

ICDI

International Child Development Initiatives

Young People's Voices





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Foreword

There are 24 rights; the most important are the right to live, the right to have a family, the right to say what you want. Many adults don't know that children have rights. (Jessica, Nicaragua)

This is one of the many quotes we gathered during 2006 and we feel that Jessica makes a point that can't be heeded well enough. Indeed, over and over again we see that children and young people are not being listened to, let alone taken seriously. We saw that again in three studies that we carried out, two in Eastern Europe - Bulgaria and Slovakia - and one in Nicaragua, which specifically sought to hear them out and, as always, these young people helped us to enrich our thinking and inspire our work.

Recording the voices of children and youth stimulate us to rethink how civil society can work toward improving the wellbeing of children and youth. It is well known that young people feel excluded from wider decision making processes and see many initiatives to increase their involvement as tokenistic. Yet, including young people in programming should result in, among others, programmes being more appropriate, inclusive and acceptable. A commitment to the rights of young people therefore means a commitment to continuously involve young people in decision making in ways that are truly meaningful - and to continuously assess how we go about this.

We hope this annual report will provide you with a good sense of our main activities to improve youth welfare in a wide range of countries as well as our main plans for the coming year. Young people voices will continue to guide ICDI priorities, and we look forward to working with an increasing number of partners to ensure the meaningful involvement of youth in decision-making processes.

Advice given to the headmasters of schools by a group of Roma children in Slovakia

...clean up the school area...paint the school violet and green...draw various pictures, change the playfield, so that children could play basket ball there...establish a control system there, so that this all wouldn't be destroyed afterwards, the control should consist of children, so they would respect it and keep it themselves...

From: Learning from winning Roma youth

Who we are

ICDI is a non-profit organisation that is practice, research and policy-oriented. We work globally to address violations of the rights of children and youth as well as barriers to the fulfilment of these rights. We recognise the fact that children's lives are shaped and affected by their circumstances and by many inter-linked processes and events that constrain their possibilities. We strive to tackle underlying reasons of rights' violations and find viable ways to resolve these underlying problems with our partners. The issues we focus on include: child labour, street children, child abuse and neglect, children affected by war, HIV/AIDS, child trafficking, commercial exploitation of children, children in prison, and domestic violence. We are also concerned that young children receive good care and education, that families under stress receive priority attention and that the needs of children who live without nurturing families are addressed.

Our guiding principles are the holistic development of children, the need to support families and communities, and to build on available knowledge and local strengths. We work internationally, collaborating with NGOs, government agencies and research institutions. ICDI is also active in international networks for children and youth and acts as a liaison between donors and local civil society organisations.

What we do

ICDI's core competence lies in its expertise in the field of addressing impoverishment, discrimination and social exclusion of children, and its ability to help specialist organisations step back from their immediate problems, understand underlying causes and find solutions to problems. We have extensive experience in policy formulation, development and management of programmes and projects, monitoring and evaluation, local capacity building, networking and coalition formation, action research, and training on problems of children and youth living in marginalised situations.

ICDI is not a grant-making organisation and does not provide financial aid to other organisations; it has to generate its own income, mainly through paid project work and consultancies and grants, and needs to be compensated for its technical assistance.

Where we work

At present, ICDI is involved in research and projects - in collaboration with our partners - in Bulgaria, India, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Suriname and Turkey. Our brief is, however, worldwide and we have the technical expertise to work with partners in virtually any part of the world.



ICDI Networks

We have built a diverse and broad network over the years. This network helps the organisation to stay in tune with the situation of children and youth in different countries, to develop good practices in decreasing vulnerabilities and risk, and improving equity and equality in the broader social context. ICDI staff represent the organisation on the boards of the following educational and developmental organisations and/or enjoys strategic relationship with them:

- The Balkan Children and Youth Foundation
- CARDEA, a regional children and youth care organisation in the Netherlands
- Children of Slovak Foundation
- The Civil Society Development Foundation, Romania
- Comenius Foundation, Poland
- EUKEF, the European Knowledge Exchange Forum
- EFSCW, the European Foundation for Street Children World Wide
- External Review Group (ERG) of the MBN, a group of specialists involved in the evaluation of major international development efforts sponsored by key Dutch agencies
- The Free and Democratic Bulgaria Foundation
- IDEA, International Debate Education Association
- IDPAD, the Indo Dutch Programme on Alternatives in Development
- IFCO, the International Foster Care Organisation
- ISS, the Institute of Social Studies, with which we manage ICCYS
- ISSA, the International Step-by-Step Association
- De 'Leidse Sleuteltjes'
- MV Foundation, India
- New Perspectives Foundation, Russia
- National Home for Child Rights (Kinderrechtenhuis Nederland)
- Friends of Prelukye, a youth prison in the Ukraine
- RAAK, Reflectie- en Actiegroep Aanpak Kindermishandeling, the Netherlands
- Sardes, the Netherlands
- The Trust for Early Childhood, Family and Community Education in Jerusalem
- SPOLU International
- UNESCO Newsletter on Early Child Development
- VBJK, the Research Centre for Early Childhood Care and Education, Belgium

Looking back: project and research activities in 2006

2006 was another busy year for ICDI. We were involved in a number of longer-term international development projects, such as the 'Children in Suriname Programme', and 'Building Civil Society by Strengthening the Life Skills of Institutionalised Children in Bulgaria'. In addition, we continued our collaboration with the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague on the International Centre for Child and Youth Studies (ICCY). Thanks to additional funding, we were able to recruit two additional programme managers in December. With two new staff members on board, we will be able to move into new fields and regions and cope with the increasing volume of work coming to us.

International project activities

Suriname: Children in Suriname (CIS) Programme

Programme goal: To strengthen the capacity and collaboration among agencies – mainly NGOs - working with and on behalf of children and youth.

Key partners:

- Association of Private Social Institutions – Vereniging van Particuliere Sociale Instellingen (VPSI), Paramaribo
- Klimop ('Climb up'), Paramaribo
- Surinamese Foster Care Foundation - Stichting Pleeggezinnen Centrale Suriname (SPCS), Paramaribo
- Tabiki Productions

Programme duration: Ongoing (since 1996)

Financed by:

- Funding of project partners activities by Schiefbaan Hovius Foundation
- Funding for the bi-annual 'Young in the Caribbean' newsletter by the DOB Foundation.

Total programme budget (2005-2007): € 291,000

Short description:

The overall coordination of the Children in Suriname programme rests with ICDI, whilst ICDI partners in Suriname are responsible for the actual implementation of activities. VPSI focuses on improving institutional care, working with children with handicaps, and general child advocacy and training. Klimop primarily works in the field of early child development and the training of early childhood educators and reaches out to large groups of young women wishing to work with young children. Finally, SPCS focuses on strengthening foster care in Suriname, offering an effective alternative to institutionalisation of children.

Main achievements in 2006 include:

- SPCS was again able to place children in need of alternative care in appropriate foster families – in 2006 this increased by a third, with the current total being 97 children. 25 new families volunteered to serve as foster families, of which SPCS positively evaluated 19. SPCS also worked on raising awareness in communities on sexual abuse of children and young people. A final example of SPCS's work is the start of a psycho-motoric therapy and diagnostics and observation programme allowing the organisation to provide more tailored care to children with serious and/or complex development problems.
- Klimop revised and finalised training modules for managerial staff of care-giving institutions and the first training sessions for 42 management level professionals started mid-2006. Of Klimop's first batch of early childhood care and education trainees, 16 of the 21 trainees successfully completed their training and were awarded an officially recognised diploma. The second batch consisted of a total of 60 trainees of which 43 sat their final exam, of which 38 graduated successfully. Klimop also continued its ongoing supervision of day-care staff, developed short training modules for these staff, and did much, much more..

The Children in Suriname programme suffered the loss of Robert Wijdenbosch, the director of VPSI, the founder of and driving force behind the SPCS, and our *switi brada* Robert Wijdenbosch tirelessly worked on issues relating to child welfare in Suriname. His presence and inputs, not only to our projects, will be greatly missed. Robert's passing away affected the management of VPSI and the implementation of its activities. The organisation struggled to replace Robert and other key staff members who had left. VPSI is close to filling the gap the various staff members left behind and we trust that in 2007 project activities will once again be implemented with the same energy as before.

The current programme will run until the end of 2007. New funds have been secured from Schiefbaan Hovius Foundation for an additional three years (2008-2010), which will allow the partner organisations to consolidate and expand their activities

'Children's safety in the newspaper' –reaching a wide audience on safety for children

Safety is increasingly becoming an issue in Trinidad. The Trinidad Guardian is a daily newspaper that takes the safety of its youth seriously, regularly publishing columns with practical tips. A few of the suggestions the paper has made to caregivers are:

- ✓ **Teach your children to yell loudly when they feel endangered. Their safety is more important than being polite;**
- ✓ **Know where and with whom your children are at all times. Remind them never to take anything or respond if approached by someone they don't know.**
- ✓ **Pay attention to your children and listen to them. If you don't, there's someone else who will.**
- ✓ **Security for school children: vary the drop-off times for your child and don't allow children to play or wait for collection outside the school gate.**

From: 'Young in the Caribbean', Vol 4, # 2, December 2006

Bulgaria: Building Civil Society by Strengthening the Life Skills of Institutionalised Children

Project goal: To prepare caregivers in child care institutions to stimulate children in the development of relevant life skills.

Partners: Free and Democratic Bulgaria Foundation, Sofia

Project duration: 2004 - 2007

Financed by: Matra Projects Programme, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands

Total project budget: € 579,497

Short description:

The project contributes to ongoing efforts in Bulgaria to modernise the child-welfare system and aims to prepare caregivers in child care institutions to work in a de-institutionalised environment and to stimulate the children in the development of relevant life skills.

Main achievements in 2006 include:

- Establishment of eight training teams.
- Implementation of 35 training sessions with caregivers on life skills and special needs.
- Implementation of three refresher training sessions for training teams on development of skills of institutionalised children to ease their re-integration into society, and conflict resolution and mediation in institutional care.
- Implementation of seven exchange visits to other towns in Bulgaria to share the project experiences with other child welfare professionals and strengthen relationships and networks with other professionals.
- Preparation of mini-projects in child care institutions to improve ties between children and institutions' staff, as well as with surrounding communities, and to increase staff and children's awareness of children's rights.

Eleonora - upbeat

I like the name Eleonora, beautiful name, is it not? I study in the high school My father is a truck driver and he travels a lot abroad, most of the time he is away ... and when he is not, there are other things to do. My mother is a teacher. I have a little sister. My parents are liberal with me and sometimes I want them to forbid some things for me. Before I felt embarrassed that I come from a village but I think I overcame it. My parents are afraid to let me go to a discothèque in the town in the evenings but they let me go anyway so that I do not feel different because I grow up in a village. I like my life; my family is not rich but I miss nothing. I would like to be a surgeon but I hear that it is extremely difficult for a girl to become one, especially if there is no one to help you. If I can't reach what I wish here I would go abroad if this would help my family.

From: Take us seriously! Bulgaria: a transitional generation finds its own way



Romania: Children and Youth as builders of Civil Society

Project goal: To improve the overall development of children and youth, focusing particularly on life skills and young people's preparation for an active role in society

Partners: Civil Society Development Foundation, Bucharest

Project duration: 2005- 2008

Financed by: Matra Projects Programme, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands

Total project budget: € 451,761

Short description:

The project seeks to strengthen the role of youth NGOs, in particular to build the leadership skills of youth leaders, their knowledge of democratic processes and institutions and their capacity to provide of life skills education to children and youth.

Main achievements in 2006 include:

- Strengthening of regional cooperation through a Master Trainer study visit to the Children of Slovakia Foundation, a partner organisation that has successfully rounded off a Matra financed project.
- By organizing a range of meetings and a national workshop, a national network was formed, consisting of representatives of civil society and government.
- In total, 18 Master Trainers were trained to provide training to personnel from youth NGOs on strengthening partnerships between civil society and public institutions, and on participatory teaching-learning methods and life skills.
- Preparation of the training of staff from 30 NGOs by the master trainers. In 2007, the 30 youth NGOs will devote their time to implementing a range of educational projects with children and young people, putting into practice what they learned during their training.

Slovakia: Removing barriers to full education of Roma children

Project goal: To provide technical assistance during the monitoring and evaluation of the Spolu project Removing Barriers to Full Education of Roma Children in Slovakia.

Partner: Spolu International Foundation, Utrecht

Project duration: February-March 2006

Financed by: Spolu International Foundation

Total project budget: € 8,050

Short description:

Spolu International Foundation works to improve the socio-economic position of Roma communities in Central and Eastern Europe. The organisation requested us to support the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of their project on 'Removing barriers to full education for Roma children' in Slovakia. It was decided to carry out the evaluation by providing young people from the Roma community with the means to directly voice their opinion on the barriers they faced in gaining quality education.

Main achievements in 2006 include:

- Conduct of a field study on 'Positive deviance of Roma youth'.
- Production of a booklet on 'Learning from winning Roma youth'.

Description of the study:

We interviewed a number of Roma youth who had done remarkably well in comparison with their (Roma) peers, despite the fact that they had grown up in similarly - 'unhappy' - circumstances. Despite the fact that all the odds appear to be against them, they do very well and for this reason the term 'positive deviance' is used. What is it that characterizes these young people? What might be some of the reasons for their seeming ability to overcome the various barriers they face?

The selected interviewees had been identified as children who considered themselves to be successful and who were perceived to be successful in their communities. Nine girls and three boys between 14-15 years from different communities took part in the study. The boys and girls came from Kremnica, which has a population of approximately 5000 inhabitants, of which 250 are of Roma origin; Chminianské Jabkubovany, which is one of the largest and poorest Roma communities in Eastern Slovakia; and Detva, a middle-sized town in Central eastern Slovakia. The results of the study and the recommendations of the young Roma's are presented in 'Learning from winning Roma youth' (Spolu, 2006).

Who or what makes the difference?

Having a person nearby who motivates and helps when needed was found to be one of the most important factors in helping - Roma - children do well. In many cases it was a direct family member or members: *my mother encourages me in learning the most, or my brother is an idol for me. He is only twelve years old, but he likes school so much that he would surely want to go studying. It's my brother who helps me. In other cases it was a teacher or another trusted and credible person: It was our special elementary school headmaster and the deputy of the headmaster, they talked to me, they kept persuading me to go to secondary school, ... they also talked to my parents...*

A demanding idol or role model was also found to be important: *I would like to be like my mother; she has an interesting job...or I would like to be like our headmistress, she can solve everything and give advice to anyone...*

Listening to the Roma children taking part in the study made us realise once again just how important the 'basics' of a safe home environment, social support, and quality education are.

From: Learning from winning Roma youth



Project activities in the Netherlands

Kinderrechtenhuis Nederland (National Home of the Rights of the Child)

Project goal: To create a national Child Rights' House Partners:

- Defence for Children International, Amsterdam
- Cardea Youth care organisation, Leiden
- Regional Centre for Education (ROC), Leiden. ROC is one of the oldest NGOs in the country
- The Heilige Gheest of Arme Wees en Kindertehuis Foundation, 'Holy Ghost Poor Orphans and Children Foundation'

Programme duration: Ongoing (since 1996)

Financed by: Municipality of Leiden and the UTOPA Foundation

Total programme budget: to be confirmed in 2007

Short description:

ICDI has its offices on the premises of what used to be Holy Ghost Poor Orphans and Children's Home established in the late Sixteenth Century. Renovations will start mid-2007 with the goal to turn the building into a national Child Rights House. This national house will provide space for two child-oriented NGOs - ICDI and Defence for Children International Netherlands - and will also be made available for activities with and for children and young people. The Child Rights House will offer facilities for both workshops and conferences on issues relating to child rights and welfare, and activities by, with and on behalf of children and young people.

Main achievements in 2006 include:

- A major development for ICDI was securing funding for the renovation and future rent of the building from the Municipality of Leiden and the UTOPA Foundation.

Implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

The CRC provides us with a framework for looking at the *needs* of children – old and new - through a *rights* lens. It reaffirms the rights that children have as human beings and gives them additional rights that arise from their special needs and vulnerabilities.

The CRC is an important and path breaking intervention that takes the needs of children out of the arena of charity and welfare and puts them squarely into the realm of rights. In addition, it provides a legally binding instrument that applies to all children. The question then is how these rights are to be translated into the day to day needs of diverse groups of children.

From: Newly emerging needs of children; an exploration

Under the umbrella of the national Child Rights House we will be able to explore the implications of the CRC and support partners around the world in clarifying issues surrounding rights and needs, the primacy of one set of rights over others and the roles and responsibilities of different duty bearers.

Partnerships

Plan Netherlands-ICDI Partnership

The special relationship with Plan Netherlands will allow us to undertake a number of important steps and activities. The partnership has two main components: to give shape to the Child Rights House and carry out further innovative research; and to strengthen ICDI capacity by investing in new staff.

At the same time, ICDI will contribute to Plan's knowledge base and experience by sharing lessons learnt in our work. Within this partnership, we embarked on an 18-month research project that aims to create a universally-applicable set of indicators for psycho-social development of five-year-old children. The working title of the research project is 'UPSI-5' (Universal Psycho-social Indicator – 5).

The arrangement has an initial duration of three years but may continue if both parties are happy with it. The total amount earmarked is € 344,000.

International Partnership programme

Programme goal: Capacity Building of Partner Organisations

Partners:

- Step by Step, Macedonia
- Civil Society Development Foundation, Bucharest
- Children of Slovakia Foundation
- Child Welfare Reform Project of the Bulgarian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

Programme duration: Ongoing (as of 2006)

With support from: Liberty Foundation, the Netherlands

Total programme budget 2006: € 29,670

Short description:

This programme came about as a result of the frequent requests from partner organisations to support them in developing their project ideas, and ICDI's experience of the benefits - in terms of mutual learning - of working in partnership and face to face.

Main achievements:

- Four study visits by seven colleagues from Bulgaria, Macedonia, Slovakia and Romania.
- Three project drafts and one programme draft developed for submission to funding agencies.
- Extended and strengthened partners' networks in the Netherlands and Belgium.
- Decision to turn the partnership programme into a permanent ICDI service.

ICDI received positive feedback from its partner organisations who indicated that the visiting colleagues returned with concrete ideas for improving their organisational performance. Our visitors were able to significantly expand their professional network and gained insight into the policies and approaches of various organisations visited. A number of concrete plans were formulated to develop programmes in the fields of life skills development of pre-school and primary school children, and strengthening conflict resolution skills for 11-15 year olds living in ethnically mixed region.

International Centre of Child and Youth Studies (ICCYS)

The International Centre for Child and Youth Studies (ICCYS) is a specialised unit for training, research and policy analysis, focusing on the needs of children and youth in developing, transitional and developed countries. ICCYS is a collaborative venture of ISS and ICDI. In 2006, ICDI was involved in the following activities under the umbrella of ICCYS:

■ Children, Youth and Development (CYD) Diploma Programme

Programme goal: To engage mid-career professionals in a critical overview of changing ideas and debates on selected problem areas affecting children and youth

Project duration: Ongoing (since 2003)

Financing of student participation in 2006:

- Plan Netherlands (ten participants)
- World Bank (one participant)
- Ford Foundation (four participants)
- Netherlands Fellowships Program/Nuffic (four participants)
- Self-financed (six participants)

Short description:

As in previous years, participants from across the world successfully completed the ten-week Children and Youth Development (CYD) diploma course. In total 25 mid-career professionals from 17 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, South and North America, and the Caribbean took part. The professional backgrounds of the students was equally diverse; the CYD class of 2006 included people working for international and national organisations, a TV producer, teachers, and government officials.

The course introduced key issues in analysis, policy-making and implementation, with the aim of engaging participants in a critical overview of changing ideas and debates on selected problem areas affecting children and youth.

The issues focused on were:

- Childhood
- Work and education
- Early Child Development
- Health and sexuality
- Rights of the Child
- Violence, abuse and neglect
- Youth marginalization and movements

■ Connecting People

Programme goal: To acquaint CYD students with the child and youth welfare sector in the Netherlands and Belgium

Programme duration: Ongoing (since 2004)

Financed by (support from): Stichting Dijkverzwaarig/van Stokkom

Total programme budget 2006: € 7,500

Short description:

The Connecting People initiative offers CYD participants class the opportunity to visit various organisations and meet a range of people working on issues relating to child and youth welfare in both the Netherlands and Belgium.

Main activities in 2006 include:

CYD participants visited a range of organisations in the Netherlands and Belgium, including:

- Cardea, a youth welfare and family support body in Leiden, where CYD participants learnt about sports as a means to work with youth with behavioural problems.
- Youth Incentives (YI), the international programme of the Rutgers Nisso Group which works on issues relating to youth, sexuality and rights.
- Plan Netherlands, an outspoken child rights based organisation.
- The Bernard van Leer Foundation, which works in the field of early childhood development. CYD participants took part in a workshop on 'the world of donors and financial subsidies'.



- VBJK, the Resource, Research and Training Centre on Early Childhood Care and Education, a joint initiative of the universities of Gent and Leuven.
- 'Kind en Gezin' ('Child and Family'), the Flemish governmental agency for children and families, which arranged a visit to a cross-cultural youth centre.

■ ICCYS Distinguished Fellowship Programme

Programme goal: To permit outstanding scholars and practitioners from developing or transitional countries to reflect on children's issues and to share their wisdom and experience with counterparts at ICCYS.

Programme duration: Ongoing (since 2004)

Financed by (support from): Plan Netherlands

Total programme budget (three year period): € 96,000

Main activities in 2006:

In 2006, ICDI received two distinguished fellows: Yvonne Caprino, executive director of Surinamese PCOS Foundation, and Vessela Banova, vice-president of the Bulgarian State Agency for Child Protection. Both Vessela Banova and Yvonne Caprino are in the vanguard of the struggle to create better life chances for socially excluded children and youth in their respective countries and have a great deal of experience and expertise to share.

During the time spent in the Netherlands, Yvonne Caprino looked into finding ways of improving educational services to children living in isolated and remote areas of Suriname, whilst Vessela Banova worked on contributing to the debate, practice and policy relating to child adoption and protection.

■ Rethinking Childhood and the New and Emerging Needs of Children and Youth

Project goal: To advance understanding of the shifts in life worlds of children and young people, and the new challenges and problems that these shifts bring with them.

Project duration: 3 years (2004-2007)

Financed by: Plan Netherlands

Total project budget: € 338,50

Short description:

The three-year research project 'Rethinking Childhood and the New and Emerging Needs of Children and Youth' (or 'NEN') is implemented by ICCYS as part of an agreement signed with Plan NL in 2004 to support an initial three years of activities under the heading 'Research and training for strengthening policy and practice on children, youth and development'.

Main achievements in 2006:

Within this partnership programme, ICDI produced two studies in 2006 detailing the voices of young people. One study was carried out in Bulgaria, the other in an altogether different setting, namely that of Nicaragua. The two studies will be compiled in book form in 2007, together with five similar studies carried out by ISS around the world (Egypt, Indonesia, India, Kenya and the Netherlands). The stories of the young people in Bulgaria and Nicaragua contained a fair number of similarities - in the wish for a steady home, having parents, being accepted by peers and being able to shape their own future - as well as many differences. Examples of differences include the contexts in which young people grew up - in Bulgaria, a country in transition from a centralized, planned economy to a market economy and in Nicaragua, a country that is still recovering from years of dictatorship - and the kinds of daily obstacles faced, e.g. street gangs in Nicaragua or lack of respect for children encountered in schools in Bulgaria.

Voices of young Bulgarians: Take us seriously!

Youth in Bulgaria: a generation of the transition finding its way.

What is the role of parents, teachers and other adults - the 'traditional mediators' - in the lives of young people in Bulgaria? This was the underlying question of the participatory research we carried out in Bulgaria in May and June of 2006. Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were conducted with respectively, over 50 and 32 young people between 13-19 years of age in urban, semi-urban and rural sites. The interviews began with letting young people describe their life stories to the interviewers, which gave them a chance to 'actively' reflect on their lives.

The young people taking part in the study all expressed the wish to have a different life to that of their parents, and that of the older generation as a whole. The young people were well aware of the fact that they lived in a rapidly changing society in which there was little space for 'family time'. Their parents were generally overstretched, trying to make a living. In many cases both fathers and mothers worked abroad and some of the young people rarely saw their parents, living with other caregivers instead.

A 16 year old interviewee - fashionably dressed with a shiny mobile phone - stated that she would 'prefer having my parents around to having a fancy mobile phone'. All young people interviewed seemed keen to talk about their parents' absence and how much they missed them. Even those parents working in Bulgaria did not have much time for their children. Says an interviewee from Sofia: 'I see my father sometimes, but do not spend much time with him; his work schedule does not overlap with the family's'. She concludes by saying that she does not miss him much, not anymore. The absence of their parents and the lack of attention the interviewees received from their parents were felt keenly, but these feelings appeared to diminish with time. They found 'substitutes' in their friends, extended family members and sometimes teachers.

The young people taking part in the study had clear views on the (lack of) quality of the education they received, saying it did not meet their expectations or needs. Their main concern was the general lack of discipline and respect of the rules among both teachers and learners. Some interviewees drew a parallel with the lack of 'discipline' in society, saying 'we lack discipline in school. Yet it is not possible to have discipline in school if there is total anarchy in society'. The youth interviewed pinpointed some of the structural causes of the lack of quality, clarifying that teachers generally had very low standing in society. Expecting high levels of motivation from people who struggled to make ends meet themselves, i.e. teachers, was hardly to be expected, the young people clarified. What was needed was a change of culture in the education system.

According to some interviewees Bulgaria was a 'selfish society'; 'everyone is focused on their own survival'. Interviewees demonstrated an impressively mature understanding of the fact that democracy is more than a constitutionally defined procedure of electing a government. They defined democracy as also meaning respect for diversity, providing space for voices of those perceived as weaker or less knowledgeable, and equality for all.

'There is a lot of work to be done in our society', says one of the young people. Judging by the young people's stories, two key issues to be addressed are child protection and family support for children and families where the parents are absent for long periods of time for work reasons, and the quality of education.

We were left with the overall impression that young Bulgarians are very capable in critically reflecting on their lives and society in general and are very articulate when sharing their views with others.

¹ 'The transition' here refers to that from socialist government (and a centrally planned economy) to a democratically elected government (and a market economy).

Voices of young Nicaraguans: Cristiaan, Elifelet, Maria, Nelson, Pedro and Nora

How do young people in Nicaragua experience being young and growing up? How do they perceive their lives, future and the possible challenges on their paths? We conducted in-depth interviews with nine young people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds in Managua, Nicaragua's capital city. The aim was to apply the notion of 'respectful listening'. The interviewers listened to the life stories of these nine young people and the report aimed to present their stories in a manner that was as close as possible to the original.

Nicaragua is striving to overcome the after effects of the civil war, Somoza dictatorship and natural calamities, which have made it one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere with one of the most unequal income distributions in the world. Nicaragua has a large young population - 53% under the age of 18 – and it is encouraging, though not entirely surprising, that young people feature high on the agenda. Adults are seen to struggle to meet the needs of young people however. Institutions that used to structure life and upbringing – such as the church and government – are no longer as relevant as they used to be, and young Nicaraguans face new challenges such as rising levels of (drug) crime and sexual abuse. The youth interviewed generally considered the nuclear family to be a myth; they saw families as 'messy' and in constant motion. Oftentimes women head the household, with men coming and going. It is in this context that the young people interviewed for this study speak.

The young Nicaraguans interviewed here talked a great deal about wanting a secure home. For most of the young people interviewed 'home' was not a place they could be sure of. **Nelson** for instance lives with a friend's family, but says: *To be truly happy, I need a real family, in that way I wouldn't have to work very hard to pay a rent and support myself, like I am doing now. I would like to live with my parents or at least with a member of my family.* **Pedro** has lived on the streets since he was eleven years old. He still longs for a home, saying that: *I got used to live in the streets but sometimes I would prefer to live with my brothers' when I don't have enough to eat or it's raining and I get wet or somebody hits me.*

Then there was the topic of education. The last ten years has seen a rise in school attendance in Nicaragua and though most of the interviewees saw education as the way to move on in life, for many getting a (good) education remained an 'elusive dream'. **Maria (17 years)**, for instance, has taken care of her younger brothers most of her life and now has a son of four years to look after. She says: *There is no money to go to school, to pay for notebooks or to pay teacher. I want my son to be a good boy and get an education. I want an education too, it is not too late.* **For others the combination of work and school proves to be too taxing. Yet others have more positive experiences. Elifelet, for example:** *The biggest change in my life was joining the Club (educational programme). This made it possible for me to fulfil my parent's dreams. My mother had no schooling. She now has the chance to give me a different life and a better future.*

The final main topic the young Nicas talked about was gender relations, and particularly about the vulnerability of women: *The guys from the street gangs think that girls are weak and they like to threaten them (Cristiaan), or My mother might think that I can take care of myself, because I am a boy, but my sister she needs protection in life, because she is a woman (Nelson).* **Gender roles in Nicaragua are traditional, with men working outside the home to provide an income and women multi-tasking inside and outside the home. Says Nora (16):** *I think that Nicaragua is a rather patriarchal country where laws are designed for the benefit of men and only for them... At home you can see that it is the man and not the woman who rules.*

In spite of it all, these are 'regular' children, expressing 'normal' wishes regarding family life, etc. **Nelson:** *Sometimes I try to analyse myself to find what is the main problem of all my problems. I came to the conclusion that the main problem might be myself but that also could be the fact that I have not been brought up by my parents but by myself. As I said before I miss my parents a lot but I also have to be strong for myself and keep going in life.*





The uncertainty of home and relationships in Nicaragua

Jessica is 16 years old and lives with the ten-member family of her boyfriend. Her boyfriend and his sister are the only ones who bring in an income to the family.

Jessica: I got pregnant because we were not careful. My mother never gave me any advice about how to prevent myself from getting pregnant. When my belly started to grow I couldn't believe that I was pregnant. My partner was very supportive and he encouraged me to have the baby although the abortion option was there. It's because of his support that I feel good about having the baby. I am not married to my boyfriend and this makes me feel insecure. He can leave me and I will have to carry on with the pregnancy by my own like my cousin did. My cousin has no support from her husband, only her mother is supporting her and I don't want to end up like that. I think that if my mother asks me to go and live with her again I will go for sure, because there I won't be hungry...

People keep asking me why I got pregnant so young, instead of enjoying my youth. I think they are right. I didn't enjoy my youth, and can't study for a degree and all because I was ignorant. Sometimes I wish I was single again; studying, doing the things that I used to do, like going for a long walk.

From: Voices of Young Nicaraguans at the beginning of the 21st century.

New publications and papers

ICDI books, papers and reports seek to meet the interests of academics, policy makers and practitioners by drawing on research data, but also on field impressions and responding to needs expressed by various stakeholders. We aim to provide concrete pointers for action in all our publications.

New publications in 2006 were:

- Romanian translation of the ICDI publication George, Shanti and Nico van Oudenhoven, *Stakeholders in Foster Care: An International Comparative Study*.
- Nico van Oudenhoven and Rekha Wazir, *Newly Emerging Needs of Children; an exploration*. Antwerp: Garant.
- Bulgarian translation of *Newly Emerging Needs of Children; an exploration*.
- Blanka Berkyová, Katarína Le_ková and Rutger van Oudenhoven, *Learning from winning Roma youth*, Kremnica: Spolu.

A full list of our papers and reports is available on our website: www.icdi.nl

And finally, a few examples of short-term or 'one off' international and national ICDI activities

- ICDI lectures to (master's level) students at ISS, the Hague.
- Lecture at the University of Bratislava on 'Newly Emerging Needs of Children' (November 2006).
- Participation as a 'junior partner' of Sardes in a Matra Flex project on ECD policy formulation in Turkey.
- Organisation of a study visit to the Netherlands for some twenty deputy mayors and policy makers from Bulgaria; these high-level professionals were all interested in social policy issues and, especially the phenomenon of 'out sourcing'.
- Guidance of a steady stream of practitioners, students and scholars
- Advisory mission to Comenius Foundation in Poland on ECD in rural areas



Looking forward: planning for 2007

ICDI remains - by choice - a relatively small organisation. We are glad, however, to have been able to recruit two new programme managers, Mathijs Euwema and Esther Miedema, who will begin work in January 2007. With new staff on board we will be in a better position to contribute more to development policy and practice.

ICDI's main plans for 2007 include the continuation of ongoing projects in Suriname, Romania and Turkey. New projects will be started in Bulgaria, Latvia and Serbia, and we will follow up on our work with removing barriers to education of Roma children.

We are also exploring ways in strengthening our collaboration with the NGO community in selected countries. One approach we are investigating is the establishment of local 'ICDI's'; ICDI Bulgaria and ICDI India are concrete options.

We will also give extra impetus to the partnerships with Plan Netherlands, ICCYS, and the Kinderrechtenhuis. With regard to the Kinderrechtenhuis: the current premises of ICDI, a monumental building dating back to the 1600s, will be renovated over a period of some two years. During this time we will develop the first multi-year programme of activities for, with and on behalf of children at local, regional and international levels.

One of our main tasks within ICCYS will be to 'decentralise' our activities and establish partnerships in selected regions. Finally, our research programme in the coming year, we expect to focus our research on building on our work on 'newly emerging needs of children' and, of course, making headway with the construction of UPSI5, the Universal Psychosocial Indicator for five-year old children. In addition, we will be looking into how the HIV/AIDS pandemic impacts on education and wellbeing of children.

Our special relationship with Plan Netherlands will be given ongoing attention and one of our main objectives will be to jointly generate new knowledge and seek effective ways to disseminate this through our networks.

Getting an education in Nicaragua

We'll sweat to get you an education.' **According to one of the children interviewed in the Nicaragua case study her father used to tell his children this. Another child however, describes how the combination of work and education can become too much of a burden;**

Geovany: *My family and my studies are two things that stopped me from having friends. I hardly ever had time to spend with friends. When I was in high school, I was compelled to travel by bus from village to the city and it took me two hours and 30 minutes to get to school. If I stayed in the park with friends my family scolded me because I arrived very late because of the distance. During the weekend I had to help my uncle and my mother in the restaurant and I did not have time to have fun. I always had that problem, a terrible routine, to help in the restaurant. Even during the week I had to work and study, the time went by so fast, I had to do homework and so many things that I could say my whole life has been very boring and tiring.*

From: Voices of Young Nicaraguans at the beginning of the 21st century



ICDI Board and staff

Board:

David Dunham, deputy rector, ISS
Thijs Malmberg, senior consultant, Ordina
Thanh-Dam Truong, senior lecturer, ISS
Nico van Oudenhoven, chairman
Rekha Wazir, secretary/treasurer

Staff per 1 January 2007:

Mathijs Euwema, senior programme manager
Jordan Lossifov, programme manager
Esther Miedema, programme manager
Bregje van Bemmel, office manager
Nico van Oudenhoven, co-director
Rutger van Oudenhoven, programme manager
Rekha Wazir, co-director

Staff turnover 2006: 0

Sick leave 2006: 0

ICDI international trainers:

Ales Bednarik
Barbara Henkes
Hans Kok

ICDI financial administration:

SynCount auditors in Bodegraven
Heemskerk Financial Advisers in Leiden

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