

APW/MWF Special project 2009-2010: Cepad in Nicaragua

Making a better tomorrow for young people



About CEPAD

CEPAD (Consejo de Iglesias Evangelicas Pro-Alianza Denominacional/Council of Protestant Churches of Nicaragua) was established in 1972 to provide relief to survivors of the devastating Managua earthquake. Recognising poverty as an ongoing disaster, it developed a wider programme and was actively engaged in conflict resolution and peace building efforts during the civil war of the 1980s.

Today the priorities of the organisation are:

- poverty alleviation
- promotion of peace and justice
- campaigns against destructive economic policies.

CEPAD's work includes development programmes (eg: food production, income opportunities, environmental protection and advocacy training to negotiate community services), emergency relief and community conflict resolution. Their programmes are based on the belief that community members must resolve their own problems and decide for themselves what they need. CEPAD then supports and trains the local people to achieve the goals they have identified. CWS has been supporting CEPAD for over 27 years.

Greetings, sisters in Christ, from CEPAD (the Council of Protestant Churches of Nicaragua).

We thank you for your faithful contribution through Christian World Service, a partner of CEPAD. Through your prayers and offerings, you are contributing to empower men and women in rural communities to lead their development process. Also, men and women farmers are learning techniques to protect soil and water sources, to diversify crops and to inter-crop so they can improve their families' nutritional situation while taking care of God's creation. Women learn that they were created equal by God and thus, have the same rights as men do. They also learn to be more economically independent by raising small animals and growing different kinds of vegetables in their gardens so they can diversify the diet of their families and contribute to the family's economy.

The Word of God is spread through Radio CEPAD where the audience, mostly in the rural areas, listen to news analysis from a Biblical perspective as well as Christian music and programmes. Visiting delegations participate in a two-way educational exchange through our Nehemiah programme and stay at our Nehemiah guesthouse.

Thank you, sisters, for being a part of the ministry of CEPAD. We greatly appreciate it and wish you God's blessings upon your own ministries.

Dámaris Albuquerque E.
Executive Director, CEPAD

CEPAD and young people

All CEPAD's programmes help build a better future for the children and young people of Nicaragua. Increased family incomes and access to nutritious food gives everyone a healthier life and enables previous luxuries such as schooling to be paid for. Improved services to communities (such as electricity, roads and water) and better environmental protection improve living conditions.

In addition, CEPAD directly trains young people in practical skills, educates them about their rights, provides psycho-social development for children in rural communities, and gives some opportunities for secondary schooling. Youth committees have been established to help young people deal with the many social problem affecting poor communities.



About Nicaragua:



Population: est. 5,891,199

Land Area: 130,000

Capital: Managua

Currency: Córdoba

Official Language: Spanish

People

Ethnicity: 69% mixed descendants of American Indians and Spanish colonizers; 17% of European descent; 9% of African descent and 5% American Indian minorities (Miskitos, Sunos and Ramas).

Religion: Catholics 85%; Protestants 15%

Urban population: 59%

Life expectancy at birth: 71.1 years

Poverty Indicators

Population living in poverty (under US\$2 a day): 83%

Average per capita income: \$US \$430

Infant mortality: 31.0 per 1,000 births
Under 5 mortality rate: 38.0 per 1,000 live births

Malnutrition: 10.0% of children under 5 years old

Undernourishment: 27.0%

Inadequate sanitation: 53%

No access to safe water: 21%

Inequality

Share of income and expenditure

Poorest 10%: 2.2%

Poorest 20%: 5.6%

Richest 20%: 49.3%

Richest 10%: 33.8%

Source: CEPAD, UN Human Development Report 2008, New Internationalist World Guide

Nicaragua is the 'land of lakes and volcanoes'. Its geology, climate, and location make it the victim of different kinds of disasters (volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and drought), while its political history, including consistent US involvement, has contributed to a history of conflict and war. These factors have made Nicaragua one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere, alongside Haiti and Bolivia.

Environment

The country is crossed by two mountain ranges: the Central American Andes, running from northwest to southeast, and a volcanic chain with several active volcanoes along the western coast. The Managua and Nicaragua lakes lie between the two ranges. On the eastern slopes, the climate is tropical with abundant rainfall, while it is drier on the western side where the population is concentrated.

Growing environmental deterioration is aggravating poverty. Nearly 40% of the water and soil resources are polluted, and there is significant deforestation. The loss of trees dries up rivers and contributes to soil erosion.

"We have a problem with water. It is running out. We used to get water from our stream but our neighbour cut down the trees and the stream dried up. The only solution I can see is to buy his land and replant. He is doing a lot of damage selling the trees for firewood. But he won't listen. He doesn't care about protecting the environment."

Sorayda, small farmer, Nicaragua

Economy

The economy is largely agricultural (60%) with sugar, coffee and bananas the main cash crops. A major source of foreign income is remittances from more than a million Nicaraguans who have been forced to leave the country in search of work. Many are illegal immigrants working in the US or on the coffee plantations in Costa Rica. Increasing numbers of rural people are moving to urban areas in search of work. Free Trade Zones offer some employment, but the factories operate without having to follow legislation on workers' rights, minimum wages and environmental protection.

The official unemployment rate is 13.8% compared to a Latin American average of 9.4%. However this dramatically distorts the true situation. Taking into account people working in the informal cash economy for subsistence, it is believed the country has levels of 60% unemployment.

Debt repayments are a large cost to the country and have meant a lack of investment in public health and education. Conditions imposed by international lenders have forced privatisation of services like electricity. People are concerned that water will be next.

"Life is difficult now and if services are privatised it will be worse. We are working so hard just to eat."

Tomasa, tortilla maker, Nicaragua

Children

Children are affected by the country's extreme poverty and inequality. One in three experiences malnutrition and one in nine suffers from chronic malnutrition. It is estimated that less than 30% of children finish primary school. Many children and teenagers have to work. Many are disillusioned by the lack of opportunity. CEPAD staff work to counter the attitude of "why should we study if there are no jobs".



Sugar cane and volcanoes dominate Nicaragua's landscape

Youth Psychosocial care:

This CEPAD programme trains young people to support and counsel peers through difficulties in their lives. With few, if any, government services available in this area, the youth groups report they are seeing 70% more cases since starting in 2005.

They are dealing with cases of domestic violence, alcoholism, low self-esteem, child abuse, learning problems and drug addiction.

The groups are also organizing community events to promote human rights, work with families to raise awareness about relationships of respect and when necessary take complaints to the appropriate authorities.

Ricksell's story

"When I came to CEPAD looking for psychological aid, I was afraid. I felt worthless, I did not look positively at life. I thought that everything around me was negative. I thought that everybody who approached me, regardless of their gender, came to hurt me. When I came to CEPAD in 2005, it was one year after that terrible experience I suffered. I was depressed and tried three times to commit suicide."

Nineteen year old Ricksell, went to his local CEPAD office looking for psychological care because he was raped. He joined the CEPAD's psychosocial programme as part of his therapy. The programme holds meetings with young people where they exchange experiences, play together and help other youth and children who have difficulties.

"Once I started working with youth and children, I felt it was like a light that has shown me the path to a positive reality because of the friendship and appreciation I was shown. I started approaching people without fear, I started doing my everyday activities. I was invited by two youth from the group to go to a church. Now I am an active member of that church where I am part of the musical group. I can say nowadays that I am a different person with a positive attitude. Although this does not mean that I've wiped from my life what happened to me, God changed my pain to joy. I thank CEPAD for this opportunity of helping me and helping so many people through this programme where we find a light of hope."

Rosetta's story

Rosetta was first involved with CEPAD when Hurricane Mitch (1998) destroyed



her community. For a young teen, it was a life changing event. "As a young person you always think you will be safe but we were afraid we would lose our lives, our families. In other places it was worse still. Thousands of people died. We felt the pain of those who lost their whole families. But you can't imagine their pain."

Her family lost their house and jobs, forcing Rosetta to leave school. She now sews from home but is also a mobiliser in her community. Through CEPAD she has learnt how to run a plant nursery and look after chickens. She teaches those skills to local families and provides ongoing support. After the devastation they all went through, "I was inspired by the idea of serving the community".

Education is a major problem for young people. "People can't finish school because there is such a need for work. It's a luxury to study. Most people only finish primary school. It is very unusual for anyone to go to university. No one can afford it. We have to try to find work." They get casual work at the sugar cane plantation and harvesting peanuts from the big farms but because the work is irregular, "people only have money for part of the year".

Thanks to CEPAD, she says, things have changed a lot. "We have reforestation including fruit trees. We have fruit now and we don't have to go out and buy it. CEPAD has helped us to learn new things." Her hopes for the future? "To progress. To have a way of maintaining ourselves with good water. We hope the chickens will give us plenty of eggs."



Improving family life

Aurelia lives with her husband Manuel, daughter Jualki, 14 and son Bilomar, 16 in the village of Yolaina. Through CEPAD she has been able to improve her household nutrition and income, enabling her to keep her children in school.

Before getting CEPAD training and loans to develop her garden and maintain livestock, Aurelia's household garden was virtually empty. There were a few lemons, tangerines and green bananas. Now she also produces malanga (similar to taro), carrot, green pepper, pumpkin, tomatoes, oranges and sugar cane and has pigs and hens. Aurelia sells piglets and some hens and collects 36 eggs each week. These are used for family consumption with the balance being sold. For Aurelia, CEPAD has improved the life of her children in several ways. They eat a more balanced and varied diet, their school fees have been paid and she has some savings for emergencies such as health care. She is determined to give her children the educational opportunities that she and her husband were unable to have. One day Jualki hopes to train in administration and Bilomar wants to pursue computing.



Many Nicaraguan families live in one room houses with no amenities.

Discussion Points

- *What are some of the challenges facing young people in Nicaragua?*
- *How does CEPAD work with young people?*
- *What differences have they made for young Nicaraguans?*
- *Are these challenges similar to those facing young New Zealanders?*
- *What motivates CEPAD to do the work they do?*
- *What can New Zealand churches learn from CEPAD?*

CEPAD's Mission

"We are a Christian organization answering God's call to stand with and serve poor communities by means of development programs, emergency relief and by promoting just relationships between men and women."

See: www.cepad.org.ni

Other Resources

In 2003 CWS produced *Making Change: Economic Challenges in Nicaragua*. This documentary explores how CEPAD is meeting the challenges, most of which unfortunately continue today. Borrow a video or DVD to see CEPAD in action. Study guide and bible study included.

PowerPoint slide show: CWS has produced a presentation on CEPAD for the APW/MWF special project.

Speakers are also available.

Contact CWS 03 366 9274 or email cws@cws.org.nz if you wish to order these resources.