

EDUCATION SECTION
PROGRAMME DIVISION



CHILD FRIENDLY SCHOOLS

CASE STUDY:
NICARAGUA

UNICEF 2009

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II. PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

Overview of CFS programme

Nicaragua has shown progress in the development of legal and policy frameworks for education based on an understanding that the role of the school and the availability of other learning opportunities play a significant role in transforming individuals, their families and local communities. But the sustainable translation of this legal and policy framework has not been enough to make a systematic change for the generations who are the future of this country. For this reason, and based on UNICEF and other partners' pledges to support Nicaragua in efforts to achieve EFA and Millennium Goals and CRC commitments, several national institutions – with timely support from United Nations agencies – agreed on the Child-Friendly and Healthy School (CFHS) Initiative. It was an attempt to put into practice an institutional consensus about the priority to improve the outreach and quality of education in Nicaragua and to address a number of critical child development factors through an intersectoral, multi-institutional, and child rights oriented approach.

The vision established early on as to what is a Child-Friendly and Healthy School (CFHS) can be best described by the following statement: *“A Friendly and Healthy School is a place where children and adolescents build, practice and develop knowledge, abilities and skills for life, in a healthy, safe, comprehensive, protective environment where differences and cultural diversity are respected, with the active involvement of children, adolescents, educators, parents and the community.”* (Taken from UNICEF Nicaragua CFHS Concept Document)

CFS history¹¹

For decades, UNICEF has demonstrated an unyielding dedication to Nicaragua's children and to government and civil society efforts to improve their situation and advance towards the fulfillment of their established rights. Experiences gained over the years in critical elements of integrated health, education and child protection actions – combined with the firm commitment and professional capacity of the present UNICEF staff – form the basis of UNICEF's effort to design a Nicaraguan translation of the UNICEF global CFS initiative, referred to in Nicaragua as the Child-Friendly and Healthy School Initiative – CFHS (*Escuela Amiga y Saludable*).

Initial foundation (pre-CFHS Initiative)

The first related UNICEF initiative began in 1994 when the two Ministries of Education, Culture and Sports and Health signed a collaboration agreement to promote health and health education in primary schools. The agreement included multiple components: provision of school health services and lunches; promotion of a healthy school environment; organization of physical education activities; and teacher training. In 1998, the Nicaraguan Water and Sewage Company (ENACAL), with the support from UNICEF and the Swedish International Development Agency, launched the Nicaraguan Hygiene

¹¹Davila et al., “Case Study: ‘Building Alliances at the National and Local Level’ – Health and Friendly School Initiative”, UNICEF, Nicaragua, 2005.

and Environmental Sanitation Initiative to promote changes in attitudes and the adoption of good hygiene and sanitation practices among primary school students. As indicated, UNICEF's initial entry point for the more recent CFHS development targeted water and sanitation, a clear and concrete programme area valued by the population.

CFHS Initiative (linked to global CFS efforts during 2001–2007 cooperation period)

In early 2001, the Ministries of Health (MINSa) and Education (MINED) and ENACAL began to implement the school hygiene and environmental sanitation component in 17 schools in strategically selected municipalities. An inter-institutional approach was established, including the participation of each, along with the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment (MARENA), joining shortly after.

Based on initial experiences previously mentioned, in June 2001 MINSa, MINED and ENACAL signed the Child-Friendly and Healthy School Initiative agreement, with the support of UNICEF and the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO). These institutions formed an inter-institutional committee responsible for coordinating implementation on a national level. The organizational structure included national, departmental and municipal levels. Based on key primary-school-based issues, MINED headed the committee.

The CFHS Initiative was and continues to be compatible with the National Education Plan 2001-2015 and the international EFA flagship FRESH¹² initiative. Unique to most model development efforts in LAC, this initiative recognized and utilized the positive aspects of three regional initiatives that were being implemented in Nicaragua – with specific adaptations considering the country's reality: (1) New School Model/*Escuela Nueva Modelo* for the quality of education component; (2) Healthy School/Health Promoting School for the health-related components; and (3) Friendly School for the child rights, duties and participation component. This effort assisted to reduce the duplication of actions and promote more coordinated cooperation.¹³

As mentioned, the Nicaraguan initiative began in 2001 with a restricted approach in

The Friendly and Healthy School focuses on 5 standards.

1. Quality, friendly and successful learning

"The school possesses the necessary conditions to enable teachers to facilitate a quality, friendly and successful teaching-learning process."

2. Friendly and safe physical and environmental conditions

"The physical-environmental conditions of the school and surrounding environment are friendly and safe for children."

3. Water, school hygiene and environmental health

"The school has a safe source of drinking water, and adequately disposes of excrement, garbage and sewage waters, and promotes the formation of hygienic health habits through the teaching-learning process."

4. School health and nutrition

"The school promotes practices and habits that maintain and improve health."

5. Rights, duties and participation

"The school promotes and practices a culture in which rights and duties are respected within the educational community."

¹² Focusing Resources on Effective School Health (FRESH), a joint effort on the part of the World Bank, WHO/PAHO, UNICEF and UNESCO, is an initiative to improve educational quality and equity through intersectoral action.

¹³ Davila et al., "Case Study: 'Building Alliances at the National and Local Level' – Health and Friendly School Initiative", UNICEF, Nicaragua, 2005, p. 1.

17 primary schools, with an emphasis on one CFHS model component - *improving the health and hygiene of primary school students*. Following this initial stage, project development (2001–2006) witnessed a gradual going to scale approach to 75 primary schools in 2003 and finally reaching 200 schools in 2006.¹⁴ During this expansion process, all five CFHS components were incorporated: (1) *quality, friendly and successful learning*; (2) *friendly and safe physical and environmental conditions*; (3) *water, school hygiene and environmental health*; (4) *school health and nutrition*; and (5) *rights, duties, and participation*.

During the 2001-2007 programming period, 42 municipalities (identified as PSRP priority municipalities) were selected in 8 departments, with 287 schools benefitting. In addition, a decision was made to focus on rural, multi-grade schools. As described in the recent AIR global CFHS evaluation:¹⁵ “In Nicaragua, CFHS is primarily implemented in rural poor communities throughout the country where agricultural activities are the primary source of income. Some of the rural schools in which CFHS is implemented are highly isolated and cannot be reached by public transportation, making travel in and out of these communities infrequent.”¹⁶ In the Atlantic region, conditions are more challenging due to the lack of roads, requiring travel on foot, by boat, horse or burro. While there are no CFHS schools in the capital city, Managua, there are some urban CFHS schools in the regional capitals.

Support by the above-mentioned ministries and cooperation partners for the design and development of CFHS efforts in Nicaragua encouraged a more coordinated plan with similar actions. As stated by AIR, “many CFSs also receive support from USAID as part of its *Excellencia* programme. The EXCELENCIA programme, vis-a-vis support at a national level, has developed an educational model that promotes active learning with community participation and a competency-based curriculum incorporating educational needs specific to the indigenous and ethnic communities. Other donors have also supported the implementation of similar or parallel programmes, which in many cases eventually emerged as mutually supportive programme actions. The evaluation team observed that World Vision has donated learning materials and school libraries to several of the CFHS schools visited during this evaluation, while WFP donated food to some CFHS schools.¹⁷ In addition, an innovative partnership was established with CISA coffee producers to promote socially responsible private-sector initiatives for education, including expanded use of CFHS components.

Present and future (in line with 2008–2012 Country Programme and national context)

During 2007 and 2008, adjustments were made to achieve a more sustainable focus that would have national impact. Coverage has been increased to include 350 schools, with the incorporation of new elements and an expanded focus: introducing inclusive

¹⁴ United Nations Children’s Fund Nicaragua, *UNICEF Power Point – “The Child-Friendly and Healthy School Initiative*. UNICEF: Nicaragua, 2006.

¹⁵ American Institutes for Research, *UNICEF Child-Friendly Schools Programming: Global Evaluation Final Report – Review Draft – December 19, 2008*. UNICEF, New York, December 2008, p. 14.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.14.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.14.

education for children with disabilities; adopting an expanded life-cycle approach, including preschool and secondary education services; linking school-based actions with the development of other community-based learning opportunities for adolescents; and increasing actions in the RAAN, with a significant focus on bilingual-intercultural education and education in emergency.

Within the framework of national policies and in line with United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) targets, future CFHS development will continue to move towards strengthening MINED efforts to design and promote a unified Nicaraguan Quality School for All. Critical to this process is building on MINED's curriculum reform process and capacity-building initiative to guarantee a sustainable quality of education through a broad participatory process and based on a no-school-fee approach.

Funding

During project implementation, UNICEF was active in mobilizing resources for multi-year CFHS development, with a vision to design a plan aimed at achieving a long-term impact in line with national priorities and international commitments. From the start, UNICEF's target for CFHS has been the promotion of national ownership alongside the strengthening of MINED capacity to sustain the programme without significant dependency on international cooperation.

During this period, support was guaranteed through the use of UNICEF regular resources and donor assistance, focusing on an integrated approach for achieving education, water and sanitation targets. Considerable donor funds were provided from the following sources: the Governments of Sweden, Netherlands and Denmark; Spanish UNICEF National Committee; UNICEF Education Thematic Funding, with an emphasis on Girls Education and Emergency; private sector support from Cargill Corporation, in coordination with WFP; special donation from the American–Nicaraguan School; and regular resources. For the 2002–2007 period, an estimated US\$2,929,248 of UNICEF funding was utilized for all CFHS components.¹⁸

Programme beneficiaries

Due to the nature of UNICEF's involvement in PSRP municipalities, poor primary age boys and girls, both in and out of school, have been prioritized with a gradual increase of attention for young children in adjoining and neighboring preschools and adolescents still found in and returning to primary-level studies. In recent years, emerging efforts have been directed toward linking CFHS with child-labour eradication, reaching and including children with disabilities, and designing more appropriate educational opportunities for indigenous and afro-descendent children. In addition, UNICEF's response to emergency situations in the RAAN and RAAS through the use of Return to Happiness/Return to

¹⁸ UNICEF Nicaragua, Financial Review by UNICEF Nicaragua Education Section of PROMS/APBs for UNICEF Nicaragua CFS initiatives (2002-2007), UNICEF: Nicaragua, 2009.

School actions and emerging CFHS initiatives has benefited some of Nicaragua’s most at-risk population groups.

The number of beneficiaries and municipalities (geographic coverage) has expanded over time with a gradual increase in those directly involved in participating schools. School and municipal level support surpassed what was initially targeted in the 2002–2006 cooperation agreement. The long-term impact and coverage should continue to increase during the coming years, taking into account that the Ministry of Education has incorporated CFHS strategies and components as part of national policy design for all schools. The following table illustrates the progressive increase of beneficiaries and geographic coverage for the 2002–2006 period.

Overview of programme beneficiaries ¹⁹ (2002 – 2006)*						
	Cooperation years (2002 – 2006) – Accumulative data					
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2006-2007*
Student beneficiaries						
Students (total)	5,039	18,571	27,354	34,032	37,307	39,432
Girls	2,511	8,879	11,998	15,315	18,174	19,106
Boys	2,528	9,692	15,356	18,717	19,133	20,326
Geographic coverage						
Departments & autonomous regions	8	9	11	11	12	13
Municipalities	13	32	39	39	40	45
Schools	17	87	122	188	217	293

*Note: Based on the review of additional information sources, slight variations were found between coverage statistics, often related to dates of data collection and consideration of CFHS UNICEF partnerships/components supported.

More recent data prepared during the 2008 UNICEF Child-Friendly Schools global evaluation indicate that at the time of the evaluation visit, mid-2008 school coverage reached 342 schools, mostly primary school in poor rural areas.

In addition to a clear focus on poor, rural primary schools (many being multi-grade), priority has been given to address the lingering education problems faced by children in the early years of the educational cycle, where school repetition is high (as seen in many Latin American countries). As indicated in the following 2006 data table, an estimated 65 per cent of CFHS beneficiaries were enrolled in the early levels, including preschool through (and including) third grade.

¹⁹ The table has been constructed through the use of a wide range of internal UNICEF documents and Excel project coverage worksheets, also including MINED reports to UNICEF (MINED-UNICEF 2007 implementation report), containing statistical data on student and geographic coverage.

Summary of CFHS coverage by department and grade level (2006) ²⁰								
Department	Student enrolment by grade level							
	Preschool	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Total
Esteli	305	592	365	470	386	382	309	2809
Madriz	340	577	516	435	381	407	364	3020
Nueva Segovia	1704	4491	3186	2842	2402	2075	1754	18 454
Granada	603	891	770	736	639	685	541	4865
RAAS	79	273	291	249	252	190	179	1513
Matagalpa	438	1185	1111	867	682	550	540	5373
Boaco	129	164	118	139	139	112	98	899
Leon	60	92	76	80	71	79	57	515
Chinandega	62	103	75	62	65	75	65	507
Chontales	202	307	235	242	173	181	137	1477
Total (by grade level)	3922	8675	6743	6122	5190	4736	4044	39 432
% by grade level	10%	22%	17%	16%	13%	12%	10%	

Working structure and stakeholders

Within the 2001 - 2006 UNICEF Country Programme, the CFHS Initiative was included as a priority component within the Basic Education and Citizenship Programme. UNICEF involvement was targeted at all political and operational levels (national, departmental, municipal, and school), recognizing that guaranteeing sustainable change with appropriate participatory models and strategies requires working at all levels and with all stakeholders.

From the beginning, a multi-institutional alliance was constructed with four key government institutions – MINED, MINSA, MARENA and ENACAL, in joint partnership with UNICEF and PAHO/WHO. With these founding partners, a steering committee was formed that was responsible to oversee implementations. Due to the nature of project development (focusing on school-based activities), MINED was selected to coordinate the CFHS steering committee. Other ministry sections and institutions collaborated in specific components, including the National School Feeding Program and Handicap International. Critical to the entire process was the ongoing involvement of local municipal governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

Parallel to this process was the organization of an inter-agency coordination body, including UNICEF, PAHO/WHO, WFP and UNESCO, to guarantee ongoing support to this initiative and to establish mechanisms to better disseminate and utilize results and experiences. As indicated in past and recent country programmes, UNICEF continues to participate in relevant SWAp processes, with active involvement in the education sector donor table, which provides an excellent communication channel to advocate for more

²⁰ Data taken from an internal UNICEF statistical worksheet for the 2006 period: "Estadísticas Escuelas Amigas y Saludables", 2006.

expanded CFHS utilization with the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) support.

Programme structure – Education (2002 – 2006 Country Programme)²¹			
Projects	Geographic coverage	Beneficiaries	Key counterparts
1. Basic Education and Citizenship for All <i>(Educación Básica y Ciudadanía para Todos)</i>	National – policies and public opinion Local level in 30 municipalities through the implementation of specific initiatives: ECD, Friendly and Health Schools, and work with municipal commissions, school governments and parent councils, and NGOs	Children- ages 0-3 Children – ages 3-6 Children and adolescents - ages 7-18 (those in school, along with those out-of-school)	-Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports; (along with MINSA, ENACAL) -Ministry of the Family -Fé y Alegría & other NGOs -National Assembly -30 municipal commissions, -Communication/media
2. Eradication of Child Labour and Protection of the Adolescent Worker <i>(Erradicación del Trabajo Infantil y Protección del Adolescente Trabajador)</i>	National – through technical assistance to the Ministries of Labour and Education, Culture and Sports Local level – through work with local NGOs, municipal commissions in extracurricular activities and training for working adolescents.	Children and adolescents between the ages of 6 – 14 Working adolescents between ages of 14–18.	-Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports; - Ministry of Labour -Ministry of the Family -Fé y Alegría & other NGOs -National Assembly -30 municipal commissions, -Communication/media -Junior Achievement (<i>Emprendedores Juveniles</i>)
Partners - IDB (Initial Education and Preschool PAININ) - Social Emergency Investment Fund (FISE) – extracurricular activities - Save-the-Children Alliance (ECD and eradication of child labour) - USAID (Primary Education Project BASE) - World Bank		Cooperation agencies: - ILO- IPEC (Eradication of Child Labour) - UNESCO (Implementation of National Education Plan - WFP (Food support for ECD, preschools, primary schools, working children, pregnant mothers and those breastfeeding) - PAHO/WHO (Friendly and Health School Initiative) - UNPFA (Adolescent clubs)	

During CFHS development and implementation stages, the basic working structure and stakeholder involvement has remained the same, with slight modifications of expanding partnerships with national and international entities. Key to this effort, and as illustrated in the following section, is the ongoing effort of municipal, family/community and school staff efforts, with the active participation of students at each education level. The following information box illustrates the different levels of involvement during the 2001–2007 cycles for developing CFHS.²²

Level	Structure/participants	Role
National	Intersectoral technical committee (ICT), MINED, MINSA, ENACAL and MARENA Support from UNICEF and PAHO	Develop plans, norms, reports and evaluations. Monitor implementation in the municipalities. Guarantee coordination of efforts at different project levels.
Departmental/municipal	Municipal work group/team MINED, MINSA, ENACAL and MARENA Municipal governments and interested NGOs.	Develop municipal and departmental monitoring plans. Support implementation of actions that have been jointly defined with the national level. Act as liaison between the national level and schools.

²¹ United Nations Children’s Fund Nicaragua, *Plano Maestro de Operaciones 2002 – 2006*, UNICEF, Nicaragua, 2002, p. 138.

²² United Nations Children’s Fund Nicaragua, *Conceptual Framework – Friendly and Healthy School Initiative*, UNICEF: Nicaragua, 2004, p. 12.

Level	Structure/participants	Role
School/ community	School work team (school councils, principals, student governments, teachers, parents, students and community leaders).	Responsible for implementing the CFHS Initiative's six-step cycle at the community/school level. (Refer to attached information on CFHS process)
Agency/ partner Support	PAHO /WHO– Pan American Health Organization (National)	Main partner with UNICEF for CFHS development, with a special interest and role in development of health components.
	WFP – World Food Programme	Involved in the development of the School Feeding Model, along with strengthening specific life-skill elements.
	Handicap International	Key partner for the incorporation of key elements of an inclusive education focus, for reaching children with disabilities and other special learning needs
	ILO – International Labour Organization	Coordination in specific project actions related to child labour eradication and the right to education for working children
	UNESCO	Coordination in aspects related to EFA and policy issues
	Note: In addition to the above-mentioned agencies, coordination with the World Bank and IDB along with key country donors was undertaken through participation and involvement in the Education Sector Donor Group. In addition, increasing efforts are underway through government leadership to link CFHS efforts with USAID support primary education efforts.	

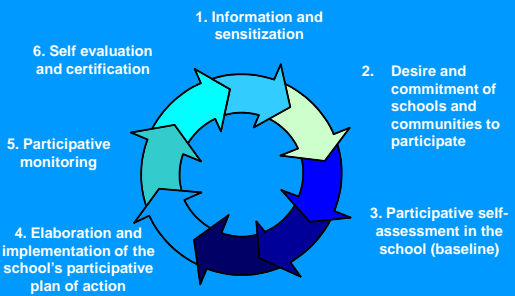
Future project development will incorporate a more active and decision-making role of additional partners to expand CFHS initiatives and strengthen the national teacher training and school support system. For new CFHS initiatives with a bilingual-intercultural focus, community education committees and regional authorities in the RAAN will play an important role to guarantee the quality and sustainability of project initiatives.

As part of national actions to increase systematic teacher training capacity and school-based supervision, assistance to the monthly TEPCE component (educational evaluation, planning and training workshops) is critical, along with assisting MINED in the organization and pre- and in-service teacher capacity of regional teacher preparation schools (*Escuelas normales*). The new national focus to utilize a school clustering system with a 'base' (mentor) school (*Núcleos educativas*) will fortify the local system, while increasing more school-to-school cooperation. Further efforts will also be taken to expand the depth of innovation to: reinforce early learning in the preschool years and transitioning to and through the first grades of primary; widen efforts to incorporate inclusive education elements, especially for children with disabilities; and incorporate more community-based initiatives to expand in safe spaces other learning and participatory opportunities for adolescents.

SIX-STEP CFHS Process²³

CFHS Initiative step by step

To be put on the pathway to become child-friendly and healthy, a school must carry out specific actions. When these are completed, the school is awarded a certificate indicating that it has fulfilled the requirements and has earned the status of a Child-Friendly and Healthy School (CFHS). A description of the actions follows:

<p>How is a child-friendly and healthy school implemented ?</p> 	<p>Action 1: Inform and raise the awareness of the educational community about the Child-Friendly and Healthy Schools Initiative (CFHS).</p> <p>The educational community needs to be informed about the CFHS Initiative and what it involves, and what a school must do to be declared as such. Authorities from the MINED, in conjunction with MINSA and ENACAL, are responsible for this action. If a school is interested, it will receive informational materials to publicize the initiative, and outreach activities may include organizing campaigns and meetings and hanging banners and posters.</p> <p>Suggested activities include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Intersectoral technical committees (ITCs) at the municipal level inform schools about the CFHS. 2. Within the school, the principal informs teachers about the CFHS, and the teachers inform their
<p>classrooms.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. The principal and teachers organize meetings with parents to introduce the initiative and invite their participation. 4. The teachers and students create a newspaper, mural and posters that publicize the initiative. 	
<p>Action 2: The educational community and municipality wish to participate in the Initiative, and make a commitment to do so.</p>	
<p>Once the initiative is explained and the commitments it implies for each member of the educational community have been analyzed, the decision is made to participate. This is formally expressed in writing, and signed by all members of the school council, and is then sent to the person coordinating the Initiative at the MINED municipal office.</p>	
<p>Suggested activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The school council sends the signed request, expressing the school's interest in joining the initiative. The principal sends this request to the MINED's municipal delegation. 2. The principal informs the community about the decision to join the initiative at parades, meetings, and other public activities. 3. The school council forms a school committee that will be responsible for organizing activities. 4. The principal informs the municipal government about the school's decision and requests its support. 	
<p>Selecting schools.</p>	
<p>Given that joining the CFHS implies systematic monitoring and the commitment to provide technical and in some cases financial support, not all schools can join the initiative simultaneously.²⁴ The different intersectoral technical committees at the municipal, departmental and national levels will analyze the requests of each school and make decisions about which schools may join the initiative and begin related actions on the basis of previously established criteria.²⁵</p>	
<p>Suggested activities:</p>	

²³ Ibid. pp. 6–11.

²⁴ The intersectoral committee will coordinate with other projects working in the same areas of intervention, to jointly promote the initiative.

²⁵ The most important of the established criteria include: rural school, with relative access, with an average of 100 students, and a committed educational community.

1. The intersectoral technical committee for the Child-Friendly and Healthy Schools Initiative at the municipal level will conduct a rapid assessment of each school. On the basis of these assessments, it will make a pre-selection of schools based on the maximum number of schools it can reach.
2. At the departmental level, the ITC is informed about the proposal, which it will forward to the national-level ITC, which must endorse the decisions of municipal committees.
3. The national ITC notifies schools with its decision via the MINED's municipal delegates.

Action 3: Develop a participatory assessment to determine the school's situation.

Each school is unique. Therefore, a participatory assessment is needed to obtain information, and then the community itself identifies the most important problems affecting the school and proposes possible solutions. This will help to determine the school's situation at the time it joins the initiative, and then help to measure progress.

Suggested activities:

1. Hold a training workshop for teachers, to support the participatory assessment and to involve the entire educational community. The workshop should be conducted by a member of the municipal intersectoral technical committee.
2. Apply the methodological guide when conducting school assessments (Instrument 1).
3. The team of school facilitators, trained for this purpose, conducts focal groups with students, parents and teachers, using the assessment instrument to identify the school's situation with respect to the five CFHS standards.
4. The principal coordinates a meeting to synthesize the work of each group into one document and coordinates the production of a report about the school's participatory assessment.
5. The principal shares a summary of the assessment results with students, teachers and parents.
6. Teachers and students publicize the results of the assessment through posters and newspaper murals. Different work teams for this task can be set up.

Action 4: Develop the school's participatory work plan for obtaining certification as a Child-Friendly and Healthy School.

Following the assessment, the most important step is knowing what needs to be done to change and improve the school's conditions, and how to transform it into a Child-Friendly and Healthy School.

A plan of action is needed that responds to the needs determined by the assessment and the priorities defined by the educational community. In addition, this plan should define the time and resources needed, and how people will participate in the team.

Suggested activities:

1. The first step for developing the work plan is reviewing the standards and indicators outlined in below. The standards and indicators help to explain, group and select the situations, and more precisely outline all of the elements indicated in the participatory assessment. It also allows indicators that had not been considered to be included.
2. The selection of indicators for a school essentially forms the basis of the work plan. This task may be carried out during one or more sessions, in the following manner:
 - The work team completes the form.
 - The indicator or indicators are selected.
 - Once the indicators are defined, each of the standards should be read and discussed.
 - To solidify the goals for each indicator, ideas and activities should be organized in Format 2 or the school work plan.

Organizing for action

The educational community, represented by the school council, is responsible for promoting the CFHS. To support the many functions of the school council, each school will organize a work team responsible for coordinating the activities mentioned in this document, taking care not to overload the school's structures.

The most critical factor when teams are being set up is the enthusiasm and commitment of team members, along with the clear definition of what the teams are going to do. The teams may be made up of classroom teachers, parents, members of student governments and community representatives. It should not be a very large group, since a large group is harder to coordinate. This group coordinates actions and guarantees the involvement of other members of the educational community.

Suggested activities:

1. Inform the educational community about the formation of the work team and request volunteers. This may be done by the school principal or delegated to a teacher or other member of the school council.
2. Define the team's internal structure and functions. Remember that the work team is a very flexible structure. This activity should be carried out by the team itself, once it has been set up.
3. The team defines its work plan for activities. This manual is the guide for initiating actions, along with the school's plan of action. In other words, this manual and the school's plan define the content of work to be done.
4. Inform the entire school about the work team's composition and functions. The principal will do this.

Developing the Child-Friendly and Healthy School work plan

- The CFHS work plan should be incorporated into the school's annual work plan, which will allow for consideration of the indicators selected at the beginning of the year.
- The CFHS work plan is also a pedagogic instrument that should be used as part of the teaching-learning process. Thus, it should be incorporated into the planning of work in the classroom.

To develop the Child-Friendly and Health School plan, the following is needed:

- Inclusion of the CFHS work plan into the school's annual work plan.
- Development of careful planning, so that sufficient activities for fulfilling each indicator from the CFHS work plan, have been defined.
- It will be equally important to set up commissions and coordinators for all activities.
- The annual work plan for the CFHS should be presented to the community through all means available (meetings, murals, publication of pamphlets, etc.).

Action 5: Conduct participatory monitoring.

Monitoring, follow up and evaluation are processes that allow us to know how much we have progressed toward achieving our goals, and to identify problems so that solutions may be sought.

The school council will meet periodically to discuss progress made, specific achievements, difficulties, unplanned situations and aspects that need adjustments. It is important that the time periods for completing activities defined in the plan be met. Periodic reports from these meetings will be written up and sent to the municipal technical committee.

Suggested activities:

1. The work team develops a CFHS thermometer, situating each standard on the grid and leaving space for marking achievements.
2. The principal organizes periodic monitoring meetings with the commissions or work teams in charge of specific activities.
3. The school council produces monitoring reports on a bi-monthly basis, using the indicators in Instruction 2.
4. The principal reports progress made to the educational community.

Action 6: Evaluate and give a certification.

The school may conduct annual self-evaluations to determine progress made toward fulfilling proposed activities. Once the established requirements have been met, the school may request the committee's review to be certified as a Child-Friendly and Healthy School. The review instrument will be the work plan, and completion of the minimum indicators established for each of the standards, which are indicated on the CFHS thermometer.

Certification process

An external committee, national and/or regional, made up of at least two people from the social sector with recognized credibility will certify that the school has achieved the friendly and healthy status. They may come from universities, cooperation agencies, professional associations or the ombudsman's office for child and adolescent rights, among others, and will be trained and provided with the most appropriate instruments for evaluating schools.

The members of the committee will be selected jointly with the national and/or departmental ITC based on proposals made by each of these. The cooperation agencies supporting the CFHS may be members of the committee and eventually will support their training.

The certification will be based upon minimum criteria and requirements, information tools and monitoring. The certification process should be carried out during the period requested by the school.

Suggested activities:

- Request an evaluation by the committee responsible for certifying Child-Friendly and Healthy Schools, via the municipal committee. The school council makes this request.
- Review of the school's achievements by the committee designated for this purpose.
- Hold a certification ceremony, with participation from the educational community, the municipal government and other invited guests.
- Update the assessment and development of a new work plan.
- Periodic reviews to maintain the status of a Child-Friendly and Healthy School.

Three coordination structures have been designated for implementing the initiative:

- Central level
- Departmental/municipal level
- School/community level

III. OUTCOMES

The Nicaraguan CFHS Initiative began its eight-year effort, starting with pilot projects in 2001 followed by a long-term UNICEF Nicaragua institutional commitment expressed in two programme cycles: the 2002–2006 Country Programme Cooperation period with a one-year bridging plan and the 2008–2012 Country Programme. In both programmes, goals, targets and strategies established in the multi-year Education and Citizenship programme have been and are given top priority by UNICEF and partners, recognizing the critical role of education as a key foundation for the long-term achievement of all children and adolescents rights and essential for sustainable country development and peaceful co-existence.



Proposed goals and strategies (2002 – 2006 Country Programme Cycle)²⁶

During the 2002–2006 period, education was considered essential to achieve the overall programme goal. More specifically, the **Basic Education and Citizenship for All** programme was designed to contribute to ensuring the right to a quality education for all within the policy framework provided by the 2001–2015 National Education Plan. Key to the strategy was the focus on partnership with other agencies to address such barriers as: poor access linked to low enrolment; deficient quality and relevance of content and teaching practices; insufficient parental competencies to support learning; and limited demand by families and communities for better services. As indicated in the overall country programme, design and national-level initiatives were combined with local actions in selected priority municipalities.

Programme design included a life-cycle approach to increase ECD coverage and improve primary enrolment and quality, with a priority for the most excluded children. Outreach and quality improvement of family- and community-based ECD and preschool programmes in the 30 selected municipalities were targeted, along with selecting a strategic focus for primary-level plans aimed at improving the quality of multi-grade, rural schools’ teaching and learning processes. The CFHS model was targeted for this intersectoral effort in selected schools, with a clear vision to use municipal initiatives to feed into the development of national policies and strategies, especially to reach the most vulnerable children and to leverage donor funding.

Directly linked to this CFHS initiative was the citizenship component designed to foster child and adolescent participation and promote additional learning opportunities and life

²⁶ For the purpose of this report, the summarized review of CFHS programme cooperation and resulting outcomes will focus on the 2001–2006 period, with brief mention to the new cooperation cycle 2008–2012, which is covered in the Future Direction Section. Also see United Nations Children’s Fund Executive Board (2001). *Country Programme Recommendation – Nicaragua for 2002-2006 Period* (E/ICEF/2001/P/L.31/Add.1), UNICEF, New York, 2001, pp. 12-13.

skill practices both in and out of school (through extracurricular activities) to promote values of democracy and peace. For both components, priority was given to 30 deprived municipalities in the central and northern departments of Nueva Segovia, Madriz and Estelí and in the Atlantic region, which were selected according to their levels of poverty, as described in the PRSP.

Overview of results and project impacts (highlights from 2001–2007 period²⁷)

Annual project monitoring with national counterparts and three external CFHS evaluations²⁸ have generated a wealth of information on the results of the multi-year CFHS initiative, including specific highlights as to the short-term outcomes and challenges faced. Over the eight years of implementation, numerous outputs and outcomes have been achieved through national and local counterpart efforts, combined with an effective cooperation plan of UNICEF and other international partners. The following evaluation summaries and highlights from past donor reports illustrate some of the key results and impacts of programme/project actions.

Summary of 2005 mid-term (MTR) CFHS evaluation – Sanitation and hygiene education component²⁹

During the course of the UNICEF mid-term (MTR) evaluation exercise, special emphasis was given to evaluate processes and results of one specific element of the CFHS initiative (sanitation and hygiene education), along with the implementation of the complete structure and strategic design. As mentioned throughout this document, the sanitation and hygiene education component played an important role as the starting point for the Nicaraguan CFHS experience. The following results identified through the evaluation process provided an important foundation for the long-term and expanded CFHS effort.

The CFHS conceptual framework outlined in the initial project design provided the guiding structure for initial and long-term actions. Sanitary and water facilities were supplied to participating schools, along with teacher training to guarantee the appropriate use of instruments and materials designed. These efforts were aimed at facilitating changes in children's behavior in aspects related to sanitation and hygiene. In addition and in line with project strategies, coordination was promoted with other institutions and organizations to achieve proposed goals and objectives.

As witnessed in other project actions, participating schools achieved different levels of development, and have implemented activities to varying degrees. As indicated, time requirements for activity implementation were linked to the starting point for each school

²⁷ Considering that a significant number of project outputs and outcomes were achieved during the past eight year period, only a select number of examples have been included (with a more detailed and lengthy report to be prepared during the course of 2009).

²⁸ Three external evaluation processes were undertaken, including two specific MTR evaluation exercises (2005) and one more recent process as part of the global CFS evaluation exercise (2008).

²⁹ Partial sections of the text were taken directly from the corresponding UNICEF MTR evaluation document. UNICEF Nicaragua, *Evaluation of the Friendly and Healthy Schools Initiative's School Sanitation and Hygiene Education Component* (as part of MTR Evaluation Process), UNICEF, Nicaragua, February 2005, pp. 9–15.

and the existing conditions and local dynamics appropriate for each CFHS implementation cycle.

Regarding the extent to which expected target and results were achieved, the SSHE component of CFHS contributed to a considerable improvement in the main baseline indicators established for each school, except for the drainage of surface and used water. “The positive results and changes indicate a clear and sustained trend toward achieving the proposed objective of 80 per cent of school children in CFH schools in selected municipalities practicing hygienic behaviors by 2006”.

Some specific result areas (highlights taken directly from evaluation)³⁰

Participation: The CFHS and the SSHE component in particular were based on the participation of different community actors, including children, teachers, parents, governmental and non-governmental institutions and municipal governments.

- **Student governments** (*one example*) In four of the eight schools examined, the student government helped to develop the participatory school assessment study and the operation and maintenance plan; monitor the school plan of action and the operation and maintenance plan; and monitor the school council’s monthly meetings.

- **School councils** (*one example*) School councils (SCs) in five of the eight schools also took part in the participatory school assessment, which was carried out as part of the CFHS implementation cycle and SCs in the same number of schools have also coordinated work with other organizations and institutions. Coordination has been particularly strong with MINSa and has included the treatment of parasitosis and the organization of vaccination campaigns and educational talks about different issues in the communities.

- **Parents** (*one example*) Parental participation existed in all of the schools, with varying degrees of involvement. They have been particularly active in supporting clean-up campaigns, repairing fences and planting trees.

- **Decision making** (*one example*) The decision-making process related to the design of sanitary facilities has been extremely democratic in all of the schools. Existing structures have been factors in these decisions, including student governments, school councils and the children. Each school was able to make informed decisions based on the most viable technological options and the respective maintenance costs presented by contractors.

Water facilities: (*one example*) In terms of access to safe drinking water, the general conclusion is that the situation has improved noticeably compared with the pre-CFHS situation. Children have continuous access to clean drinking water and, as they themselves stated, it is now available at school and they no longer need to carry it for long distances.

Sanitary facilities: (*one example*). All of the CFHS schools in selected municipalities now have differentiated sanitary facilities. Some have sanitary blocks consisting of solar

³⁰ Ibid, pp. 9–15.

latrines³¹ separated by sex and age, the boys' block now includes urinals and one of the latrines is adapted for children with disabilities.³² In other cases, the sanitary block consists of toilets separated by sex, with one block for boys, one for girls, one for preschool children and one for teachers. The sanitary blocks are tailored to the different heights of users.

Hand-washing facilities: (*one example*). None of the schools had hand-washing facilities when the initiative began, nor was there any evidence of soap use. All of the schools have now been equipped with enough sinks to cover the student population, with technological designs that correspond to the availability of water and the height of the students.

Children's hygiene practices: (*one example*). An average of 27 per cent of boys and girls washed their hands before eating, according to the initial assessment studies.³³ During this evaluation, the percentage of children washing hands with soap and water averaged 85 per cent in the six evaluated schools with supplementary school feeding programmes.

Gender impact: (*one example*). Guaranteeing the inclusion of a gender-based approach in all activities has been a priority during the implementation of this component. In all schools visited, girls indicated that their opinions about both esthetic design and the separation of bathrooms by sex were taken into consideration when sanitary facilities were being designed and constructed.

Summary of 2005 mid-term CFHS evaluation (focusing on educational components)

In addition to the specific evaluation process for the sanitation and hygiene education component, the 2005 MTR external evaluation of all elements identified some of the following results, which were in relation to the impact of the CFHS model on improving the educational opportunities of primary school level boys and girls. As found by the external evaluation team, promising evidence was demonstrated on the success of the CFHS model in "organizing and carrying out new school-community dynamics and achieve more participation of the community". Highlights included:

- **Increased ownership of the Education Ministry (MINED) opened up the possibility to influence education policy.** It is important to note that the new MINED leadership and technical staff have maintained and actually increased their ownership position of this process and model.

³¹ Solar latrines: compost latrines that do not separate urine and in which the composting process is accelerated by heat from solar panels (metal sheets painted black, constantly exposed to the sun's rays).

³² With access ramps, wider doors, more space and support bars on the walls to facilitate movement.

³³ There is no evidence of how this indicator was measured in each school, but it was discovered that it was based on qualitative information obtained from focus groups with children and teachers during the participatory assessment process. The average was calculated using the percentages established in the baselines of the eight evaluated schools.

- **Good inter-institutional coordination** has been a key element from the start. The coordination with the four mentioned ministries, combined with the timely collaboration of international agencies, has been a solid cornerstone of this initiative. But new efforts are required with incoming ministry staff of MINSA, ENACAL and MARENA.
- **Articulation of technical and political support for the initiative** has been a key factor for mobilizing resources as well as guaranteeing a functional linkage between national and local levels.
- **Improved school enrolment and retention in the participating schools** results from a clear focus of school teams and the education community to search for out-of-school children and to improve the permanence and participation in school. CFHS results show improvement. As mentioned, specific inclusive education and child labour eradication components have enriched this effort.
- **Improved teaching practices in participating schools** (e.g., introduction of active, hands-on methodologies for health promotion were increasingly applied to other curricula) has benefited from specific health promotion components as previously mentioned, along with the incorporation of specific elements of other internationally support initiatives in Nicaragua (*Excelencia*)
- **Increased participation of parents and community** has increased local ownership and CFHS adaptations to respond to local characteristics, as seen in the emerging RAAN efforts.

The **external evaluation** also provided a number of **recommendations** from which these were the most significant and are considered for programming:

- Mainstream the concept and methodologies of the CFHS Initiative as a quality model for all Nicaraguan schools as well as within the national health policy.
- Link CFRS with the process of decentralization and the transference of schools to the municipal authority, which will be modified to meet the new MINED priority strategy of school clustering.
- Strengthen participatory opportunities for children and families through school councils and children's chairs in school management.
- Strengthen principal, teacher and health personnel training on children's rights, life skills and other specific topics highlighted by the initiative.
- It is necessary to harmonize school infrastructure and water and sanitation with FHS standards.
- Validate and adapt CFHS to bilingual and multi-cultural context of the Autonomous (Miskito) regions.

Initial points concerning the 2008 global UNICEF CFS evaluation process³⁴

In 2008, Nicaragua participated in the UNICEF-funded global CFS evaluation process, involving six countries initiatives in three regions (including Nicaragua and Guyana for the Latin America and Caribbean region). Although final evaluation results have not been officially disseminated and individual country reports prepared, preliminary documentation and evaluation survey results provide insight of advances, results and tendencies for the CFHS initiative in Nicaragua (as well as for other countries).

Three points mentioned in the draft document help to reinforce previous evaluation results for Nicaragua (with specific text taken directly from the AIR draft evaluation document):

- UNICEF Nicaragua’s focus has been to support an increasing number of selective schools, primarily in rural areas and in the poorest municipalities, with the aim to incorporate experiences and design as part of national policy development, and with important results. “UNICEF Nicaragua spent significant time planning and adapting the CFS programming elements as defined by UNICEF Headquarters to the local context. The UNICEF vision for CFS in Nicaragua is to give ownership to and build capacity within the MINED to sustain the programme independently.”
- In addition to a clear and productive record of achieving solid intersectoral cooperation of national ministries and partners, important coordination has emerged with other international partners, as indicated by some of the following statements: “Many Child-Friendly Schools receive support from USAID as part of its *Excellencia* programme”; “... the World Vision has donated learning materials and school libraries to several of the CFS schools”; and “the World Food Programme has donated food to some CFS schools”.
- As indicated in global evaluation findings, two issues resulting from data collected from UNICEF Education Officers implementing CFS, and based on a review of prior CFS studies and literature, have demonstrated the following:
 - The CFS initiative has been effective in engaging stakeholders at all levels of education systems in creating schools with conditions and characteristics of effective, child-focused teaching and learning, and in encouraging educators to think about how to serve the whole child. School directors and teachers across all countries we visited speak the language of CFS.
 - The CFS initiative has provided MINED with a useful framework for improving education that promotes child development and is inclusive, participatory and responsive. Ministries support and have embraced, although to varying degrees, the objectives of the CFS model.

³⁴ Final detailed results of the Nicaraguan component of the 2008 Global CFS evaluation process will be available in the near future, which will include a more in-depth analysis of country-specific results.

A preliminary analysis of the multiple survey results included in the global evaluation indicates some specific strengths and gaps (challenges) in the CFHS programme in Nicaragua.

- In aspects related to **inclusiveness**, student, teachers and school directors' perceptions and evaluation team observations indicate positive progress and results towards guaranteeing the right to primary education for all. High marks were found for such items as: inclusive policy development; child-seeking schools; creating an inclusive and respectful climate for all children; and providing accessible school facilities and opportunities (especially for students with disabilities). However, limitations were found in the provision of outdoor play opportunities for children with physical disabilities and for addressing student absenteeism.
- Important results have been achieved to **provide students with a healthy, safe and protective learning environment**, targeting such aspects as guaranteeing: good physical school building structures; appropriate classroom conditions for learning; and gender-appropriate water and sanitary conditions. School observations confirmed the significant advances made in CFH schools for the provision of sanitary facilities and improved hygiene skills, while school director comments highlighted efforts to provide important health and nutrition services, including de-worming treatment and school feeding for undernourished students. Apparent gaps have been identified for student referrals to community-based health providers (based on school director reporting) and how students feel about their physical and emotional safety.
- Regarding advances towards providing **child-center teaching and learning**, as with other countries, progress is being made but achieving significant changes in traditional approaches (with the required materials) remains a challenge. Student perception and classroom observations provide a slightly higher than satisfactory rating in aspects related to providing a child-centered learning environment (and pedagogy), with more specific limitations observed about the utilization by teachers of child-centered instructional materials. As indicated through the student survey, positive marks were found for items related to the extent that teachers encourage student-to-student cooperation within the classroom, along with stimulating students to share their ideas and express their opinions.
- In general above-average marks were given by teachers and school directors for elements related to **democratic participation**, which has been and continues to be a key component within the CFHS framework for Nicaragua (especially linked to the implementation of the school government component). Teacher and school director input (with limit student comments) showed that family participation and decision-making were perhaps the main gaps or limitations found.

Highlights of other key CFHS Results (included in donor reports and presented by results)³⁵

³⁵ Major points taken from UNICEF Nicaragua (2005), Country Thematic Report on Girl's Education, with updated data included from more recent documents, including AIR UNICEF Child-Friendly Schools Global

In addition to the above-mentioned results, yearly donor reports provide an important overview of progress made and limitations faced, based on UNICEF Nicaragua's established programme targets. The following are some of the key highlights mentioned.

- **Learning process strengthened in multi-grade schools in 30 municipalities**
The CFHS model was incorporated into the new Learning and Progress Centre (CAPs) model (during the 2002–2006 period) and now forms part of the construction of a new Quality Education model of the new Government in the 2007–2008 period. In both cases, linking CFHS with national priorities and strategies has allowed for the expanded use of this experience. All components of the Child-Friendly and Healthy Schools (CFHS) Initiative were included and it is considered to be one of the strategies for achieving greater access to and quality of education with a view to fulfilling the MDGs.
- **Friendly and Healthy Schools Initiative applied in 30 municipalities**
To date (at the time of the 2006 donor report preparation), the CFHS Initiative was being implemented in 350 schools in 40 municipalities and 11 departments, benefiting an estimated 37,000 children, including the important expansion of project initiatives in the two Autonomous Atlantic regions (RAAN and RAAS).³⁶ Based on the initial goals and targets, project implementation surpassed 2006 targets. More important for long-term impact, the key CFHS elements have been incorporated with national policy and model design for national use.
- **Widespread participation of students, parents and the community**
In preparation for the CFHS full-cycle implementation process by the educational community (including components of self-assessment survey, planning, monitoring and evaluation) all members were trained in the use of user-friendly instruments and methodologies. As a result, the self-assessment survey generated local demand and collective action to find solutions to situations previously not considered problems, such as disability, exclusion, gender needs and security.
- **Achievement of favourable public opinion and creation of positive environments for the citizen participation of children and adolescents**
During the 2004 municipal elections, children and adolescents from 20 municipalities actively participated in creating municipal agendas. During 2005, students carried out monitoring and advocacy activities to ensure that elected candidates assumed agendas and commitments.
- **200 schools implementing educational actions for citizenship and peace**
According to the Law of Educational Participation,³⁷ members of the educational community delegate authority in the student governments and school councils to make decisions and participate in all relevant areas of school life. The CFHS

Evaluation and UNICEF Nicaragua (2006) Fifth Progress Report of the Governments of Sweden and the Netherlands.

³⁶ As mentioned, more recent data indicates a variation in coverage and beneficiaries, with slight increases.

³⁷ Approved in 2003. Along with the Citizen Participation Law it forms the legal framework for democratic functioning in schools.

programme has focused on developing the right capacities for this function and for school democratization in 184 schools.

- **Community experiences for child and adolescent participation in building citizenry and peace implemented, systematized and disseminated**

The training of the network of child and adolescent communicators continued. Information obtained and analyzed from the broad consultation carried out to identify the level of understanding and application by boys and girls of the principle that all are equal has been used to produce radio programmes, songs and messages. Results have also been used for stimulating reflection during workshops, discussions, radio forums and meetings with authorities, in addition to serving as a source of data and arguments for awareness raising and advocacy with the authorities on violence and discrimination against children and adolescents. These activities involved the participation of 1210 boys, 1242 girls, 600 mothers, 343 fathers and 483 teachers from 71 schools.

Long-term effects linked to policy and legislation changes

As mentioned throughout this document, two government administrations have participated and demonstrated ownership of this CFHS initiative. Most recently, MINED has taken firm command in the development of a Nicaraguan Quality Education model building-on proven experiences (CFHS and others) and incorporating new innovative components aimed at gaps. In addition, the proposed national capacity building effort with key locally based school-to-school collaboration will provide the channel to expand CFHS component utilization on a national level.

The CFHS initiative is in line with the Nicaraguan Education Law and the 2001-2015 National Education Plan, along with responding to the emerging policy focus of the new government. As is the case of most LAC countries, the main barriers are related to putting into practice what is on paper, securing a sustainable budget for all levels and guaranteeing systematic teacher and school support. Although positive results have been achieved, major questions are still lingering. Improving the quality and stability of pre- and primary-school teachers remains a significant challenge, potentially blocking any dramatic change. Advances in the priority RAAN must overcome multiple barriers, including language and cultural differences with the central level, conflicts over the governance of an autonomous region, reaching extremely poor and disperse populations, and preparing for and dealing with ongoing natural disasters.

Monitoring and evaluation

Significant efforts have been made to guarantee ongoing CFHS internal monitoring and annual assessments with key counterparts and partner agencies. Systematic site visits, monthly coordination meetings and annual UNICEF-counterpart reviews have guaranteed mechanisms for supporting project development and undertaking required modifications, in addition to completing the required donor reporting process. One major advance has been the design and approval of a unified supervision/monitoring instrument, now being used by all ministries.

Unique to most UNICEF programmes, the CFHS Initiative has undergone three external evaluations (two in 2005) and (one in 2008) to guarantee a neutral and critical revision of CFHS design, implementation and results.

Changing attitudes

The acceptance of the CFHS model has been demonstrated by past and present government ministries, with a move to incorporate the appropriate elements of innovative strategies into a Nicaragua model supported through international and national cooperation. In addition, a new culture of intersectoral coordination has emerged. To translate this desire into concrete actions and results, more must be done to design and strengthen the critical support components aimed at local and national planning, capacity-building, monitoring and evaluation with wide reaching sector and civil society participation.

Positive impacts on children and communities (and learning achievement)

Results of the 2005 MTR evaluation process indicated a clear impact of CFHS interventions on the issues of increased enrolment and improved six-grade completion rates, especially for girls, in comparison with other non-CFHS schools. There were evaluation gaps related to impacts on learning achievement since this aspect was not covered in the 2005 evaluation. New 2008 global evaluation results are now being processed, and will assist to review in a more in-depth manner CFHS results and impacts, especially in reference to perceptions of students and key players.

IV. ANALYSIS

Modifications made to the Child-Friendly and Healthy School (CFHS) Initiative since its inception and why

As documented by UNICEF/PAHO, the present model was constructed based on a previous UNICEF water and sanitation initiative and combined with the incorporation of key elements of existing Latin American and Nicaraguan innovative experiences in primary education.³⁸ The initial implementation strategy, which focused mostly on water and sanitation elements, was gradually expanded to include all five CFHS components. The integrated vision was maintained but, as experienced with other innovative strategies and scaling-up initiatives, not all components were implemented during the initial stages.

“CFHS was not about launching new policies but about how to implement what was already in the education agenda through an innovative and coordinated strategy, avoiding duplication, dispersion, and negative competition amongst the different stakeholders and ongoing programmes. The rationale of the initiative emphasized the fact that some previous experiences did not succeed or were unsustainable because they were inserted into schools without a real understanding of the needs and institutional culture of the schools”.
UNICEF/PAHO

During the eight-year project period, more specific modifications were proposed without altering the initial vision, based on the incorporation of new priorities and geared to adapting to different geographic conditions. Examples include introducing more specific components to reach and include the most excluded population (working children and those with a disability or other special learning needs) through locally proven inclusive education strategies, linking CFHS actions and content with special conditions in geographic areas affected by natural disasters, incorporating a bilingual and intercultural focus to respond to the unique situation of the RAAN and gradually promoting an expanded life-cycle approach, which includes targeting transition processes and content for both pre- and post-primary educational levels, with CFHS primary school efforts.

Addressing the challenge of teacher quality, violence in school, etc.

During the 2002–2006 period, capacity-building actions in the form of teacher training and preparation of municipal commissions were key elements of the above-mentioned commitment, considering the significant number of poorly prepared and under-paid teachers, combined with an inadequate pre- and in-service teacher preparation strategy and capacity. Early stages of UNICEF funding and technical assistance focused on local

³⁸ The New School Model School (*Escuela nueva*) was a reference in relation to quality education; Health School/Health Promoting School in relation to health and the Friendly School on how to approach children rights, responsibilities and participation.

level training needs of pre-school and primary school teachers, in those priority municipalities identified.

Perhaps the most significant shift of UNICEF actions aimed at addressing the existing challenges of teacher quality emerged within the last two-year period, with the new Government's arrival. Based on government requests, initial steps were taken to support the decentralized monthly TEPCE workshop strategy aimed at providing locally-based school-to-school support and planning, along with quality in-service teacher training opportunities, the initial collaboration for transforming the pre-service teacher preparation curricula in *escuelas normales* and the placing into practice the school clustering and mentoring strategy.

Action to address school-based violence was and continues to be addressed through the implementation of the rights, duties and participation component, which is directly linked to the ongoing development of school governments and other student participation mechanisms, especially for and with adolescents. In all cases, parent, family and community involvement is critical, as part of the education community.

Organizational collaboration and operational challenges in leadership roles

One noteworthy achievement has been the success in establishing and sustaining throughout past years a strong organizational collaboration, including the multi-level involvement of and cooperation with ministries and international organizations. Over time, additional partners joined as new components were included and project success demonstrated the soundness of the CFHS model. Maintaining this success is an ongoing challenge. Progress was made in the recent project expansion in the RAN, but this required strategy modifications in response to the unique regional governance structure and multi-lingual and diverse cultural settings.

Key was the vision to build-on each partner's comparative advantage, to establish clear roles and responsibilities for all and to give recognition to all actors as equal partners. Although important advances have been made, there still remain challenges for UNICEF and other international agencies in terms of maintaining a balanced visibility, often requiring a low profile to promote more government and community recognition and ownership, while publically demonstrating agency involvement and tangible assistance, requested by donors and necessary for fundraising and international agency mobilization and advocacy.

Maintaining and strengthening organizational collaboration has not been without its tests and bottlenecks. As with all national social programmes, there is a need for policy and ministry level changes and agency staff rotation to reconstruct working relationships at all levels with the necessary adjustments to emerging challenges and new institutional priority shifts. With the arrival of the new government, significant modifications have been made as to how MINED operates and to what priorities are targeted. In addition, recent adjustments in the ENACAL role and responsibilities drastically alter how the water and sanitation component will be addressed at the local level. Although certain delays have

been encountered and specific partner roles have changed, the present collaboration with most national counterparts has been strengthened and new cooperation opportunities are present. UNICEF clearly understands that further model development, advocacy and multi-level capacity-building must respond to the existing National Education Law, with ongoing adjustment being made with the new government, aimed at reducing the once common duplication or parallel actions of international agencies.

Capacity gap analysis

Significant challenges are faced to improve the professional level and skills of pre and primary school teachers. Until now, the existing system has not made a major impact on existing challenges faced by MINED to make sustainable improvements. The lack of a more functional, decentralized supervision and technical follow-up system has left a significant number of schools and teachers without the necessary and timely assistance to improve the school-based learning environment and methodology, especially for those working in multi-grade schools in remote rural areas. The adequate introduction of new components such as inclusive education, education in emergency, and pre-school to primary transitioning also places additional burden on the national and local systems. However, with the present government's commitment and action to transform the education system, specific solutions have been proposed and are being implemented.

Finally, recent efforts by UNICEF and other United Nations partner agencies to assist community leaders and institutional staff of the RAAN have been a wake-up call for cooperation agencies in terms of better understanding the significant capacity limitations in all social sectors. MINED, other key ministries and regional government staff are presently limited in staff and knowledge to undertake a more systematic and culturally appropriate approach to strength local systems and to overcome ongoing bottlenecks caused by frequent natural disasters and existing constraints based on conditions of a dispersed population without adequate transportation mechanisms.

The need for continuing advocacy and social mobilization

With national level MINED decision-making staff, advocacy actions are not required to convince them to move towards the design of a child-rights based quality education model and to develop a more integrated, decentralized teacher preparation and school support plan. Both are already clear institutional priorities. But, continual advocacy and social mobilization actions are required to reconstruct, maintain and sustain functional partnerships with other original Ministries (MINSA, ENACAL, and MARENA) and FISE (Emergency Social Investment Fund) which have somewhat lost their once clear vision and systematic involvement, due to government changes. As steps are being taken to expand initial actions, advocacy and communication strategies will be required to inform, prepare and mobilize newly elected municipal governments and their staff. This is also appropriate to maintain and strengthen existing partnerships with other technical agencies and donor partners.

Some examples of lessons learned from the implementation process³⁹

..... *Related to intersectoral and inter-agency coordination*

- **Consistent institutional leadership and public support.** The presence of sound intersectoral leadership as part of this national initiative has been identified as a critical factor and feasible element to undertake multi-level efforts and to guarantee the appropriate technical and financial resources required for sustainable local development avoiding the often reliance on individual leadership and voluntarism.
- **The creation of an inter-agency task force** resulted in another important learning experience. In addition to UNICEF, PAHO/WHO, UNESCO and WFP, other key partner organizations involved in specific school health and learning components collaborated with the initiative, including CARE, Plan International, SNV, Save the Children and Handicap. Through the education sector roundtable, coordination with international financing institutions (World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank) was maintained. “This experience has proven the enormous potential of complementing technical and financial resources as well as delivering a consistent message to local authorities”⁴⁰ avoiding the frequent dispersion of resources and the competitive relationships between international agencies in promoting slightly different approaches to linking health and education components.

..... *Related to focus and strategies*

- **Articulation of technical and political support for the initiative.** Based on this multi- sectorial and multi-institutional initiative, complementary funding and personnel resources were mobilized to address the multiple school requirements for project implementation as well as to provide a supportive political and institutional environment to advance and sustain efforts. “Rigid institutional agendas, individualism and striving to impose own ideas have been mentioned as possible hindering factors, while such competencies as dialogue, communication and conflict resolution skills are critical to build trust amongst participants.”⁴¹
- **Complementary actions between *focused* interventions and *comprehensive* approaches:** While focused and comprehensive approaches have often been seen as conflictive strategies, the Nicaraguan experience shows that this does not have to be the case. Numerous projects targeted initial interventions in specific geographic areas to tackle specific health problems, such as provision of water and sanitation. This strategy provided an excellent opportunity to mobilize community

³⁹ Main points and specific quotes taken from Meresman, Sergio and Sanabria, Anyoli (2008), Draft Article: “Nicaragua: Education and Child Development Founded by the “Social Gold” of Participation, pp. 10-12, along with inputs from UNICEF Nicaragua (2005). *Evaluation of the Friendly and Healthy Schools Initiative’s School Sanitation and Hygiene Education Component* (as part of MTR Evaluation Process), UNICEF Nicaragua (2005, December). *Country Thematic Report on Girl’s Education -2005, and .. UNICEF Nicaragua (2006, April). Final Donor Report for Cargill (company) – Child-Friendly and Healthy Schools Initiative “Better Schools Make Happy Children” Project*

⁴⁰ Meresman, Sergio and Sanabria, Anyoli (2008), Draft Article: “Nicaragua: Education and Child Development Founded by the “Social Gold” of Participation, p. 10.

⁴¹ Ibid, page 10

and family support linked to school-based efforts. Through a gradual process, the other CFHS components were included to strengthen the integrated approach within the school complementing and/or expanding the once focused intervention on health and hygiene education. This clearly demonstrates that making schools child-friendly is not an all-or-nothing process. It can start with one principle and build up on others over time in a strategic sequence that fits with local realities to promote the progressive realization of a CFS model.

- **Addressing the multiple needs and rights of teachers** is critical to the success of CFHS model development, as is the case of all education initiatives. Some of the critical elements identified for action are the following: to encourage the continuance and stability of teachers in rural communities consideration should be given to ensure an institutional incentives policy; to adequately implement an active teaching-learning process in CFHS rural multi-grade schools increased systematic teacher training opportunities and supervision support is required in the methodology for areas of reading, writing and mathematics; and school-to-school (teacher-to-teacher) support through the new clustering system should emphasize the provision of positive examples and practical learning experiences for local teachers.
- **Systematic and quality participation does not come naturally.** Positive results are achieved when actions and processes are planned through participatory approaches, including such elements as: definition of roles; follow-up support; and the development of capacities for participation (negotiation, decision making, planning, technical knowledge, etc.), to facilitate the empowerment of local communities.

..... ***Related to school-based actions***

- **Emphasis on the capacity of schools and communities to address their own needs and wishes.** The CFHS framework put into practice a model that required a process of auto-analysis lead by each school and community. Using a school-based self-diagnosis tool for a local situation analysis helped to generate baseline information, while creating an active participatory planning process that involved the community. This process also provided an opportunity for each school to analyze its reality and construct its own vision on quality gaps, based on a unified technical agreement on the basic indicators and components. This guided participants through an empowering experience through the identification and mobilization of existing and potential local capacities. The CFHS design has allowed for the required flexibility for local communities to respond to identified gaps and potential opportunities.



©UNICEF Nicaragua
Student government president receiving a delegation at her school.

..... ***Related to students and learning experiences***

- “The participatory approach has been systematically and consistently applied throughout the project cycle, helping empower both the educational community and children.” The MTR evaluation process identified that at the time a wide range of mechanisms were in place that fostered children’s participation at all stages of the project cycle. “In addition to raising awareness and generating commitment, the participatory approach also fosters changes in habits by allowing children to identify problems and propose their own solutions.”⁴²
- During periods of project implementation, multiple situations were faced which hindered or delay proposed actions and learning opportunities for students: a start-of-year teachers’ strike, natural disasters and a general climate of political instability. Situations mentioned clearly reinforcing the need to design and incorporate flexible learning strategies for students and project implementation.
- The provision of early learning skills during the vacation period for children entering first grade without having attended pre-school has proved to be an effective compensatory measure to ensure learning achievements in first grades of primary. While efforts are being made to increase preschool coverage, this strategy should continue. In both cases, emerging efforts to link child development, school readiness and transitioning actions with CFHS initiatives is positive and should be reinforced.

..... Related to addressing external challenges and transitioning

- The availability of detailed documentation and analysis (including strategies, instruments, evaluations, etc.) prepared throughout the project period was critical to mobilize and work with partners, donors and government counterparts, while reducing the potential long-term interruptions during the government transitioning process. UNICEF’s neutral position and clear focus on the rights of all children to education, combined with a transitioning strategy supported by project documentation and evaluations, assisted in the advocacy and awareness building process on project goals and strategies with new government staff.

⁴² United Nations Children’s Fund Nicaragua. *Evaluation of the Friendly and Healthy Schools Initiative’s School Sanitation and Hygiene Education Component* (as part of MTR Evaluation Process). UNICEF, Nicaragua, February 2005.

V. FUTURE DIRECTION

Overview of the present and future context and vision ⁴³

UNICEF's further support to the Nicaraguan government and civil society partners is clear in the present cooperation plan to achieve EFA and Millennium goals, along with moving forward to fulfill national commitments to realize the rights of all children and adolescents to a quality education, as framed in the CRC. More than eight years of evaluated CFHS experiences have provided partners with a sound foundation to continue the construction process of a Nicaraguan Quality Education Model. The future direction of UNICEF's support is framed in the 2008–2012 UNICEF Country Programme cooperation package and is presently being fine-tuned to the emerging priority areas of the relatively new Nicaraguan government and civil society. The following information highlights UNICEF's institutional commitments, in direct response to government priorities, national and local context, and existing opportunities and gaps, identified in recent evaluation processes.

UNICEF supported actions will: *“emphasize sectoral interventions in the 52 poorest municipalities prioritized in the UNDAF, targeting the most excluded children, including the disabled and children of migrant families. In 15 of these municipalities, the programme will draw together all components and promote comprehensive local development policies and initiatives to strengthen local governance for children. The local development experiences will feed into countrywide policies for the fulfillment of child rights. The participation of civil society, especially children and adolescents, will be key in capacity-building and in monitoring the impact of national policies and investment at the local level.”* (2008–2012 UNICEF Nicaragua CPD)

New 2008–2012 Country Programme

Within the framework of the new five-year Country Programme and in line with the Nicaraguan General Law on Education and National 2001–2015 Education Plan, CFHS remains a key element of UNICEFs' support to assist national efforts to achieve the right to **Quality Education for All**. The proposed education component will contribute to collective United Nations efforts expressed in **UNDAF outcomes** and assist public institutions, civil society and families in developing their capacities to ensure goal achievement, with special emphasis on reaching and including the most excluded children and adolescents. Further project design and implementation will be undertaken in coordination with all donors and partners involved in the EFA Fast Track Initiative.

In line with the multiple level approach, which builds on UNICEF's comparative advantage to

⁴³ Input for this section was taken from the following sources: United Nations Children's Fund Executive Board, *Draft Country Programme Document – Nicaragua for 2008–2012 Period (E/ICEF/2007/P/L.47)*. UNICEF, New York, 2007; United Nations Children's Fund Nicaragua (2008). *Draft “Plan de Acción del Programa de País entre Gobierno de la República de Nicaragua y Fondo de Las Naciones Unidas para la Infancia (UNICEF) – Periodo de Cooperación 2008–2012”*, UNICEF, Nicaragua, 2008; Nicaragua Network/Nicaragua Monitor, *“Interview with Miguel de Castilla (Minister of Education) by Karla Jacobs – The New Education – a giant and inspiring task”* and *“Interview with Anyoli Sanabria, Education Project Officer”*, UNICEF, Nicaragua, November–December 2008.

work at and link local and sub-national initiatives with national policy design and implementation, the following targets are proposed:

(1) “at the national level, the component will support the development of a national policy for basic education, addressing quality and coverage, including the implementation of a child-friendly public school model by the Ministry of Education.

(2) In prioritized municipalities, efforts will support culturally appropriate and comprehensive family- and/or community-based strategies for early childhood development for at least 60 per cent of children in the most vulnerable communities. The aim is for least 50 per cent of children 4 to 5 years of age to have access to and be enrolled in culturally appropriate, inclusive and quality preschools. The component will also aim to close the gap in primary school retention and completion, especially for indigenous populations, eliminating exclusion tied to gender, disability and child labour. The programme will support the development and application in primary schools in priority municipalities of a basic set of indicators on life skills.

(3) As part of child-friendly schools initiatives, the programme will promote WASH in schools to increase healthy hygiene habits in 80 per cent of children and guarantee the installation and adequate use of water and sanitation services in 50 per cent of schools in prioritized municipalities.”⁴⁴

Achieving the above-mentioned goals will require further strengthening of the education community (school directors, teachers, students and parents) and other civil society actors in school decision-making and in the development of education policies and monitoring at municipal, regional and national levels. The sustainable achievement of EFA and Millennium goals and CRC rights will require further UNICEF and partner support for improving the quality of multiple learning opportunities, promoting inclusion, and eliminating violence within and around the school setting. As a cross-cutting element and in coordination with other sector initiatives, education programme actions will support national and local institutions for increasing their capacity to guarantee the right to education in emergencies and to include risk prevention and environmental care in the school curricula and teaching practices.

Adopting national standards on CFS

MINED decision-makers, along with other partner ministries have supported the process to incorporate CFHS standards in the design of a national model to achieve quality primary education for all, along with utilizing specific components of other existing initiatives supported by USAID, the World Bank and others. During the past administration, CFHS served as valuable input for the construction of learning and progress centres, while this present administration has clearly promoted the use of the UNICEF and PAHO/WHO experience for further innovation and organization of a viable

⁴⁴ United Nations Children’s Fund Executive Board (2007), *Draft Country Programme Document – Nicaragua for 2008–2012 Period (E/ICEF/2007/P/L.47)*. UNICEF, New York, 2007, p. 9, paragraphs 42-44.

support system for all levels – especially for pre- and primary-education services. In addition, unified local service monitoring instruments have been established for use by all participating ministries (strengthening an integrated approach).

Support from (and to) the Ministry of Education (MINED)

MINED continues to recognize the importance of CFHS model development and values this ongoing innovative experience as appropriate and timely input to National Ministry efforts to construct and implement the most effective and appropriate model(s) for this country. Of equal importance, MINED, MINSA, ENACAL and MARENA have used national and other international funding sources to expand the use of CFHS experiences on a national level. UNICEF's involvement as a neutral partner is valued by MINED and will continue to be a significant support, based on specific government requests, especially for providing ongoing technical assistance in child-rights based policy making, strategy design and ongoing monitoring.

Cost-effectiveness of scaling up (gender budgeting, etc.)

Scaling-up of an emerging Nicaraguan Quality Education Model, which incorporates specific CFHS components and experiences, is critical to trigger a more profound and sustainable transformation of the present education system. Limiting investments for expansion efforts of proven and effective quality education strategies is certainly the wrong path to take nor an appropriate solution to the alarming situation. The present cost of failure and poor quality education is devastating to children, adolescent and their families, along with being a financial drain on the country budget, caused by the multiple costs of high repetition and dropping out. UNICEF, along with other international organizations and donors, should strengthen specific technical and funding support to monitor and analyze the cost-effectiveness of the emerging Nicaraguan Quality Education Model, along with the further development of other innovative model(s) and system components, now contributing to national policy design and implementation.

Policy mainstreaming (gender in policies) and legislation changes

The General Education Law and the 2001–2015 National Education Plan continues to provide the overall action framework, with MINED leadership designing more targeted policies and strategies in line with an ongoing transformation process of the Nicaraguan educational model. Priority actions include a wide-reaching participatory approach ('Participative Revolution in Education') and targeting to eliminate all direct and in-direct school fees, which was considered a major obstacle in the past for the poorest and most excluded populations. UNICEF will further assist new model development and

strengthening of the multi-level support system, based on MINED's five fundamental 'pillars':⁴⁵

- Application of the new curriculum (combined with ongoing participatory monitoring)
- Expanded implementation of the national/decentralized evaluation, planning and educative training workshops system (TEPCE)
- Organization of the educational nuclei model (*nucleos educativos*) – including school clustering around a 'base' (mentor) school for more systematic support
- Improving classroom conditions and environment through rebuilding and rehabilitation
- Increasing teacher recognition and support as the heart of the transformation process

Continuing capacity development⁴⁶

As previously mentioned, within the present UNICEF cooperation package, an increased emphasis will be directed towards: increasing the capacity of the education system to support improved school-based learning processes; strengthening the transformation of the pre- and in-service teacher preparation and training programme; and expanding further development of CFHS inclusive education components as part of national innovation efforts to achieve the proposed transformation to achieve a Nicaraguan model of quality education for all. The following information highlights proposed priority areas of UNICEF support.

1. Capacity of the education system to support improved school-based learning processes:

- As part of the education system transformation process, new government priority has been given to reorganize the school system, based on a school clustering strategy (*nucleos educativos*) in defined geographic areas, linking a specific number of neighboring schools around a 'base' (mentor) school. UNICEF will support the strengthening of this school-to-school and teacher-to-teacher support systems - totaling 1423 clusters, with a main focus in priority municipalities.
- In line with 2008-2012 UNICEF and United Nations priorities, further attention will be given to strengthen system capacity in the RAAN, which is home to the highest



⁴⁵ *Nicaragua Network – Nicaragua Monitor. November-December, 2008 – “Interview with Miguel de Castilla (Minister of Education) by Karla Jacobs – The New Education – a giant and inspiring task”; page 2; and Interview with Anyoli Sanabria, Education Project Office, UNICEF Nicaragua*

⁴⁶ Input for this section was taken from the following sources: UNICEF/Executive Board (2007), *Draft Country Programme Document – Nicaragua for 2008 – 2012 Period (E/ICEF/2007/P/L.47)*. UNICEF: New York; UNICEF Nicaragua (2008). *Draft “Plan de Acción del Programa de País entre Gobierno de la República de Nicaragua y Fondo de Las Naciones Unidas para la Infancia (UNICEF) – Periodo de Cooperación 2008 – 2012”*; and *Interview with Anyoli Sanabria, Education Project Officer, UNICEF Nicaragua*.

percent of indigenous and afro-descendent populations, along with being vulnerable to natural disasters.

2. Transformation of the pre- and in-service teacher preparation and training programme:

- The expanded utilization of the TEPCE monthly workshop model (utilizing the ‘educational nuclei’) provides locally-based opportunities for strengthening in-service teacher training, along with supporting the quality improvement of school-based management and reform. A two-level UNICEF assistance strategy includes: TEPCE actions in priority municipalities, along with strengthening national efforts through material development, monitoring and evaluation components.
- For initial teacher preparation, a more systematic government effort is being made to improve the quality and content of existing teacher training programmes (*Escuelas normales*) in eight regions. UNICEF will provide technical and financial assistance to reform the teacher training curricula, in line the overall education reform process.

3. Further development of CFHS inclusive education and transitioning strategies, through the support and sharing of new innovation actions in selected schools:

- In support of MINED’s effort to transform the education system, UNICEF will continue to support innovative practices and strategies at the school level, in selected municipalities (aimed at feeding in to national policy development). Some priority areas are:
 - Strengthening inclusive education components to reach and provide quality education for working children, and those with a disability. The expanded use of the child-to-child component will be highlighted, along with emphasizing more family competencies and participation.
 - Improving links between pre- (ECD) and primary school services, within an aim to improve the age-appropriate entry point of children in first grade and the successful transitioning to and through the first grades of primary schooling – with strong parent/ extended family involvement.
 - Expanding the design and implementation of other learning opportunities and spaces linked to existing CFHS initiatives, for children and adolescents in school and for including those out-of-school, targeting violence prevention and child-labour eradication, while increasing safe spaces for inclusion and participation.
- In recognition of the unique situation and historical neglect in the RAAN, further attention will focus on strengthening CFHS bilingual-intercultural components, along with expanding efforts on disaster risk reduction and education in emergency.



Responding to national Government and partner needs and priorities

CFHS project implementation – with all advances achieved and obstacles faced – has proven to be productive and promising: assisting government and civil society efforts to develop a Nicaragua’s Quality Education Model for All; promoting more functional and productive intersectoral initiatives between key ministries; building stronger bridges with other partner agencies and the donor community; and strengthening national and local capacity to improve and sustain results. UNICEF will continue to respond to existing and emerging government, civil society, and partner requirements and priorities – within our institutional mandate and in line with cooperation agreements and the SWAp process

..... giving priority to those proven initiatives – like CFHS – that focus on guaranteeing the Right to a Quality Education for All.

VIGNETTES (ANNEX SECTION)

Nicaragua: Newslines

Nicaragua: New national education model counteracts gender discrimination, often linked to domestic violence

LIMAY, Nicaragua/NEW YORK, 28 October 2005 – Victoria Rayo primary school in Limay, Estelí province, northern Nicaragua, has undergone remarkable changes since it joined the country's Child-Friendly and Healthy Schools Initiative in 2003. Water and sanitation facilities have been fixed, children are being served a daily meal and the classrooms are nicely decorated with learning materials.

More importantly, teachers and parents now pay special attention to what is being taught.



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Boys and girls studying together at Victoria Rayo school.

“We don't tolerate any gender discrimination,” says Alex Bismar, head teacher at the school. “As a strategy,” he adds, “we make boys and girls do the same tasks, such as cleaning.

“If boys protest, we talk about why people shouldn't be limited by stereotypes, why women can do what men do, and vice-versa. Now, boys get involved in tasks that are not typical for men, not just at school but also at home.”



© UNICEF/2005/Stark-Merklein
Alex Bismar, head teacher at Victoria Rayo primary school, with Liliam Espinoza (wearing a red blouse) and other students.

Study on violence against children

Latin American children who were consulted for a study on violence against children commissioned by the United Nations Secretary-General reported everyday exposure to a variety of forms of violence between parents, including abuse of the mother by her man. A wide group of the children considers girls to experience most sexual abuse.

Preliminary findings of the study were presented earlier this month at the United Nations General Assembly by Professor Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, the independent expert appointed to lead the project.

“Children on all continents have told me how much the routine violence they suffer in their homes, schools and other institutions hurts them, both physically and ‘inside,’” said Mr. Pinheiro at the United Nations. “They have also told me how adult approval and

acceptance of this violence upsets them. The objective of the study must be to ensure that children enjoy the same protection as adults.”

The study, published in 2006, provides the first detailed look at how children experience violence worldwide and what must be done to prevent and end this violence.

Banning violence

In Nicaragua’s child-friendly school model, any form of violence is banned. “We discuss in class how to resolve conflict without resorting to violence,” explains Mr. Bismar, “and we openly talk about machismo and gender stereotypes.”

“When a student tells us about conflict and beating at home, we bring up the subject in the teacher-parents meetings we hold regularly,” says Mr. Bismar. “We won’t put the parents on the spot,” he adds, “but talk about it in general terms.”



©UNICEF/2005/Stark-Merklein
Alex Bismar and his fifth grade students.

The Child-Friendly and Healthy School Initiative in Nicaragua is being implemented by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the ministries of Health and the Environment, the Water Authority, the Pan-American Health Organization, the World Food Programme and UNICEF. Currently, 184 schools have joined the Initiative.

Child-friendly schools boost girls’ self-esteem

Students elect their student government in a process that mirrors democratic electoral processes and teaches important civic responsibilities, giving boys and girls equal chances to be elected and develop leadership skills.

In Nicaragua’s male-dominated culture, girls flourish in the improved school environment. Many student governments are headed by girls who bear witness to the positive impact of their new roles.

Eleven-year-old Liliam Espinoza, president of Victoria Rayo’s student government since last year, radiates self-confidence. There is no stopping her once she starts listing the gains her school, and she, made since pupils have a say in school affairs.

“I was very shy when I started working with the student government,” she says with a big smile, “but not anymore.”

Liliam says that working as a student delegate has taught her a lot. She and her peers organize sports events and school cleaning, but they also sit on the school council, together with teachers and parents, and zealously protect the integrity of the electoral processes they manage.

“We have much more knowledge thanks to the student government,” she says, adding, “We have stronger opinions now and can express ourselves better.”

It is not easy to ‘unlearn’ attitudes and behaviour century-old cultures have taught men (and women). According to Mr. Bismar, “It will take a while to change, but with the new school model, the perspective of our teachers and parents has broadened already.”

[The United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence Against Children](#)⁵ is a joint initiative, directly supported by the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights ([OHCHR](#))⁶, the United Nations Children Fund ([UNICEF](#))⁷, and the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)).⁸

A day in the life of a determined schoolgirl

MANAGUA, Nicaragua, 8 November 2004 - Fifteen-year-old Haitza Ortiz lives with her mother and younger sister in a poor suburb of Managua, Nicaragua’s capital. Haitza’s school starts in the afternoon, so she uses the morning to do chores around the house.

She gets up at 5:30 a.m. every day to prepare breakfast for her sister and mother. Her sister Lupita goes to the same school, but in the morning, and her mother takes the bus to work as a maid at the other end of town.

After Haitza’s sister and mother leave the house, she feeds the animals and brings breakfast to an old man who lives next door. She then washes the dishes and the clothes. Afterwards, she begins to review her homework for school. A friend of Haitza’s always comes by to study with her.

After finishing her homework, Haitza cleans the house, then goes shopping and prepares lunch.

The morning goes by fast and Haitza has to rush to take a bath before her friends arrive to accompany her on the 30-minute walk to school.

Haitza studies at the San Luis School. She is in the second year of her secondary school. Haitza studies hard, with dreams of becoming a computer scientist, an ambition supported by her mother. “My mother is always telling me I have to study to have a life better than hers. She had to drop out of school when she was 10 and was sent to work as a maid in the capital,” says Haitza.

At night, when she returns home, Haitza likes to watch television and relax.

UNICEF’s work in Nicaragua

As the largest country in Central America, Nicaragua has a population of 5.1 million people, more than half of whom are under 18 years of age. The country is also the third

poorest in the Americas - 46 per cent of the population are poor and 15 per cent are extremely poor.

Although 79 per cent of primary school-age children are enrolled in school, the quality of education and completion rates leave much to be desired. In 2002, only 29 per cent of students completed primary school. Girls often drop out of school to take care of younger siblings or help with household chores.



UNICEF is working with the government of Nicaragua to improve the education system. One example is the Child-Friendly and Healthy Schools Initiative. The initiative builds on strong student, parent, teacher and community involvement. Good teaching, health services, meals, water and sanitation for the students are essential components of the programme. In 2003, the initiative was implemented in 99 schools nationwide and 200 more have been certified as Child-Friendly and Healthy Schools.

Many families in Nicaragua appreciate the importance of education and want to break the cycle of poverty in which they find themselves. The family of Haitza Ortiz is just one of them.

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⁴⁷ Note: This draft article utilized as a reference document was later published (*Nicaragua: The Social “Treasure” of Participation*) in 2008 in the following publication: *Case Studies in Global School Health Promotion – From Research to Practice*, Cheryl Whitman and Carmen Aldinger, Springer Publishers, 2008.

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