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Nicaragua, Factor 16: Education

### **Nicaragua: Pushing Education to its Extremity**

Nicaragua is a beautiful country located in the center of Central America. It has beautiful people, beaches, and eight active volcanoes with 19 in total. As amazing as this place may seem they are having one big issue...and that is education. Along with the country being largest in size and fourth in population mass, Nicaragua is close to the bottom when it comes to education in Central America. Did you know that majority of Nicaraguans have not passed what we consider elementary school?<sup>1</sup> According to the article Starting School (2017) the most common reason why they drop out of school was to help support their families. Nicaragua is the second poorest country in Central America, this means education is extremely vital (CGD, 2017).<sup>2</sup> Students in the city are already given an “ok” education, which makes students in rural village areas education even more crucial. In 2013, an article called “Education in Nicaragua” stated that “33.6% of rural Nicaraguans are illiterate, versus 11.1% in towns and cities.”<sup>3</sup> These kids not having the proper supplies or facilities only makes education harder to receive. With higher education available at a very expensive price, it is a dream for most Nicaraguans to attend a university or college. Some Nicaraguans however are granted the rare opportunity to go on and complete their years of schooling. There are five private schools or as we know them as academies in Nicaragua.<sup>4</sup> There are also around 40 universities with most being in the capital, Managua. These schools are bilingual, have better systems of educating, as well as having better facilities for learning and teaching. A person being able to go to one and or both of the schools puts a person at a much higher level in terms of education. The gross domestic product of Nicaragua as well as most vacation spots is tourism, which means the more people who come to the country the better it is for the economy. However, if tourism begins to decrease the people will have to suffer as the economy does poorly and supplies will not come as hasty. According to a resort in Nicaragua called the Gran Pacifica, when it comes to the country the people are nice and the place is beautiful but not enough attractions to make the guests want to stay longer.<sup>5</sup> An article by Suzy Strutner called “ 13 Reasons To Get To Nicaragua Before Everyone Discovers It” states everything but the people, describing all the things that can be done including ‘volcano boarding’ and being able to see all the history of the country.<sup>6</sup> It seems the land and history of Nicaragua receives more attention than the education.

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<sup>1</sup> Starting school. (n.d.). Retrieved July 22, 2017, from [http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/primary\\_and\\_post\\_primary\\_education/going\\_to\\_primary\\_school/primary\\_education\\_life\\_event.html](http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/primary_and_post_primary_education/going_to_primary_school/primary_education_life_event.html)

<sup>2</sup> Rich World. Poor World: A Guide to Global Development. The Center for Global Development (CGD) Retrieved April 03, 2017, from [https://www.cgdev.org/files/2844\\_file\\_EDUCATION1.pdf](https://www.cgdev.org/files/2844_file_EDUCATION1.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Education In Nicaragua. (2013, May 12). Retrieved July 18 , 2017, from [sites.miiis.edu/educationinnicaragua/2013/05/12/access-to-education/](http://sites.miiis.edu/educationinnicaragua/2013/05/12/access-to-education/)

<sup>4</sup> Nicaragua Education & Schools - Retire to Nicaragua, Part 4. (n.d.). Retrieved July 22, 2017, from <http://www.retirepedia.com/nicaragua-education.html>

<sup>5</sup> Tourism In Nicaragua. (2015). Retrieved July 18, 2017, from [www.granpacificacom.com/blog/2015-tourism-in-nicaragua-report](http://www.granpacificacom.com/blog/2015-tourism-in-nicaragua-report)

<sup>6</sup> Strutner, S. (2015, February 02). 13 Reasons To Get To Nicaragua Before Everyone Discovers It. Retrieved July 18, 2017, from [www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/02/what-to-do-in-nicaragua\\_n\\_6524202](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/02/what-to-do-in-nicaragua_n_6524202)

## 1. Overview of the Nicaraguan Life

Although the size of Nicaragua is the largest the population is not the biggest yet it is not the smallest. As of July 17, 2017, there has been a recorded amount of 6.2 million people for its' population. Majority of the population (90%) lives in cities, with almost (54%) living in the capital city of Managua. Nicaragua makes up 0.08% of the world's population.<sup>7</sup> The average family household contains an extended family with on average 6-8 people living in each home, regardless if in rural or urban areas. The people living in these homes are usually the intermediate family which is the mother, father, kids and then extended to members that includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, godchildren, nieces, nephews, or even older siblings with children of their own.

The Nicaraguan diet is very different in terms of what is used and how it is used, but there is one common factor and it is corn, specifically maize. Yes, the Nicaraguans eat more than just corn however around 20% of the land is used to grow the corn. There are islands off the coast called The Corn Islands, where all the corn given to the people come from. The Nicaraguan diet consists of cilantro, mangos, limes, avocados, cabbage, eggs, fish, plantains, red beans, and of course corn.<sup>8</sup> There are a few common dishes that are partially made or eaten everyday. Gallo Pinto (red beans and rice) and Nacatamal (a large corn cake filled with meat and vegetables) are common foods, however a common drink is called Chicha-de Maiz. This drink is made by leaving corn in water overnight so the corn is able to become soft, then you would grind it up the next day with red food coloring, cook it, add "dulce" which is a common local candy and water, and then you will let it sit again overnight. The next day you add more water with sugar, let it sit again overnight, and the following morning it is ready.<sup>9</sup>

Healthcare access in Nicaragua is extremely good, however the people who have health care are not required to attend monthly or yearly appointments. The biggest issue with the system is that rural village areas do not have access to this healthcare. The main reason why these rural residents do not have access is because most medical professionals are not encouraged to go to these areas as well as there are not enough funds to support the professionals to treat the people. It is almost a luxury to see a doctor in the country. Healthcare is not at all expensive depending on what the person is being treated for, most treatments cost about \$35.<sup>10 11</sup>

## 2. The History of Education

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<sup>7</sup>Nicaragua Population (LIVE). (2017, July 17 ). Retrieved July 21, 2017, from <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/nicaragua-population/>

<sup>8</sup> Cahill, N. (2016, June 03). The Nicaraguan Diet: Simple, Low-cost, Delicious and Nutritious. Retrieved July 18, 2017, from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/naomi-cahill/the-nicaraguan-diet-simpl\\_b\\_10281198.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/naomi-cahill/the-nicaraguan-diet-simpl_b_10281198.html)

<sup>9</sup> Corn Fields Forever: One Traveler's Guide to Eating in Nicaragua. (n.d.). Retrieved July 22, 2017, from <http://www.dirt.online/posts/eating-in-nicaragua/>

<sup>10</sup> Healthcare in Nicaragua. (2016, October 18). Retrieved July 19, 2017, from [sites.darmouth.edu/greshaun\\_lacs20fal16/2016/10/18/healthcare-in-nicaragua](http://sites.darmouth.edu/greshaun_lacs20fal16/2016/10/18/healthcare-in-nicaragua)

<sup>11</sup> Healthcare in Nicaragua - International Living Countries. (n.d.). Retrieved July 22, 2017, from <https://internationalliving.com/countries/nicaragua/health-care-in-nicaragua/>

Education in Nicaragua is one of the poorest in Central America, and little improvement has been made since the late 1970's. The Nicaraguan Revolution which was from 1979-1990 had a big impact on the education system. During this revolution as supplies were getting low, the government decided to take money from the schools to fund their army. Mass destruction then came and affected the land greatly and caused millions to evacuate their homes. The government with very little to spend was not able to properly help their people rebuild their country. A lot of people started to work longer hours at their jobs and when payments were not being met the parents then relied on their children to help bring money to the household. This also forced children who were already working part-time to then completely drop out of school to work full-time. However efforts were made to help these students with their education during this revolution. In 2014, an article called "About Nicaragua-Education" by Ashley Manning '...declared 1980 as the year of "alphabetisation", where an educational model to massively increase literacy levels across the country was created. ...The plan was to build a strong force of teachers, most of whom were actually literate high-school students who were trained and sent across the country to help improve literacy in rural and inaccessible areas. For March of 1980, it was set that 7,000 instructors would be ready to prepare 175,000 students for teaching the "literacy method".'<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, there was very little improvement to the education system. This then falls into why most Nicaraguans have not been able to continue their schooling years. However the students who work part-time are allowed to have the opportunity to go to school at anytime they have available to learn. These students would have the choice to chose a school that meets during the morning, afternoon, or at night.

Another factor that played in the education system was gender inequality. Along with it already being hard to attend schools if a boy and girl were enrolled and another boy was trying to be enrolled that boy would then take the girl's spot. In the 70's girls were taught that boys were superior when it came to education. In the late 80's however, females started to enroll regardless if a male wanted in to the school.<sup>13</sup> There was a pro and con with this happening. The pro was that females now have the mindset that they are just as important as males when receiving their education. The con is because the females were becoming educated and getting good jobs, the amount of food being produced in each household decreased as well as the household chores not being done because the males were not as heavily involved as the females were. Up until this time women made up a large part of the labor force at home for production of food and household duties. This shift in education directly affected the production of agriculture.

## 2. Education's Effect

The government's actions to try and restore the country seemed to fail dreadfully. Nicaraguans fell into such a hole that former President Violeta Barrios Torres de Chamorro or Dona Violeta Chamorro filed for bankruptcy and asked the United States for an emergency loan.<sup>14</sup> Nicaraguans who were of the schooling

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<sup>12</sup> Manning, A. (2014). About-Nicaragua Education. Retrieved July 19, 2017, from <https://sites.darmouth.edu/ashely-in-nicaragua/about-nicaragua-education>

<sup>13</sup> Savin, C. (2004). The Educational Situation in Central America . Retrieved April 3, 2017, from <https://www.maclester.edu/educationreform/reformcomposition/CinthiaSR.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Nicaragua: Before and After the Revolution. (n.d.). Retrieved July 22, 2017, from [http://www.bing.com/cr?IG=DAF7EB2B3FE6406BA3A4176010A0AB7D&CID=0DAA0266BD9963243F9908A1BC9F621E&rd=1&h=taWfmRuz4HaOut3mhdnhSNTpDm7oypwhF6\\_Vh6u1Om0&v=1&r=http%3a%2f%2fopensiuc.lib.siu.edu%2fcgi%2fviewcontent.cgi%3farticle%3d1031%26amp%3bcontext%3duhp\\_theses&p=DevEx,5052.1](http://www.bing.com/cr?IG=DAF7EB2B3FE6406BA3A4176010A0AB7D&CID=0DAA0266BD9963243F9908A1BC9F621E&rd=1&h=taWfmRuz4HaOut3mhdnhSNTpDm7oypwhF6_Vh6u1Om0&v=1&r=http%3a%2f%2fopensiuc.lib.siu.edu%2fcgi%2fviewcontent.cgi%3farticle%3d1031%26amp%3bcontext%3duhp_theses&p=DevEx,5052.1)

age during the Nicaraguan Revolution were not able to receive the same education as those before and after them. Due to the lack of quality education during that time working aged adults are now working even harder to receive an education

It is also commonly known for people to receive certain jobs because of family relations. If a person had a relative that had a good reputation of work, another family member was often times allowed to take a job at the same place or one very close to it. This is another obstacle rural residents had to face. Being such a distance away from the job they wanted and not being as educated as the city folk it made it hard to find a good job. This bias has made it difficult for rural residents. Rural residents lack the proper networks needed to obtain the higher economic positions that are normally given to city residents.

### 3. The Solutions

There are several solutions to making the Nicaraguan education system better. 1. There can be a book drive to where hundreds maybe even thousands of books of all genres such as mystery, autobiographies/biographies, drama, action, and more can be donated from students in the United States. Even slightly used school books can be donated. It would allow Nicaraguans, especially students to have a chance to read about the subject of choice from any state or the U.S. altogether. This allows the interest of reading to drastically increase. The one issue with this method of improving the system is that the main language of Nicaragua is Spanish and most books in the U.S. are printed in English. The issue then causes for something good to eventually happen. It will allow for U.S. students to now have a mandatory class of a foreign language as well as students in Nicaraguan public schools being able to learn English or even another as a second language. 2. Including more science related classes into the curriculum. The students in public schools have the same basic courses however instead of a regular science class such as we Americans take, they are taking women based history classes. The same effect the second language would have in schools will also greatly affect more science classes. Since there are people of all cultures in science allowing them to learn more about the subject as well as being able to fluently communicate with them on ideas can push any topic in science to have a greater and positive name.<sup>15</sup> 3. In my school, of Gwynn Park High School there is a program for students who struggle in certain subjects. The program is called ‘Multiple Pathways to Success’. This would be a great program to have in the education system of Nicaragua because even though their classes are considered “basic” not everyone understands a subject as easily as others may. The chances of getting better jobs begins to grow rapidly. Some barriers that may affect the program from being instituted into the system is that there is already a limited amount of teachers at each school so there would be a problem in finding a group of teachers to help the students who are struggling. 4. Building rural schools. One of the barriers of helping educate children is that their homes are at such a distance away from the school building. By having these schools it will then allow for rural children to then be able to receive the same or somewhat of the same education as students in the city. This now allows for a new curriculum to be taught to teachers so they will be able to teach these children. 5. Another solution that can help is being able to have breakfast and lunch at school. Most students are not receiving the proper nutrition. This is mainly because families do not have enough money to pay for any food as well there being a huge drought in the country. A program called the “World Food Programme” has a group of people who help feed the students but because there is such a big need the people have

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<sup>15</sup> Savin, C. (2004). The Educational Situation in Central America . Retrieved April 3, 2017, from <https://www.maclester.edu/educationreform/reformcomposition/CinthiaSR.pdf>

decided to start taking food to those homes. However, they are slowly running out of food which means the students will not receive the proper nutrition and have a hard time to focus and learn in school<sup>16</sup>. Now an even bigger problem with having all of these solutions is money. How are they going to be funded especially events that would happen directly in Nicaragua such as the World Food Programme? Different organizations such as the National Education Association, Global Partnership for Education, buildON, and Education International could help fund these schools and programs. Combining these organizations to help build better schools, properly feed the students, fund different programs in schools and more can affect the population by forcing the poverty levels to decrease. The Nicaraguan lifestyle would greatly be affected because the children would no longer have to work as long or even at all and be able to fully dedicate themselves to school. In the near future it also allows for rural residents to have more opportunities at healthcare and jobs being they would have the same education and be able to apply to those jobs. This also allows for more jobs to become available as more science classes are implemented. There will now be things the people could research, fix, or even invent to help the country.

#### 4. Conclusion

We as people need to come together and continue to strive for excellence by helping those who are not as fortunate as us. We need to increase what we are doing and create settings to where people of these countries can be able to help their own people without any problems. Settings for more diverse leaders need to be created so they can go directly to those places and help those people who currently do not have someone to step in and help them. This allows for a bonus opportunity for Nicaraguan children to learn directly how the United States of America and Nicaragua differ. These American or even people of other countries are able to come to Nicaragua and teach these students certain skills that they would not receive in day-to-day classes. A famous quote from one of Nelson Mandela's speeches said "Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world." By putting all of our very different yet great minds together we have the opportunities to create some great things. We will be able to overcome many hurdles that are consistently being put in our ways or even ones that have been left there for too long. With the large increase of almost 2 billion more people predicted to be here by the year 2050 it is important that not just Nicaraguans or even Americans just wait for the other. By educating one, you open the possibilities for great things to occur as well as the chance to make the choice of education no longer a privilege or something to struggle for but a right.

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