

**FOOTBALL AS A TOOL FOR PEACE AND INTEGRAL  
DEVELOPMENT IN THE ZENÚ INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY:  
ADDRESSING CHILD ABDUCTION, SOCIAL COHESION AND  
SUSTAINABILITY**



## SUMMARY

The Zenú indigenous community located in Sampués, Sucre, Colombia faces the serious problem of child abduction at the hands of subversive groups, profoundly affecting the development of young people and the social cohesion of the community. This situation has generated an environment of fear and mistrust, preventing the healthy growth and integral development of children, who present traumas and difficulties in their education and emotional well-being.

This study proposes to use soccer as an effective tool to promote peace and social cohesion among Zenú youth. Through regular sports activities, leadership and human rights trainings, and improvements in sports infrastructure, it seeks to offer a safe and positive space for children. Sports activities would not only provide a means for recreation and physical exercise, but also an environment where core values such as teamwork, discipline, and respect can be taught.

In addition, a detailed analysis of the current situation faced by Zenú children is included, exploring the causes and consequences of child abduction. The intervention proposal focuses on specific strategies to reduce kidnapping, foster social cohesion, and promote the integral development of young people. The expected benefits of the program, such as improved psychological well-being and reduced violence, will be discussed, as well as potential limitations and challenges, such as the availability of resources and cultural acceptance of the program.

**KEY WORDS:** Child kidnapping, Subversive groups, football, human rights.

## INTRODUCTION

The Zenú indigenous community, located in the departments of Córdoba and Sucre in Colombia, has historically suffered various forms of violence and marginalization. Among these problems, child abduction stands out as one of the most devastating, not only because of its immediate impact on victims and their families, but also because of its long-term impact on social cohesion and community development. This phenomenon has weakened the social fabric of the community, negatively affecting the general well-being and development opportunities of young people.

The abduction of children in the Zenú community is closely linked to the presence of illegal armed groups in the region, who often use abduction as a tactic to instill fear and recruit new members to their ranks. This context of structural and systematic violence has created an environment of insecurity and mistrust that affects all areas of community life. Families live in constant fear that their children will be abducted, which limits children's freedom of movement and opportunities to participate in educational and recreational activities.

This study proposes an innovative approach to address this problem using sport, and in particular football, as a tool to promote peace and social cohesion in the Zenú community. The choice of

football is not arbitrary; This sport has a significant presence in Colombian culture and has proven to be an effective tool for social integration and community development in various regions of the country. Successful experiences in other areas of Colombia, such as the program implemented by the organization Colombianitos, have shown that soccer can be a powerful platform to educate young people, foster discipline and cooperation, and create safe and positive spaces where children can develop well.



The objective of this study is to develop a comprehensive program that uses soccer as a means to reduce the incidence of child abduction, promote social cohesion, and empower youth in the Zenú community. Through the implementation of regular sports activities, leadership and human rights trainings, and the construction of adequate sports infrastructure, it is hoped to provide Zenú children and youth with the necessary tools and opportunities to overcome adversity and build a safer and brighter future.

The following sections will detail the specific objectives of the programme, the proposed methodologies for its implementation, a discussion

of the expected benefits and possible limitations of the approach, as well as a conclusion summarizing the main contributions and projections of the study. This comprehensive approach not only seeks to address the immediate needs of Zenú youth, but also to lay the foundation for long-term sustainable and harmonious development, promoting an environment of peace, security, and progress for the entire community.

## OBJECTIVES

The proposed program aims to comprehensively address the problem of child abduction in the Zenú community of Sampués, Colombia, using soccer as the main tool. The specific objectives of the programme are as follows:

- **Reduce the Incidence of Child Abduction:** Significantly reduce cases of child abduction in the Zenú community through the creation of safe spaces and the provision of recreational and educational activities that keep children occupied and away from risky situations. The goal is to reduce kidnapping cases by 30% in the first two years of the program's implementation.
- **Promote Social Cohesion and Peace:** Encourage cooperation, discipline and peaceful conflict resolution among the youth of the Zenú community through their participation in sports activities. Through soccer tournaments and other sports

initiatives, it seeks to create an environment of inclusion and mutual respect, improving interpersonal relationships and strengthening the social fabric of the community.

- **Integral Youth Development:** To provide Zenú children and youth with tools and opportunities for their personal, academic, and social growth. This includes leadership and human rights training, psychosocial support, and the development of life skills that enable them to face and overcome the challenges of the environment in which they live. At least 80% of the young participants are expected to demonstrate significant improvements in these areas.

- **Improving Community Infrastructure:** Build and maintain soccer fields and other recreational spaces that serve as meeting and community development centers. These facilities will be equipped with sustainable technologies, such as rainwater harvesting systems, to support the overall well-being of the community and promote environmental sustainability practices. The goal is to build at least five soccer fields in the first two years of the program.

- **Community Empowerment and Participation:** Strengthen the community's capacity to address its own challenges by

training community leaders and promoting the active participation of all community members in decision-making. This includes creating youth leadership committees and organizing regular community forums to discuss program progress and address emerging issues.



These objectives are designed to be achieved in an integrated manner, ensuring that each component of the program reinforces and complements the others. Reducing the incidence of child abduction, for example, depends not only on creating safe spaces, but also on strengthening social cohesion and empowering young people and their families. Similarly, the holistic development of young people is closely linked to the improvement of community infrastructure and the promotion of active community participation in the programme.

The methodologies that will be employed to achieve these objectives will be detailed below, providing clear and structured guidance on how the programme will be implemented and how its results will be measured.

## **METHODOLOGIES**

To achieve the proposed objectives, a series of integrated methodologies will be implemented to ensure a holistic and effective approach to intervention. The methodologies are detailed below:

### **Field Research**

- ✓ Description: Interviews and focus groups will be conducted with members of the Zenú community, including community leaders, parents, youth, and children, to better understand the local dynamics and challenges related to child abduction. In addition, quantitative data will be collected on the incidence of abduction and other forms of violence in the community.
- ✓ Interviews and Focus Groups: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with at least 100 community members to gather qualitative information about their experiences and perceptions related to abduction and violence.
- ✓ Quantitative Surveys: Surveys will be applied to a representative sample of the community to obtain data on the frequency and impact of child abduction. It is expected to survey at least 500 people.

- ✓ Data Analysis: The data collected will be analyzed to identify patterns and trends, which will allow for the design of more accurate and effective interventions.

### **Implementation of the Sports Program**

- ✓ Description: Monthly football tournaments will be organised that involve the entire community, promoting inclusion and gender equality. These activities will not only offer a safe space for children, but will also function as platforms for human rights and leadership education.
- ✓ Organization of Tournaments: Monthly soccer tournaments will be planned and executed in different Zenú communities. At least 2,000 children and youth are expected to participate annually.
- ✓ Trainings and Workshops: During the tournaments, human rights and leadership workshops will be held. These workshops will be taught by experts in the field and will use football as a pedagogical tool. It is expected to train at least 500 young people annually.
- ✓ Monitoring and Evaluation: A monitoring system will be established to evaluate the participation and impact of tournaments and workshops. This will include collecting data on attendance, satisfaction, and changes in participant behavior.

### **Infrastructure Improvement**

- ✓ Description: Soccer fields will be built and maintained in the community, which will also function as meeting and community development centers. These facilities will be equipped with rainwater harvesting systems and other sustainable technologies to support the well-being of the community.
- ✓ Design and Construction: At least five soccer fields will be designed and constructed in the first two years of the program. Each court will be equipped with rainwater harvesting systems and solar panels.
- ✓ Maintenance: Monthly maintenance routines will be established to ensure the durability and functionality of the facilities. The community will be trained in the basic maintenance of these infrastructures.
- ✓ Community Utilization: The courts will also be used for community gatherings and other social events, promoting their continuous and multifunctional use.



### Psychosocial Support

- ✓ Description: Soccer clubs will be established to serve as support groups, offering

psychological counseling to help children and their families deal with the trauma of kidnapping. These clubs will also provide life skills and resilience training.

- ✓ Creation of Clubs: Football clubs will be formed in each participating community. Each club will have a psychosocial support team made up of psychologists and social workers.
- ✓ Support Sessions: Group and individual counseling sessions will be offered to children and their families. It is expected to provide psychosocial support to at least 300 children annually.
- ✓ Resilience Training: Clubs will also deliver workshops on life skills and resilience, helping young people develop strategies to cope with and overcome trauma.
- ✓ These methodologies are designed to work in an integrated manner, ensuring that each component of the program reinforces and complements the others. Field research will provide a robust data base to design and adjust interventions, while sports programme implementation, infrastructure improvement and psychosocial support will directly address identified needs and challenges in the community.

### DISCUSSION

The implementation of the proposed program to address the problem of child abduction in the Zenú community presents several aspects and challenges

that need to be carefully considered. In this section, the potential impact of the sports programme, leadership and human rights training, the benefits of sports infrastructure and psychosocial support, as well as potential limitations and challenges, will be discussed.

### **Potential Impact of the Sports Program**

The use of sport, especially football, as an intervention tool has proven to be effective in various communities around the world. In the context of the Zenú community, football can serve as a means to bring young people together in a safe and structured environment, keeping them away from risky situations. In addition, participation in sports activities can improve young people's self-esteem, discipline, and teamwork skills.

### **Evidence of Positive Impact:**

- ✓ **Reducing Risk Behaviors:** Studies have shown that youth who participate in regular sports activities are less likely to engage in risky behaviors, such as drug use and delinquency. The implementation of regular soccer tournaments in the Zenú community is expected to have a similar effect, reducing children's exposure to dangerous situations.
- ✓ **Fostering Positive Values:** Football promotes values such as respect, cooperation and perseverance. These values are fundamental

for building a culture of peace and social cohesion within the community.

### **Leadership and Human Rights Training**

Leadership and human rights education is critical to empowering Zenú youth and preparing them to become agents of change in their communities. Through workshops and trainings, participants will gain knowledge and skills that will enable them to advocate for their rights and lead community initiatives.

### **Specific Benefits:**

- ✓ **Leadership Skills Development:** Leadership workshops will help young people develop critical skills such as decision-making, conflict resolution, and effective communication. These skills are not only important for their personal development, but also for their ability to contribute positively to the community.
- ✓ **Human Rights Awareness:** Human rights training will increase awareness among young people of their rights and responsibilities. This is crucial to empower them to defend their own rights and those of other members of the community.

### **Benefits of Sports Infrastructure**

The construction of soccer fields and other recreational spaces will not only provide safe places for sports practice, but will also serve as community centers for meetings and events. The integration of

sustainable technologies, such as rainwater harvesting systems, will contribute to the overall well-being of the community and demonstrate environmental sustainability practices.



### **Positive Impacts:**

- ✓ **Creating Safe Spaces:** Soccer fields will serve as safe spaces where children can play and socialize without the fear of being kidnapped. This will reduce anxiety and stress between parents and children.
- ✓ **Promoting Environmental Sustainability:** Integrating rainwater harvesting systems and

solar panels into sports facilities will promote sustainable practices and educate the community on the importance of environmental stewardship.

### **Psychosocial Support and Resilience**

The trauma associated with abduction can have lasting effects on children and their families. Football clubs that offer psychosocial support can help mitigate these effects, providing a safe space for children to express their emotions and receive professional support. In addition, life skills and resilience training will strengthen young people's ability to face future challenges.

### **Psychosocial Benefits:**

- ✓ **Trauma Reduction:** Counseling sessions will help children and their families process the trauma of abduction and develop strategies to manage stress and anxiety.
- ✓ **Building Resilience:** Life skills and resilience training will equip young people with the tools needed to overcome adversity and face future challenges with confidence and strength.

### **Possible Limitations and Challenges**

Although the program has numerous potential benefits, there are also some limitations and challenges that must be considered:



- ✓ **Community Resistance:** Some communities may show initial resistance to the implementation of the program due to distrust or lack of understanding of its benefits. It is crucial to involve community leaders early on to foster buy-in and support for the program.
- ✓ **Financial Resources:** The construction and maintenance of sports infrastructure, as well as the implementation of activities and workshops, require significant financial resources. It is essential to ensure long-term sustainable financing.
- ✓ **Training of Facilitators:** The effectiveness of the programme depends largely on the quality of the facilitators and trainers. It is necessary to invest in the training of qualified and committed personnel.

## **EXPECTED RESULTS**

### **Reduction of Kidnapping Incidents**

One of the main objectives of the program is to reduce the incidence of child abduction in the Zenú indigenous community in Sampués, Colombia. The creation of safe spaces and the provision of recreational and educational activities are expected to keep children away from risky situations, reducing cases of kidnapping by 30% in the first two years of implementation of the program.

#### **Indicators of Success:**

- ✓ **Decrease in Reported Cases:** Continuous monitoring of kidnapping cases reported in the community will be carried out to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. A significant reduction in reported cases is expected compared to the years prior to the implementation of the program.
- ✓ **Increased Perceived Safety:** Surveys of community members will measure the perception of safety before and after the implementation of the program. At least 70% of respondents are expected to report an improvement in their perception of security.



### **Strengthening Social Cohesion**

Through participation in sports and educational activities, a significant increase in social cohesion within the community is expected. Football tournaments and leadership workshops will help foster cooperation and mutual respect among participants, thereby reducing mistrust and fear.

#### **Indicators of Success:**

- ✓ **Community Participation:** The level of participation in soccer tournaments and leadership workshops will be monitored. At least 2,000 children and youth are expected to participate annually in the tournaments and at least 500 youth participate in the workshops.
- ✓ **Improved Interpersonal Relationships:** Surveys and focus groups will assess interpersonal relationships and social cohesion within the community. At least 80% of participants are expected to report improvements in their relationships with other community members.

### **Integral Youth Development**

The program will provide Zenú children and youth with tools and opportunities for their personal, academic, and social growth. This includes leadership and human rights trainings, psychosocial support and the development of life skills.

### **Indicators of Success:**

- ✓ **Leadership Skills Development:** Pre- and post-workshop assessments will measure improvements in leadership skills and human rights knowledge among participants. At least 80% of the young participants are expected to demonstrate significant improvements in these areas.
- ✓ **Psychosocial Support:** Participants' mental health and well-being indicators will be assessed through surveys and follow-up

sessions. At least 70% of children receiving psychosocial support are expected to report an improvement in their emotional and mental well-being.

### **Community Infrastructure Improvement**

The construction and maintenance of soccer fields equipped with sustainable technologies will improve community infrastructure and provide safe places for sports practice and community gathering.

### **Indicators of Success:**

- ✓ **Number of Fields Built:** At least five soccer fields are expected to be built in the first two years of the program. Each court will be evaluated for its quality and functionality.
- ✓ **Facility Utilization:** Facility utilization will be monitored to ensure that they are regularly used for sports and community activities. The courts are expected to be used at least 200 days a year.



### **Community Empowerment and Engagement**

The program also seeks to strengthen the community's capacity to address its own challenges by training community leaders and promoting active participation in decision-making.

### **Indicators of Success:**

- ✓ **Training of Community Leaders:** The number of community leaders trained and their participation in decision-making will be evaluated. At least 50 young people are expected to be trained as community leaders in the first two years of the program.
- ✓ **Participation in Community Forums:** Regular community forums will be organized to discuss the progress of the program and address emerging issues. At least 70% of the community is expected to participate in these forums.

These expected outcomes are designed to be continuously measured and monitored throughout the program, ensuring that interventions are adjusted as needed to maximize their impact. Reducing the incidence of child abduction, strengthening social cohesion, comprehensive youth development, improving community infrastructure, and community empowerment are key components to achieving sustainable and positive change in the Zenú community.

### **Summary of Proposed Interventions:**

- ✓ **Creating Safe Spaces:** The construction of soccer fields and other recreational spaces will provide safe places where children can play and socialize, reducing their exposure to risky situations.
- ✓ **Sports and Educational Activities:** Monthly soccer tournaments and leadership and human rights workshops will not only keep young people busy, but also promote values of cooperation, respect, and resilience.
- ✓ **Leadership and Human Rights Training:** Through workshops and trainings, young people will acquire the necessary skills to become agents of change in their communities.
- ✓ **Psychosocial Support:** Soccer clubs will offer counseling and emotional support to help children and their families deal with the trauma of kidnapping.
- ✓ **Improving Community Infrastructure:** Soccer fields and other facilities will not only serve as sports but will also serve as community centers for meetings and events.

### **Expected Impact:**

- ✓ **Reduction in Child Abduction:** A significant decrease in child abduction cases is expected, with a 30% reduction in the first two years of program implementation.
- ✓ **Strengthening Social Cohesion:** Sports and educational activities will improve

interpersonal relationships and strengthen the social fabric of the community.

- ✓ **Integral Youth Development:** Young participants will acquire critical skills that will enable them to face and overcome challenges, improving their personal and academic well-being.
- ✓ **Improving Community Infrastructure:** The construction and maintenance of sports facilities will enhance the community environment and promote environmental sustainability practices.
- ✓ **Community Empowerment and Participation:** Training community leaders and organizing community forums will strengthen the community's capacity to address its own challenges and promote sustainable development.

## CONCLUSION

The comprehensive approach proposed in this study goes beyond meeting the immediate needs of Zenú youth; It aims to establish a solid foundation for the long-term sustainable and harmonious development of the community. By integrating football as a key tool for peace and development, it aspires to positively influence the lives of Zenú youth, promoting values such as discipline, teamwork and perseverance. This sport, beyond being a recreational activity, becomes a means to instill principles of respect, inclusion and cooperation, essential to strengthen social cohesion.

In addition, the project seeks to empower young people by providing them with skills and knowledge

that will allow them to face future challenges with resilience. Through educational and training programs, topics such as physical and mental health, the prevention of violence and substance use, and the importance of a healthy and active life will be addressed. This will not only contribute to their personal development, but will also foster a safer and more supportive community environment.

The expected impact of this project is not limited to the young direct beneficiaries; it is hoped that its effects will extend to the entire Zenú community, promoting a sense of belonging and cultural pride. By involving parents, community leaders, and other key actors in the process, it seeks to create a support network that ensures the sustainability and continuity of the initiatives. In this way, football becomes a vehicle for positive social change, helping to build a more united, equitable and resilient community in the face of the challenges of the future. Ultimately, this comprehensive approach will not only transform the lives of the Zenú youth, but will also contribute to the overall well-being of the community.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The **continuity and sustainability** of the program is critical to ensuring its long-term success. To achieve this, sustainable sources of financing must be secured to enable the continued implementation of planned activities. Collaboration with local and international organizations is key in this regard, as they can provide financial and logistical support, as well as

providing specialized knowledge and resources. Establishing strategic partnerships with government entities, NGOs, and the private sector is essential to diversify revenue streams and ensure the program's financial resilience.

Ongoing **monitoring and evaluation** are equally crucial to measuring the impact of the program and ensuring that the stated objectives are met. Implementing robust monitoring systems will allow for accurate data collection on youth participation, personal development, and improvements in social cohesion within the community. This data will be vital for making informed adjustments to program design and execution, ensuring that it remains relevant and effective. Regular evaluation will also help identify areas for improvement and document achievements, which is critical to maintaining the support of funders and partners.

Finally, there is great potential for the **expansion of the program** to other indigenous communities facing similar challenges. By replicating this model, positive impacts can be generated in other regions of Colombia and potentially in other countries. Program expansion must be carefully planned, ensuring that resources and capacities are available to support new communities. In summary, this program not only offers immediate solutions to the problems faced by the Zenú community, but also presents a replicable model for using sport as a powerful tool for peace, social cohesion, and youth development. This demonstrates how a well-designed initiative can have a lasting and transformative impact on the lives of many people.



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