



From Barranquilla to Lima in Reducing Child Labor: Lessons in Community Action

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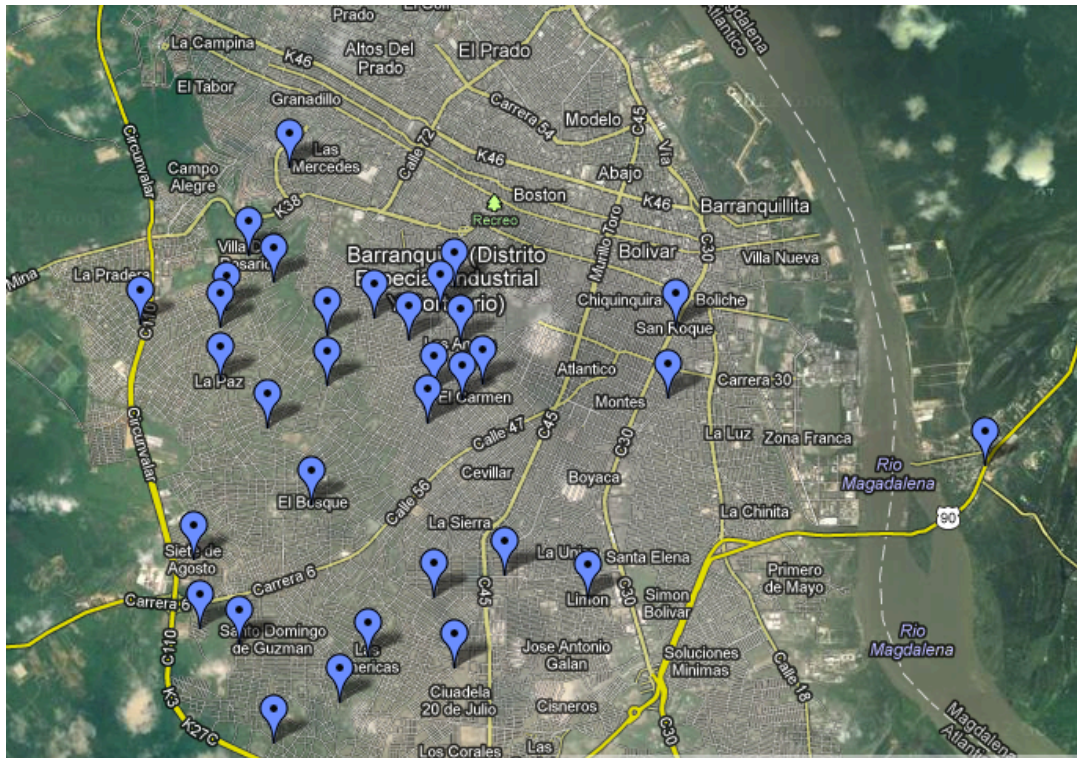
Kyrah K. Brown & Jasmine Douglas, Editors, SCRA Mini Grant Team

The SCRA Community Mini-Grants was founded in 2010 with the intention of supporting small, time-sensitive community-based projects that are consistent with SCRA's mission, principles and goals. We are ecstatic about the great work being done by SCRA members and their community partners, and even happier to be able to highlight examples of this work and share them with the GJCPP readership. Below, Isidro Maya-Jariego and Daniel Holgado describe their collaborative work with *Edúcame Primero Colombia*, an evidence-based child labor prevention program; and provide insight into the impact that Community Mini-Grants funding had on their work in identifying lessons learned and best practices for the replication of this intervention program in Lima, Peru.

According to International Labour Organization (ILO) 168 million children work worldwide, 85 million of which are engaged in hazardous work. In the past decade a 30 per cent reduction of child labor worldwide has been achieved with programs that promote universal access to quality education, conditional cash transfer and coalitions of social agents. The program *Edúcame Primero Colombia* for prevention of child labor was applied between 2008 and 2010 as part of a cooperation for development initiative in 7 departments of Colombia, with the participation of about 10,000 children. Thereafter Universidad del Norte proceeded to local ownership of the program from 2011 to 2013: the intervention was implemented through a network of university students doing their practices in 33 schools and educational foundations of Barranquilla, Department of the Atlantic. In this piece we summarize the lessons learned by facilitators of the program as well as teachers and principals of the schools where the program was implemented. We systematize the experiences in Colombia in order to enable the transference of the same intervention to Lima (Peru). This work was possible with the support of a SCRA Community Mini-Grant that was helpful for organizing meetings with facilitators, conducting interviews with teachers and principals, and elaborating a video with lessons learned in Colombia, which will be used for launching the program in Peru next year.

Keywords: *SCRA mini-grants, Community Psychology, Best Practices, Community Readiness, Child Labor.*

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Location of the 33 schools in Barranquilla where *Éducame Primero Colombia* was implemented

The experience of the program *Éducame Primero Colombia*

Éducame Primero Colombia is a psychoeducational intervention with activities to promote personal skills and free play among participants. It has two different components -‘Spaces to Grow’ and ‘Spaces to Play’-, which aim to strengthen universal access to education as an alternative to child labor. It is therefore an effort to guarantee children time for training, personal development and learning. Since 2011, the University of Sevilla has contributed to the initiative through joint training grants from the Office of Cooperation for Development as well as postgraduate scholarships from the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECID). The Laboratory of Personal Networks and Communities (LRPC) joined then an international team for the evaluation and improvement of the implementation of the program.

Éducame Primero Colombia is an evidence-based practice, which had proven effective in several previous applications in six Central American countries: Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. The intervention consists of academic orientation, socialization among peers and personal development activities, which are usually applied in academic institutions following the instructions of the educational materials of the program. The intervention is effective improving academic performance and reducing absenteeism at school. There is also evidence of an impact in the number of hours of child labor, as well as the number of children doing some labor activities. This experience of collaboration of the Universidad del Norte and the University of Sevilla has contributed to the Latin American Network of Child Labour (LACTI), and other systems for exchanging best practices, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the IVI in Spain.

Along these years of international cooperation with Colombia we have found that universal access to quality education is a central element in the fight against child labor. We are referring specifically to actions to prevent absenteeism and dropout, as well as to improve academic performance, ensure compulsory education and improve the educational system. In fact, the highest impact of child labor in academic performance seems to occur when the time devoted to child labor competes with the time devoted to school. That is to say, both the number of weekly hours spent at work, as well as making work activities coinciding with school hours, are the conditions that most negatively affect social and educational development of children.



Universal access to quality education is central in the fight against child labor
(Foto: Antonio Gallardo, © LRPC & Oficina de Cooperación al Desarrollo de la Universidad de Sevilla)

Transferring the program from Colombia to Peru

We are preparing the replication of the program in Lima (Peru), introducing some changes after the experience in Colombia. In this context, the SCRA Mini Grant was used to organize two meetings with facilitators, volunteers, teachers and other practitioners both in Barranquilla and Seville. Focus groups and interviews were carried out to describing lessons learned and detecting best practices in the former implementation of the program. Secondly, this material was used to make a video with recommendations for future implementers of the intervention in Peru.

Participants focused in (a) the key role of mediators in each school, (b) the diversity of community contexts, (c) the relevance of community readiness as well as the engagement of the families, and (d) the integration of the program in the organizational context of the school. We summarize these ideas below, which are also summarized in the resulting video: <http://youtu.be/pfjLRfkEm18>

Informal network of facilitators. A group of psychology graduate students was selected to coordinate the activities in each school participating in the intervention. Each student

was assigned to a particular school and adopted the role of “facilitator”, adjusting the program to the specifics of the context. During implementation they negotiated with the principal and teachers of the school, they were in contact with the families of children participating in the program, and they informally assumed a broker role between the school, the families and the neighborhood community organizations where the intervention was taking place. These activities were not originally planned in the program, but finally revealed to be essential for the successful implementation of the program. Facilitators assumed an unanticipated role of improving community fit of the intervention, adapting the program to the diversity of community contexts and schools.

Diversity of contexts. Child labor takes different forms depending on the social and community context in which it operates. In the case of Colombia, the main predictor of child labor in rural areas was suffering forced displacement in the last five years. However, in urban areas child labor seems to depend on the socio-educational profile of the mother, as well as family income. In suburban areas, where child labor is most frequently, political violence and natural disasters are key factors. In cities, however, child labor is more likely among children of mothers with no education and who worked when they were a child. Therefore the intervention has to be modulated depending on the specific community context in which it is performed.

Family and community readiness. The most effective prevention strategies go through the involvement of families and community. As noted, college students who acted as facilitators of the intervention adapted the program to the peculiarities of each context, and put in place strategies to involve families. In prevention programs, facilitators acted as mediators and promoted community fit. The program worked better when there was a prior socialization with parents. Linking families with educational institutions, as well as overall good levels of community organizing and participation, were key for preventing school absenteeism of the children. In sum, tailoring the intervention to the specific characteristics of each community context improves outcomes.

Integrating the program in the school. Often teachers were reluctant to incorporate working children in the school: they thought would adversely affect other students. On the other hand, parents did not see the relevance of recreational activities carried out in the program. However, the program improved motivation and educational achievement of children. Participants in the program learned to take turns and to talk to authority figures properly, and later they reproduced these behaviors in the classroom. Consequently, the parents changed their attitude toward the program. Teachers also began to incorporate in their classes the participatory methodology of the program. Overall the program contributed to a positive school climate and facilitated the transfer of learning to the context of class. The fit of the program to the organizational context was crucial.

This set of lessons learned has been summarized in a video designed for future implementers of the program in Peru. The video highlights three main issues to be discussed in the context of training sessions: the adaptation of the program to the diversity of contexts, the promotion of family involvement in the program, and the key community mediation role performed by facilitators. Each idea is illustrated with input from parents, teachers and facilitators, so that can be used in the training of new facilitators, as well as in the debate and reflection before program implementation.



Maya-Jariego, I., Holgado, D., Palacio, J. E. & Romero, P. (2014). Edúcame Primero Colombia. Reducing Child Labor in Barranquilla [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://youtu.be/pfjLRfkEm18>

Communities against child labor

We anticipate starting the program implementation in Lima in 2015. The process of transferring the program to Peru is an opportunity to apply what we have learned in Colombia, but it is also a challenge in terms of adapting the program to a different institutional and community setting. This time we intend to enhance the community nature of the program, developing specific activities of adaptation to the educational context, direct work with families and community involvement.

The extent of the movement of working children in Peru, which has been contrary to international policies against child labor, requires the implementation of specific actions for community readiness. For this we have the baggage of the actions that, in different Latin American countries, have improved the lives of families and contributed to the protection of children over recent years.

Effective interventions against child labor are usually intense, sustained over time, and have institutional support. They are also comprehensive, and promote simultaneously compulsory education, poverty reduction through redistributive policies, changing the social norm on the minimum age to work, and the development of new patterns of socialization in families.

In this new challenge in Peru we will combine the implementation of former psychoeducational activities of the program with the forge of coalitions of social agents and strategies for community readiness.

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