

## Nicaragua

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### Part 1: Situation update in the country

Nicaragua is a middle-income country that has made significant economic and social progress in recent years, particularly related to children and adolescents. Of a population of 6.3 million, around 41 per cent (2.6 million) are children and adolescents; nearly 60 per cent of the population lives in urban areas.

Nicaragua has had positive macroeconomic indicators, with an average gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 5.2 per cent over the last seven years and inflation falling from 16.9 per cent in 2007 to 3.1 per cent in 2016 according to the Central Bank of Nicaragua. Progress in economic and social policy is reflected in a reduction of monetary poverty from 42.5 per cent in 2009 to 24.9 per cent in 2016, with extreme poverty falling from 14.6 per cent to 6.9 per cent (Living Standards Survey 2016). However, disparities remain: in rural areas, the poverty level is 50.1 per cent and extreme poverty is 16.3 per cent, compared with 14.8 per cent and 2.4 per cent, respectively, in urban areas. The highest levels of poverty occur in the central region, where 44.4 per cent live in poverty and 13.9 per cent in extreme poverty, followed by the Caribbean coast (39 per cent and 11.5 per cent, respectively).

Approximately 16 per cent of persons with disabilities (132,530) registered by the “Everyone with you” (Todos con Vos) programme are children and adolescents. The most common disabilities are physical, motor, hearing and visual.

In Nicaragua, under-five mortality fell from 67.5 to 19.7 per 1,000 live births and infant mortality fell from 17 to 14.3 per 1,000 live births between 2011 and 2018. However, neonatal mortality remained unchanged in recent years, at 10.7 per 1,000 live births. Despite considerable progress in reducing maternal mortality, challenges remained such as cultural beliefs and practices that prevent the use of services, geographic barriers to access, gender violence and teenage pregnancy (due to its inherent risk factors).

Although over-weight and obesity rates among children under five years old fell from 12.7 per cent to 9.7 per cent between 2014 and 2018, the prevalence is above the national average in 74 per cent of municipalities, which indicates that the reductions are concentrated in a few highly populated municipalities. The departments with the highest prevalence are Managua (19.4 per cent), Carazo (16.8 per cent) and Rivas (16.4 per cent).

Chronic malnutrition fell from 17.3 per cent in 2011/2012 to 12.4 per cent in 2018, with the highest levels in the departments of Madriz (21.5 per cent), North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region (20.8 per cent) and Jinotega (18.9 per cent). Acute malnutrition affects 4 per cent of children under five years of age, with highest prevalence rates in Bilwi (9.9 per cent), Jinotega (8.8 per cent) and Granada (8.4 per cent). Malnutrition is due to a lack of information on healthy diet for families; a lack of nutrition plans for a coordinated intersectoral response; and inadequate cultural practices concerning eating and care. At the national level, early initiation of breastfeeding (within one hour of birth) increased from 54.4 to 77.3 per cent and exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of a child's life is at 46 per cent.

In terms of early childhood development, the Ministry of Health monitoring and promotion strategy for growth and development covers 100 per cent of children under one year old and 62 per cent of children under four years old registered by the programmes, but more is required for early stimulation and comprehensive care. The barriers include inadequate coordination mechanisms among institutions of the programme "Love for the smallest ones," as well as poor coverage of protection services which are limited to a network of 267 child development centres covering around 15,000 children under six years of age.

In the past five years, considerable progress was made in primary and secondary education in free access, expanding coverage and improving quality. Between 2010 and 2016, the gross average enrolment rate in the second stage of initial education (children four to six years old) increased from 54.5 per cent to 65.1 per cent. For primary education, the gross enrolment rate was more than 100 per cent (indicating the capture of children of all ages, including underage and overage children) and the rate for secondary education increased from 67.9 per cent to 76.5 per cent.

However, the quality of education remains a challenge for the education system, requiring improvements to school infrastructure, providing teacher training, updating teaching materials, expanding and strengthening modalities of education (for example, community initial education and distance learning for primary and secondary levels in rural areas) and family involvement in their children's education.

Between 2011 and 2016, the retention rate for the second stage of initial education rose from 90.4 per cent to 91.6 per cent; for primary school the figure remained at 92 per cent; for secondary school it rose from 86.3 per cent to 87.5 per cent. Keeping 100 per cent of children and adolescents in school is a challenge, as is reinsertion of children who have dropped out of the system. UNICEF Nicaragua works on motivating children, using educational technology in the learning process, developing life skills and ensuring quality and equitable education at the national level.

One factor for education quality is that teachers are trained and up-to-date.. An estimated four per cent of initial education teachers, 13 per cent of primary school teachers and 5 per cent of secondary school teachers do not have a teaching qualification, according to research by the

Ministry of Education 2017. It is essential that teaching staff receive training and ongoing refresher training in the use of educational technologies and tools, including strategies and materials to transform teaching practices to favour learning with an inclusive and equitable approach.

To improve the quality of learning, challenges remain in strengthening research in education, evaluating learning, and monitoring the initiatives and strategies implemented by the Ministry of Education. These mechanisms provide valuable information on early warnings, adjustments and improvements to teaching practices and the sound management of schooling.

Approximately 15 per cent of children under five years old are not registered by the civil registry, with the figure rising to 20 per cent in rural areas, 22 per cent in the South Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region and 37 per cent in the North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region.

In Nicaragua, statistics show 16 per cent of mothers with children under 18 years of age consider physical punishment to be an acceptable way for educating. According to the Institute of Forensic Medicine (Legal Forensic Institute), 60 per cent of the 150,586 forensic analyses in the country between 2013 and 2015 involved cases of physical and psychological violence against women, girls and female adolescents, 17 per cent of which were classified as sexual abuse. A total of 82 per cent of victims of sexual abuse were girls and adolescents under 17 years of age, with most cases occurring in the family and community environment.

In Nicaragua, sexual violence is a taboo subject and the sexual abuse of children and adolescents is considered a family matter. Social perceptions of age and gender condition this type of violence. Girls and adolescents of primary school age are the highest risk group for cases of sexual violence. Aggressors are most often family members including parents, uncles and grandparents, and the crimes are mainly committed at home.

Nicaragua has traditionally low levels of homicide in comparison to neighbouring countries, with a murder rate of seven per 100,000 inhabitants in 2016. However, since April 2018, the country has faced a social and political crisis when the Government announced social security and pension reforms. The conflict has spread across the country with hundreds of deaths according to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights report in August 2018. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that 23,000 people have left the country since April 2018. Migration is likely to increase because of an economic downturn and international economic sanctions, such as the approval of Nica Act by the United States government.

After several years with growth rates above 3.5 per cent, Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean revised growth projections for 2018 from 4.5 per cent to 0.5 per cent. Other projections are pessimistic about the economic situation: the World Bank forecasts a 3.8 per cent drop in 2018 GDP. According to the Central Bank of Nicaragua, between March and June, the National Institute of Social Security lost 86,439 active insured (a fall of 9.6 per cent), which could be interpreted as a rise unemployment due to the crisis.

Faced with these difficulties, the National Assembly approved in August a first adjustment to the 2018 General Budget of the Republic. The bill of 2019 General Budget of the Republic delivered to the National Assembly by the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit reduces public investment 8.2 per cent from the 2018 budget amended in August 2018. Today, there is an elevated level of uncertainty and socio-economic implications will probably impact the fulfilment of children's rights. Access and quality of social services could be affected and migration increase. This situation could jeopardise the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals.

## Part 2: Major Results including in humanitarian action and gender, against the results in the Country Programme Documents

The results described herein refer to the entire cycle of the 2013-2018 Cooperation Programme between the Government of Nicaragua and UNICEF. In this period, UNICEF Nicaragua supported objectives of the National Development Plan regarding children and adolescents. It aligned with UNICEF Strategic Plan and with global strategic initiatives such as 'A promise renewed', 'Every woman every child' strategy and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Although there was no United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), UNICEF Nicaragua's Country Programme worked with United Nations agencies to strengthen synergy and complementarity. As Nicaragua is highly vulnerable to natural disaster, emergency preparedness is a key cross-cutting area, mainstreamed in all programme planning and implementation.

### Goal area 1: Every child survives and thrives

Early child survival and development is under the "Every child survives and thrives" goal of UNICEF 2018-2021 Strategic Plan.

#### Reduce infant and neonatal mortality

UNICEF Nicaragua provided technical and financial assistance to the Ministry of Health, focusing on the seven most vulnerable local comprehensive health care systems (SILAIS), developing actions to reduce infant mortality by 9 per cent and neonatal mortality by 3 to 6 per cent within the geographic areas of the seven SILAIS.

The reduction in neonatal and infant mortality was possible due to the following strategies: implementing the mother- and child-friendly health units Initiative; improved quality of neonatal care; and increased immunization coverage for the prevention of immuno-preventable diseases. Positive results have allowed the practices to be expanded at national level.

**Mother- and child-friendly health units Initiative:** institutionalized and contributed to increase breastfeeding  
UNICEF's advocacy for promoting exclusive breastfeeding resulted in the commitment by the

Ministry of Health to re-certify 93 per cent (212) health units as baby-friendly. The key indicators for early breastfeeding are now being monitored by the Office of the President of the Republic.

In alliance with partners and under the Ministry of Health leadership, the guidelines of the health centre evaluation were adapted; a teaching programme was conducted for training of 884 Ministry of Health healthcare workers including paediatricians, general practitioners and nurses from the 19 SILAIS, and support was provided to complete the process of internal and external evaluation in these health units.

As a result, the exclusive breastfeeding coverage rose from 31 per cent to 46 per cent, while chronic malnutrition dropped from 18 per cent to 12.4 per cent

### **Improved quality of neonatal care**

UNICEF provided technical and financial support to the Ministry of Health to improve neonatal care through: promotion of appropriate umbilical chord care for preventing sepsis and newborn anaemia; neonatal resuscitation techniques; continuous positive airway pressure; 'kangaroo mother care'. A total of 1,050 health workers, who provide direct care to new-borns, strengthened their capacity to implement the 'kangaroo family strategy' at national-level, including paediatricians and neonatologists.

Between 2014-2015, the implementation of the kangaroo mother care strategy helped reduce neonatal mortality of pre-term babies from 70 to 30 per cent in SILAIS Bilwi and from 90 to 10 per cent in SILAIS Madriz. In these SILAIS, 100 per cent of newborns received proper chord care for preventing sepsis and anaemia. At national level, the institutional childbirth coverage gradually increased over the last three years from 85 per cent (2016) to 94 per cent (2018).

### **Increased immunization coverage**

As part of the Global Alliance for Vaccination and Immunization (GAVI), UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health by importing vaccines for the National Programme for Immunization; monitoring vaccination indicators; and strengthening competence for healthcare workers to provide care for the mother-child binomial with a focus on immunization.

Based on an assessment study on immunization coverage that involved 250 health auxiliaries who work in the country's most remote areas, UNICEF Nicaragua technically supported Ministry of Health to elaborate an educational manual and training programme to reach 900 health auxiliaries from the 'family and community health model'. The actions reduced mother and infant mortality with identification of risk signs and reducing missed opportunities for immunization.

Education material was produced to promote immunization at national level. These materials were culturally adapted to the Miskito language, training 726 community leaders and promoters in the Caribbean Coast.

To identify barriers and bottlenecks that lower immunization coverage in indigenous and Afro-descendent communities, a knowledge, attitudes and practices study was conducted on immunization. The results provided the baseline for a communication for development strategy.

By September 2018, pentavalent vaccination coverage had reached 75 per cent among children in the prioritized SILAIS. The pentavalent vaccine immunization coverage increased in five to ten per cent among children under one year old, in municipalities with the lowest coverage in the four prioritized SILAIS.

### **The National Nutrition Plan**

UNICEF contributed to Ministry of Health to implement the updated Community Nutrition and Health Programme (PROCOSAN), and trained 3,720 community leaders. This improved referral services for children with malnutrition or obesity in 1,240 communities from the Caribbean Coast and the Northern dry corridor which had an elevated risk of drought.

In the last two years, UNICEF Nicaragua supported the Ministry of Health in implementing the national strategy to improve the nutritional status of children under six years of age, focused on increasing breastfeeding coverage and improved child feeding practices.

With support from INCAP/Pan American Health Organisation and UNICEF, the Ministry of Health conducted the evaluation of Law 295 'Promotion, protection and maintenance of breastfeeding and the regulation of the marketing of breast milk substitutes'. As a result of the evaluation, the Ministry of Health initiated a process for updating and regulating Law 295.

### **Communication for development institutionalized in the Ministry of Health**

In prioritized SILAIS, community leaders acquired skills on the communication for development 'social ecological model', to be able to support families in the 18 communities selected due to their high maternal and child mortality and morbidity rates. UNICEF provided assistance to charts for the analysis of determinants to improve maternal and child health at family level.

A diploma course on communication for development was held in 2017. Technicians (50) from the 19 SILAIS and communication officers World Food Programme, United Nations Population Fund, IOM and WHO/Pan American Health Organization completed this course. A training on communication for development was given to 30 technicians from six non-government organizations and USAID who work on Zika.

UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health in producing the national communication strategy "Child-rearing with values for early childhood development for social and behaviour change". This communication for development strategy was jointly designed with the Ministry of Health, which involved 40 health workers including doctors, educators, communicators from the Ministry of Health and Nicaragua's 19 SILAIS. The communication for development strategy approaches pregnant women and children under six years old, and focuses on nutrition, promotion of early stimulation, promotion of values in raising children and prevention of violence.

### **Promote quality education in child development centres**

With UNICEF support, the Ministry of Family, Adolescents and Children (Ministry of Family) implemented the curriculum for children under three years in the framework of the family-community modality; developed methodological, theoretical and practical quality care competencies among educational agents that include the production and updating of 18 national standards and technical guides to improve the comprehensive care for children; and created an institutional network among Ministry of Family, Ministry of Health, the Nicaraguan Municipal Development Institute and municipal mayor's offices to monitor indicators in the child development centres at the national level.

The alliance between Ministry of Family and Nicaraguan Municipal Development Institute increased the national child development centres coverage from 63 centres in 2012 to 270 in 2018. UNICEF contributed to improve quality of services provided to 14,275 (95 per cent) children under six years of age enrolled in the child development centres, developing technical capacity to assess child development milestones, educational inclusion, quality standards and monitoring and evaluation.

UNICEF supported implementation of the 'child-rearing with tenderness' educational approach, which reached 100 per cent of the educators, technical personnel and territorial liaisons, spread to almost 4,000 parents. This educational approach stresses the importance of fathers' involvement in raising their children and the prevention of violence.

### **UNICEF contributed to strengthen comprehensive care for children with disabilities**

UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health on strengthening the response to Zika. A total of 2,161 (88 per cent) affected children received follow up from multidisciplinary teams with support from a community network of 5,951 community volunteers and health workers. A network of 2,841 adolescents were trained on the prevention of Zika in seven prioritized SILAIS: Managua, Carazo, Estelí, Las Minas, Nueva Segovia, Madriz and Jinotega.

To ensure the quality care and timely diagnosis, UNICEF contributed to elaborate a guide for surveillance of the congenital syndrome associated with infection by the Zika virus. The Nicaraguan Congenital Malformations Registry was strengthened and expanded. Furthermore, an educational toolbox was produced for child care and family support, taking as reference the community-based rehabilitation approach, the essential components framework and the gaps identified by families and health workers for early interventions. Finally, technical capacities were generated in local staff of 19 SILAIS for registration and evaluation of Zika indicators.

### **Elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV**

UNICEF Nicaragua continued to cooperate to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV at the national level through: analysis of the epidemic's situation; monitoring of the situation of children exposed to HIV; and supporting the implementation of recommendations from the Pan American Health Organization pre-validation mission. UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health to produce and implement an action plan for elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV,

referencing the 'HIV PMTCT cascade'. UNICEF supported seven priority SILAIS to increase the coverage of HIV counselling and testing, and to improve the quality of HIV treatment for pregnant women and their babies. To date, the transmission rate is 2.2 per cent; while 93 per cent of pregnant women have access to the diagnostic test and 98 per cent to antiretrovirals.

### **Improved access to birth registration**

With UNICEF support, the Central Civil Registry Office mobilized its team to serve the most disadvantaged populations in Nicaragua with mobile registration services, the most effective way to combat the lack of registration in 62 remote communities with the least access to services (UNICEF Baseline study, 2013). As a result, 12,351 children and adolescents mainly from indigenous communities in Waspam, Rosita, Bilwi and El Tortuguero were registered, exceeding the target of 9,500 children.

UNICEF Nicaragua supported the National Assembly Commission on Population Issues to elaborate two administrative laws that are fundamental for administrative procedures of updated birth registration processes, based on the Family Code (April 2015) which extended free birth registration up to seven years of age.

### **Improve the quality of pre-school education**

UNICEF supported the training of 3,350 preschool teachers from across the country with an emphasis on those from the Caribbean Coast. The teachers were provided with updated educational materials and trained on the implementation of regular and multilevel preschool programmes.

UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education in updating the "Guide for identifying and responding to early development problems". It supported the implementation of the Early Education Model for Comprehensive Development, which evaluates school environments and family participation in educational processes. A total of 80 pre-school directors were trained on this model.

With the participation of teachers and parents of the North Caribbean region, UNICEF supported the creation and printing of two alternative programmes for pre-school: one for the promotion of equitable gender relations and new masculinities and the other for using experimentation-based learning as a pedagogical tool for generating knowledge.

## **Goal area 2: Every child learns**

### **Quality and inclusive education**

In education, the following results can be highlighted, responding to the "every child learns" goal area of UNICEF 2018-2021 Strategic Plan:

a) UNICEF reinforced participation of children, parents and communities in the school life:

From 2013 to 2018, UNICEF Nicaragua supported the promotion of active participation of

children, parents and the communities in school management, which improves the education they receive.

Since 2016, UNICEF supported the educational community counselling strategy which the Ministry of Education derived from a national policy to prevent violence by fostering violence-free educational spaces. Support was provided to train Ministry of Education officials, including area directors and national, departmental and municipal pedagogical advisers, on the organization and implementation of the strategy and on issues such as personal values, health care, the early warning system and the school's role in assisting people in special situations that threaten their physical and emotional security. Support was provided to review and print materials (modules, guides) which reached more than 160,000 volunteers, including students, parents and teachers. UNICEF guaranteed support to the implementation of the strategy in the Caribbean Coast, including the printing of promotional and formative materials in the Miskito language.

The strategy promoted adolescent leadership to provide psychosocial support and solidarity to other students experiencing difficult situations such as bullying, adolescent pregnancy or the loss of loved ones. UNICEF contributed to systematizing the experience, with a focus on participation and empowerment, to revisit best practices and lessons learned during the four years since the strategy was implemented. Results will guide the strategy in its goal of promoting the educational community's participation and leading role.

From 2016 to 2017, UNICEF supported the development of the Secondary Students Federation in the Caribbean Coast, to help improve visibility and effectiveness of their actions. Main activities were the promotion of sports and culture, to provide students with alternative ways to learn, develop leadership skills and prevent social risks such as drugs, alcohol and all kinds of violence. As a result, Secondary Students Federation was recognized by local education actors as active players in supporting comprehensive education.

UNICEF, in alliance with local and international partners (such as with the National Technological Institute and the Governments of the Autonomous Caribbean Coast Regions) supported schools access to clean and safe drinking water and sanitation services. In this framework, UNICEF supported the promotion of community' participation —particularly children—through school committees in personal and environmental hygiene, as well as in maintenance of water and sanitation systems, ensuring long-term sustainability of services. Guides to promote the participation of the school communities in activities were produced. Teachers and technical staff were trained in the “Family, schools and health community” methodology. Environmental sanitation student brigades were organized and trained to recycle plastic bottles, with which sanitation facilities were constructed.

From 2014 to 2017, a pilot project to real-time monitor pedagogical processes and general school environments allowed the participation of children and parents as well as teachers from rural and isolated areas to report issues that affect development of the school day. This provided the basis for education authorities to find practical ways to monitor school activities

more effectively, even in the most remote areas of the country.

b) UNICEF contributed to improving teacher technical skills

UNICEF helped reinforce the capacities of the Ministry of Education personnel in a variety of areas, including cross-cutting issues, such as disability and inclusive education; prevention of gender violence; monitoring child development at school; and school management.

Between 2013 and 2015, a security programme was implemented by United Nations agencies, to address needs in the indigenous Alto WangkiBocay region. In education, UNICEF contributed to train teachers on curriculum management and mainstream inclusive education, so that teachers could provide education based on the individual learning pace. Other trainings were conducted on new teaching methodologies such as the analytical synthetic phonic method (for reading and writing), and a scientific inquiry-based education methodology. For the period 2014-2018, teacher training in the Caribbean Coast in general disseminated national teaching strategies such as “Everyone can learn”, “the open class”, the use of new textbooks and methodological guides for pre-school and multi-level classrooms.

In support to inclusive education, UNICEF contributed to the updating and reproduction of materials on learning difficulties in reading and writing for 5,000 regular and integrated schools: five guides with practical exercises to detect and respond to development problems that hinder learning of reading and writing, used by teachers at the pre-school level and in the first years of primary education. Training was provided for special-education teachers on the use and management of the materials. Also, a post-graduate course on inclusive education, aimed to 40 national technical staff who provide technical support to integrated schools, is being developed by the state university.

The first steps were taken to produce 10 video-books with contents from the curriculum aimed at strengthening the inclusion of children with disabilities in regular schools. The video-books, which are produced in sign and written languages, with integrated voice and sound effects, allow access to reading and learning for both children with hearing and visual disabilities, as well as for children without disabilities.

In preschool education, UNICEF supported a project to provide preschool teachers from the Caribbean Coast with the much-needed materials to address gender issues since early stages in life. A practical guide with activities on how to address gender biased misconceptions was put together by teachers. Also, a guide with activities to promote learning based on experimentation was developed. A postgraduate course on early childhood development and preschool education offered by UNAN was initiated in 2018, aimed at some 240 pedagogical advisers and teachers.

UNICEF contributed to develop the early education model for comprehensive development, strengthening capacities through the training of pre-school principals on the findings of the World Bank-accompanied pilot phase and the use of in-class monitoring tools.

To improve the teachers' classroom performance, since 2017 UNICEF supported the training of some 4,000 school directors on pedagogical accompaniment and practical improvements in the classroom, particularly monitoring indicators such as student and family participation. School principals were trained in the use of a national class observation instrument.

UNICEF supported the exchange of experiences in the South-South cooperation. It contributed to train the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education's central-level personnel on strategies for inclusive education in Paraguay and educational television and strategies for pre-school level in Mexico. Specialists from Bolivia, Chile, Mexico and Spain helped support the training of the national team that leads the Educational Community Counselling strategy in aspects related to the provision of psychosocial support.

c) UNICEF contributed to strengthen institutional capacities

During the 2013-2018 period, UNICEF supported the development of institutional capacities of the Ministry of Education, the Regional Education Secretariats and the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Regional Directorate at the North and South Caribbean Regional Autonomous Governments, with technical and financial assistance on education management. UNICEF Nicaragua also supported Ministry of Family, the Ministry of Health, the National System for Emergency Prevention and Response, the Government of the Indigenous Territory and groups from the local and international civil society.

UNICEF Nicaragua supported the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Family to incorporate a gender approach to educational actions under the inter-institution strategy, "coexistence with respect and equity in the school, family and community". With the support of specialists from the FLACSO Gender Directorate and from UNICEF Latin America and Caribbean regional office, the capacities of an interinstitutional technical team, created to develop this strategy, were strengthened, resulting in the personnel's raised awareness and the development of a conceptual framework for the strategy.

Nicaragua is vulnerable to natural phenomena such as earthquakes, hurricanes, volcano eruptions and floods emergencies. For disaster risk reduction, UNICEF Nicaragua promoted the creation of ad-hoc institutional and civil society technical committees on education in emergency, involving Government such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Family, the Ministry of Health, SINAPRED, and Save the Children, Plan International, World Vision, Aldeas SOS, EDUCO, Christian Children's Fund of Canada, Terre des Hommes Italy. The organisations developed institutional emergency-response plans, reactivated emergency preparedness and response coordination that had been inactive, and developed a pool of specialists in the area of education in emergencies.

Over the years, UNICEF Nicaragua has improved education in the Caribbean Coast with interventions that range from political lobbying for the Caribbean Coast, to the development of local initiatives born out of the need to have educational materials adapted to the local reality, preserving the idiosyncrasies and world views of the different ethnic groups. UNICEF strengthened coordination between the Caribbean Coast Autonomous Governments and the

national Government to align plans, and reach agreements on education situation in the Caribbean Coast through harmonized plans that invest in teacher training, school infrastructure and curricula updates.

To support the Caribbean Coast education authorities to administer to an education system where rurality and isolation is a reality for communities and schools, a real-time monitoring system was piloted from 2014 to 2017. The experience proving that there are low-cost alternatives to enhance quality of education in rural areas. The experience is yet to be officially incorporated into the system and scaled up.

Regarding water, sanitation and hygiene in schools, UNICEF Nicaragua supported efforts to develop alternative ways for schools in the Caribbean context to equip themselves with systems that are tailored to their needs and reality. Publications produced as part of WASH in school interventions include: a catalogue with technological options for water and sanitation in schools, modules for technical training of adolescents in plumbing and masonry, and a school activity guide for the control and elimination of *Aedes aegypti* (mosquito responsible for transmitting malaria and dengue) tailored to pre-school, primary and secondary levels.

In the previous two years (2017-2018) UNICEF Nicaragua supported efforts of the Ministry of Education and the World Bank to develop a comprehensive early childhood development education model. Instruments to evaluate the quality of school environments and family participation are being created.

UNICEF Nicaragua is active in the group of organizations cooperating in education, which support the creation and implementation of 2017-2021 national education plans. Other members of the group are United Nations Population Fund, the World Bank, the European Union, the Organisation of Ibero-American States and bilateral cooperation agencies such as USAID, JICA, AECID, Luxemburg Cooperation. In 2019, UNICEF Nicaragua acted as coordinator, contributing to the approval by Global Partnership for Education of US\$ 5 million to finance the Education Plan 2017-2021, allocated to pre-school education.

### **Goal area 3: Every child is protected from violence and exploitation**

#### **Child protection**

In child protection, the following results respond to the “every child is protected from violence and exploitation” goal area of the UNICEF 2018-2021 Strategic Plan:

a) UNICEF strengthened national capacity to prevent and respond to violence against children and adolescents:

With technical and financial support from UNICEF, the Ministry of Family, Ministry of Education, the judicial branch, the Legal Forensic Institute and the national police strengthened capacities in gender, violence prevention, care to victims of sexual abuse, and adolescents at social risk and in conflict with the law. In total, 543 volunteer family counsellors acquired tools to improve

the values school for parents; 250 of them participated in the national congress of volunteer counsellors to encourage 1,112 counsellors to continue and acquire knowledge on the importance of voluntary work for violence prevention. With UNICEF support, Ministry of Family improved its violence prevention efforts through strengthening the parental skills of 6,019 mothers and fathers. In addition, 1,240 children (489 girls, 751 boys) at social risk were attended by Ministry of Family's 'interest groups', for them to remain at school. The specialized care model for children who are victims of sexual abuse was consolidated, providing care services to 586 children countrywide.

Regarding institutional coordination, UNICEF supported Ministry of Family and Ministry of Education to jointly implement an early warning system to detect situations of school bullying, addiction, adolescent pregnancy, family conflict, sexual abuse and self-aggression.

Until 2017, UNICEF collaborated with the national police to enhance the model for attending to victims by training investigators and heads of sectors on investigating crimes against women, adolescents and children. Alongside the technical training, awareness was raising to administer gender perspective. The national police led the process to reactivate the inter-institutional violence commissions, coordination where cases of gender-based violence are followed up at the national level.

b) UNICEF contributed to deinstitutionalize children

With UNICEF Nicaragua technical and financial assistance, the Ministry of Family implemented the 'Loving return' (Retorno Amoroso) plan to deinstitutionalize children. This includes strengthening capacities related to the guidelines on the alternative child care modalities. Only in 2018, a total of 183 children (103 girls and 80 boys) left special protection centers to be reintegrated into their biological and extended families. This successful experience represents a model at regional level and was shared through the "Systematization of the experience of the process of deinstitutionalization of children and adolescents in Nicaragua: Love Programme 2007-2017" which was officially presented at the Central American Forum on the right of children to grow up in a family: transforming institutionalization policies into alternative care modalities, held in Managua in March, 2018.

c) UNICEF contributed to strengthen justice system for adolescents in conflict with the law

To develop skills for those involved with adolescents in conflict with the law, UNICEF supported a multi-year process in alliance with the judicial branch. A pilot project was implemented for the design of a creative and systemic pedagogy for the specialized juvenile penal justice system, with the participation of 75 adolescents (68 boys, seven girls) in conflict with the law. Then, the process was scaled-up and a total of 173 adolescents (165 boys and eight girls) in conflict with the law participated in the supervised replications of the diploma course on creative, systemic and life-skills methodologies aimed at 90 professionals from Penal Sanctions Implementation and Monitoring Offices and interdisciplinary teams of the Juvenile Penal District Courts. This permitted reflection with the adolescents on their life plans and allowed them to receive new life skills.

Support was provided to the judicial branch to administrate justice with a gender perspective and promote human rights of vulnerable populations. Fifty local judges were certified in the 'trainer of trainers' methodology to promote respect for individual rights, the human rights of children and women, and the prevention of violence against children. In addition, 430 judicial facilitators (231 male, 199 female) strengthened technical capacity for managing the booklets on constitutional rights, the family and violence prevention in their work with the community; 168 judicial branch officials (126 female, 42 male) developed skills in gender, graduating from a diploma course on mainstreaming the gender perspective.

Assistance was provided to the Specialized Juvenile Penal Justice System to develop a new pedagogy for the application and follow up of penal measures. With UNICEF Nicaragua support, the judicial branch enhanced the capacities of 217 national police officers (43 per cent women, 57 per cent men) in juvenile penal justice for the correct application of the Third Book of the Legal Code for Children and Adolescents. This book refers to the presumption of minor status; the time, form and treatment during detention; and coordination mechanisms among the police, public prosecutor's office and courts.

d) UNICEF contributed to generate and use evidence to prevent violence

UNICEF encouraged government institutions to generate and use evidence to design, monitor and evaluate public policies to protect children and adolescents from violence and exploitation, with a results-based management focus.

It is worth highlighting the innovative partnership UNICEF built with the Legal Forensic Institute. With UNICEF support, the Legal Forensic Institute led processes to strengthen capacities and developing systems for gathering and analysing child-related data and indicators. It helped UNICEF to place the subject of prevention of sexual abuse and adolescent pregnancy on the national public agenda, validated by data and evidence. This led to agreements at the national level, including: the design and implementation of a communication strategy for the prevention of sexual abuse; the Ministry of Family's creation of a care model for victims of sexual abuse and pregnant adolescents; the design of a manual for convening workshops on preventing and attending to adolescent pregnancy.

In 2018, with technical and financial support from UNICEF, the Legal Forensic Institute strengthened its capacities and GALENO automated information system, which generates real-time information on child victims of violence. UNICEF supported the Legal Forensic Institute to conduct an assessment study on national research team competences in the production of new studies, guaranteeing the application of the child rights and gender focus. The quality of the experience led the Legal Forensic Institute to present the results of the study on violence against girls at the United Nations Global Data Forum in Dubai, demonstrating a direct contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals based on the work done with the GALENO information system.

The information generated by the Legal Forensic Institute was relevant to design the 'prevention of sexual abuse starts at home' the communication for development strategy,

implemented with the promotion of five behaviours in its first stage, reaching 2,814,716 people, exchange of opinions of 40,574 and impressions 9,840,935. The Ministry of Family took on the strategy implementation through talks to students and parents, educational fairs and family counselling.

UNICEF Nicaragua supported the Ministry of Family and the National Assembly to strengthen institutional capacity to develop systems that collect and analyse child-related data and indicators. The National Assembly received technical and financial assistance from UNICEF on issues related to the Sustainable Development Goals and public investment in children.

UNICEF assisted the Ministry of Family to strengthen data management through the training of 192 officials on the planning cycle of the Nicaraguan Government, its management and follow up tools, and its administrative registration system, known as the 'single protagonist registry'. To ensure institutional anchorage, the single protagonist registry system user's manual was updated and validated in Ministry of Family's departmental offices. The Ministry of Family collected and analysed inputs for the national adolescent pregnancy prevention policy, for which 18 workshops were held (one per department and one for the Autonomous South Caribbean Region) with the participation of 595 stakeholders (42 percent of them adolescents). Ministry of Family finalized the systematization of the process, which included risk and protection factors, along with the adolescents' demands on education, health and sexuality.

UNICEF Nicaragua promoted the use of evidence to form public policies at local level through its strong cooperation with the Autonomous Regional Government of the Southern Caribbean Coast (GRACCS). The GRACCS' Planning Secretariat (SEPLAN) developed its Information and Knowledge Management System (SIGC), which includes priority child indicators to be monitored. The updated information generated by the system is published on the GRACCS' webpage and allowed it to make evidence-based decisions on which services should be increased, which capacities and opportunities need to be developed for children and youths, and which geographical areas should be prioritized. In parallel, the GRACCS Secretariat for Women, Children and Adolescents designed and implemented the Injuries Surveillance System, generating reports and data on violence against children in Bluefields. One of the main achievements and guarantees of sustainability was the continuation of the Interinstitutional Alliance for Fighting against Violence in the South Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region.

e) UNICEF contributed to design and implement regional policies for children and adolescents UNICEF Nicaragua supported the GRACCS with the development of the Regional Policy for Children and Adolescents, adopted in December 2014. Through a human-centred design approach, 44 local authorities collaboratively drew up plans to implement prototypes of social innovations for children in five municipalities. The process strengthened the capacity of local officials in testing and adapting innovative interventions based on continuous feedback from local communities. These processes included the consultation and participation of adolescents. After the participatory design phase, the GRACCS Secretariat for Women, Children and Adolescents strengthened the process for disseminating and implementing the Regional Policy and Strategy for Children (PERNA) in the whole Autonomous Region.

f) UNICEF fostered social inclusion and violence prevention through skills development in children and adolescents

Through the support by UNICEF to institutions such as the Bluefields Indian Caribbean University, Ministry of Family and GRACCS, more than 10,000 children and adolescents from across the country developed skills to prevent violence by an analysis of social gender norms and practices, participation in designing solutions to problems affecting their community, preparation of their life plans, and entrepreneurship for social inclusion.

With technical and financial support from UNICEF, Bluefields Indian Caribbean University launched the Innovation Laboratory in April 2015. To date, more than 1,000 children, adolescents and young people developed skills in demand today, such as creativity; team work; information, communication, and technology literacy; and assertive communication. Methodologies implemented by the Innovation Lab included innovation camps, community social mapping, information, communication and technology workshops, and educational robotics trainings. Hundreds of adolescents and young people opened doors to the labour market through their participation in internship fairs. In the framework of Nicaragua's participation in the Generation Unlimited Youth Challenge, 50 adolescents and young people from seven communities of the Caribbean Coast worked in teams to design ten projects to innovatively address problems related to staying on at school, the development of competences and empowerment with a gender focus.

Through UNICEF support, the National Technological Institute in Bluefields accredited the vocational training course of masonry and plumbing for adolescents. Almost 200 adolescents (including 20 females) graduated from the course and created 15 micro-companies, providing services in masonry to their communities. To make these entrepreneurship initiatives sustainable, a South Caribbean youth and adolescent network was organized in the South Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region and trained on issues linked to entrepreneurship, emotional intelligence, and sexual and reproductive health. To be inserted in local economy, the young people in the network established the multiservice cooperative, accompanied in the process by the Ministry for the Family and Community Economy.

In collaboration with the national police, 7,422 adolescents and youths (4,899 male, 2,523 female) at social risk enhanced their skills for the prevention of violence, drug consumption and the use of arms through community intervention plans based on play, sports and recreational activities.

Additionally, within the framework of the first phase of UNICEF Nicaragua's volunteer strategy, 65 volunteers' commitment helped 177 children strengthen self-care skills to prevent sexual abuse. The volunteers (university students) were organized into groups and received training workshops on children's rights, team strengthening and project design. The projects designed by the volunteers focused on internalizing key sexual abuse prevention messages through play-based methodologies. The projects received close technical, economic and logistical support from UNICEF. The work carried out with the volunteers in 2018 was the initial phase of

a volunteering strategy that will be scaled-up in 2019.

### Part 3: Lessons learned and constraints

Lessons learned and constraints are from the entire Cooperation Programme (2013-2018).

Cooperation at the local level in the two Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast involved developing partnership with both the Autonomous Regional Governments of the South Caribbean Coast (GRACCS) and the North Caribbean Coast (GRACCN), including opening UNICEF field offices in Bluefields and Bilwi. This programmatic approach lost strategic cooperation with ministries at the central level. It also created an overlap of interventions in the geographic area where programmes implemented by the national ministries and the initiatives of the regional Governments coincided.

Considering that the UNICEF Nicaragua mandate applies to the entire national territory, the implementation of universal public policies requires a balance between presence at the central level and anchoring at the local level with relevant institutions. Actually, in a situation where there are Autonomous Local Governments, one of the added values of UNICEF cooperation is precisely to facilitate the articulation and coordination between the different levels of government (national and local) within the legislative framework that regulate decentralization in the country.

Above all, it is essential to develop joint planning processes based on the identification of national priorities and defining their implementation at the local level. It is necessary to understand the functioning and institutional role of the different partners in order to adapt UNICEF cooperation to their dimensions and objectives, which is a critical aspect to anchor the programmes sustainably. Based on this analysis, corrective measures, such as promoting joint planning spaces with Autonomous Regional Governments and Central Ministries, were taken during the last two years of the Cooperation Programme, which gave the opportunity to re-establish a certain balance, highlighting the lessons learned.

The 2013-2018 Cooperation Programme faced difficulties with access to updated and opportune official data and statistical information. The last Nicaraguan Health and Demography Survey, ENDESA, which incorporated many indicators related to UNICEF's mandate, was carried out in 2011. The lack of updated indicators and the absence of other sources of official information was a barrier to monitor the situation of children in the country and measure the impact of UNICEF cooperation with a results-based approach.

The bottlenecks generated learning opportunities, however. In this context, generating baseline at the beginning of an intervention is essential, as a starting point to monitor and evaluate the intervention. Another way to address a lack of official public information is to develop studies with institutional partners, in the context of the Cooperation Programme. For example, the good practice with the Legal Forensic Institute which produced two studies on violence against

children and adolescents for the periods 2013-2015 and 2016-2017. The quality and relevance of the information were crucial to analyse and understand the causes and effects of violence against children and adolescents in the country. The Legal Forensic Institute and UNICEF were invited to present this experience at the United Nations World Data Forum organized in Dubai in 2018.

In recent years, the programmes implemented by UNICEF were marked by innovation and the development of pilot projects. The lessons learned were identified during the evaluation carried out in 2017 to analyse seven pilot projects implemented in the Caribbean Coast. One of these lessons is that before developing a new initiative, it is essential to have a shared conceptual framework with partners to design, implement, monitor and evaluate the intervention. In addition to a theory of change (including objectives, strategies, risks, assumptions) the conceptual framework must have clear goals and indicators with a focus on results-based management. This will facilitate the evaluation, dissemination, scaling-up and sustainability of the interventions, and provide the necessary information for the systematization and documentation of the strategies.

These requirements are important when dealing with model experiences and it is key to ensure the presence of UNICEF Nicaragua in the territories for technical support in implementation. The systematization and documentation of the strategies should not be limited to evaluation, but rather have a continuity perspective. It is worth mentioning that a large part of these lessons learned were used to design and initiate the implementation of UNICEF's volunteering strategy in 2018.

The Cooperation Programme that ended in 2018 demonstrated that the intersectoral programmes and implementing joint strategies by the different programme areas reach interesting achievements. For example, the prevention of child sexual abuse was addressed by both child protection and education programmes. The programmes developed transversal initiatives that involved various institutions such as the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Family, Ministry of Health, through funds shared by different programmes. The lessons learned from intersectoral experiences such as the prevention of child sexual abuse and the comprehensive development of early childhood serve to design new initiatives, such as the strategy of adolescent participation in the Cooperation Programme 2019-2023.

Within the intersectoral framework of the 2013-2018 Cooperation Programme, communication for development was important to reach programmatic results, and achieved institutionalization in the Ministry of Health. The intersectoral implementation of the communication for development strategy for the prevention of sexual abuse against children was important, as was the alliance with the ND Media consortium to disseminate educational messages for well-defined behaviours. In the Cooperation Programme 2019-2023, the communication for development component is a core cross-cutting strategy in programme implementation, to systematize and disseminate the country office experience on this matter.

At different moments of the 2013-2018 Cooperation Programme, bottlenecks were experienced

to implement HACT activities. Depending on the Government's authorization to implement micro assessments, spot checks or audits, the activities suffered delays or even cancellations. Based on the lessons learned from the difficulties, the country office developed mitigation mechanisms to improve implementation. In the future, UNICEF Nicaragua will seek to directly incorporate these quality assurance activities in the annual work plans signed with the implementing partners so that they are validated and authorized in advance by the Government.

Finally, there were lessons learned by Nicaragua's recent socio-political crisis. In this context, UNICEF Nicaragua quickly ascertained that it was essential to balance its respected relationship with the Government while fulfilling its mandate to contribute children's rights to health, nutrition, education and protection. UNICEF Regional Office support was key to develop a risk assessment, to closely monitor the situation and to respond. In line with results of risk assessments, training workshops were conducted to strengthen the capacities of civil society organizations and government institutions on psychosocial care for children in emergency situations. UNICEF staff also received training on ethical management of social networks.

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