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Literacy in Nicaragua

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LITERACY IN NICARAGUA

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HISTORY AND CURRENT SITUATION: A SYNTHESIS

Sustained and objective analysis of illiteracy and/or literacy in the Nicaragua of 2005 necessarily reveals a **continuum** – albeit an atypical one – in the active presence of the multiform phenomenon of literacy.

Throughout its history, this phenomenon has found a rich diversity of expressions, closely connected with the sociopolitical climate of each epoch but weaving themselves into an interesting process of innovations and regressions that has led to the present situation.

- a) Until the end of the 1970s, under the dominance of a successful agro-export model and sustained economic growth, education moved to the rhythm of an additive, inequitable form of development, with education conceived and managed as a means to uphold that model. In accordance with the precepts of the Major Project in the field of Education (PPE), conceived in Lima in 1958, and with those of UNESCO since 1947, a major effort was made in Nicaragua to improve the cover and quality of primary education, with emphasis on reading and writing and school literacy. “The Alliance for Progress” and its concern for education were unable to overcome the influence exerted by the development model – with its concentration of wealth and exclusion of large sectors of the poor – over education, since the limitations of the model were repeated in the education system.
- b) One expression of this real contradiction was an illiteracy rate of 51.2% in the population aged ten and above.
- c) The project of the Sandinista People’s Revolution filled the decade of the 1980s – a project that considered literacy to be a human right that was fundamental to every human being and to his or her freedom and self-affirmation, while being the necessary means to build a broad, aware, educated and participatory social base that would carry out the economic and social transformations needed for true social equity.

1980, “Literacy Year”, is known as the Crusade because of its global campaign, unprecedented in the history of Nicaragua, to eradicate illiteracy. The pedagogical ideas and spirit of Paulo Freire’s experience inspired the action, and together with lessons learnt from the Cuban literacy campaign they converted the Crusade into a **political and pedagogical whole** in which the organization, mobilization and participation of an entire people interacted to great effect.

This project entailed an inseparable association between literacy and subsequent activities to support and consolidate measures through “**Adult Popular Education**”. However, the development of the latter was to a certain extent detached from literacy activity proper under the school system, despite the active and influential presence of the Major Project in the Field of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean (PPE). (The theory and origins of the PPE were contained in the Mexico Declaration of 1979, which was produced by the Regional Conference of Ministers of Education and Those Responsible for Economic Planning of Member States in Latin America and the Caribbean and later found shape and force in the Quito Project of 1981.)

In the 1980s the literacy effort took on a more integral approach, which included a multilingual conception of indigenous groups and the different aspects involved and tentative use of radio and television. The result of this extraordinary campaign was demonstrated in a 12% reduction of the illiteracy rate according to the calculation method used – which did raise certain objections from the UNESCO Office of Statistics.

Limitations aside, the 1980 Literacy Crusade was an important milestone in the history of education in Nicaragua, closely associated with and inseparable from the force of a revolutionary, popular political project. Hence its own characteristic stamp. UNESCO awarded the Crusade the 1980 Nadezka Kruskaya prize

- c) 1990 marked the beginning of a new epoch in the political and educational history of Nicaragua. The débâcle of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in the national elections had direct consequences for the future of literacy. Already at the end of the 1980s the effects of the Contra war were being felt in all areas of national life, alongside the effects of the dismantling of the Revolution's Education Project by the new education authorities against a background of dynamic and extensive globalization and modernization.

It was in this context that the influence of renewal arrived from the World Conference on Education for All (1990) with its various ramifications, such as the Delors Report (1996), Hamburg (1997), and other international and regional conferences and meetings that gave literacy a new perspective and an inseparable association from then onwards with the Education for All (EFA) philosophy and policy.

In Nicaragua the Spanish-funded Programme of Adult Literacy and Basic Education in Nicaragua (PAEBANIC) took over the responsibility for literacy, alongside the Organization of Iberoamerican States for Education, Science and Culture (OEI) and a variety of literacy programmes organized by civil society which to a large extent owed their roots and methods to the 1980 Crusade. These included the Nicaraguan Institute of Research and Popular Education (INIEP), CARITAS-Nicaragua, the Carlos Fonseca Amador Foundation and the Centre for Education and Integral Training (CECIM).

In general, of the NGOs that, from the 1990s onwards, initiated and developed their socio-humanist and human-development activities in the spirit of the 1980s, nearly all were promoting literacy and basic education activities for population groups as yet marginalized from education. Some of those NGOs focused their action on young children, which would make connection with the Dakar 2000 EFA goals easier.

Official figures for 1998 and 2001 provided by the Nicaraguan Statistics and Census Institute (INEC), which are based on the EMNV-98 and 2001 household living standards surveys, place the illiteracy rate at 20.9% for age ten and above, and these figures are used in the official statistics of later INEC documents.

Thanks to the efficient action of PAEBANIC under the Ministry of Education, and to other civil society programmes such as the one carried out by the Carlos Fonseca Amador Foundation, the official figure quoted in Nicaragua for 2004 is 18.8%.

Throughout these three periods UNESCO has awarded prizes for literacy in Nicaragua. These were for the National Literacy Campaign (1980); Adult Popular Education-Post-literacy – Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (MED) (1982); Literacy in Río San Juan (1986); CECIM, Ciudad Sandino (1987); CARITAS of Nicaragua (1995); and PAEBANIC-MED (2000).

1. DEFINITIONS OF LITERACY PREVAILING IN DIFFERENT SECTORS: MEASURING AND ASSESSING ILLITERACY.

Definitions of illiteracy and/or literacy in Nicaragua are directly related to official national sources and the methods these use to measure and assess corresponding rates. Responsibility for this task lies with the Nicaraguan Statistics and Census Institute (INEC), which currently bases its research on the 1993, 1998 and 2001 EMNV household living standards surveys.

Official data obtained from the above are completed with information from other documents, which are also official since they come from government departments such as the Technical Secretariat of the Presidency of

the Republic (SECEP) and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (MECD), but which offer different perspectives. Such documents provide literacy statistics, with given variations based on specific studies, preparatory work for national plans, cooperation agreements, etc.

At the same time, different bodies and organizations from civil society, universities and NGOs, as well as United Nations agencies, including UNDP, UNICEF and UNESCO, are devoting a great deal of research capacity to the issue and dynamics of development, particularly in the education field by tackling the reality of illiteracy.

The latest official information on illiteracy in Nicaragua is provided in the **General Report on the National Household Survey for Measuring Living Standards – EMNV’98**, the **General Report on the National Household Survey for Measuring Living Standards – EMNV 2001**, the **Report on the National Household Survey for Measuring Living Standards, 2001**, the **Comparative Report of the National Survey for Measuring Living Standards 1993 and 1998**. The foregoing are published by the Nicaraguan Statistics and Census Institute (INEC) as part of the **Programme for the Improvement of Surveys and Measurement of Living Conditions (MECOVI-Nicaragua)**.¹

In connection with these reports and as part of the same MECOVI project, INEC has published the following two additional studies, which help to clarify the concept of and approach to illiteracy in Nicaragua:

- Sociodemographic and socio-economic factors in absenteeism and dropout from primary education (March 2001); and
- Analysis of the social and economic situation of Nicaraguan youth (March 2001).

Both studies provide important socio-economic data for analysing and obtaining a deeper understanding of the real situation regarding illiteracy in Nicaragua.

Generally speaking, it appears that there is something of a mechanical relation between **school enrolment and literacy** and between **school enrolment and school attendance**, which would imply that individuals are literate when they go beyond fourth grade in basic education, and that they are literate for sure when they go beyond sixth grade. This connection is not made explicit, but it can be derived from the methodology used in the surveys that pupils having gone beyond fourth grade – and beyond sixth grade, naturally – of primary education possess a basic mastery of the fundamental codes of modern life in reading, writing and arithmetic that will help them in all aspects of their ordinary lives – personal, family, work and civic.

In the case of programmes set up by bodies and organizations in civil society, these generally transcend a strictly schooling-oriented focus and consider the development of literacy as part of a broader educational and socio-economic approach, not merely limited to reading and writing but encompassing individuals and their needs, in both material and human development aspects.

Approached from this angle, literacy activities aim to build critical awareness and strengthen organizational and technical skills among the popular sectors, with emphasis on literacy as a social and cultural action closely involved with the popular movement.

In this sense, literacy has been combined with other processes for global development and social change, and with other educational options, which include Adult Basic Education, technical work training, community development and the appropriation and use of appropriate techniques, and so on.

¹ Reports published by INEC are official government documents. They are backed by the Programme for the Improvement of Surveys and Measurement of Living Conditions (MECOVI), which is coordinated by INEC’s Technical Council, with technical advice from the World Bank, IDB and UNDP and an inter-institutional committee. Reports are the result of technical, methodological work which is shared within a specialized field of surveys on living standards, in which education is one of the indicators.

Most literacy programmes are explicit and determined in their inclusion of topics connected with gender, preventive and reproductive health, human, family and community relations and work orientation.

The Household Living Standards Surveys of 1993, 1998 and 2001 researched and produced illiteracy rates for the population aged ten and above. Data reflect a drop of almost 3% between 1993 (23.5%) and 1998 (20.9%), with the 2001 figure hardly moving (20.5%).

TABLE I
Illiteracy rate for the population aged ten and above, by area of residence, gender and region.
Comparative rates for 1993, 1998 and 2001

Source: EMNV-2001.

Regions: The Republic (Total, Male, Female) Urban (Total, Male, Female),
 Rural (Total, Male, Female)

Tasa de analfabetismo de la población de 10 años y más,
por área de residencia y sexo, según región.
Comparativo 1993, 1998 y 2001

Región	La República			Urbano			Rural		
	Total	Hombres	Mujeres	Total	Hombres	Mujeres	Total	Hombres	Mujeres
Total 1993	23.5	23.0	24.0	12.0	9.8	14.0	39.3	39.8	38.7
Managua	14.7	12.9	16.3						
Pacífico	17.0	15.6	18.3	10.6	8.6	12.5	26.9	26.3	27.4
Central	37.0	37.9	36.1	15.0	13.3	16.4	48.3	49.4	47.1
Atlántico	34.4	36.0	32.7	15.3	14.1	16.2	46.7	48.0	45.2
Total 1998	20.9	21.7	20.4	11.5	10.3	12.4	33.3	34.6	31.9
Managua	9.7	9.2	10.2						
Pacífico	17.9	18.1	17.6	11.7	9.9	13.3	24.8	26.6	23.0
Central	31.7	23.3	30.1	14.5	14.4	14.5	40.8	41.9	39.7
Atlántico	31.4	31.2	31.6	19.2	17.4	20.8	44.2	44.2	44.1
Total 2001	20.5	20.7	20.3	12.3	11.5	12.9	32.9	33.3	32.5
Managua	9.5	7.7	11.0						
Pacífico	16.6	17.2	16.0	11.3	10.3	12.2	23.3	25.4	21.1
Central	30.8	31.6	30.0	18.7	19.6	18.0	39.6	39.2	40.1
Atlántico	29.8	29.9	29.6	18.3	18.4	18.1	40.0	39.4	40.5

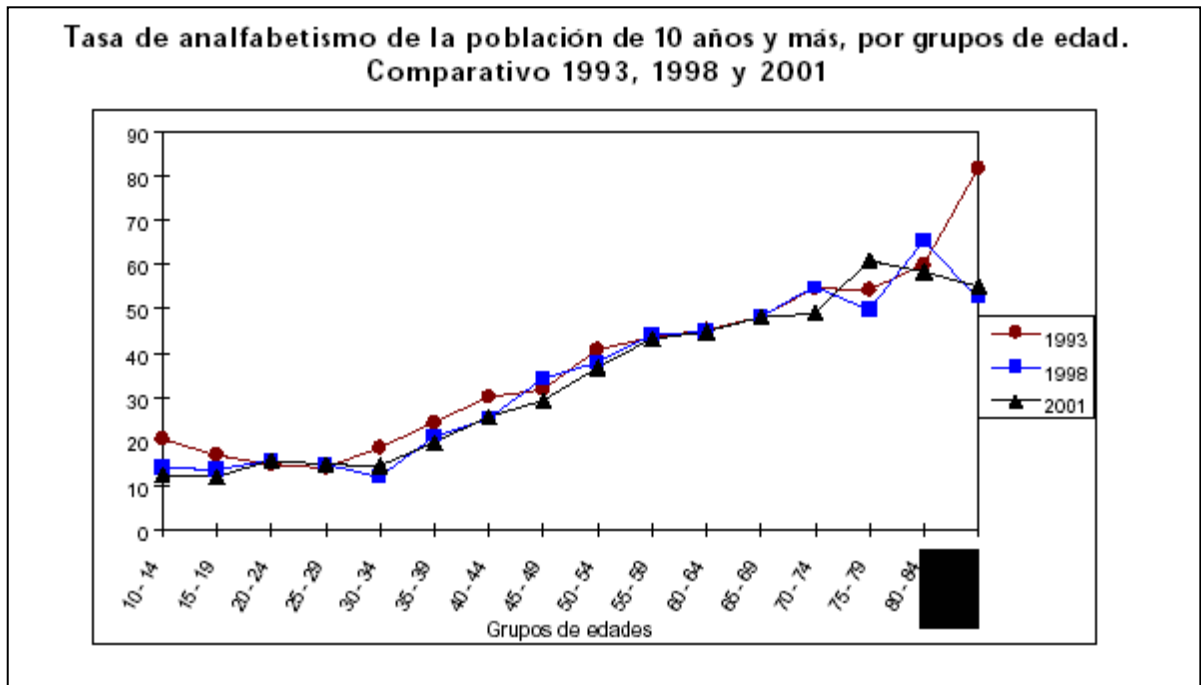
Source: EMNV-2001

Traditionally, illiteracy in Nicaragua affects male and female in similar fashion. Men had a slight advantage in 1993 but not in 2001. Another important fact is that the fall in illiteracy is due to progress in the rural environment (39% in 1993 and around 33% in 1998 and 2001), while the urban figure, around 12%, is proving difficult to lower.

There were significant changes in the regions. The greatest decrease was in Managua – from 14.7% to 9.5%, meaning a fall in illiteracy of more than 50% with advantage to the male population. This is the only region where male illiteracy is lower than female illiteracy. Rates also fell in the Central and Atlantic regions, whereas in the Pacific illiteracy oscillated around 17%.

Whereas the illiteracy rate for Managua is under 10%, rates for the Central and Atlantic regions are more than three times that figure (around 30%).

GRAPH No.1



**Illiteracy rate for the population aged ten and above by age group.
Comparative rates for 1993, 1998 and 2001**

Source: EMNV-2001.

The illiteracy rates in Graph No. 1 demonstrate the dynamics of progress in literacy in the nation. The lowest rates (20% or under) correspond to the younger age groups (under 35), whereas figures double or triple as age groups advance.

The graph also shows a fall in illiteracy between the 1993 and 2001 surveys in the under-twenties and the 20-44 year-olds, with no great differences in the 45-69 year-olds. Percentages for the highest age groups present some irregularities, affected by the infrequency of events.

TABLE. 2
Illiteracy rate for the population aged 10 and above, by area of residence and gender and according to five-year age groups. EMNV 2001

(Five-year age groups; The Republic (Total, Male, Female); Urban (Total, Male, Female); Rural (Total, Male, Female))

Tasa de analfabetismo de la población de 10 años y más, por área de residencia y sexo, según grupos quinquenales de edad. EMNV 2001

Grupos quinquenales de edad	La República			Urbano			Rural		
	Total	Hombres	Mujeres	Total	Hombres	Mujeres	Total	Hombres	Mujeres
Total	20.5	20.7	20.3	12.3	11.5	12.9	32.9	33.3	32.5
10 – 14	12.4	14.9	9.8	5.7	7.6	3.8	20.6	23.7	17.4
15 – 19	12.0	14.4	9.4	5.6	7.2	4.0	21.4	24.0	18.3
20 – 24	15.7	17.3	14.1	6.9	8.1	5.9	28.6	29.9	27.2
25 – 29	14.7	16.6	12.9	7.8	8.5	7.1	26.0	29.0	22.9
30 - 34	14.3	13.3	15.1	6.6	5.6	7.3	26.9	23.9	30.3
35 - 39	19.7	15.6	23.1	13.1	8.5	16.8	32.0	28.5	35.0
40 - 44	25.5	21.1	29.5	15.0	12.5	17.4	45.9	39.6	51.0
45 - 49	29.3	26.5	31.8	18.5	15.8	20.4	46.6	39.3	55.4
50 - 54	36.5	29.6	43.1	24.5	17.1	31.7	54.7	49.3	59.7
55 - 59	43.1	46.7	39.9	28.9	29.1	28.8	61.4	61.3	61.4
60 - 64	44.8	42.0	47.7	34.5	28.5	40.0	62.8	62.3	63.5
65 - 69	48.1	50.5	45.8	37.6	36.1	38.7	65.5	68.6	61.4
70 - 74	48.7	50.9	47.2	37.1	35.9	37.8	68.1	72.1	64.6
75 - 79	60.7	65.8	55.7	50.5	55.7	46.2	73.3	77.7	74.4
80 - 84	58.4	63.0	54.2	39.9	47.3	34.8	85.3	79.1	93.6
85 y más	55.0	60.6	50.3	33.4	32.8	33.8	84.0	79.6	91.7

Source: EMNV-2001.

It can be observed that illiteracy rates and their respective variations have a close relation with schooling levels obtained in the same periods.

Table 3 below, showing changes in enrolment by education programme between 1997 and 2004, confirms an increase in school enrolment which will have a positive impact on literacy.

TABLE No. 3
CHANGES IN THOUSANDS IN ENROLMENT BY EDUCATION PROGRAMME
(1997-2004)

PROGRAMME	YEARS								INCREASE	
	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	PERIOD	ANNUAL AVERAGE
Special	3.1	3.2	3.1	3.2	3.4	3.3	3.5	3.4	10%	1.4%
Pre-school	133.1	143.7	160.4	166.7	163.8	178.9	183.7	199.3	50%	7.1%
Primary	777.9	783.1	816.7	838.4	866.5	923.4	927.2	942.43	21%	3.0%
Secondary	268.4	287.2	304.2	315.4	335.0	364.0	376.4	394.1	47%	6.7%
Teacher training	5.8	5.6	5.3	5.8	6.2	6.8	6.2	5.9	2%	0.2%
Education for young people and adults	42.9	59.0	87.6	86.1	83.4	78.3	66.3	77.0	79%	11.3%
TOTAL	1,231.2	1,281.8	1,377.2	1,415.6	1,458.3	1,554.6	1,563.4	1,622.1	32%	4.5%

Source: General Directorate for Prospecting and Policy (DGPP), Ministry of Education (MECD)

In regard to gender, some differences are noted. In both sexes there is proof of a lower proportion of children without schooling, and of a change in education (13 years and more), with figures for 1993 showing some male predominance and figures for 2001 roughly equal, while in the second, middle school cycle (10 to 12 years' schooling), the slight advantage to girls in 1993 had increased by 2001. If this trend in higher education continues, girls will be predominant in the near future.

In this respect it is interesting to note that the 2001 Nicaraguan Demography and Health Survey (ENDESA) shows a high proportion of girls enrolled in school. While the net rate for primary school attendance was 74.5% for boys, the rate for girls was 79.8%, making a total primary school attendance rate of 77.1% – which also means that 23% of boys and girls aged seven to 12 are not attending school.

The same trend is observed in changes in the net enrolment ratio by programme and gender for 1997 to 2004, according to the Ministry of Education.

TABLE. 4
CHANGES IN NET ENROLMENT RATIO BY PROGRAMME AND GENDER
(1997-2004)

YEARS	PRE-SCHOOL		PRIMARY		SECONDARY	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boy
1997	24.11	22.88	77.32	75.13	35.36	29.26
1998	25.06	24.12	77.31	75.42	36.61	30.58
1999	27.17	26.05	79.40	78.25	37.66	31.18
2000	27.29	26.33	81.20	80.30	37.81	31.75
2001	26.27	25.86	82.05	81.42	39.51	33.24
2002	28.42	27.51	85.26	85.67	41.26	34.81
2003	29.11	28.19	83.10	83.92	41.73	35.90
2004	31.22	30.37	82.07	82.10	42.95	37.27

Source: DGPP, MECD.

In regard to area of residency, it is observed that the fall in the percentage of those without schooling is, as with illiteracy, a consequence of progress in rural areas (from 17.9% in 1993 to less than 13% in 2001). This is demonstrated in an increase in rural percentages of those with four to six and seven to nine years' schooling – an increase obtained basically between 1993 and 1998, since no further progress has been observed in the rural environment between 1998 and 2001.

2. ILLITERACY AND ITS DEVELOPMENT BEFORE AND AFTER 1990: ACHIEVING LITERACY – MODELS AND IMPROVEMENTS

Before 1990, literacy in Nicaragua was totally centred around the 1980 National Literacy Crusade and subsequent activities through the Adult Popular Basic Education Programme.

These activities, which formed a continuous whole, were part of a project that was both political and pedagogical since a political relationship is in a way an educational relationship, which in turn entails a political relationship.

The objectives were:

1. the definitive eradication in Nicaragua of the social phenomenon of illiteracy.
2. creation of awareness nationwide so that our people – formerly excluded – would freely and effectively enter into Nicaragua’s democratization process and take an active part in the development and reconstruction of the nation.
3. greater national unity – between the countryside and the city, workers and students, the Atlantic and the rest of the country, etc.
4. immediate follow-up – upon successful completion of the literacy phase – with the adult education phase, with creation to that effect of the Vice-Ministry of Adult Education.

As a necessary preliminary, a census was carried out among the population aged ten and above. Data collected were the essential, such as locality, age, schooling level, capacity for literacy, whether the person knew how to read and write, availability to take part in literacy activities, occupation, available premises in the communities.

The census produced the following illiteracy rates:

Republic`	50.35%
Urban	28.40%
Rural	75.44%
Male	51.50%
Female	49.28%

In the Crusade, the insurrectional nature and structure of the freedom fight against the Somoza dictatorship was revived in an effort to free broad sectors of the population from ignorance and their historic exclusion.

A massive 52,180 young *brigadistas* and teachers moved to the countryside for five months to join the People’s Literacy Army (EPA).

Another contingent – as many as 95,582 people’s literacy workers (known as *Alfabetizadores* or APs) – were teaching people to read and write in the workplace, in city and countryside alike.

As for programme content and method, these were essentially based on the *Cuaderno de orientación sandinista*, the Sandinist handbook for literacy tutors and what was popularly known as the *Cartilla*, a literacy primer whose full title “*El Amanecer del pueblo*” means “the dawning of the people”.

Literacy was taught in 23 topics or lessons that reflected the revolutionary project, its roots, achievements, goals, the concept of a new society and individual, etc., and the pedagogical specificities of the Nicaraguan method – a combination of the inductive, deductive and socio-psychological methods.

Literacy teaching in the Sandinista Literacy Units (UAS) was accompanied by a radio programme, “**Puño en alto**” (Fist raised high), broadcast twice daily for 30 minutes at 5.30 a.m. and 5.30 p.m. by every transmitter

in the nation. This pedagogical aid was complemented by a weekly page, “**Libro Abierto**”(Open Book), in *Barricada*, the Sandinist newspaper.

The National Literacy Crusade, which lasted from March to August 1980, succeeded in declaring literate 406,000 people aged 10 and above and reducing the national illiteracy rate from 50.35% to 12.9%; it created and left a great capacity for organization, participation and mobilization among the people which would lead to the creation of many NGOs; it inspired the National Consultation on Education to define the purposes, objectives and principles of the new education, which constituted the bases of the principal articles on education laid down in the Political Constitution of 1987, which was reformed in 1995 and is in force to this day.

One component of the Crusade that was later to have a momentous impact was literacy in languages of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast, the embryo of what would become, from 1983 onwards, the intercultural bilingual project of the Caribbean coast, which has now been fully consolidated within the Regional Autonomous Education System (SEAR).

After a brief period of support for the literacy activity, the “Adult Popular Basic Education” follow-up programme was introduced to take care of the recently literate and under-schooled. Under this programme, intensive training prepared many of the *brigadistas* to become popular teachers. The Sandista Literacy Units (UAS) were transformed into Popular Education Collectives (CEPs).

NLC	SUPPORT	INTRODUCTORY LEVEL	LEVEL I	LEVEL II	LEVEL III	LEVEL IV	DIVERSIFIED ADULT POPULAR BASIC EDUCATION, TECHNICAL TRAINING
23/03/80 23/08/80	08/80 – 03/81	Basic Popular Education Commenced 9/03/81					

Figures for the first and 2nd semesters of 1981:

Semester	Students	Popular Teachers	CEPs
1°	143,816	18,449	15,187
2°	167,852	23,826	20,500

Adult Popular Basic Education entailed an original, innovative conception of a flexible curriculum. Content and methods were organized and developed in interrelated areas of knowledge based on learners’ needs and their social and cultural environment and arranged under main topics, such as production, community organization, and so on, which were interwoven with language, mathematics and the social sciences and oriented towards work training and skills.

By 1983 the Programme was covering 187,858 adults, but the Contra war was intensifying – a war that would last until 1989 with tragic consequences for national life. Variations in Programme strategy enabled it to function until after 1990; the Revolution’s Education Project was finally dismantled in 1992 and the Programme of Adult Literacy and Basic Education in Nicaragua (PAEBANIC) made its entry in 1996 as a result of the Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government held in Viña del Mar (Chile) in 1996.

PAEBANIC AND ITS DEVELOPMENT INTO A NICARAGUAN PROGRAMME FOR ADULT EDUCATION AND A SOLID NATIONAL INSTITUTION

After the dismantling of the Revolution’s Education Project at the beginning of the 1990s, countless NGOs came into being, and turned the innovative spirit of education left by the Revolution into alternative literacy and adult basic education programmes. **The Institute of Research and Popular Education (INIEP)**, the **Carlos Fonseca Amador Foundation** and the **Centre for Education and Integral Training (CECIM)** are

examples of these. **CÁRITAS of Nicaragua**, with the outstanding action of the Catholic Vicariate of Bluefields, also made a successful incursion into this field. Nevertheless, after the 1990s, the Literacy and Adult Basic Education Programme in Nicaragua (PAEBANIC) became **the principal and most significant link in the chain of activities developed in the formal systematic sphere to reduce illiteracy and provide basic education and technical work education for adults who had not found educational alternatives in regular education programmes.**

At the sixth Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government held in Viña del Mar in 1996, Nicaragua asked for assistance in dealing with the country's problem with illiteracy and adult basic education.

The Governments of Spain and Nicaragua and the Organization of Iberoamerican States for Education, Science and Culture (OEI) were responsible for programme funding and execution from 1996 to 2000. This arrangement was later extended to 2004, at which point the Ministry of Education took over completely and the Programme acquired full institutional status.

PAEBANIC, during its functioning as such from 1997 to 2003 and since its official status within the Ministry of Education as the General Directorate of Adult Education since 2004, has been a consistent and effective pillar of support in contributing to and completing Education for All in Nicaragua.

The global objective of PAEBANIC, which was conceived and designed to renew and provide a new impetus for literacy and adult basic education, is:

“the search to satisfy the basic learning needs of young people and adults in order to develop a permanent pedagogical education and self-education process, aimed above all at work and production while it promotes participation and strengthens the national identity”. To fulfil this global objective, the following objectives are required:

1. **To improve literacy and basic education rates in the Nicaraguan population for ages 15 to 60.** Emphasis is on 15 to 24 year-olds who are not in the formal education system; training these young people is the rapidly effective key to poverty eradication. This segment of the population is considered to be the most problematic and vulnerable, because it covers large numbers of young people of both sexes who, for want of alternatives in the work market since they lack the required competencies and skills, are liable to fall into high-risk situations by, for example, joining gangs, falling into drug addiction, or taking up prostitution or other kinds of behaviour that lead to social exclusion.
2. **“To contribute to work training for graduates from the first and second levels of Basic Adult Education”.**
3. **“To promote and strengthen adult education structures in Nicaragua”**

DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION ACTION

The Programme, developed in accordance with objectives established in the Global Plan, has obtained a number of significant results, especially in the following pedagogical areas:

- **The strategy for geographical cover** was designed for progressive implementation. Already in 1998, in its execution phase, PAEBANIC commenced activities in four of the most densely populated departments or provinces of the Pacific region. In 1999 six additional departments were covered and in 2000 the northern departments joined the Programme, making a total of 14 out of the 17 Nicaraguan departments. With the inclusion of Río San Juan in 2002, the Caribbean coast is the only area still uncovered.
- **The supply of Literacy and Adult Basic Education has improved**, both in quality and quantity.

- Between 1998 and 2003, 244,896 individuals enrolled in the three levels of PAEBANIC, with a final enrolment figure of 190,549. The highest initial enrolment figures occurred in 2000 and 2001, whereas the highest final enrolment figures were recorded in 2000 and 2002 (see Table 5).
- The average global educational retention rate was 77.9%, deteriorating in the Second Phase in comparison with the First. The highest retention rates were recorded in 1998 and 2002 and the lowest in 2001 and 2003.
- Of the students who enrolled between 1998 and 2003, 87,693 finished Level I (equivalent of 2nd grade primary), 59,573 finished Level II (equivalent of 3rd and 4th grades) and 43,249 finished Level III (5th and 6th grades), thus completing basic education.

TABLE 5
STUDENTS PER YEAR : TOTAL (ALL LEVELS)

YEAR	INITIAL ENROLMENT	FINAL ENROLMENT	DROPOUT RATE
1998	14,394	12,170	15.45%
1999	39,960	32,274	19.23%
2000	52,311	42,622	18.52%
Phase I	106,665	87,066	18.38%
2001	47,859	29,767	37.80%
2002	46,488	38,609	16.95%
2003	43,884	35,073	20.08%
Phase II	138,231	103,449	25.17%
Total	244,896	190,515	22.20%
2004 BAE + III Alternative Level	63,821 + 4,119		

In 2004 63,821 people enrolled in the different PAEBANIC Levels and Circles and 4,119 in the third Alternative Level for young people, created at the beginning of the 2004 school year with specific educational materials.

Regarding participation according to gender in the 1998-2003 period, there was a slight predominance of male students (126,214 participants, i.e. 51.54% of the total) over female students (118,682, i.e. 48.46%).

When first enrolling in the Second Phase of PAEBANIC, most students (62.2%) were aged between 15 and 29, with students aged between 10 and 14 accounting for 12.4% of the total.

This means that almost 75% of the beneficiary population was aged between 10 and 29. This result is considered coherent with the demographic and age structure of Nicaragua.

74.5% of PAEBANIC students came from rural areas and the remaining 25.5% from urban areas, a result that corresponds with the greater impact of poverty and lack of education services in the rural environment.

Literacy and Adult Basic Education is carried out via Study Circles. 12,590 of these circles were organized between 1998 and 2003: 7,354 in the Second Phase and 5,226 in the First. The average number of students per Circle oscillated between 18 in 2003 and 21 in 1998 and 1999, thus meeting the methodological parameters established.

There were 3,661 Circles in 2004 – the highest figure recorded by PAEBANIC and which reflects the large numbers enrolled.

In Phase II, 70% of the Circles were located in rural areas and 30% in urban areas. In 2003, 54.6% of the Circles met in schools and 35.7% in private homes.

The human resources of the *Unidad de Dirección* (UD), including the staff of the Organization of Iberoamerican States for Education, Science and Culture (OEI), have steadily increased and numbers have risen from 20 in 1997 to 56 in 2003.

Promotors have increased from 40 in 1998 to 156 in 2003 (including the *Promotores de Apoyo*, who supervise the Promotors), of which 47 are women and 109 men. On average, each promotor covers 17 Circles and their respective facilitators.

According to 2003 data, 22% of facilitators are teachers, 23% are pupils who have passed the school-leaving examination and 41% are in secondary education. Between 1998 and 2003, 22.3% of the facilitators were male and 77.7% female, a structure that contrasts with the male predominance at central and departmental levels of PAEBANIC.

In regard to quality, mention must be made of the curricular change that PAEBANIC has brought about, since its pedagogical and curricular model is now in general use in public literacy and adult basic education, offering fast-track basic education to complete primary level in three years. This model comprises three levels, the first of which is literacy. A constructivist approach is applied which favours a pedagogy for autonomy, with active and participatory learning methodologies, and which combines theory with practice so as to improve the student's personal, family and social life. It uses language as an instrument for social communication; it investigates the different aspects of real life and organizes study contents in a way that enables integral and integrative learning. The curriculum is centred around three areas of knowledge: Spanish, mathematics and socio-natural studies, while topics and activities connected with the world of work and the gender issue are incorporated as cross-cutting themes. The concrete expression of this model is contained in the *cuadernos* (workbooks) which have become an important component in attaining established goals.

In preparing these materials, certain main themes have been incorporated, significant among which are the realities of socio-economics, production, culture and organization; the environment, the family and values. For the first level (literacy), four workbooks have been prepared, with a supporting magazine, *La revista de afianzamiento* and two methodological guides for the facilitator. In the second level (third and fourth grades), seven workbooks and complementary materials are used. For the third grade (fifth and sixth grades), there are five especially designed workbooks.

Taking a broad approach to literacy, PAEBANIC drives an integral training process, organizing basic education in the world of work in such a manner that young people and adults can acquire skills and abilities for the kind of work that will increase their opportunities to create and generate employment, and that will lead to their personal development and that of their family while contributing to the sustained human development of Nicaragua.

Between 2000 and 2004 PAEBANIC, working in coordination with the National Technological Institute (INATEC), trained and qualified 5,831 students in different technical specialities, with each student studying for six months. In the the Mining Triangle the EU is providing assistance for courses for Programme graduates in their mother tongues – Mayangna and Miskitu.

Two modalities are envisaged for the nationwide extension of the Programme: courses in the already-existing **Fixed Centres for Work Training** and **Mobile Activities** that take place in municipal premises and other sites – all with the purpose of providing young students and adults with real access to training and qualification.

THE LITERACY AND ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMME: THE CARLOS FONSECA AMADOR FOUNDATION

This programme is a continuation of the spirit of the National Literacy Crusade, whose great strength was to mobilize young people. Its aim is to perpetuate the kind of mobilization, participation and popular organization that existed in Nicaragua in the last century. It draws its experience especially from the final offensive against illiteracy in 1987 in the Department of Río San Juan, still a war zone, which reduced the rate to 3.6% thanks to the commitment of young people, teachers, women and international volunteers.

The Foundation, created on 26 February 1990, started its activities in the same year. It has no ties to officialdom, but is a popular movement conceived, organized and developed along non-formal lines.

The Foundation has a Director-Coordinator and ten experts who, in addition to having pedagogical experience, are engaged in professions connected with the three main lines of action, which are **production**, **health** and the **environment**. Completing the structure are a Municipal Commission of five members, so called because of its location whereas it covers the whole programme, 20 territorial commissions, and a group of permanent teachers and popular teachers from each community in which education activities take place. The latter are local volunteers who have undergone a training period.

To a large extent teachers in the group come from – and are renewed from – wherever they work.

Education takes place in **given territories** in different municipalities where the population expresses the need and desire for literacy and education. Once the territory has been located, the whole education process can be deployed.

The National Literacy Crusade primer, with its 21 lessons and suitable adaptations for the selected location, is still the main pedagogical material. Thus, the generating word in a district of the capital might be traffic light, and in other territories basket, bread, drought, etc. Content is developed along three main lines:

- Learning how to produce well for consumption and marketing;
- Learning how to prevent sickness and preserve health;
- Learning how to take care and take advantage of the environment for one's own sake.

The education process is progressive; it focuses on one territory, and once this territory is declared illiteracy-free (an illiteracy rate of less than 5%), with students having acquired knowledge and competencies in one of the three main lines mentioned above, activities move to another territory that has applied for and shown interest in literacy and education.

To date, eight territories have been declared **illiteracy-free**, seven of which are rural and one urban.

There are 10,200 newly literate who have also acquired basic capacities and competencies in the areas of production, health and the environment, with 1,845 professional and popular teachers providing pedagogical support and training.

For a territory to be declared illiteracy-free, intermediate and then final tests are carried out. Foreign educators, from places as far away as Barcelona and Italy, come to participate in these tests. One curious detail to emerge concerning the programme in Palacagüina (Madriz) was that 11 university professors from universities in Catalonia took part in its final evaluation.

Resources: Educational materials are provided by the local municipality.
Popular teachers are volunteers, and use is made of resources in the local community.
International assistance from Denmark, Spain and Italy amounts to an approximate annual US \$20,000.

Among its plans, the programme has set its sights on obtaining literacy for the whole of Nicaragua in three years or so. For this it enjoys the human and technical support of Cuba and Venezuela, and is taking advantage of the methodological and technical progress being achieved by those countries, basically through the use of video, television, radio, primer, etc.

As can be observed, this is a literacy and adult basic education model that is integrated with people's lives, experience and development in their own environment and circumstances, and in which people are joint activators in their own education.

3. LONG-TERM OBJECTIVES AND COMMITMENTS IN GOVERNMENT PLANS FOR EDUCATION FOR ALL AND POVERTY REDUCTION

The Government's education policy is related to the country's development policy, and the sound basis of this depends on the quality of its human resources. In theory, education is conceived, organized and planned with this in mind, although in practice there are obvious gaps between policy formulation and execution.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports has established the following three main lines of action in its education policy for meeting the 2015 deadline:

- a) Changing education: relevance and quality.
- b) Broadening the offer and stimulating the demand: adaptability and equity.
- c) Improving governability: participation, results, accountability and efficiency.

Below are the Government documents that establish literacy and poverty reduction objectives and commitments within the framework and dynamics of Education for All (EFA):

- Reinforced strategy for economic growth and poverty reduction (ERCERP) 2001-2015.
- National Education Plan 2001-2015.
- National Development Plan 2001-2020.
- National Action Plan for Education for All (EFA) 2002-2015.
- First report on follow-up to the Nicaragua Millennium Summit (December 2003).

The above documents provide clear evidence of the close relation between more schooling for people and progressive poverty reduction; they demonstrate the high rate of return and the varied and sustained social profitability generated by education, and above all by education for women, which in turn is directly related to the objectives and strategies of **Education for All** (EFA) adopted in Dakar in 2000.

To summarize very briefly from the angle of education and its consequent impact on poverty reduction, these documents commit the country to the following by the 2015 deadline:

- A 30% increase in early childhood education. in cooperation with the Ministry of the Family.
- An increase from 32% to 46% in the enrolment ratio for three- to six-year-olds, paying special attention to rural areas.
- A 90% net enrolment ratio in primary education, increased from the current 82%.
- A drop in the illiteracy rate to 10%, i.e. 50% of the present rate which oscillates between 18.8% and 20.1%.
- An increase of more than 50% in the literate population aged ten and above.
- Starting in 2005, 100,000 additional young people and adults covered, with a view to covering 500,000 around the year 2015.

These goals require substantial reforms, already under way, that aim at increasing and diversifying the education supply by stimulating the demand, at improving the different human-resource, pedagogical and methodological components of the quality of learning, at the widespread implementation of participatory, modern, efficient and effective education management and at a progressive and substantial increase in investment in the education sector.

In 2002 the World Bank produced a plan to accelerate EFA progress and launched the EFA-FAST TRACK initiative.

This initiative aims to assist low-income countries in achieving the Millennium Development Goal for education, which is to achieve universal primary education by 2015.

In the last EFA-FTI meeting, held in November 2003 in Oslo, Nicaragua was selected alongside five other countries to join the EFA FAST-TRACK initiative and received support for implementation.

Nevertheless, according to the First Report on Follow-Up to the Nicaragua Millennium Summit (December 2003), 100% achievement of universal primary education is unlikely, the estimated figure being 90%.

THE RELATION BETWEEN POVERTY AND EDUCATION

Nicaragua is one of the poorest countries in Latin America; its per capita GNP is only one third of the regional average. So it is not surprising that, according to the **consumer index**, almost half (47.9%) of Nicaragua's population is poor, meaning 2.3 million people, of whom 830,000 (17.3%) are extremely poor. Measured according to the **Unsatisfied Basic Needs (UBN)** method, poverty affects 72.6% of the population and extreme poverty 44.7%. Measured according to the **income distribution** method, global poverty affects 60% of the population and extreme poverty 33.5%. Although the incidence of poverty was still high in 1998, there was a slight fall compared with 1993. Based on relative consumption levels, poverty fell by 2.4%, whereas the rate for extreme poverty fell by 2.1%. Nevertheless, despite the relative decline in poverty, the actual number of people living in poverty and extreme poverty increased in 1998 with respect to 1993².

The results of the EMNV 1993 and 1998 household living standards surveys reveal major regional differences in the incidence and intensity of poverty and in its trends. Relatively speaking, poverty and extreme poverty are still overwhelmingly rural, especially on the Caribbean Coast or Atlantic Coast.

The observation that there is a relation between poverty or extreme poverty and low participation levels in education, schooling and literacy is not new.

² *Estrategia de Crecimiento Económico y Reducción de la Pobreza*, (Strategy for Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction) pp. 6-7.

TABLE 6

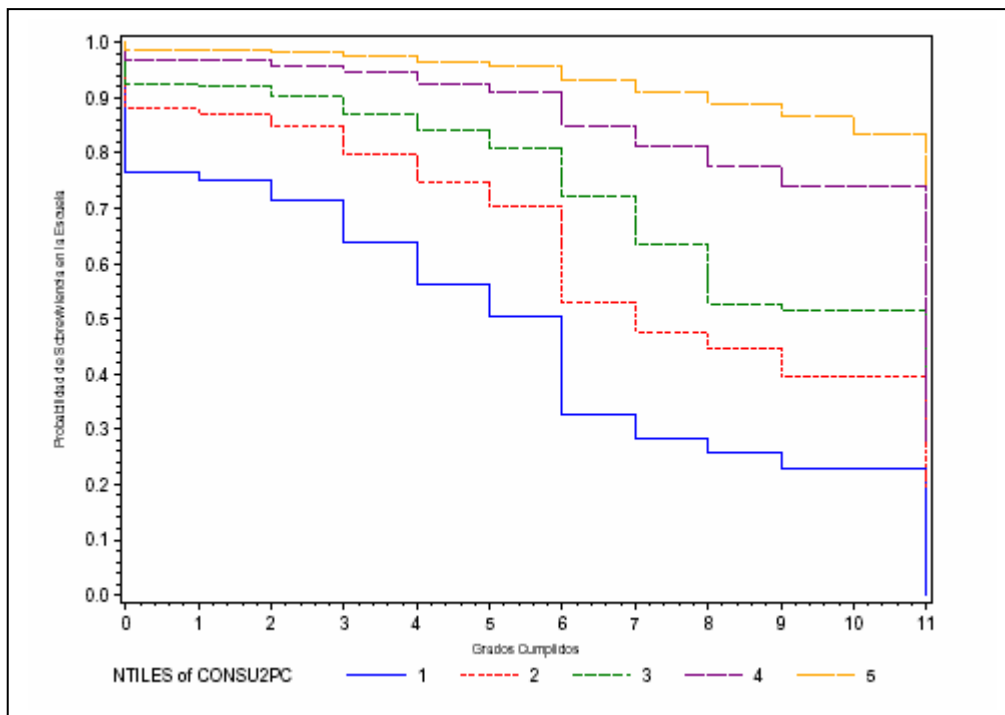
EDUCATION PROGRAMME	EXTREMELY POOR	POOR	NOT POOR
Pre-school	33.90%	28.90%	37.20%
Adult education	17.00%	51.30%	31.70%
Primary	16.90%	36.20%	46.90%
Secondary	3.90%	22.20%	73.80%
Basic technical	9.30%	7.80%	82.90%
Middle technical	2.50%	5.10%	92.40%
Teacher Training		42.40%	57.60%
Higher Technical		13.00%	87.00%
University		5.70%	94.30%
Postgraduate			100.00%
Master's			100.00%
Doctorate			100.00%
% population aged 3 to 17 enrolled.	13.6%	32.4%	53.9%
% population aged 3 to 17	18.7%	33.9%	47.4%
% Total population	15.1%	30.8%	54.2%

Source: Prepared by author on basis of the EMNV 2001 Household Living Standards survey by the General Directorate for Prospecting and Politics (DGPP) of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (MECD).

Poverty is the key factor that makes it difficult for people to progress through the different levels of education and turns the education system into a kind of bottleneck, with the poor rarely reaching the narrowest part.

GRAPH No. 2
PROBABILITY OF SCHOOL SURVIVAL ACCORDING TO CONSUMPTION QUINTILE

(grades completed and probability of survival in school)



Source: Prepared by author on basis of the EMNV 2001 Household Living Standards survey by the General Directorate for Prospecting and Politics (DGPP) of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (MECD).

Notwithstanding, Graph No. 2 offers an interesting prospect since pre-school education shows the best attendance, with 33.9% of pupils from extremely poor families, 28% from poor families and 37% from non-poor families. This good attendance in pre-school education among the poor and extremely poor is possibly explained by the development of communal pre-school facilities and by the activities of many organizations in civil society that opt for non-formal alternatives, giving preference to young children from poor families.

Poverty has an impact on the average years of schooling and illiteracy rates among persons from poor or extremely poor families.

POVERTY LEVEL	ILLITERACY		
	1998	2001	Δ
Extremely poor	37.70%	41.30%	3.60%
Poor	25.10%	23.90%	-1.20%
Not poor	10.40%	10.80%	0.40%
Total	18.70%	18.70%	0.00%

Source: Prepared by author on basis of the 1998 and 2001 EMNV Household Living Standards surveys by the General Directorate for Prospecting and Politics (DGPP) of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (MECD).

4. FINANCING EDUCATION: LITERACY

Nicaragua is a country rich in natural resources but impoverished by adverse political circumstances.

The high levels of poverty are well known and the GNP per capita scarcely reaches 740 dollars.

Faced with this situation, it is fundamental to harmonize the country's macro-economic means, with increased investment and creation of wealth, the basic factor of which is human capital. Also fundamental, therefore, are a complete education structure at all levels and the promotion of research and technological and scientific development.

As explained earlier, the country is still dogged with deficits in basic education, which are demonstrated in its high illiteracy rate and in net enrolment ratios that are still far from the parameters needed for human and economic development in the short term.

Although national and education policies aim at targets that answer modern requirements for human capital and its capacities and competencies, these contrast with severely limited resources, even when education is given priority in their distribution.

TABLE 7
INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION IN NICARAGUA
CHANGES (IN US \$ MILLIONS)

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Total education budget	106.50	106.27	146.88	151.16	149.67	161.6	159.42	160.85	216.6
Education as % of GNP	3.2%	3.0%	3.9%	3.8%	3.8%	4.0%	3.9%	3.7%	4.8%
Total expenditure on education .									
Ministry of Ed., Culture and Sport (MECD)*	71.7	69.0	107.2	108.7	102.6	104.2	102.8	107.9	151.7
National Technological Institute (INATEC)	1.3	1.1	2.9	3.0	2.4	1.8	1.6	1.6	1.7
Nicaraguan Public Administration Institute (INAP)	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
National Technological Institute (INTECNA)	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.7	1.1	1.2	0.7	0.9	0.8
OTHERS**	3.2	3.1	1.0	0.1	0.0	7.3	6.1	5.2	5.5
UNIVERSITIES	29.8	33.0	35.6	38.7	43.6	47.0	48.2	45.2	56.9
MECD BUDGET AS PERCENTAGE OF GNP.	2.1	1.9	2.9	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.5	2.5	2.4
MECD BUDGET AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE	14.1	12.7	16.9	12.6	12.2	12.7	11.3	11.0	16.0

*: Preliminary data from Central Bank of Nicaragua (BCN).

** : Based on preliminary estimations and draft general budget of the Republic.

Source: Prepared by author on basis of data from BCN, MECD, MHCP and CNU

The budget of MECD, which is responsible for all areas of basic education, represented 2.5% of the GNP in 2004 and 16% of total government expenditure.

Table 8 provides the breakdown by programme of the 2002 MECD budget:

TABLE 8
2002 MECD BUDGET BY PROGRAMME

	Year 2000		2002		VARIATION 2002/2000
	EXPENDITURE	%	BUDGET	%	
Total expenditure	1443		1564.1		8.4%
Primary education	972.8	67.4%	899.1	57.48%	-7.6%
Common projects	70	4.9%	244.4	15.63%	249.1%
Secondary education	127.7	8.8%	192.7	12.32%	50.9%
Central activities	103	7.1%	70.1	4.48%	-31.9%
Common activities	50.5	3.5%	40.8	2.61%	-19.2%
Non-assignable	37.2	2.6%	38.6	2.47%	3.8%
Adult education	22	1.5%	34.4	2.20%	56.4%
Teacher training	23.7	1.6%	19.2	1.23%	-19.0
Pre-school education	10.7	0.7%	11.5	0.74%	7.5%
Special education	7.8	0.5%	10.2	0.65%	30.8%
Central projects	18.2	1.3%	2.6	0.17%	-85.7%

Between 2000 and 2002, an important increase is observed in adult education, which covers literacy (a variation of 56.4%), but alongside this is a substantial decrease in primary education (-7.6%).

Funding for literacy and basic adult education in the formal domain, as well as schooling for boys and girls at the different pre-school, special and primary levels, is included in the MECD budget.

Non-formal programmes have their own sources of funding, but amounts are not always reported or declared, as prevailing State legislation requires, as income from international cooperation. Informal, albeit objective information has it that the pro-literacy activities of certain NGOs receive financial assistance from abroad based on solidarity. It is presumed that the amounts involved are substantial, but there is no access to accounts that would produce precise figures and information.

One example of the above is the case of the Carlos Fonseca Amador Foundation whose coordinator reports, with some reserve, on sources and amounts of funding.

Judging by the programmes and alternatives organized by civil society, a great deal is invested in literacy, basic education and non-formal alternatives in adult education in Nicaragua, but it is only the official, systematic information recorded by the Vice-Ministry of International Cooperation of the Ministry of External Relations that can objectively be taken into account.

Regarding PAEBANIC, the financial contribution from Spain and OEI must be recognized.

According to information provided by the representative of OEI in Nicaragua and reflected in the programme evaluation carried out in November 2004, in the period between 1997 and 2003 income in US dollars received by OEI to fund PAEBANIC amounted to US \$10,383,800, of which 70% came from Spanish donors”.

Funding of PAEBANIC activities during its First Phase, from 1997 to 2000, was essentially covered by contributions from the Spanish donors – the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECI), the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (MECD) and the Communities of Madrid and Aragon –, whereas Nicaraguan contributions were above all in kind.

During the Second Phase from 2001 to 2003, and as foreseen in the Institutionalization Plan, Nicaragua’s MECD took over an increasing share of PAEBANIC’s funding each year, contributing 25%, 50% and then 75% of the total budget, so that by 2003 AECI was co-funding 25% of the total budget.

Continuity of PAEBANIC from 2004 to 2006 was ensured via a loan contract with the IDB for an amount of US \$10 million, with the possibility of an increase to finance the Programme for three additional years. In

2004, PAEBANIC was started thanks to a Project Preparation Facility (PPF – an advance on the IDB loan) and the application of funds remaining from AECI’s contribution calculated at US \$750.000,.

The average cost per person having enrolled in and graduated from PAEBANIC between 1997 and 2003 was some US \$45, less than the unit cost for a pupil in formal primary education which, according to information from MECD, was calculated at US \$71 in 2002.

In any case, bearing in mind the results that should be obtained in response to plans to reform and develop non-higher national education with a view to achieving international objectives and goals, the outlook concerning budgetary requirements is as follows:

**TABLE 9
BUDGETARY REQUIREMENTS 2003-2015**

YEAR	(MILLIONS OF US \$)
2003	130
2004	168
2005	200
2006	233
2007	244
2008	253
2009	260
2010	265
2011	271
2012	278
2013	286
2014	295
2015	305

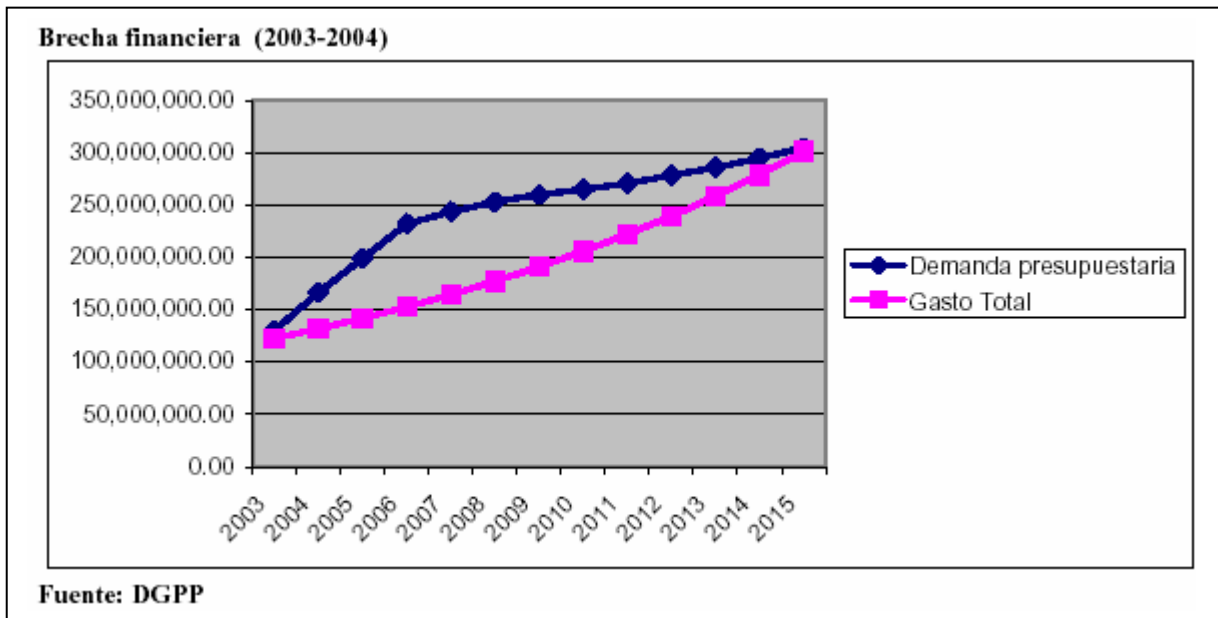
Source: DGPP of MECD.

The financial gap, i.e. the difference between funds needed and funds available, can be observed in Graph No. 3.

GRAPH No. 3

Budgetary requirement/total cost

Financial gap (2003-2004)



Source: DGPP of MECD

In spite of this gap, the supply in basic education is constantly increasing and diversifying with the purpose of advancing towards the real fulfilment of each Nicaraguan's right to education (Art. 58 of the present Political Constitution).

5. INNOVATIVE PROGRAMMES AND SUSTAINABILITY.

There have been in the past, and there are today, literacy initiatives that are run by organizations in civil society.

Nevertheless, it can be asserted in all objectivity that the most consistent programmes, and those that are absolutely guaranteed to continue, are PAEBANIC, which is now an institution in its own right under the Ministry of Education, and the Carlos Fonseca Amador Foundation Programme.

The first, which was introduced in chapter 2 of this study, continues its steady progress, starting with literacy and aiming at secondary education and a *bachillerato* for adults once they have undergone Basic Education and Work Training. It constitutes a fundamental pillar in the organization of Education for All in Nicaragua.

The second, which we also outlined in chapter 2, has lived a long and successful life since 1990, making utmost use of the valuable social mobilization left by the 1980 National Literacy Campaign and the ethical undertaking to eradicate illiteracy in Nicaragua. For historical, ideological and ethical reasons the Carlos Fonseca Amador Foundation has ties with the Sandinista Revolution, the presence and force of which has deep popular roots and is related with the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) political party.

Due to political connections, the Carlos Fonseca Amador Foundation programme receives technical and methodological assistance from Cuba with its recent experience in Venezuela.

6. GENDER AND LANGUAGES

It will be observed from information in this study that gender equity in Nicaraguan education is successful in terms of satisfied demand, and even that women's participation is equal to or greater than that of men in all education indicators, with corresponding equitable treatment of the gender approach and of the images, examples and expressions in the texts used, etc., this being a key cross-cutting theme in education programmes at all levels.

This does not mean that gender equity is as evident in every sphere of life in Nicaragua, where there is still some progress to be made.

Nevertheless, the First Nicaraguan Report (2003) on the Development Goals of the Millennium Summit considers the achievement of gender equity by 2015 to be **very probable**. It is the goal with the **highest rating**.

Concerning literacy work in the intercultural, bilingual context of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast (Atlántico), past activities and conditions created have paved the way for an institutionalized, sustained process of intercultural bilingual education in both regions of the Caribbean Coast, the North Atlantic and South Atlantic Autonomous Regions (RAAN and RAAS).

The roots of this encouraging situation lie in the literacy teaching in indigenous languages of the Caribbean Coast that was introduced as part of the global process of the 1980 National Literacy Crusade, and in the introduction of bilingual education at pre-school and primary levels (up to fourth grade) in 1983.

The autonomous status given to regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast in 1987, and later decrees and laws such as Decree Law 571 of 1980, the Law on Education in Languages of the Atlantic Coast, encourage "teaching in native languages from pre-school to fourth grade primary inclusive". This decree law was reaffirmed in 1990, and the General Law for Basic and Middle Education of 1997-1998 establishes in its chapter II, Article 9, that "intercultural education in their mother tongue is a right of the indigenous peoples of the Atlantic Coast".

Law 162 on languages (1993) authorizes Regional Autonomous Governments to "transfer intercultural bilingual education so that it is under their direct administration and to convert teacher training colleges into decentralized bilingual institutions administered by Regional Governments, Councils and Education Committees". Under this law, intercultural bilingual education (IBE) is extended to sixth grade primary.

At the same time, indigenous mother tongue usage is included in applying justice and in other administrative processes of the Indigenous Communities.

The legal consolidation, together with the institutional development of the Status of Autonomy, the regional elections to public positions, etc., has had a very large impact on the education sector of the Caribbean Coast and its processes, which has materialized in the **Regional Autonomous Education System (SEAR)** and its corresponding Action Plan.

In this context the nature and sustainability of resources for intercultural bilingual education is guaranteed under the State budget in accordance with the dynamic development of intercultural bilingual education.

With the support of "Strengthening the Education Sector" (POSED), a project financed by the European Union, priority is given to the Caribbean Coast within the SEAR framework and Plan.

As part of the dynamics of ongoing national educational reform, an ethnolinguistic curricular commission with three special committees in Miskita, Sumo-Mayagna and Creole is responsible for adapting IBE-specific contents, methods and evaluation systems and for preparing materials and texts for IBE, a process supported by linguistic and cultural research undertaken by URACCAN University and by the Costa Atlántica Centre

for Research and Documentation (CIDCA), which has its headquarters at Managua's Universidad Centroamericana.

At the same time the process of educational and curricular reform carried out by the above-mentioned committees, which are composed of experts, pedagogs and teachers from the region, provides IBE with a very special cultural hallmark through its presence in local life and the participation of the communities concerned.

Practically all of the teachers – whether male or female – working in pedagogy or education on the Caribbean Coast are natives of that region; they master the language of the community in which they work and its structure, and study it at teacher training college, with intercultural bilingual teaching and practice (IBE).

As a result, intercultural bilingual education is taught in all schools in the rural areas (native language as first language and Spanish as second).

In urban sectors monolingual education – i.e. in Spanish – is still predominant.

Given the characteristics of the region, which is vast, and its sparse and very scattered population, education in remote areas is on occasions entrusted to persons who have teaching experience and capacity, but are not qualified teachers. They are known as empirical teachers, popular teachers or facilitators. According to trustworthy accounts, they play an extraordinary educational role.

Intercultural bilingual education on the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast, with its accelerated and profound consolidation, presents an extremely well-constructed and concerted strategy to make Education for All a reality in that pluri-ethnic, plurilinguistic and pluricultural region. It is therefore understandable that SEAR has established the following goals to be attained by 2015:

50% literacy achieved; pre-school education operating in all schools; 80% of all boys and girls in primary education; emphasis on adult education, especially for women; technical vocational training programmes developed for young people; training for all teachers (men and women) in the region's teacher training colleges; intensified support from the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast (URACCAN) in the whole process of consolidating the Regional Autonomous Education System (SEAR); strengthened institutional management, authorities and technical resources, and decentralized budget, etc. – all of this within the framework of Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE). SEAR is under way and its action is driven by the objectives and dynamics of the Education for All (EFA) imperative.

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