

A YEAR IN NICARAGUA

SUMMARY REPORT 2011

Plan is raising awareness among communities about good hygiene



About Nicaragua

Nicaragua is the second poorest country in Latin America and the Caribbean, with the majority of its population living in absolute poverty.

Plan has been working in Nicaragua since 1994. Plan works hand-in-hand with local leaders and a network of more than 2,700 community volunteers in 255 communities. This approach makes families and communities active participants in their own development.

Problems affecting the children of Nicaragua

- Street and domestic violence
- Child labour and sexual exploitation
- High school dropout rates
- Lack of medicines and health centres
- Teenage pregnancy



Couple registers their son at local healthy care centre.

PLAN'S PRIORITIES IN NICARAGUA

1 Education

- Supporting children to enrol and stay in school
- Championing adult education and literacy

2 A healthy environment

- Providing hand-washing kits in schools
- Raising awareness among communities about good hygiene
- Training volunteers to detect, prevent and report violence and abuse
- Campaigning against violence

3 Family income

- Supporting families to develop better farming methods for increased production
- Establishing seed banks
- Training young people and women in business

4 Children's rights

- Supporting local governments to focus on children's rights
- Raising awareness campaigns on children's rights

5 Child protection and participation

- Encouraging children and adolescents to promote and protect their rights
- Increasing birth registration
- Lobbying the government to develop a report on children's rights, so awareness can be raised and progress can be tracked

By being a child sponsor, you have directly supported projects like the ones below. Your ongoing support sustains our long-term development work which impacts the lives of children, their families and communities for generations to come.

Together we are making an invaluable difference to the lives of people in Nicaragua.

To learn more about Plan's work in Nicaragua visit:

www.plan.org.au/ourwork/southernamerica/nicaragua



Young women working with ceramics after lobbying the municipality for funding.

CASE STUDY: SEX EDUCATION – BREAKING THE TABOO

In Nicaragua, rates of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections amongst adolescents are high. A big reason for this is the lack of information and services.

In the town of Tonalá, the pregnancy rate for adolescents is 41% – double the national average.

But with Plan's support, a group of one thousand young activists is trying to change this.

Trained by Plan, these young people work in a network in all 39 communities in the municipality of Puerto Morazán, including Tonalá. They give out information to students, friends and neighbours, as well as lobbying local government to provide health services aimed at reaching young people.

Lobbying for services

For many years, the network demanded investment in adolescent-friendly services from their local government. Now they receive 2% of the municipal budget.

"We achieved this by holding town councils where children and youth could have their say – and demanding the authorities were present," says Katarina, 23, who has been part of the network since she was 14.

The funds they receive are used to organise forums, discussion groups and debates where children and adolescents can talk about social issues that affect them, and where sexual and reproductive health information is given out.

Recognition from public institutions

Katarina gets huge satisfaction from the fact that the needs of young people are now being recognised by institutions such as the Church, the ministry of health, and the ministry of education. "It's about ensuring that young people are empowered because Plan is not always going to be in our municipality," she says. "We are the ones who make sure the voices of children and youth are heard."

In its process of growth, the Network has become able to work with various institutions. "There is no longer the fear," says Katarina. "We talk directly to the Mayor, as well as the Municipal Council."

One of the Network's main achievements has been that their projects are presented to state institutions, such as the Centre for Health Information and Services, as well as civil society organisations, such as Profamilia (an association for the wellbeing of Nicaraguan families) and the Miriam Project (an association for the intellectual promotion of women). "Today the institutions don't do anything without our input," says Katarina.

"We now make sure that adolescents have as much information as possible, to allow them to make decisions that will lead them to a better life and a healthy lifestyle."

Reaching the Church

The Church was initially opposed to working with the young activists. "The priests stared at us like this..." says Katarina, making a shocked face. "That was when we began to talk about the percentage of maternal deaths. Today they see our work as something natural. The priests open the doors, and they never say no."

Reaching their peers

The network holds regular meetings that start with dance and music. The activists give a short talk about values and self-esteem, and then when everyone's feeling comfortable, they approach the subject of sexual and reproductive health.

"There are still many challenges," says Katarina. "Sometimes parents don't allow their children to take part in our meetings. They think we're talking about inappropriate things the minute sexual health is mentioned."

However, with the backing of the ministries of education and health, the Church and local government, attitudes are starting to change. Doctor Suazo at Tonalá's health centre says: "We now make sure that adolescents have as much information as possible, to allow them to make decisions that will lead them to a better life and a healthy lifestyle."

Some names have been changed for child protection and privacy reasons.

HIGHLIGHTS IN 2010

- Helped 2,500 families to develop new farming methods and increase production
- Set up 350 community health projects to control dengue and malaria
- Trained 120 communities in disaster risk reduction, with awareness raising carried out by children



Children using writing materials provided by Plan.