



Evaluation Summaries

Eradication of child labour in the dumpsite of La Chureca, Managua

Quick Facts

Countries: *Nicaragua*

Final Evaluation: *August 2005*

Mode of Evaluation: *independent*

Technical Area: *Child Labour*

Evaluation Management: *IPEC*

Evaluation Team: *Patrizio Warren*

Project Code: *NIC/00/50/USA*

Donor: *United States*

Keywords: *Worst forms of child labour, scavenging, hazardous work*

Executive Summary of the full report

The La Chureca dumpsite is located in the community of Acahualinca, in the northern sector of Managua. For more than forty years, a large number of underprivileged urban families have been working at La Chureca, picking through and sorting trash deposited there to sell it. In early 2000, about three of every 10 informal workers at the garbage dump were minors under 18 years of age.

In 2000, ILO-IPEC started the “Project for the Eradication of Child Labor in the Dumpsite in La Chureca,” which has been evaluated in this report. The project, which was financed with \$1,133,839 from the United States Department of Labor (USDOL), was organized in four main components: i) education (executed by the NGO AVANJUNIC); ii) health (executed by the NGO Pastoral Penitenciaria); iii)

economic alternatives (executed by the Peruvian NGO IPES and later transferred to Pastoral Penitenciaria); and (iv) social awareness and policy development (directly executed by the ILO-IPEC staff). The project, which culminated with a budget of \$1,133,820, was implemented between 2001 and 2004. At the time of this final evaluation (June 2005), the economic alternatives component was still in operation; it was expected to be concluded in August 2005.

The final evaluation consisted of an analysis of how the project’s immediate objective had been achieved (*effectiveness*) and a review of the four operational components mentioned above. The review of each project component focused on i) the relationship between the goals set and the achievements reached (*productivity*); ii) the investment made per beneficiary (*efficiency*); iii) the *design and process* factors that impacted either positively or negatively on the component’s implementation; iv) the *relevance* of its achievements in comparison to and taking into account the social needs of the target population; and (v) the *sustainability* of each project component after the end of international support efforts. With this in mind, a number of research activities were carried out, including a review of the project’s documentation, visits to the La Chureca dumpsite site and to the nearby settlement community, the area’s schools, and the facilities of AVANJUNIC and Pastoral Penitenciaria.

Also done were the compilation and analysis of the project's monitoring data, identification of the unit cost and estimates of the investment made per beneficiary, semi-structured individual or small group interviews with different actors involved in the project, and a review of the feasibility study of the cooperatives for residential collection of recyclable wastes. At the end of the evaluation consultant's stay in Managua, a workshop with stakeholders was held, during which the data that had been gathered and systematized by the consultant were presented and discussed.

The main findings of the evaluation consultant may be summarized as follows:

- The project reached its objective of withdrawing 75% of the children and adolescents who had been working at the dumpsite and living within its sphere of influence (sectors of La Chureca, Acahualinca, and Los Martinez).

- The education component accomplished the enrollment of most children between 6 and 14 years old in school who belonged to the target group. The dropout and failure rates of former child workers were significantly lower than those of the general population attending the same schools. These results are due to a number of factors: the quality of the services provided by the executing agency: awareness-raising for parents, school reinforcement, and support for the schools and their teachers. In addition, the evidence suggests that the educational offer at the pre-school level and the indirect subsidies (packages of school supplies) helped to prevent the younger siblings of children who had formerly worked at the dumpsite from engaging in this work, and encouraged other children in the focus area to remain in school. These interventions (which exceeded the specified goals in the Action Program Summary Outline by between 10% and 20%) were sustained with investments ranging from a minimum of 8 dollars per user/year (support to schools and school supplies for 2002 students) to 56 dollars per user/year (school reinforcement for

775 former working children). According to local actors, this task was completely relevant to the social needs of the locals. Thanks to the commitment assumed by the schools and other entities interested in the eradication of child labor, this line of activities has a relatively high sustainability margin.

- The education component was slightly less successful with respect to the labor reorientation or retraining of adolescents (and adults). The desertion rate of adolescents enrolled in either the special mode for their group or in vocational education courses was 20%, and only 30% of the adolescents and adults who completed these courses were able to find a job other than waste collection work at the dumpsite. In the consultant's opinion, beyond the "structural" factors (marginal social conditions, unemployment, etc.), this outcome reflects the lack of articulation between the vocational education activities and the demand for labor force, as well as a much higher number of beneficiaries than expected (358 instead of the expected 165), which exceeded the project's budgetary capacity. Also noted was the insufficient investment per beneficiary (73-96 dollars) to permit completion of the basic courses with apprenticeships or other measures that would facilitate the integration of the students in their new profession. This intervention was, therefore, less relevant to the social needs than the completion of elementary education was, and it seems less sustainable.

- Thanks to the activities for raising awareness about the problems related to child labor, the health component achieved an important result by bringing the target group in closer contact with the health center staff. In addition, this component carried out interesting psychological-social support work for adolescents. However, most of the resources were invested in providing healing attention services to a population of more than 2035 beneficiaries (three times larger than the original target group) and in executing a school lunch program in the three schools of the area (1769 beneficiaries). In economic

terms this excessively diminished the investment per user/year (5 dollars for healing services; 9 dollars for the school-lunch program), which certainly did not contribute to make this task achieve significant effects on the health conditions of the target group. In the consultant's opinion, with the exception of the psycho-social work done with the adolescents, the project's health component has transformed itself into providing an assistance which is external to the primary health care, and thus was unable to reach concrete public health interventions in accordance with the health needs of the target group. Although the health center's approach to the reality of the dumpsite may compensate in part for this mistake, the sustainability of the work done in this sector by the executing agency basically depends on this institution's capacity to overcome this particular focus on assistance.

□ In the opinion of some local actors (a view which is entirely shared by the consultant), the economic alternatives component is the most relevant element of the project for the target population's social needs. However, for several reasons, its implementation was subject to repeated delays that prevented it from starting before June 2005. At the moment, the component has a clear design and an alliance network that nurtures the hopes of reaching an interesting demonstrative result with 90 beneficiaries (representing 45% of the target). The cost-benefit analysis of the cooperatives engaged in residential collection of recyclable wastes (which was updated and deepened during the evaluation mission) suggests that an initial investment of 7,416 dollars per cooperative (equivalent to 412 dollars per partner) could generate a net monthly income per partner of about 120 dollars (plus the social benefits and the creation of a small fund for raising capital). Yet, it should be pointed out that these estimates are highly theoretical, and that a valid judgment about the profitability and sustainability of these cooperatives could be formulated only after a suitable trial period.

□ The social mobilization and policy development component was directly carried out by ILO-IPEC staff with the support of the executing agencies from the other project components (AVANJUNIC and Pastoral Penitenciaria) and the endorsement of the national institutions involved in this process (Ministry of Education, MARENA, CNEPTI, etc.). The most important achievement of this component was to include the issue of the eradication of child labor in dumpsites into the agenda of the "National Policy for Solid Waste Management".

□ At the municipal level, the project's social mobilization activities facilitated the creation and strengthening of a support network for the initiatives to eradicate child labor, a network which encompasses many public institutions and the civil sector. Both achievements contributed to guaranteeing the sustainability of the work done by the project at the municipal and national levels.

Based on these judgments, the analysis of the experience of the project made it possible to note the lessons learned about the design and implementation of interventions of child-labor eradication in dumpsites, as listed below:

□ Given the peculiar and extreme characteristics of the social and environmental situation of the metropolitan dumpsites, the identification, detection, and follow-up of working boys, girls and adolescents require a long-term action research effort. This effort in turn demands both the constant presence of the implementing agencies at the dumpsite, and their capacity to interact with the institutions and the local civil sector. Specific research studies of an "extraction" type (such as, the baseline study held at the beginning of the project) will not yield reliable resources nor allow to identify the changes that take place inside these social circumstances, as they are highly dynamic and unstable. To facilitate this process, it is necessary to develop a more expeditious data-gathering format than those used for the project in La Chureca. The format employed there had created problems of

redundancy, insufficient analysis, and, finally, lack of use of the collected data for short-term programming. With this in mind, it is essential to regularly enter the information into a user-friendly database (an Excel spreadsheet would be more than adequate) and to train all the team members technically and conceptually so as to be able to extract those statistics needed to monitor the progress of the project. Finally, it is important to promote the use of this information for decision making at the project level (that is, not just as a result of the follow-up of individual cases, or for writing the official reports).

□ The definition of the area of influence of a project to eradicate child labor in a given dumpsite should take into account the geographic dispersion and the mobility of this social sector. The project should develop a contextual strategy (based on its budget allocation more than on agreements with institutions that have insufficient or reduced financial capacity), to cover the total territory from which working children and adolescents come.

On the other hand, it is not advisable to do “surgical” cuts based on pre-established population quotas or logistical considerations.

□ In real social contexts, child (and adult) labor in dumpsites is usually the extreme expression of a marginal, underprivileged, precarious, and impoverished condition which, in one way or another, affects the entire population living in the territory. This situation makes it difficult and ethically unacceptable to direct the intervention exclusively toward the target group. Therefore, a balance has to be found between the specific mandate of the project (the eradication of child labor) and the wider demand arising from other social sectors. The case of La Chureca suggests that the education action program was able to achieve that balance by using the selected services as outreach for the totality of the school population as an integration mechanism among schools, the *Churecans*, and the civil society. In contrast, the health action program

ended up expanding its direct attention and enrichment activities too far; this causes an excessive dilution of the investment per user and results in actions that are mainly of an assistance-type nature.

□ Schooling is an extremely important element for the eradication and prevention of child labor. The experience in La Chureca proved that the integration of formerly working children into school required specific and comprehensive instructional measures. These measures, in addition to facilitating the normalization of their academic level, help these children overcome the cognitive, emotional, and socialization problems related to their former status and condition as laborers at the dumpsite. The systematization of the experience by the project in this sector may greatly contribute to the preparation of a pedagogical package for school reinforcement; which could be disseminated in comparable situations and contexts.

□ In order to have an impact on the employment and living conditions of the beneficiaries, the vocational education of adolescents and adults who used to work in the dumpsites should be based on an analysis of the existing labor market. This analysis will identify in advance the job market niches in which the participants have real opportunities to find employment. Moreover, the support provided should not be limited to scholarships for basic vocational courses, but should include apprenticeship opportunities, loans or grants for honor students, or other measures that may allow trainees to easily enter their new profession. Finally, it would be extremely useful to maximize the potential synergies between the vocational education activities and activities that identify and validate economic alternatives for families of former child workers. The lack of these measures resulted in the fact that the vocational training sub-component of the project had less than the expected impact on the labor situation of the participants.

□ The intervention of the health component of a project for the eradication of child labor should not replace the primary care services provided by the territorial health services, but rather complement them. For this reason, it is important to develop awareness raising and social communication activities that will allow to establish closer contact between the health staff and the marginal population living or working in the dumpsite (this was done with a great deal of success—at La Chureca).

□ Communication and awareness-raising work should be complemented with actions to strengthen the local health services. These actions should not be limited to providing medicines and other products (as at La Chureca). Instead, they should be geared toward assuring that the service has the necessary conditions for carrying out sanitation and prevention activities outside the dumpsite and/ or areas where the workers live. This demands the investment of resources in equipment and transportation facilities, and, if necessary, support for hiring of personnel who are qualified to carry out the job in the territory (public health nurses, health technicians). This option seems more effective and efficient than establishing a referral unit that is not integrated with the health center, as was done at La Chureca.

□ Furthermore, it is necessary to design and implement specialized intervention measures in occupational health. These are measures to reduce the risks related to the collection of waste materials through specific preventive and health education activities, as well as detecting and treating the corresponding ailments and illnesses (in coordination with the second and third tier hospitals). Part of the resources allocated for these activities should be invested in the distribution of individual protection measures (gloves, shoes, masks, etc.) among the dumpsite workers, and promoting their use.

□ The health component of a project for the eradication of child labor in dumpsites should also include a line of activities aimed at the

prevention, treatment, and monitoring of social problems and psychological pathologies existing in this context. For this purpose, it would be important to exploit and systematize the experience that the project acquired while carrying out activities with adolescents from La Chureca.

□ Finally, to ensure the relevance of the project for the health needs of the community, and to document its effects in the epidemiological profile of the population, the component should have a quick and efficient information system designed by an expert in public health. This element was completely missing in the work done at La Chureca.

□ The identification and validation of economic alternatives for families of former working children plays a vital role in the process to eradicate child labor in dumpsites. Given that the mobilization of the family labor force is often fundamental in making waste collection economically profitable and socially viable, the only way to guarantee that child labor will not take place again once the support through awareness-raising, education, and health intervention ends, is that the families must have a survival alternative that is more decent and better paid. Projects to eradicate child labor need to establish priorities so as to be able to identify and validate economic alternatives, by investing more resources in this component than those invested in La Chureca (where, according to the project's document, such resources only comprised 17% of the total budget).

□ The intuition that economic alternatives should be founded on the knowledge and survival strategies of the dumpsite workers and, therefore, be focused on the selection, gathering, and recycling of solid wastes, is a highly valuable approach used at La Chureca. However, to relate this intuition to a real process of economic and social change, it is necessary to actively involve the concerned sectors in the search for and validation of these alternatives.

Otherwise, as shown by the experience in this project, an implementation strategy led by technical experts only does not allow these initiatives to be rooted in the social reality of the stakeholders. This may complicate or unnecessarily delay the implementation of the strategy.

□ Successful modernization, improvement and formalization of employment in waste collection finally depends on the combination of three factors, namely: i) the direct participation of beneficiaries in the situation analysis and in the decision-making process; (ii) the support by an entity with strong linkages in the area, and with the necessary expertise to articulate the economic-financial and socio-cultural dimensions of the problem; and (iii) the definition of national and municipal policies on urban solid waste management, that value and encourage the delegation of the collection, sorting, and recycling process to third parties.

□ The modernization of policies for urban solid waste management represents an important opportunity for ILO-IPEC and other interested agencies to incorporate the issue of child labor eradication into these policies. However, to be effective, this process has to go beyond the reiteration of abstract principles and statements of intention. The process should be about the transformation of policy trends into legal regulations, budgetary allocations, and activities carried out at the national level.