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## UNICEF EDUCATION

# Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Case Study

## NICARAGUA

### A community-based approach to support the psychosocial well-being of students and teachers

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In its National Strategic Plan 2017–2021, the Ministry of Education (MoE) of Nicaragua prioritises improving the quality of learning as well as the holistic development of students following a human-centered approach. With this approach, the Ministry focuses its efforts on cognitive development while recognizing the importance of the emotional well-being of children, adolescents as well as that of caregivers and public servants who play a role in promoting children’s learning and development. In this context, the MoE started a transformation process of the education system. Shifting its strategy around the promotion of students’ well-being from a clinical approach based on an individual case to a community-based and preventive approach. This approach promotes families and whole-of-school communities to get involved and to take the lead in supporting students. Whole-of-school communities participate to create a friendly environment where everyone’s safety and social-emotional well-being is crucial. The national strategic Plan integrates the School Community Counseling Programme (SCCP) launched by the MoE on 2015. This programme aims to promote values and works in an coordinated manner for the prevention, identification, accompaniment, and referral of children and adolescents who experience situations that affect their well-being, either inside or outside the educational centers. The SCCP programme has four core components:

- 1) the promotion of children, adolescents, and families’ participation and leadership;
- 2) the promotion of values in schools;
- 3) strengthening the capacities of the education community, and
- 4) improving socio-emotional support for children.

The SCCP has a national technical team in charge of teachers' capacity development and coordination, monitoring and follow-up on how the programme is being implemented in 9,105 public primary and secondary schools. This programme highlights the critical role of schools in facilitating spaces for community participation where teachers, caregivers and children have the opportunity to express their opinions and cooperate to find solutions to identified challenges. At the beginning of the school year, an educational center commission is established in every public school. The commission members (the school manager, teachers, caregivers, and students) are tasked with promoting a positive school environment by fostering appropriate individual and collective attitudes and behaviors that favor everyone's well-being and safety.

Since 2016, UNICEF has supported the Ministry of Education to develop the capacity of teachers to implement the SCCP. As a result, teachers have acquired the skills needed to help children and adolescents in the school, family and community to cope with stressful situations through psychological first aid, as well as individual and group support interventions. More recently, UNICEF supported the MoE in systematizing and evaluating the SCCP programme after six years of implementation (see below). In 2020, in response to the COVID-19 crisis, UNICEF supported the launch of a new programme called "I feel good expressing myself". It involved [distributing kits containing arts and play materials across 153 schools](#), reaching 73,000 children and adolescents. Additionally, the programme involved developing and distributing [60,000 guidebooks](#) on providing socio-emotional support and adapting curriculums, giving teachers practical tools to support their students.

## RESULTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The following results and key lessons learned emerged from the evaluation process of the SCCP programme conducted by the Ministry of Education in 2020:

- SCCP's alignment with the national education strategy and regional policies guarantees its sustainability and operation with the participation of 180,000 volunteers. The programme has an assigned budget from the public treasury and the volunteers are trained and supervised by the MoE technical team.
- As a result of the programme, teachers and students perceive improvements in their school environments; students recognize the rights of their peers; self-esteem has been strengthened; and there is greater communication between the school and caregivers. On the other hand, teachers have improved their relationships with students and have promoted actions to create safe school environments.
- The Ministry of Education identifies the lack of men's participation in the care and welfare of their children as a challenge and is designing new strategies and approaches to promote men's involvement in the programme.

## NEXT STEPS

In 2021, UNICEF will continue to support the strengthening of the capacities of the Ministry of Education staff to carry out the SCCP, by training teachers in mindfulness and socio-emotional accompaniment. Likewise, it will support the implementation of the strategy "I feel good expressing myself" especially in the Nicaraguan Caribbean Region, which was affected by two hurricanes in 2021. UNICEF will also support MoE efforts to ensure access to school, reintegration, retention and promotion of children as well as adolescents affected by migration.

**Cost effectiveness:** In 2021, UNICEF's investment of US\$ 30,000 supported the training of 9,125 teachers who will reach out to 1.8 million students.

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