# Study of Feedback Mechanisms Adapted to Children in NGO Programs







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Second phase report

#### Acknowledgements

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

CAYP	Children, adolescents and young people
СҮР	Centers for Young People
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
ME	Ministry of Education
MH	Ministry of Health
NCCA	National Council of Children and Adolescents
ISNA	Salvadorian Institute for the integral development of Children and Adoles- cents (ISNA in Spanish)
LIPCA	Law for the Integral Protection of Children and Adolescents
NSIPCA	National System for the Integral Protection of Children and Adolescents



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# I. Introduction

This study is part of the second phase of research about the feedback mechanisms for children implemented in NGO programs. The first phase of the study, published in 2015, was carried out in collaboration with four other international NGOs that work with children – Plan International, Save the Children UK, War Child UK and World Vision – and was focused on the accessibility of feedback mechanisms for children, adolescents and young people (CAYP).

Now in this second phase, the idea is to investigate more thoroughly the CAYP feedback mechanism preferences, and the barriers that they can face when using them, via a consultation process with groups of CAYP and technical staff, in the Centers for Young People project in El Salvador. This study presents the findings from this process, along with our recommendations for supporting the implementation of feedback mechanisms adapted to children and young people and for ensuring that they are accessible and efficient.

# II. Definitions

- Feedback mechanisms: a series of tools and processes which enable the reception, management and response to the suggestions, complaints and praise from the organization's stakeholders and apply the relevant improvements as part of an ongoing learning cycle.
- Accountability: Educo understands accountability as a responsibility and commitment to listening to and responding to the opinions and needs of the stakeholders in the decisions that are taken and the activities that are carried out, with the aim of improving the impact of the organization and ensuring a responsible use of resources.
- **Rights holders:** Educo considers children, adolescents and young people to be *rights holders*.
- **Duty bearers:** Educo classifies as *duty bearers* the social actors which are responsible for ensuring the fulfilment of the rights of children, i.e. the State and international bodies.
- Secondary duty bearers: Educo classifies as *secondary duty bearers* the social actors who are responsible for respecting and demanding the fulfilment of the rights of children, i.e. families, the community, civil society and the private sector, among others.



Young people participating in the opening of the Center for Young People in Teotepeque

## III. Context of the study

Educo's work is focused on the promotion and protection of children's rights, within the framework of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). This focus leads to the application in all of our actions of the four fundamental principles of the convention, one of which is the right of children to express their opinions and be taken into account in all issues that affect them. Equally, as an institutional principle, we are committed to guaranteeing the participation of children and adolescents and young people, and those that accompany them, in the full enjoyment of their citizenship.

Educo is therefore committed to implementing and promoting feedback mechanisms in its action areas, so that the CAYP that participate in our work have a voice in the activities we deliver and the decisions we make. We think it is our duty to listen to, respond to, and take into account the opinions of children, adolescents and young people, their families and communities in order to be accountable to them, and we think this process will allow us to improve how we adjust our programs and projects to their needs, and therefore strengthen quality and effectiveness.

Within the accountability and transparency framework, having effective mechanisms for receiving and managing the opinions and complaints of the participating population in the projects is a requirement demanded by various quality standards developed for NGOs, both nationally and internationally. But, despite the fact that many of these NGOs are already working in the implementation of feedback mechanisms for the communities they work in, there is still very little information available about the accessibility of feedback mechanisms specifically aimed at children, and the actual use of these mechanisms by children, adolescents and young people. The first phase of this study emerged in response to the lack of information available about this area.

First Phase: Interinstitutional Study about Feedback Mechanisms Adapted to Children



Adolescents participating in a jewelry workshop in the Teotepeque YC

The first phase of this study<sup>1</sup>, published in 2015, was carried out in collaboration with four other international NGOs that work with children – Plan International, Save the Children UK, War Child UK and World Vision – with the aim of documenting experiences in the management of feedback mechanisms adapted to children and their accessibility. The study was based on a review of existing literature and responses to questionnaires and interviews carried out with NGO staff in the different countries they work in.

Among the findings of the first phase, it is observed that, in general, the participating organizations have managed to implement feedback mechanisms which are used by some children, adolescents and young people. However it is highlighted that access is still not universal and that there are CAYP that cannot or are not willing to access these mechanisms. Various explanations are given for this lack of access, among them a lack of awareness of these mechanisms and how to access them, a lack of information about the organization's work, fear of the confidentiality of the channels or their potential negative consequences, shyness and lack of confidence, as well as a lack of appropriate channels for CAYP with high levels of illiteracy and those with disabilities. The conclusions also

<sup>1</sup> Interagency Study on Child-Friendly Feedback and Complaints Mechanisms with NGO programmes https://educo.org/Educo/media/Documentos/ Prensa/Child-friendly-feedback-mechanisms-report.pdf

indicate, according to the views of project technical staff, that the organizations only receive a small part of the suggestions and complaints that they would hope to receive from the CAYP, especially from those in the most vulnerable situations.

In the light of the results of the research, some recommendations were made for the implementation of feedback mechanisms which are more accessible and better adapted to children's needs.

- 1. Involve the CAYP in the design and implementation of feedback channels and in their monitoring and evaluation. The participation of CAYP in the whole process can help to increase their confidence in the mechanisms and in the organization, raise awareness of their rights and encourage the design of mechanisms better adapted to their preferences and possibilities, therefore solving the problems of accessibility identified.
- Collect disaggregated data about the feedback channels. The collection of disaggregated information can provide information about the use of mechanisms on behalf of children and more vulnerable groups like children with disabilities, in order to treat gaps in access afterwards.
- 3. Systematically evaluate the feedback mechanisms to make sure that they are still responding to the preferences and needs of the CAYP. The ongoing monitoring of how the mechanisms work will ensure on the one hand that they are still relevant and on the other that the opinions of the CAYP are reflected in the planning and decision-making processes.
- 4. Collect socio-economic information and carry out a mapping of the context in order to identify the role that the context plays (projects in rural or urban areas, humanitarian action projects, or development projects, for example) in the preferences and the use of the mechanisms and adapt them consequently.

# IV. Objectives and Approach of the Second Phase

On the basis of the results of the first phase of the study, the development of the second phase was proposed to consolidate and investigate the findings further. Applying a learning in action approach was proposed, based on consultations with children, adolescents and young people, which would enable working on the real challenge of implementing feedback mechanisms adapted to children in an Educo project.

#### The main aims of the second phase are:

- Test tools for consulting CAYP of different ages about the feedback mechanisms they prefer to use.
- Identify which feedback mechanisms CAYP identify more with and feel more comfortable with, and those that are better adapted to their needs.
- Revise, adjust and strengthen the feedback mechanisms aimed at CAYP already implemented in Educo projects, making them more accessible and adapted to the contexts of children, adolescents and young people.
- Support the process of identification, design and implementation of new feedback mechanisms for children and young people in Educo projects.

#### Furthermore, a series of key questions are identified for guiding the research:

What information do CAYP receive about the project?What feedback mechanisms are used by CAYP? How often?Which are the barriers faced by CAYP for using feedback mechanisms?How should we communicate the actions we take to CAYP?Do we take the complaints and suggestions we receive from CAYP into account?

These questions make up the foundation of the second phase of the study and guide the design of the methodology which will be applied in the consultations with groups of children, adolescents and young people.

In accordance with the needs of the research, the Casas de Encuentro Juvenil (Centers for Young People) Project in El Salvador is chosen to carry out the second phase of the study. This project, which currently takes place in nine municipalities in El Salvador, combines the following characteristics

• Participation of children, adolescents and young people (between the ages of 6 and 12)

- Project continuity: Educo has been working with the Casas de Encuentro since 2004.
- Presence of a multidisciplinary team which has participated in consultation processes with CAYP in previous years.
- Logistical feasibility for carrying out all of the phases of the process (for example the testing of methodology, consultations, validation of results, etc.)



Entrance to the Teotepeque Center for Young People

# V. El Salvador and the Centers for Young People





Educo El Salvador is present in the five departments in the country: La Libertad, La Paz, San Vicente, Usulután and Morazán. In these departments it works in 56 municipalities through eight projects focused on education, child protection and good governance.

In the framework of the work which is carried out in the country, strategic relationships have been established with different primary and secondary duty bearers. Among them, we can mention the following:

- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Health
- Instituto de la Juventud (Youth Institute, In juve)
- El Salvador Culture Secretariat
- National Council of Children and Adolescents
- Salvadorian Institute for the Integral Development of Children and Adolescents (ISNA in Spanish)
- Municipal Governments

El Salvador is also the country that has ratified the highest number of international treaties related to CAYP rights, among them the three facultative protocols of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

With regard to legislation relating to children and adolescents, El Salvador has had a Law for the Integral Protection of Children and Adolescents (LEPINA) since January 2011, and ever since it went into force the process of construction and installation of the National System for the Integral Protection of Children and Adolescents (SNPINA) began, with the aim of decentralizing actions for the protection and defense of the rights of children and adolescents and as a way of applying the Doctrine of Integral Protection. Also, in 2012 the General Law for Youth was approved, which aims to guarantee their fundamental rights as well as favoring their social, political, cultural and economic participation.

However, despite having a complete legal framework based on comprehensive protection, in practice the progress in guaranteeing children's rights is still not being taken on by the State, society and families, because in general there continues to be a protective attitude towards issues that involve children and adolescents. Additionally, the phenomenon of violence affecting the country at this time has caused very high rates of crime and violent assaults, and unfortunately adolescents and young people are the most vulnerable and are more likely to victims of this situation.

In response to these gaps, a strategy is being developed which involves working with this vulnerable section of the society.

As a member of ChildFund Alliance, Educo El Salvador participates in two global initiatives which aim to contribute to objective 16.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which focuses on eliminating violence against children. On the one hand, El Salvador will be a pilot country for Educo in the initiative *Child-Friendly Accountability* from ChildFund, which aims to promote empowerment processes with children, adolescents and young people in order to monitor the advances of the State and institutions in their commitments to objective 16.2 and ensure effective accountability. El Salvador will also participate as a Pathfinding Country in the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, with the aim of supporting the national measures which prioritize the elimination of violence against children at political and program levels.

In the case of the Centers for Young People (CYP) project, its main aim is to contribute to the strengthening of the protection factors in the violent context which children, adolescents and young people are exposed to. The Center for Young People is an educational and social

space which offers training aimed at giving the participants the opportunity to develop and exercise their rights consciously and progressively. The project aims to inform, raise awareness and educate children, adolescents and young people about their fundamental rights and duties, and mechanisms for care, self-care, protection and reporting.

The experience with this project began in 2004 within the framework of the initiative "Cultural and Social Spaces for Young People" (Espacios para la cultura y el encuentro juvenil), with activities aimed at adolescents and young people. Educo has collaborated in the creation of 18 Centers for Young People in the areas it works in, and the project has been adjusted and adapted according to the requests and social changes that the community is facing. Currently the Centers for Young People also offer activities for children aged 6 and up, as a result of the success of the project and the detection of a need to cater for this age group.

One aspect that can be highlighted is that local governments have taken on their coresponsibility for the work involved in the Centers for Young People, they contribute part of the budget for the project and then once they have been running for a year they progressively take on the full cost. Because the project has generated very good results and learning, Educo has decided that it is important to systemize the experience as a strategy so that it can be taken up again as an alternative for working with children and young people.

# VI. Methodology



Consultation methodology validation session, with children aged 6 to 8 in the CYP in San Juan de Tepezontes

The investigation was carried out based on a learning in action approach, in which consultations took place with groups of participants in the projects aged from 6 to 21, and a group of technical staff. Participative methodologies were developed and adapted to the different age groups, which aimed to ensure the involvement and inclusion of all of the participants.

Below is a summary of the construction phases of the study:



Limits of the study

• The investigation was carried out with the children, adolescents and young people that normally participate in the YC project activities.

Therefore the people consulted are not a representative statistical sample and the sample does not include all of the diversity in the CAYP sector. If the conclusions and recommendations from this study are used in other contexts the adaptability and replicability of these would need to be analyzed, because the results correspond to this specific group and does not represent the whole population.

- Some of the CAYP invited to the consultations at the CYP in Teotepeque did not come due to the insecure and violent situation in their communities. The young people and adolescents that had to travel the furthest were those most affected.
- Although the result validation sessions worked very well with the groups of adolescents and young people, the young children (6 to 12-year-olds) found it more difficult to remember what they had said in the consultation sessions and understand the aim of the session, and the methodology had to be modified. The needs of this group would need to be reassessed in the future designs of these result validation sessions.

## 6.1 Research Ethics

The study was carried out within the framework of respect for national and international standards regarding children's human rights, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Law for the Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents (LEPINA in Spanish). It also applied the relevant internal policies and protocols for guaranteeing the security, protection and confidentiality of the children, adolescents and young people that participated, in order to avoid any negative impact which would affect their wellbeing and integrity during and after the consultation.

In accordance with these principles, the following protocols were applied to the research:

#### Protection

• All of the people that had direct contact with CAYP during the study accepted and signed Educo's Child Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Educo Child Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct: https://educo.org/Educo/media/Documentos/InformacionFinanciera/Child-Safeguarding-Policy-and-Code-of-Conduct\_2.pdf f

- As part of the preparation for the consultation sessions, risk assessments were made, in the meetings with the facilitators and CAYP Center for Young People committees, in which the physical spaces for carrying out the consultations, the timetables and the participation of responsible adults were all assessed.
- In relation to the photos, videos and audios from the consultation, the CAYP were informed about what these would be used for and written and verbal permission was obtained both from the CAYP and their parents and/or guardians, before each session.
- There were always two adults minimum in each consultation session with CAYP.

#### Participation

- The Educo Participation Standards for Children and Adolescents<sup>3</sup> were applied before, during and after the carrying out of activities developed with participants of the projects in the framework of the study.
- Before the start of each consultation, the facilitating team communicated the aim of the session and the objectives of the study clearly to the CAYP and their guardians, as well as how the information collected would be managed, adapting the information to their necessities.
- The participation of the CAYP was voluntary and the decision to not participate in any phase of the process was respected. The CAYP signed an informed consent form in order to participate (in the case of younger children, their parents or guardians signed it) and gave their consent verbally before each session.
- Equal participation from all the different CAYP age groups was sought.
- It was ensured that participation in the study did not compromise the fulfilment of other rights, for example, participation in school activities, nor did it significantly compromise the leisure time of children, adolescents and young people.

## 6.2 Characteristics of the sample

The consultations for the study were carried out in three of the 18 Centers for Young People which Educo works with in the country, in the municipalities of Teotepeque, Santa Clara and Osicala. In the selection of the CYP, the fact that they included representation from different areas of the country was taken into account, as well as those with different socioeconomic and geographical contexts. In each of the three CYP chosen, four consultation sessions with children, adolescents and young people were carried out.

<sup>3</sup> Educo Child Participation Standards: https://educo.org/Educo/media/Documentos/somos/Child\_participation\_standars\_20150511\_Educo.pdf

Also, a consultation with a group of facilitators and library staff from the CYP was carried out in the central Educo office in San Salvador.

Below is a summary of the characteristics of the sample used for this study, by g	ender
and age group:	

Age groups/role		ď	TOTAL
Project participants – aged 6-8 years		17	38
Project participants – aged 9-12 years		17	41
Project participants – aged 13-16 years		24	51
Project participants – aged 17-21 years		19	31
TOTAL		77	171
Project Staff - adults		5	13
TOTAL		82	205

A STEEP<sup>4</sup> analysis of the profile of the Centers for Young People project participants enables us to highlight the following external factors, which affect the results of the consultation:

#### Social Aspect

AIn the community, there are no spaces which promote the organization of children, adolescents and young people. On the other hand, Salvadorian society does not recognize the right to participation as a fundamental human right, because there is a high level of influence from the Irregular Situation Doctrine<sup>5</sup> in which children and adolescents are regarded as passive objects and not as rights holders.

Another aspect to highlight is the situation of violence and insecurity which the country is living in at the moment. The strong presence of gangs and organized crime limits the free access of some adolescents and young people to employment and studying opportunities outside their area of residence.

Although some progress has been made, there are still some significant gaps in gender equality in Salvadorian society. The women who are underrepresented in the political

<sup>4</sup> STEEP (Social, Technological, Economical, Environmental, and Political) analysis.

<sup>5</sup> Irregular Situation Doctrine: This model conceived children as objects of protection rather than subjects of rights. Under this framework, children who had committed a crime were treated equally as well as those who were in a state of material and moral danger or neglect, or who had a physical or mental disability.

spheres are more likely to be victims of poverty due to the range of gaps in employment conditions, and there is an alarming rate of gender-based violence which has gone up in recent years. Also, culturally in the family environment education is a privilege normally given to male children and girls are limited to developing their domestic skills, because the idea that the society and the family have is that girls are in charge of domestic labor and caring for children.

#### Access to Technology

El Salvador is a country with a growing number of people who decide to migrate, most commonly to the US, and this situation facilitates the access of some CAYP to technological devices like tablets, computers and mobile telephones.

CAYP participants in the Centers for Young People have access to technology both in rural and urban areas, however in the rural areas access is more limited due to financial factors, because families' incomes tend to be less in rural areas than in urban ones. Additionally, in some municipalities in the country there is free access to Wi-Fi networks, which also can be an aspect which facilitates the access of CAYP to the internet and social media.

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#### **Financial Aspect**

The CAYP from the Centers for Young People come from areas in the country with high levels of poverty, where access to development and education opportunities is limited, especially access to secondary and higher education for adolescents and young people. On the other hand, the lack of financial resources in families leads to a need for CAYP to look for work as soon as they reach adulthood, or even before, in order to contribute to the family finances. However the lack of employment means that the most accessible employment opportunities are agricultural and domestic, as well as seasonal employment, like for example the coffee harvest in some municipalities

#### **Environmental Aspect**

The communities which the Centers for Young People are located in are considered vulnerable to environmental catastrophes, especially floods and landslides caused by hurricanes, tropical storms and earthquakes. These situations lead to difficulties in access to basic health and education services, which particularly affect children and adolescents.

On the other hand, in the last few years the country has had periods of draught which have generated considerable financial losses, especially in the harvest of basic grains. These losses have worsened the poverty situation for many families, with a significant impact on the child development, and has led to an increase in school abandonment, child labor and levels of malnutrition.

#### **Political Aspect**

There is not a clear awareness of the need to work with an approach based on Human Rights, and, at the same time, young people and adolescents are unaware of the governing bodies that guarantee their rights.

Also, in most cases, at municipal level there are no local policies aimed at guaranteeing the rights of children, adolescents and young people. This absence of policies means that the duty bearers are not committed to generating citizen participation methods in which CAYP could express their doubts, complaints and suggestions.

Another important assessment of the political aspect is the use of these communities in electoral periods, since adolescents and young people are often used for propaganda and political party proselytism.

## 6.3 Validation of the consultation tools

Once the different consultation tools have been designed, sessions for validating the methodology with each age group are carried out in order to identify possible improvements and to adapt the consultation to the needs of the participants. The tool validation sessions

were carried out in the Centers for Young People in San Juan de Teotepeque (La Paz Department) and in Teotepeque (La Libertad Department). According to what was learnt in those sessions, the methodological guide for the study was updated in order to apply the changes in all of the consultations.

## 6.4 Methodology Development



Consultation methodology validation session, with children aged 6 to 8 in the CYP in San Juan de Tepezontes

In all of the consultations, it was emphasized that the children, adolescents and young people could opt to not participate in the sessions if they wanted to. They were also asked for permission before any photos or videos of the day were made. As an introduction to the consultation, the right to participation aimed at feedback mechanisms was contextualized and the objective of the study was explained, as well as its uses and the importance of their opinions.

## The Participation Carousel

With the group of children aged 6 to 8, the 'participation carousel' technique was used. This tool was developed from the creation of three stations, represented by parts of the body: the ear station, which represents everything related to what the children have heard about Educo and its projects; the mouth station, which represents everything related to the way in which the children talk about or want to talk about their doubts, complaints and suggestions through the feedback mechanisms; and the head station, which represents everything related to the ideas that the children have about the feedback mechanisms and the management of their complaints and suggestions. The methodology was developed in a very playful, dynamic way, with games and music, and with images of each station hanging on the wall.

In each station the relevant issues were addressed through an open dialogue with the children. In order to stimulate the debate, images of the Educo projects and the possible feedback mechanisms were shown. In the last station, to liven up the session and diversify the consultation techniques, the children were asked to draw pictures of the feedback mechanism they would like to use in the project.



Consultation session with children aged 6 to 8 in the CYP in Santa Clara

#### The H Tool

With the group of children aged 9 to 12, the H methodology was used, a methodology developed by Save the Children to generate qualitative and quantitative data about their preferences in relation to the feedback mechanisms. We adapted the tool, which is part of

the Children's Satisfaction Tool from Save the Children, in order to test it in the specific context of this project.

As a first step, the Educo projects the children knew and the ones they had participated in were identified. The participants were divided into two groups (one of boys and one of girls) and the H was used (a giant H made out of card, with space to write on each part of the letter) to pose the five key questions of the study (detailed on page 7, in the section 'Objectives and Approach of the Second Phase') and register the positive and negative comments. In their answers, the children spoke mostly about the Center for Young People, but there were some comments about other Educo projects that they knew.

Afterwards each participant was asked to evaluate (from 0 to 10, marked on the central part of the H) the feedback mechanisms currently being used in the Center for Young People. This process was carried out anonymously using a ballot box, with separate answers from boys and girls.

## Adolescents and Young People Focus Groups

The opinions of the adolescents and young people were gathered using the focus group tool, with a high content of participation techniques and motivating activities. In each Center for Young People consultation sessions with one or two groups of adolescents aged 13 to 16 and one or two groups of young people aged 17 to 21.

The focus group sessions were guided like an open conversation in which each participant could comment, ask questions or respond to other participants' comments. Based on the key questions identified, a series of sub-questions were defined to guide the dialogue with the adolescents and young people.



Participant in the focus group for 17 to 21-year-olds in the CYP in Teotepeque

#### Focus Group for the Project Technical Staff

In the case of the project facilitator and the librarian staff, the consultation was based on the issue of the barriers that can appear in the use of the feedback mechanisms by CAYP participants. The use of current feedback mechanisms, the existence of barriers, the improvements introduced, and their effectivity were all discussed.

#### **Evaluation of the Activity**

All of the consultation sessions concluded with an evaluation activity in which the participants expressed their opinions about the workshop using cards with faces showing different emotions on.

## 6.5 Data Analysis

Once all of the information was fed into a matrix that had been prepared beforehand, an analysis workshop was carried out with the technical staff involved in the elaboration of the study to examine the results in depth —both the information gathered in the matrix, and the observations made during the consultations – and identify any conclusions or recommendations.

This process included the participation of all of the technical staff that developed the consultation process in the three Centers for Young People, which ensures the inclusion of the perspective from each different age group and geographical area that participated.

On the other hand, the results analysis workshop methodology allowed for the construction of validation tools for the conclusions from all the technical staff, thus taking advantage of their experience in the consultation process and their knowledge of the CAYPs who participated in the process.

## 6.6 Validation of Results

The validation of the results with the people who participated in the study is part of our commitment to accountability. To guarantee their roles as collaborators in the study, it is very important that the children, adolescents and young people have the opportunity to express their opinions and provide feedback in all the phases of the project. In the same way, validating the preliminary conclusions with the CAYP allows us to check that the

findings we have identified are a true reflection of their opinions and ideas or, on the contrary, make any necessary adjustment.

The preliminary conclusions of the study were initially shared with a representation of children, adolescents and young people from the Teotepeque Center for Young People, to test the validation tools and adjust them if necessary. Subsequently, a validation process was carried out with the CAYP from the CYP in Osicala. It is worth mentioning that in the CYP in Santa Clara the validation process could not be developed, because it coincided with the fact that most of the participating CAYP were involved in other school activities.



Result validation session with children aged 9 to 12 in the CYP in Teotepeque

## VII Findings

#### What information do the CAYP receive about the project?

Diverse opinions were observed in the different age groups regarding the type and quality of the information they receive about the project. It is generally agreed that they receive information about the project, and in general the participating CAYP know how to identify the projects and activities specific to Educo.

However despite the fact that in general the participating CAYP feel that they receive information about the project, the four age groups coincide in the opinion that the information they receive **tends not to be complete, relevant or of interest to them.** 

"What we would like to know, because Educo is an NGO that supports lots of countries, is how do they get their funding? How much do they invest in the projects?". Participant in the group of adolescents aged 13 to 16 in the CYP in Osicala.

Similarly, various participants consider that the information that they are given is not very useful because it **doesn't encourage their participation in the decision-making processes.** This weakness is something that is even detected in the consultations with the youngest participants, perhaps because the mechanisms for participation and spreading the information about the CYP has always been aimed more at adolescents and young people, because historically the activities in the CYP are aimed at these groups. Now that younger children have been incorporated in the project, there is a proposal to re-evaluate the operational methodology so that **the youngest participants are also included in the spaces for decision-making and information communication**.

Another highlighted issue, especially among the adolescents and young people, is that the **information takes too long to arrive**. This could be linked to the fact that at these ages the participants are used to communicating instantly using social media, and they feel that the project communication doesn't have the same speed.

"We like communication to be quicker, like on social media". Participant from the group of young people aged 17 to 21 in the CYP in Santa Clara.

Among the participants aged 9 to 12 and 13 to 16, in some cases there was criticism for the fact that changes to the projects are not communicated, something which has a direct effect on the CAYP's daily lives.

"We are hardly ever told about changes to the activities". Participant from the group of adolescents aged 13 to 16 in the CYP in Santa Clara.

However this feeling was not shared by all of the consulted CAYP: there are various positive responses, especially among adolescents and young people (aged 13 to 21), from participants that feel informed specifically about this type of aspect. In some cases, the adolescents and young people confirmed that they **receive notifications via social media and message apps**.

"We are told about changes via Whatsapp...". Participant from the group aged 17 to 21 in the CYP in Santa Clara

This difference in perception could be related to the access to information dissemination mechanisms, because the CAYP consulted highlight on various occasions that the mechanisms in use for communicating information **are not adapted to their needs or are not accessible**. A clear example of this is access to social media, especially for the younger participants and those that live in the rural parts of the municipalities where the projects are carried out. Of these groups, many participants indicate that they do not have access to social media and are therefore excluded from this type of communication.

**"Social media is used but some of us don't have it"**. Participant from the group of children aged 9 to 12 in the CYP in Santa Clara.

Indeed, the consultations reveal **a lack of formal mechanisms for sharing information** in the project. The CAYP consulted confirmed that they receive information when there is a relationship of trust with the project staff, but there are no formal systems for guaranteeing the provision of information. This leads to the information not reaching everyone.

"Not everyone is notified or informed". Participant from the group of children aged 9 to 12 in the CYP in Osicala.

One issue that could affect the building of relationships of trust between the CAYP participants and the technical staff is the level of involvement of the latter in community projects. In various CYP, the children (aged 6 to 12) indicate that they feel that **the lack of participation of the technical staff in community projects in their municipality** undermines their confidence in them, and limits communication and dissemination of information. They value and request that Educo's intervention be more involved with their community or family.



Consultation session with children aged 13 to 16 in the CYP in Osicala.

In the same way, it is important to note that the **importance of trust is perceived more among the girls than among the boys:** the girls name the project facilitators and talk about the trust they have with them to tell them things; instead the boys talk about the project staff more generally, without indicating specific names. Thus, the lack of community involvement between the project's technical staff and the CAYPs seems to affect girls more than boys.

"There are facilitators that when they see us in the community they don't talk to us and I don't like that". Girl from the group of participants aged 9 to 12 in the CYP in Santa Clara.

Some participants (including both adolescents and children) highlight the importance of sharing the information about the CYP activities with the duty bearers, so that there is consistency in the development of the activities. For them it is important that their parents are informed about what is done in the CYP and feel that communication with them could be better.

"They should send permission slips to our parents and they should know about the things that take place in the CYP". Participant from the group of children aged 9 to 12 in the CYP in Osicala.

# What feedback mechanisms are used by CAYP? How often? What feedback mechanisms would CAYP like to use?

The four age groups indicate that they have used a variety of channels for communicating with the project and sharing their opinions and ideas about it. They identify the suggestions box, participation in meetings and assemblies, direct consultations with technical staff, the CYP website, email and social media.

Currently the different CAYP groups agree that the **mechanism used the most and the one they trust the most** is direct dialogue with the project technical staff. However when asked what mechanisms they would most like to use to express themselves, various participants in the four age groups proposed other methods, like a suggestions box or social media. This means that although direct dialogue with technical staff seems to be the mechanism they use the most at the moment, that could be because of a **lack of alternative methods or lack of knowledge that other methods exist.** 

Among adolescents and young people, the use of social media is highlighted for communicating or informing about the project, but currently they are not used as an official mechanism for feedback. These groups indicate that they would like **social media to be introduced as an alternative and official feedback mechanism for the project**.

"[Facebook] is used more for promoting the activities, not as a mailbox for receiving complaints and suggestions". Participant from the group of young people aged 17 to 21 at the CYP in Santa Clara.

The youngest children also identify social media as a possible feedback mechanism that could be used, but they emphasize that they are mechanisms for adolescents and young people, because children of their age do not have access to them.

The different age groups, especially the youngest ones, and in particular the boys, propose a physical suggestions box as an alternative mechanism that they would like to use (in cases where it has not yet been implemented). The boys seem to prefer to give feedback anonymously: they indicate more often that they would like to use the suggestions box because they can use it without giving their name, and that would give them the ability to comment on issues that embarrass or scare them. "The suggestions box because that way no one can get angry with us for making complaints". Boy from the group of young people aged 9 to 12 at the CYP in Santa Clara.

In general, it seems that currently there is little use of the existing feedback mechanisms, especially among children (6 to 12-year-olds). In fact, in many cases the children in this age group do not even reply to the question about how often they use the mechanisms. Among the adolescents and young people a slightly more frequent use is detected, but mostly through meetings with staff from the project. However it is not clear that all of the adolescents and young people can or will participate in these spaces, and there are various participants that highlight the lack of alternative and inclusive mechanisms for everyone.

On the other hand, it is detected that the use of **the mechanisms depends on the time that the Center for Young People has been running in the municipality**. In the Santa Clara CYP it is observed that the participation of the CAYP is more limited; whereas in the CYP in Teotepeque, which has been running for longer, there is more trust among the CAYP participants and the project staff, and more use of the available mechanisms.

"There have been no barriers for talking to the Educo staff". "They generate trust". Participants from the group of young people aged 13 to 16 at the CYP in Teotepeque.



Participant in the focal group of 13 to 17-year-olds during the results validation, in the CYP in Teotepeque

## Which are the barriers faced by CAYP for using feedback mechanisms?

Generally, a very significant cultural barrier is detected, which means that many CAYP that participate in the YCs do not express their opinions, suggestions or complaints when something worries them because it scares or embarrasses them.

There are various participants that say they do not want to express their opinions because they are shy or embarrassed, perhaps because they don't know if their comments will be treated confidentially or how the complaint or suggestion will be managed. Also, there are participants that indicate that they do not use the feedback mechanisms because they are **afraid of the possible consequences**.

It is highlighted that mostly boys are the ones that talk about the fear issue, and they link it to situations of harassment or physical aggression from older boys. In these situations the children confirm that they don't say anything to the people in charge of the project, because they are afraid of what might happen. This has a lot to do with the violent situation that the country is going through at the moment, which tends to affect boys more directly.

"Sometimes we don't complain because if we do, when we come out they hit us". Boy from the group of young people aged 9 to 12 at the CYP in Santa Clara.

On the other hand, **shyness or embarrassment when expressing an opinion appears more often among the girls,** both the young ones and the older ones. This reflects the social and cultural expectations about the role of the woman and her lack of empowerment for participating in the public arena, expressing opinions and making decisions.

"It embarrasses me, I am very shy". Girl from the group of children aged 9 to 12 at the CYP in Santa Clara.

On the other hand, the CAYP participants say that another of the reasons for not using the feedback mechanisms is **the belief that their opinions will not be taken into consideration.** There are participants, from the different age groups, that indicate that they have felt let down on other occasions, when their suggestions have not been listened to. This discourages them and makes them less willing to participate on other occasions. When talking about the feedback mechanisms that they would like to use for example, one of the adolescent participants comments that they had proposed the creation of a suggestions and complaints box, but in the CYP this had not been implemented. "When what has been said is not done, it is disappointing". Participant from the group of adolescents aged 13 to 16 in the CYP in Osicala.

In relation to this, the perception that **the project staff do not have time to listen to the CAYP** is detected, and that they don't act on the complaints and suggestions that are presented. The CAYP perceive that the technical staff have a heavy workload, and they think that they don't have time to dedicate to these issues. This idea is detected in particular in the groups of adolescents and young people, perhaps because they are more aware of the work the technical staff do and the other responsibilities they have.

"Sometimes they don't pay attention to us, because of all the work they have". Participant from the group of young people aged 17 to 21 at the CYP in Teotepeque.

Another important barrier detected during the consultations is **a lack of knowledge of the mechanisms that exist,** which implies a lack of promotion and visibility, including information about how they work, and what the commitments of the organization and the rights of the project participants are.

"We don't know that there are communication channels for making a complaint about anything to do with Educo". Participant from the group of adolescents aged 13 to 16 in the CYP in Teotepeque.

This lack of information about the existence and management of the mechanisms is detected both among adolescents and young people, among both younger boys and girls; and they propose more awareness raising about what the mechanisms are and how to use them.

"These mechanisms and how they work should be promoted". Participant from the group of children aged 6 to 8 in the CYP in Santa Clara.

Ignorance of the feedback mechanisms can be attributed to the fact that often these mechanisms are not formally implemented, and therefore there are no established procedures or resources assigned to ensure they are run effectively and their sustainability over time. Additionally, it is possible that the lack of official and standardized mechanisms generates inequality in relation to the access to them, because the possibility of presenting a complaint or suggestion will depend on the relationship that the CAYP establish with the technical staff, or the will of the technical staff to promote this aspect.

The issue of inclusive access to the mechanisms emerges during the consultations as another barrier that some CAYP groups can come up against when they present suggestions or complaints or receive information about the project. In relation to social networks, for example, the different age groups indicate that there are various barriers to the use of this channel, as there are participants who, due to their economic situation, do not have smartphones (or other devices) or a continuous or efficient connection to the Internet. This situation is detected more frequently in rural contexts, where there is less access to these services.

On the other hand, there are participants that highlight that sometimes the mechanisms that are used are not adapted to the needs of all the CAYP participants, because those that do not know how to read or write do not have access to the information, nor can they present their complaints and suggestions through mechanisms like the suggestions box.

"There is the case of my sister, she almost can't read, and they don't listen to her". Participant from the group of young people aged 17 to 21 at the CYP in Teotepeque.

Do we take the complaints and suggestions we receive from CAYP into account?



Consultation session with children aged 9 to 12 in the CYP in Santa Clara

Among the children (aged 6 to 12) consulted, there were few responses to the question about whether or not their complaints and suggestions were taken into consideration. This could be considered as another indicator that although they know about the mechanisms, children of this age use them very little. There is considerable disparity in the answers to this question among groups of adolescents and young people. On the one hand, various participants provide positive responses, in which they state that their opinions are listened to and that changes have been made to the project as a result of their suggestions.

"We are always taken into consideration, for example when we organized the book collection...". Participant from the group of young people aged 17 to 21 at the CYP in Santa Clara.

However there are other CAYP participants that feel that their complaints and suggestions are not taken into account. Some state that the suggestions that they presented have not been carried out, and this produces feelings of disappointment. Others comment that some requests are taken into account, but others aren't, indicating a **lack of clarity regarding the way the suggestions and complaints received** are managed and the criteria for which the decision to act on them is based.

"Not all of them have been taken into account, for example workshops and committee". Participant from the group of adolescents aged 13 to 16 in the CYP in Teotepeque.

Additionally, **a lack of a formal reply** to the person who presents the suggestion or complaint has been detected.

"Most of the time they are silent, there is no reply". Participant from the group of young people aged 17 to 21 at the CYP in Santa Clara.

The replies from the CAYP consulted make it clear that the fact that **the suggestions presented are taken into account is probably the most important factor for encouraging the use of the mechanisms**, and their credibility. When a suggestion is materialized, the CAYP speak very positively about their participation in the CYP and its importance, and they feel listened to. However when measures are not taken and, most of all, when no **explanation is given about how the request has been assessed, trust in the mechanisms is significantly undermined**, and it is difficult to retrieve that trust.

## How should we communicate the actions we take to the CAYP?

In general, the youngest children (6 to 8-year-olds) do not reply to this question. This could be attributed to the fact that they do not have experience using the mechanisms, and it is therefore more difficult for them to reply, or that the children at this age are used to solving their worries in a more immediate way, by talking to the project technical staff.

In contrast, the other CAYP groups (aged 9 to 21) propose different ways of communicating the actions taken in relation to a suggestion or complaint. On one hand, **they suggest communicating the reply in writing**, with a letter or personal message, or a sign or public notice. Various CAYP propose communicating the reply using social media. On the other hand, the CAYP state that **they think it is good to say the replies in person**, by talking to the person involved, or informing everyone in the meeting.

In general, the CAYP do not show any preference for a personalized or public reply, although **the majority talk about public channels** in which the replies would be visible to everyone. Also, in most of their answers, the CAYP propose the use of **various different complementary communication channels**, **instead of just one**.



Children using online evaluation tools in the presentation of the results of the study in Santa Clara

"Announcements, social media, more frequent meetings". Participant from the group of children aged 10 to 13 at the CYP in Santa Clara.

"Through conversation, in writing or via messages". Participant from the group of adolescents aged 13 to 17 in the CYP in Santa Clara.

It is important to highlight that in response to this question the CAYP reiterate that for them **the most essential thing is for them to always get a reply** to their suggestions and complaints, and to see that something has been done as a consequence. For them, the way they communicate is secondary, the important thing is that the communication happens, and in a constant and systematic way.

"Always get a reply, that is what tells me that I am taken into consideration. See the action from what I suggested". Participant from the group of adolescents aged 13 to 16 in the CYP in Teotepeque.

#### Consultations with facilitators in the Centers for Young People:

During the consultation process a focal group with 13 facilitators from the Centers for Young People was developed. With this group the consultation centered on the identification of actions that could reduce the barriers for using the feedback mechanisms in the project, as well as trying to identify the improvements that the projects have introduced in these aspects.

Elements that came up during the consultation:

- Little specific knowledge about the feedback mechanism issue was identified among the facilitator team, and in this respect the replies were very general and vague.
- Despite insisting that the reason for the consultation was not to judge their work, when it came to talking about how to include feedback mechanisms in the project the replies from people showed that they associated them with their work being assessed. As a consequence, they took a defensive and reserved position in their replies.
- It is important to highlight that the facilitators are aware that everything related to the feedback mechanisms needs to be strengthened, because that makes the resulting actions more organic instead of just being institutionalized or considered within the project.
- On the other hand, the facilitators indicated that they tend to feel their hands are tied when it comes to complaints and suggestions that are outside their area of responsibility. In this respect, a lack of synchronization and coordination with the relevant authorities is detected, as this would allow for a more effective follow-up of the complaints and suggestions which should be passed on to them.

"When complaints about a service arrive, the internet or something else, it isn't that we don't want to respond, but that we don't have the resources, we pass on the request to the municipality and it is up to them...". Participant in the group of facilitators from the CYP in Santa Clara.

"Listening is one thing and finding a solution is another thing, we try to do everything we can". Participant in the group of facilitators from the CYP project.

# VIII Recommendations

## Disseminating information about the project

First of all, **consulting the CAYP about the information they want or need** is recommended in order to be informed and pass on their opinion about Educo's work. They should also be consulted about how they would like to receive the information (via what mechanisms and in what format) and how often.

Based on their contributions, it is recommended that a communication plan aimed at the CAYP be written which includes the dissemination of information about the project to the different age groups via various mechanisms, as well as communication about changes to the projects. That way the dissemination of information mechanisms is formalized within the project and the fulfilment of minimum standards in all the CYPs is ensured. This is fundamental for the transparency and dissemination mechanisms to become part of the management of the project and the philosophy of the organization.

Equally, when it is written, the communication plan should contemplate, at the very least: the context of the CYP and the time it has been running, the needs of the different age groups and genders, the different levels of education among the CAYP participants, and other possible barriers for accessing information. It should also consider the application of the *Educo Participation Standards for children and adolescents*<sup>6</sup>.

Simultaneously to the development of a communication plan for CAYP, it is advisable to **create a communication plan for the primary duty bearers** -the parents- in order to encourage their involvement in the CYP activities and a role of co-responsibility in the project.

## Design and implementation of feedback mechanisms adapted to children

It is recommended that, **during the planning phase of the projects** in which the CAYP participate directly, a **process for the design, elaboration and incorporation of feedback mechanisms** be considered a priority component. This process should be carried out collaboratively with the CAYP. Formalizing the implementation of feedback mechanisms is essential for ensuring minimum standards in the project, and that facilitators have the

<sup>6</sup> Educo Participation Standards: https://educo.org/Educo/media/Documentos/somos/Child\_participation\_standars\_20150511\_Educo.pdf

necessary resources (time, staff and technical capacity) to manage the mechanisms effectively. Additionally, lessons learned from the complaints and suggestions received should be considered in the planning phase. In other words, the **suggestions and complaints received should feed the evaluation and planning processes**, to enable the inclusion of improvements and to ensure that the voices of the CAYP are taken into consideration while the activities are being designed.



Consultation sessions with facilitators from the Centers for Young People

It is fundamental to **ensure the accessibility of the feedback mechanisms** for all of the groups of children, adolescents and young people that participate. This could be done via a mapping of the groups of CAYP potentially excluded, to ensure that all of them are contemplated in the mechanism designs. In the case of CYPs, it has been noted that special attention must be given to the needs of the youngest children, the ones that live in rural areas, and the ones that do not know how to read or write. Equally, the assessment of the accessibility should include the gender-based approach, in order to consider the different needs of boys and girls.

On the other hand, it is important to take into account the context of the project and the time it has been running in the municipality, because this can affect how much the CAYP trust the project staff, and as a consequence have an effect on the types of mechanisms that are chosen and the ways they are promoted. It is noted that the relationship with

the project staff is a hugely important aspect for the CAYP, and significantly affects their willingness to express their opinions. Therefore, it is essential to value the building and exemplary nature of trusting relationships between CAYP and facilitating staff and the promotion of sensitivity and empathy towards CAYP as key factors in encouraging their participation and sharing their views and concerns.

The results of the consultation show the need **to have a range of different complementary feedback mechanisms**, to ensure that all of the CAYP have access to them and to satisfy the preferences of the different participants. The multiplicity of the mechanisms is particularly important when talking about children, adolescents and young people, due to the differences in maturity, ability and understanding that can exist within these groups. It must be taken into consideration that some participants prefer to present their suggestions and complaints in writing, while others feel more comfortable talking to someone. Others, however, will only give their opinion anonymously, for fear or embarrassment. It is therefore important to promote and maintain all of the mechanisms that are implemented, even the ones that are used less, to guarantee inclusivity.

On the other hand, **encouraging the use of feedback mechanisms via promotional activities** is recommended for ensuring that the CAYP participants know that they exist and how to use them. Equally, they should know how they are processed and the timeline for getting a response, and what the criteria for acting on a suggestion or not are. The results of the study demonstrate that having information about how the mechanisms work increases the trust in them on behalf of the CAYP, and as a consequence could encourage their use. In the case of the suggestions box, it is proposed that next to the box there is information about how the suggestions are processed and how the reply will be communicated.

The promotional activities must be adapted to the reality of each municipality and the needs of the different age groups and should include a gender-based approach. Based on the replies from the CAYP consulted, the use of material like posters and flyers (which are permanently available) is proposed alongside occasional activities like videos or messages via social media, open days or meetings, to ensure that all groups of CAYP are reached, including the new CAYP that have just joined the project, and to keep the process alive and connected with the reality of the project. It is also recommended that the name of the reference person who the CAYP can talk to be made known, as well as their availability, because direct communication with the facilitator of the project is one of the preferred channels for the CAYP.

Additionally, informing about the feedback mechanisms should be framed within the promotion of a positive culture of feedback, learning and ongoing improvement, bearing in mind cultural situations like shyness, embarrassment and fear observed in the consultations when it comes to expressing disagreement or criticism. Creativity must be used in motivating CAYP to share their opinions and concerns, based on their reality and framing the information in the principles that guide the actions of the Educo staff: confidentiality, transparency and ongoing improvement, to name but a few.

"Telling children that no one will get angry if we tell them they are doing something wrong. It is important to explain things to children". Participant from the group of adolescents aged 13 to 17 in the CYP in Teotepeque.

As a part of the promotion of the mechanisms, it is recommended that **an emphasis is made on the changes made** and improvements introduced as a consequence of the contributions from the CAYP, in order to refute the belief that their opinions are not taken into account. The use of the mechanisms must be promoted to present issues related to the quality of the activities, not just aspects of quantity or logistics. It is fundamental **to ensure that the proposals received are always replied to formally** (and, where possible, in writing), and that an explanation is included that states how the request (the criteria used) has been evaluated and what the next steps are.



Results validation session with children aged 6 to 8, in the CYP in San Juan de Tepezontes

It is recommended that, as a pilot trial, **social media platforms be introduced as official feedback mechanisms.** Currently Facebook and Whatsapp are being used as informal communication channels in some CYPs, and now it is proposed that their use be formalized for presenting complaints and suggestions, while also ensuring the existence of

alternative mechanisms for the people that do not have access to them. **The writing of a protocol for the use of these platforms** is recommended, both for sharing information and presenting feedback, with special attention to confidentiality and response times.

If possible, it is suggested that knowledge of child-friendly accountability be included in the job descriptions for the technical staff but even then it is considered vital to carry out training and awareness raising activities with the project technical staff about transparency and child-friendly accountability and, specifically, about the management of feedback mechanisms adapted to children. Awareness must also be raised about the concerns identified in the consultations, in relation to the lack of participation of the technical staff in the municipal project and the availability they have for talking to CAYP and listening to their proposals.

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#### Websites:

www.feedbackmechanisms.org

www.feedbacklabs.org

## X. Additional documentation

- A Participants in the study
- B Methodological toolkit

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