation results suggest that the level of violence in families has reduced.



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3. COMMUNITY FACILITATORS (*PROMOTORAS*) AND CHILD CARE CENTRES: A CRITICAL LINK

Community leaders (*promotoras*) and child care centres are critical to linking the intricate layers of the child protection safety net. Partners worked closely with them to deepen and expand the project by working with children and parents on the one hand and local institutions on the other, including municipal representatives, schools, and the police.

Spanning the country, 75 *promotoras* were involved in different phases of the project including:

- organizing workshops to assess violence in communities
- piloting and facilitating training curriculum
- supporting mothers to implement their ideas to protect young children from violence

The *promotoras* strengthened their skills and knowledge related to rights protection and oversight. They have also demonstrated a new commitment to supporting and scaling up the training process with local families.

Finally, *promotoras* have developed innovative community monitoring committees to link formal (government) and non-formal (family and community) protection systems.

Close to 20 Directors of Child Care Centres were involved in the training—reaching as many as 1,200 families.

Commitment to Change: Story of Luz Amparo

Luz Amparo from Comuna 13 has been a *promotora* for nine years. She talks about the importance of working with families as “the first place where the child develops... and a key place to intervene for protection.” As a result of the project’s training, she says that key actors are now able to identify and to intervene in cases where young children’s well being is threatened. The training gives them knowledge not only about how to identify different types of violence, but also to develop an action plan that can bring about long term-changes in her community.

According to her, the emphasis on building commitment to create community change is a key distinguishing factor of the project. Her long term-vision: “The community needs to strengthen its ability to manage the good treatment of children and to become agents of peace capable of reducing violence. I hope that in the not too distant future our social context is one of solidarity, respect and understanding for the good of all.” She considers this to be a key mandate of *Corporación Centro Familiar y Comunitario con la Niñez*, an organization which she recently formed as a result of the project.



“IF OUR PARENTS HAD THESE OPPORTUNITIES—
THE KNOWLEDGE, INFORMATION AND TOOLS
THAT WE ARE LIVING TODAY—THEY WOULD NOT
HAVE MADE THE SAME MISTAKES, SUCH AS THE
MISTREATMENT OF THEIR CHILDREN.”
COMMUNITY *PROMOTORA*

4. BUILDING COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY THROUGH CITIES

The project has teamed up with the Municipality of Medellin's *Buen Comienzo* program to create connections between community-based learning and municipal programming. *Buen Comienzo* is the flagship program of the Municipality's Early Childhood Care and Development policy. It is also being tracked as an innovative model to replicate nationally.

More than 50 early childhood educators as well as youth from Comuna 8 and 13 (Medellin) participated in the project's training.

As a result, representatives from *Buen Comienzo* have recognized and made explicit connections between the protection of children's rights and reducing violence in families and communities. For example, CPECV project approaches have been integrated into teacher training as well as reviewed to improve the oversight processes of children's centres. Current work is focused on integrating aspects of CPECV's local child protection indicators with *Buen Comienzo*'s protection indicators.



BUEN COMIENZO COMMUNITY STREET FESTIVAL

Creating Citizens: Fabian's Story

Fabian Zuluaga Garcia, *Buen Comienzo* Director, believes that the project has strengthened communities' role to protecting young children and building a sense of citizenship. He believes that partnering with universities and educational institutions is critical to guaranteeing that projects are sustained beyond political mandates and to cultivating a sense of collective responsibility.

An early childhood educator from *Buen Comienzo* and trainee reflected: "We are not only teachers. We are members of a community so we must share our knowledge with families. We can help the community in many ways." In particular, the importance of rights and participation were identified as essential aspects of the training.

5. STRENGTHENING CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Accountability for protecting children from violence needs to be grounded in strong policies and practice. Project partners engaged higher levels of government—including the state, national and international representatives—to translate community knowledge into training, legislation guidelines, and programming. For example, a new relationship with the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF), a national agency responsible for the protection of young people and the welfare of families, will help the project to expand its reach in the long term to 200 resource centres where about 10 million Colombians benefit from their services.



“THE INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT AND BUY-IN FROM THE COLOMBIAN INSTITUTE OF FAMILY WELFARE HAS BEEN CRITICAL TO ALLOW FOR THE EXPANSION AND OUTREACH OF THE PROGRAM.” UNICEF REPRESENTATIVE

Contributing to Early Childhood Education: Beatriz's Story

Beatriz Elena Zapata, a member of Red Antioqueña de Niñez, was involved in training 16 key representatives from a range of organizations responsible for early childhood across the Department of Antioquia. As she states: "We were amazed with the knowledge, skills and professionalism of the workshop participants...These approaches will make a contribution to the field of early childhood education. The curriculum will support the Department to provide practical tools and offer new approaches to tackling the issue of protecting young children from violence."

The network plans to integrate the experience and training into its work. The committee has already started this process with the University San Buenaventura of Medellín. The next step is to implement the protection plan developed during the training. For the future, she notes: "This initiative depends on the opportunities at the municipal level. We must seize the installed capacity and empower institutions."

Charting the Path Forward to Protect Children



Growing community demands to end violence combined with recent political commitments to address early childhood programming have created new opportunities to protect young children. The CPECV project has contributed important legacies and learnings to help chart a more peaceful path forward for Colombian communities.

CAPTURING LESSONS

- Family and youth are a key entry point to addressing systemic issues of violence that cannot be treated directly. Research and training creates neutral spaces for participants to safely share their stories of violence and to develop capacity for preventing violence in their homes and communities.
- It is important to build formal and non-formal system commitments and to share project responsibilities with diverse stakeholders holding the child protection safety net, including: state agencies, community leaders, families, youth and children themselves.
- The training of trainer model is a useful strategy not only to expand outreach to diverse community stakeholders, but also to strengthen community empowerment and communication skills, which, in the long term builds respect, trust and empathy between adults and children.

“I NOW KNOW A BETTER WAY TO TREAT OUR CHILDREN AND TO REMEMBER THAT ONE HAS TO IMPROVE EVERY DAY—TO HAVE MORE CAPACITY FOR TOLERANCE, TO TALK AND LISTEN AND TO GIVE SO MUCH AFFECTION.” TRAINING PARTICIPANT

- Community development is gradual, non-linear and long term. To increase sustainability, it is essential to work with leaders and local organizations to provide follow-up support to training participants so that they can link their solutions for preventing violence to municipal planning and priorities.
- Be realistic about communities participating in child protection monitoring and evaluation. It is important to create simple tangible approaches to help communities to measure programs and services targeting young children (e.g. using self-assessment tools).
- Strengthen connections between community and government institutions to support coordinated action. Through research, training and networking, partners brought community members and government representatives together to improve communication and to build trust. To reduce violence, collaboration is needed to improve programs and services to better protect young children.

"I HAVE CHANGED AS A PERSON THROUGH CARING FOR THE PROTECTION OF SMALL CHILDREN. I WILL NEVER BE THE SAME AND WILL CONTINUE TO BE VIGILANT IN PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM VIOLENCE AS WELL AS PROMOTING PEACE AMONGST MY PEERS." YOUTH PARTICIPANT



Project Affects Participants

During a learning event held in Medellin, participants prepared posters to discuss the influence the project had on them. One group shared that the project helped them to:

- Grow as a person and practice their skills
- Work as a grandmother, aunt, mother, community, family and community outreach worker
- Fulfill the rights of children
- Support family and community togetherness by respecting the rights of our children
- Improve their management and behaviour

Favourable Factors



Three key factors have created favourable conditions for charting a new path for children:

1. Medellin's comprehensive *Buen Comienzo* program stands as an exemplary case of regulations, actions and developments on protection in early childhood.
2. Through leadership from the Office of the President, Colombia is undertaking a serious effort to implement a national public policy on Early Childhood Care and Development through the strategy *Cero a Siempre* (From Zero to Always). This is currently one of the Government's top priorities.
3. There is an identified need to train various stakeholders on rights protection and the prevention of early childhood violence.

Sustaining Impact

- Inspire lasting hope and personal change in parents, children, youth, *promotoras* and community members through learning and transforming how they can protect Colombia's youngest citizens
- Create peace through community development, particularly through the role of the *promotoras* to strengthen their skills, social capital, community esteem and networks by building trust between parents, children, youth, and government institutions
- Expand capacity building for front-line early childhood educators through the integration of the project curriculum into professional and non-formal training provided at a national scale by the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF) and the Pastoral Service in Early Childhood of the Catholic Church
- Support the integration of training and community-based indicators into the *Buen Comienzo* early childhood program, including a graduate-level course on protecting young children

- Nurture older youth as protectors of young children through the urban arts (hip hop, graffiti, break dancing) to create capacity for empathy to prevent violence
- Explore how community-based indicators can be linked to national and international indicators. Opportunities include working with Colombia's Presidential office for children to develop early childhood monitoring approaches as well as to adopt a new international electronic database to support the implementation of children's rights in early childhood (UN CRC, General Comment 7)
- Explore possibilities to expand to other areas in the country, including opportunities to broaden the protection approaches in other departments and municipalities in Colombia



“I WANT TO TRANSFORM THE MENTALITY OF
YOUNG CHILDREN, YOUTH AND ADULTS
TO DEVELOP THEIR CAPACITY TO RESIST THE
BAD THAT SURROUNDS US.”
ADOLESCENT PARTICIPANT

Partners for Protection

The Colombia Protecting Early Childhood from Violence project is being implemented by a multi-institutional partnership. Together, the project benefits from diverse experience and expertise at community, national and international levels.

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:

International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD)
Centro Internacional de Educacion y Desarrollo Humano (CINDE)
International Child Development Programme (ICDP-UK/Colombia)

FUNDERS/SUPPORTERS:

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Canacol Energy

TECHNICAL AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS:

Childhood Observatory of University of Colombia
University of San Buenaventura
Subsecretaría de Espacio Público- Government Office- Municipality of Medellín
Fundación Golondrinas
World Vision- Antioquia
UNICEF
Pastoral Social
Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar
Secretaría de Educación Municipal Quindío
Secretaría de Salud Municipal de Quindío
Acción social
Lideres Juntas Acción Comunal
Institución Oliverio Lara cede Manuela Beltrán
E.S.E Carmen Emilia Ospina
Lideres Familias en Acción
La Familia Ayara
Fundación Red Caquetá Paz



“WE CAN IDENTIFY THINGS THAT ARE BAD
FOR CHILDREN. NOW WE CAN SPEAK TO
OTHER MOTHERS ABOUT CHILD PROTECTION
ISSUES AND KNOW HOW TO IDENTIFY AND
MONITOR THE ABUSE OF THE RIGHTS OF
OUR CHILDREN.”
TRAINING PARTICIPANT

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