

REWRITING THE FUTURE

Promoting peace through education in
Colombia, Haiti and Guatemala
Learning Session



Results and commitments
Bogotá, Colombia
October 19 - 23, 2009



Save the Children

Rewrite the Future

CREDITS

Save the Children International is the world's leading independent children's rights organisation, with members in 29 countries and operational programmes in more than 100. We fight for children's rights and deliver lasting improvements to children's lives worldwide.

This report was written by Tatiana Romero, with special thanks for their contributions to Cynthia Koons, Maureen Codd, Cándida Rabanales, Andrea Portaro and all the participants in the Learning Session in Colombia.

Translation: Marcela Vallejos, Lara Guzman.

Style checking: Sammy Riley.

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Save the Children *Reescribamos el Futuro*



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INTRODUCTION

All children have the right to quality education. However, millions of children affected by conflict and living in precarious conditions do not have access to the educational system. Save the Children's global campaign, Rewrite the Future, has improved the quality of education for over 10 million children and young adults in 23 countries affected by conflict.

Since 2005, Rewrite the Future has improved the quality of education for over 409,000 children in Colombia, Haiti and Guatemala. In November 2009, specialists from these countries gathered to share the lessons learned from five years of providing education to children living in conflict-affected fragile states.

Purpose of Rewrite the Future Regional Meeting

- Share best practices and lessons learned in education and peace-building to protect children.
- Strengthen the links between the countries in the region involved in the Rewrite the Future campaign and define possible joint actions.
- Share the results of the global Rewrite the Future campaign and Save the Children's strategic education plan for the next 5 years.
- Raise awareness regarding the region's urgent situation and needs in spite of the progress made by some countries.

The meeting highlighted the characteristics of the conflicts in the three countries and their effects on children's education.

Colombia, affected by an incessant internal armed conflict for over 50 years which has affected children and young people for generations; **Guatemala**, shaken by 37 years of war and currently struggling in a post-conflict scenario. In 1996 a peace agreement was signed that marked the beginning of the reconstruction process-aslow in which education has played a very important role; **Haiti**, affected by major political upheaval, massive street demonstrations and a weak domestic economy and natural disasters.



In addition to, and in some cases as a result of the conflict, the three countries share a history marked by multiple inequalities and inequities, especially in the distribution of income and assurance of fundamental rights for the population as a whole. However, these are contrasted with the great potential of the cultural diversity in these countries: **Guatemala** with an indigenous majority; **Haiti** with a population mainly of Afro-Caribbean descent and **Colombia** with a significant racial and cultural mixture. Each country embraces diversity and fights to generate inclusion within the diversity.

In addition to identifying the threats to quality education in **Haiti, Guatemala** and **Colombia**, the meeting confirmed the strengths and opportunities particular to each country, such as strong civil society engagement, cooperation between education stakeholders, strong feelings of solidarity, concern for the pain of others, and commitment to sustainable education development.

- In **Haiti**, grassroots organizations have been working to promote the rights of children;
- In **Guatemala**, the nationwide Movement to build the National Bilingual and Multi-Cultural Plan is working relentlessly;
- In **Colombia**, local governments are working to include children's rights in their development plans.

Characteristics of quality education in conflict-affected and fragile states

Generally, conflict and fragility have the most negative effects on the poorest populations and conflict often results in social emergencies for the most vulnerable populations: women, children and teenagers.

Education can respond to social emergencies through flexible strategies, which provide the structure and psychosocial support needed. Save the Children's Rewrite the Future campaign seeks to provide innovative, flexible education through a variety of characteristics and mechanisms:



Quality Education in Conflict

CHARACTERISTICS

Relevant: it can be used in day to day life and prepares children for the labour market.

Effective: children can heal their wounds, learn and feel happy.

Inclusive: accepts diversity and educates children within the framework of inclusion.

Creative: teachers use active and creative methodologies.

Changes mentalities: focuses on the common good and respect for others.

Participatory: involves all of the educational community.

MECHANISMS

Teacher training

Curricula

Infrastructure

Materials

Adequate school environments

Community work

Evaluation

Save the Children in **Colombia**, to ensure inclusive education policies, seeks to achieve three levels of change: (i) Diversity in schools from management to service - stressing the development of children regardless of their race, culture or gender; (ii) Inclusive practices that promote learning as an active and participatory process respecting the learning rhythm, knowledge and experience of the students, their cultural heritage and history, damaged in so many cases by violence; (iii) An inclusive culture that promotes safe, welcoming, collaborative, stimulating and protected communities.



Save the Children in **Haiti** has been working to realize the right to formal and non-formal quality education and the meaningful participation of children and youth in the poorest communities. 250 schools from the most vulnerable areas in the country participated in Haiti's Rewrite the Future program, where they have implemented interactive programs that include innovative learning tools. The program has promoted safe schools and respect for codes of conduct that ensure the security of the children. They have disseminated knowledge about children, prioritizing the schooling system and strengthening local groups and networks that promote child protection.

Save the Children in **Guatemala** forms part of a group of organizations that promotes the reform of the national curricula, focusing on Bilingual and Intercultural Education. Activities include teacher training and the strengthening of education councils for participation in formulation of policies and decentralization of the educational system.



PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATIONS

Within the contexts of conflict, it is the innovations in pedagogy —teaching and learning— that are fundamental to quality education. Innovative teaching processes that reach beyond traditional education models based on rigid thematic areas, to incorporate topics such as peace-building and conflict transformation, are relevant to the students. Save the Children in Haiti, Guatemala and Colombia identified common characteristics of quality education pedagogy for children affected by conflict and fragile states.



Characteristics of Innovations in Schools Affected by Conflict

IN THE CLASSROOM

- Children heal their wounds
- Students become interested and are invited to research
- Spaces are distributed collaboratively
- Classrooms are flexible and provide adequate learning periods
- Completion of projects
- Different communication schemes are introduced
- The spoken word and comprehensive reading are seen as fundamental keys for education
- Environmental awareness is included in the curriculum
- Dialogue is used as a pedagogical principle
- The school promotes pleasure in learning
- Teachers are guides and protectors

IN THE SCHOOL

- The educational community is involved
- The school focuses on the voices of children and young people
- The school protects children from physical and emotional abuse
- Doors are opened for the use of cultural and community processes
- The fundamental role of the family is recognized
- Schools redefine coexistence
- Peace building is promoted
- Schools ensure the best learning environments
- Teachers are sensitized to community life



ADVOCACY

Rewrite the Future is committed to providing long-lasting change for children. Save the Children in Haiti, Guatemala and Colombia work with stakeholders to strengthen communities and promote changes in public policies. Participants in the meeting agreed on three key elements of advocacy for education in armed conflict contexts:



- **Construct** alliances and synergies with different actors and national and international dynamics.
- **Build** links with mass media to expand public debate and transform social and cultural ideals.
- **Promote** simultaneous processes from the bottom to the top and from the top to the bottom; in other words, at local and national levels.



1. Begin with situational analysis

- Violations of children's rights and other associated factors.
- Budget deficit, lack of technical capacity and other difficulties or barriers decision-makers face to guarantee the rights of children when formulating and implementing policies and legislation.
- Social and cultural constructions that guarantee the fulfilment of the rights of children.

2. Apply these advocacy principles

- **Guide** advocacy actions towards public policy and social and cultural transformations.
- **Incorporate** the participation of children and youth, communities and civil society to the advocacy cycle, ensuring equal opportunities.

3. Identify Advocacy Strategy:

For example, bringing together community members and political associations to prepare schools' codes of conduct.

A Meaningful Advocacy Experience: Guatemala

To advocate for the right to Basic Intercultural Quality Education for all children, Rewrite the Future in Guatemala coordinated with youth, children and the Ministry of Education to design a basic education model that would ensure the right to education for the indigenous populations.

INNOVATIVE CASE STUDIES in HAITI AND GUATEMALA

During the conference two creative experiences based on literacy were presented. The first was the “**Lekti se lavni**” Creole reading program in Haiti, and the second was “**The Magic of Reading**” from Guatemala. Both are examples of how education can be innovative in conflict contexts.

HAITI: *Lekti se lavni*



Three main premises have defined Haiti’s program: (i) Reading is a fundamental skill for learning, (ii) Fluent reading facilitates comprehension and (iii) Learning to read in the mother tongue makes learning other languages easier.

Lekti se Lavni means “Reading is the Future”. It is a systematic teaching method that covers seven stages, progressively helping children to learn how to read and write. Children use tools to learn the alphabet, develop skills to read a given number of words per minute, and learn grammar and the de-codification of words. They are immersed in collective and individual reading and writing.

The method has faced challenges such as the search and production of books and materials in Creole, teachers’ alphabetization and training levels, and making flexible timetables to improve students’ and teachers’ attendance around informal community activities (market day, harvest and weather, among others). These are in addition to the challenges presented by involving children from all age groups within each class.

GUATEMALA: *The Magic of Reading*

This program is a response to the lack of education opportunities in communities affected by conflict and violence in both rural and urban areas in Guatemala.



The purpose of this experience is to:

- Create democratic and peace-building environments that promote meaningful learning.
- Promote the habit of reading in students of all ages and in the communities.
- Facilitate comprehension of the texts read.
- Develop reading, writing, listening, speaking and thinking skills.

The methodology uses several strategies to reach the schools and communities: the reading basket, reading Wednesdays, the reading corner, creation of libraries, activities to develop reading comprehension, reading fairs and teacher training.

In promoting reading habits, the project takes into account the Guatemalan belief that reading is essential for children and youth, to develop critical thinking skills and become people with the capacity to analyze.

VISIT TO REWRITE THE FUTURE PROGRAMS IN COLOMBIA

During the meeting, the participants visited education programs to share in a dialogue with the implementing

partners and community members. Local partners like CEDECIS (Community Development and Social Integration Corporation) and SIEMBRA Corporation in Colombia play a critical role in fulfilling the mission of Save the Children for sustainable development of quality education programming.

CEDECIS CORPORATION

Education and social inclusion with displaced communities and extremely impoverished populations.

Underlying Principles

To strengthen their capacity, the schools have to:

- Ensure that children and youth do not abandon their education.
- Open spaces of meaningful participation in all social and school-related scenarios so that children and youth can exercise their rights.

Strategies

Access: Community and grassroots associations are able to self-manage and advocate with local governments to ensure coverage, improve local school infrastructure and develop teacher skills.

Quality: The students, teachers, school boards and households acknowledge the importance of their active involvement in school scenarios. They improve their skills and acquire tools and materials to mediate in school conflicts and promote significant learning.

Protection: The education community transforms ideas and beliefs to invalidate physical abuse, hazardous child work, sexual abuse and exploitation, as well as favouring self-care practices in the schools, family and their neighbourhoods.

Advocacy: The education community is aware of and uses its local government's programs and plans to ensure the fulfilment of their rights, and to manage agreements, projects and strategic alliances.

SIEMBRA CORPORATION

Pedagogical Strategies for Communication, Participation and Peaceful Coexistence.

Underlying Principles

Communications are the basis of pedagogical endeavors and processes of peace building and participation. Peaceful coexistence is something that we learn. The forms of communication determined through education processes generate favorable or negative environments. To improve communications we first have to transform the way teachers and students express themselves so that they can be assertive, open to dialogue, democratic, participatory and inclusive.

Strategies

Teacher training, to promote education environments from a child rights approach and including the meaningful participation of children, as well as to encourage peaceful coexistence throughout the education community.

School newspapers: To create a tool where students have a voice in their schools.

Itinerant newspapers: To start teacher and student networks in several schools so that they can exchange their knowledge, ideas, thoughts, wishes and emotions.

Movie clubs: To work on the formation of values, encourage team work, audio-visual languages, and context analysis.

Local forums: To socialize multiple learning.



SAVE THE CHILDREN INTERNATIONAL GLOBAL EDUCATION STRATEGY 2010-2015

The participants learned that Rewrite the Future principles and results will be a foundational piece of Save the Children's education strategy for 2010-2015. The new education strategy will build on the success and lessons learned of Rewrite the Future and expand to include additional low-income countries. This strategy will be achieved by continuing to listen to children, working with partners, being innovative, and building upon our best practices, programs and policies.



Goal: The 2010 -2015 education strategy seeks to promote basic education in areas affected by conflict, fragile states and the most impoverished countries.

Program Objectives

- To ensure that 2 million more children have access to education.
- To improve outcomes for three million children-better numeracy, literacy, rights awareness, life skills.
- To demonstrate measurably improved outcomes for 500,000 of these children.
- To increase the availability of early childhood care and development.
- To increase our activities in urban settings and in non-formal education for adolescents.
- To reach a total of 60 million children a year in 2015.

Advocacy Objectives

- National, regional and international funding is increased to ensure quality education for all children, including those in countries affected by conflict.
- Major donor governments include and provide long-term funding for education in emergency responses.
- Donors and governments improve quality education policies and practices to ensure children fulfill their right to learn (life skills, rights, literacy and numeracy).
- National, regional and international policies and funding address early childhood care, development and education.

LESSONS LEARNED & RECOMMENDATIONS

At the end of the learning session the participants summarized lessons learned through the Rewrite the Future experience in Haiti, Guatemala and Colombia. They also highlighted the importance of sharing experiences between countries so that they can be replicated and adapted according to country context.

- 👤 **Focus on open door schools:** Rewrite the Future's open door program ensures access to schools that protect children, deliver flexible and relevant education including actions that prepare children for work, help them heal their wounds and contribute to the peace-building efforts.
- 👤 **Strengthen work with families and communities as key actors in the education of children:** Construct a movement of parents and educational communities. Strengthen the concept and practice of families and communities as primary actors in the education of children and youth. Education is the responsibility of not only the school, but also the family and community, including the participation of a variety of actors: networks, alliances, governments, leaders, parents, children and youth.
- 👤 **Promote all the rights of children, including education:** Guaranteeing the right to education must include other aspects dictated by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, such as participation, protection and survival, as they form part of a whole; fighting for the right to education is fighting for all the rights of children.
- 👤 **Advocate free access to quality education with governments and policy makers to finance:** Partner with governments to: build capacity; improve education finance, offer tools, support school construction, and share good practices and pedagogical innovations.
- 👤 **Include early childhood education strategies for those affected by conflict:** The population between 0 and 6 years of age has rarely been included in education measures taken by countries in conflict. Because of the

strong impact education has when delivered during these years, it is highly recommended that strategies are developed to include these children in education programs.

- 👤 **Systematize and document best practices of education provision in the context of armed conflict:** The importance of recording and systematizing the experiences, methodologies and models developed in each country, and accompanying it with statistical information is recognized. This makes sharing experiences easier and allows expansion of programs to be visualized more effectively.
- 👤 **Strengthen teacher training as a key element in improvement of quality education:** Teacher training is a crucial axis to improve practices and children's learning processes. Training must improve the teacher's capacities in all levels, through the generation of innovative tools to improve teacher performances.
- 👤 **Guaranteeing learning results and the participation of children:** Promote changes in learning results, strengthen self-esteem in children and encourage the active and true participation of children; giving them a voice and listening to them.
- 👤 **Partnership with communication media:** Develop education strategies based in the media and in conjunction with the media. Be an interactive school that sees the media as powerful educational actors.



Meeting Participants

Save the Children in Haiti

Save the Children Guatemala

Save the Children in Colombia

Save the Children Canada

Save the Children Sweden

Save the Children Canada – Regional Office for Latin America

Save the Children International

Siembra Corporation

CEDECIS Corporation

IPC - Popular Institute for Training

Project: "As we Learn we Grow" Nariño, Colombia

Meeting Special Guests

Ministry of Education Colombia

UNICEF

Office of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights in Colombia

Foundation Let's Go Back to People/New School

CESDE

Universidad Nacional de Colombia – Centre for Social Studies



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