



## Puentes Educativos – Educational bridges

*Lesbia Karina Gadea Salguera*

<b>Name of Activity</b> Puentes Educativos – An educational strategy for migrant labor's children	<b>Total time</b> 12 hours (5:30 am to 5:30 pm) everyday in the 3-month-period of coffee harvest (October to March)
<b>Overview</b> A strategy which aims at giving children who are excluded from the educational system and exposed to the threat of child labor during the 3-month-period of coffee harvest (October to March), access to education so that they can continue to study and thus move on to the subsequent scholar level/class/grade in regular school.	<b>Materials/room</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A safe, comfortable space provided in coffee plantations.</li><li>• Pedagogical material to support the educational intervention</li></ul>
<b>Number of people</b> Flexible	<b>Target groups &amp; Age</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Infants from the ages of 3 months up to 3 years.</li><li>2. Children from the ages of 4–13 years.</li></ol>

**Learning outcomes**

Customized educational intervention in small doses right in children's own environment is one way of ensuring education for all.

Take learning to children if they can't come to school

Unconventional ways to reach out to those who miss out on school due to their families being migrant workers is the innovative ethos behind Puentes Educativos. It has become a task for all in the framework of shared social responsibility between the state, private enterprises and civil society organizations (La Cuculmeca).

**PART I: The background to the Method***Educational philosophy:*

The following program is an example of how customized educational intervention in small doses; in children's own environments is one way of ensuring education for all. We learned that in cases whereby children do not have the possibility to attend regular school classes it is necessary to look at unconventional ways to reach out to them directly. In this sense *Puentes Educativos* – 'educational bridges' – is a strategy which aims at giving children who are excluded from the educational system and exposed to the threat of child labor during the 3-month-period of coffee harvest (October to March), access to education so that they can continue to study and thus be promoted to the subsequent scholar level at a regular school.

The program continues with the coordination of local actors, governmental ministries and the civil society in order to concretize the establishment of Puentes Educativos in their respective territories and therefore to guarantee to the children in danger of child labor their right to education.

*Background*

The Educational and Communicational Association *La Cuculmeca* is a non-profit making organization in Jinotega, Nicaragua which has been working in the field of education for Nicaraguan children and adults for more than 27 years.

*La Cuculmeca* defines its priorities based on education as an alternative development for its target groups. It manifests in its first

strategic objective: Children, adolescents and adults who are accompanied by La Cuculmeca's learning interventions have better access to quality education that focuses on their rights and which is relevant for their lives.

### *Genesis of Puentes Educativos*

The strategy Puentes Educativos is based on a socio educational survey conducted in 2005 by the Municipal Delegation of the Ministry of Education, which revealed that 8,565 children were excluded from the educational system of Jinotega Municipality. The results proved the necessity to join forces in order to include these children in the educational system and in order to guarantee their right to education. An important finding of the study is that child labor is one of the most critical reasons for school dropouts and lack of integration of the children in the school system.

In this context it is important to mention that the parents of these children are migrant workers who travel from community to community on the quest for temporary employment on coffee farms. Many aspects play a part in this phenomenon—in many cases these families argue that they depend on the financial contribution of their children. Furthermore, it is culturally accepted to place domestic and family responsibilities on the children's shoulders from a very young age.

Another decisive aspect in this is lack of care and a safe place for the children while their parents work in the field.

Based on the analysis of the study, strategies and actions were designed in order to confront the multilayered problem. A working methodology was designed to sensitize parents as well as their employers of the children's rights and needs.

The ultimate goal of the program is to guarantee the children's basic needs so that they have the opportunity to attend to and stay in the educational system – all of which is fundamental in the context of the 'batalla por el sexto grado' (fight for sixth grade) of the Ministry of Education.

### *Steps towards the Establishment of Puentes Educativos*

#### **Step 1: Coordination and Joint Forces**

Identifying the situation of the working children, strategic alliances emerged and links with the Ministry of Education (MINED), Ministry of Labor (MITRAB), Ministry of Family Affairs (MIFAM), Institute of Social Security (INSS), Ministry of Health (MINSA) and the private

sector (owners of coffee farms) were created, who assume their roles and competencies in the context of education, child labor and development of children and adolescents.

### ***Step 2: Process of Sensitization of Producers and Employers***

This step offers information and sensitization to coffee producers and employers about laws and conventions that support the accomplishment of the rights and the protection of children.

As a result of this effort (tenemos que) producers and employers assumed their responsibilities to guarantee the accomplishment of the rights of the children against the background of two codices:

The Nicaraguan codex of children and youth – international convention on the rights of the children.

The Nicaraguan codex of labor – chapter six which stipulates minimum age limit for employment.

### ***Step 3: Setting up and adaptation of places on the coffee farms by the owners of the farms***

The owners of the farms and the employers invest financial resources by setting up and adapting places for classes in order to facilitate the project Puentes Educativos. They guarantee minimum conditions of attention for the children, including space for child care.

### ***Step 4: Identification of facilitators for child care on the coffee farms***

In the next step, educators and kindergarten teachers from each respective community who also work at the farms have to be identified. Another possibility is to engage university students who are in their final year of teacher training whose work is recognized as practical working experience. Furthermore, they can gain economic acknowledgement from the side from the farm's owner.

### ***Step 5: Coordination between MINED, La Cuculmeca and the owners of the farms aiming at the training of facilitators in the period of coffee harvest.***

Facilitators enjoy training on the methodology of the implementation of 'educational bridges' – Puentes Educativos. They get to know methodological considerations in the development of Puentes Educativos.

### ***Step 6: Implementation of Puentes Educativos in the period of coffee harvest***

Generally, the period of implementation of Puentes Educativos lasts from October to March every year. While parents deliver their labor harvesting coffee, their children enjoy the attention and the protection offered by Puentes Educativos.



### **Step 7: Visits and accompaniment by governmental institutions and La Cuculmeca**

All actors already mentioned above coordinate visits and accompaniment.

- MITRAB: guarantees that children are not employed as child workers. Checking of the payroll as well as on site in the coffee plantation is the norm.

- MINED and La Cuculmeca: technical and methodological accompaniment in order to guarantee integral attention of children with a strengthening and leveling of the scholarly level, with a focus on recreation, culture and environmental education. They make sure that children are free from child labor.

- MINSA: guarantees adequate hygienic, sanitary conditions as well as conducts workshops on integral health for the children in Puentes Educativos.

- INSS: guarantees that permanent staff issues are taken care of.



## PART II: The Method

### *Methodology of Puentes Educativos*

The methodological momentums in the development of Puentes Educativos are determined in the following way:

#### **Opening: Arrival of the Children**

Between 5:30 and 7:00 am: The children arrive

Between 7:00 and 8:00 am: Groups for the educational work are determined.

#### **The groups are formed according to the following categories:**

Infants from 3 months up to 3 years

Children aged 4–13 years, depending on the grade they are in, usually 3 groups are formed that are organized in the following way:

Preschoolers: between 4 and 6 years;

First, second and third grade for children between 7–9 years;

Fourth, fifth and sixth grade for children between 10–13 years.

#### **First Momentum: morning**

Scholar strengthening and leveling particularly in Mathematics;

Break;

Scholar strengthening and leveling in languages and literature;

Lunch.



## **Second Momentum: afternoon**

Workshops (handicrafts, environmental education accompanied by seminars on cleaning and reforestation and hygienic behavior);

Excursions;

Sports – instructed games.

**Closing:** the children leave between 4:00 and 5:00 pm.

*Who are stakeholders of the program?*

- Children in the age range of 0-12 years;
- Parents of these children;
- Owners of the coffee farms;
- Administrators of the coffee farms;
- Managers of the coffee farms;
- Labor unions of coffee farms.

*Achievements of Puentes Educativos in the education of rural children*

1) The children capitalized on opportunities to develop, in safe, playful, creative and sheltered spaces where they can enjoy their childhood. Such spaces trigger learning from an experiential and experimental methodology that fosters creativity, culture and school of life.

2) After concluding the process of Puentes Educativos (after 3 months of coffee harvest) the children receive a certificate of approbation for the school year which the Ministry of Education (MINED) acknowledges. The certificate permits them to matriculate in the subsequent grade in any educational institution in the country.

3) The work with mothers and fathers in the context of sensitization and information on the rights of children, on the importance of education and on the consequences of child labor capacitate the parents to assume their roles more belligerently when it comes to protecting and supporting their children in their educational process.

4) Strengthening and coordination of local actors in order to guarantee education and the accomplishment of the rights of the children.

5) Sensitized farmers assumed the challenge to develop and implement in their farms the strategy of Puentes Educativos and they plan it year after year as a form of social responsibility in their realms.

6) Implementation of knowledge and experiences of the different actors and sectors involved, on the search for solutions for the identified problems concerning the care of children and the guaranteeing of their rights.

7) Pedagogic accompaniment for facilitators of Puentes Educativos and organizational support for farm owners. Furthermore, governmental institutions guarantee integral and integrative attention to the children who are part of Puentes Educativos.

8) Institutionalization of the strategy Puentes Educativos as 'a task for all in the framework of shared social responsibility' between the state, private enterprises and organizations of the civil society (La Cuculmeca).

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Coach in Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), economist, consultant and facilitator for personal and organizational development processes.

Since 2013, she has been responsible for the Institute of Knowledge Management of the Educational and Communicational non-profit Organization "La Cuculmeca" which has 27 years of work experience in sustainable development of the rural population of Nicaragua.

She is experienced in the planning, monitoring, evaluation and systematization of social programs and projects and furthermore has broad skills in the development of knowledge management processes where she applies participative methodologies that focus on the personal development, emerging from a gender and generational perspective.