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Item 7(d)**

The Norfolk and Norwich –El Viejo Friendship Link

Report of a Delegation Visit to El Viejo

March 2011

This report has been compiled by the Link Chairperson, David Trevanion,
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1. Introduction and Background

The Link between Norwich and El Viejo, in NW Nicaragua, was first formed in 1986. Thus 2011 is the 25th anniversary of the Link. It is also 10 years since the last Delegation visit in 2001. This took place after Norwich City Council had agreed, in November 1999, to establish a formal civic twinning with the Municipality of El Viejo. The 2011 delegation visit builds on previous visits, including several made by the Secretary of the Link, Ralph Gayton, the most recent of which was in 2009. Ralph was unable to take part in this visit for personal reasons, but has been able to make a separate visit in May 2011.

The purpose of the visit was for members of the Link to establish first hand experience of El Viejo and review our current projects. It was actually during the visit ten years ago that the current Mayor of El Viejo, Alcides Moradel, asked the current Norwich Link Group to put in place a scholarship scheme, which would enable 200 children to be able to attend primary school. Last year, 2010, the number of children was increased to 240, following a monitoring exercise of the scheme.

The scheme recognises that many parents are too poor to send their children to school and that at least for the immediately foreseeable future, the government of Nicaragua is unable to fully fund all aspects of universal primary education. By and large the government does pay for teachers and school buildings. But many of the school buildings are very inadequate, some lack electricity and teachers are not well paid.

Their salaries have increased over the last two years from \$90 dollars a month (\$3 dollars a day) to \$180 a month (\$6 dollars a day). Whilst this is a considerable improvement it still only represents an hourly rate of about 70 pence an hour, in pounds sterling. Teacher's salaries have not actually doubled over 2 years, as inflation has not been fully covered in previous years and teachers are paid in Nicaraguan cordobas (22 to the US dollar and 33 to UK pound sterling in March 2011). In 2001 there were 13 cordobas to the US dollar, representing therefore a 69% loss in value over ten years, against the dollar.

The scholarship scheme concentrates on primary school children whose parents cannot afford to buy uniforms and materials needed for school. It provides school uniform, shoes, a rucksack, exercise books, pens and pencils and gives the school \$10 for each child for the school to purchase whatever the teachers need most for teaching purposes. The value of each grant to each child, including the \$10 dollar donation to the school is currently about 40 US dollars, £27 sterling, just under £6,500 a year in total. In addition the Link is currently funding a schools' garden scheme, facilitating the growth of fruit and vegetables and we are also seeking to purchase one computer for each school.

Before leaving the UK the delegation had read of increased funding for primary schools coming from the government of Nicaragua, a \$19 million World Bank loan to improve school attendance and some additional funding from the Council of El Viejo itself. We therefore wanted to find out the details of these schemes, to ensure that there was no duplication and that there is still a need for what we have been doing.

The main text, which follows, concentrates on our actual visit to El Viejo. For those readers who are interested in why Nicaragua remains second only to Haiti in terms of poverty in the hemisphere of the Americas, some selected extracts from a World Bank Report on poverty reduction have been reproduced as Appendix 1. In addition a short account of the recent history of Nicaragua, which explains the background to Nicaragua's current political and economic situation has been provided as Appendix 2.

2. Meetings with our Representative in El Viejo

We met Carmela Hernandez, our representative in El Viejo, at her house in Leon on our way to El Viejo. We saw her nearly every day at the schools we visited and then had a round up meeting on our last night in El Viejo.

At the first meeting we discussed our programme in El Viejo and made sure that Carmela was clear about the aims of our visit. We told her about our proposal to give \$2500 for the anniversary project and explained that we were seeking two possible placements, one through the EU and one for a UEA student. Her house was full of rucksacks and school exercise books, ready to be given out at the schools.

After meeting with Carmela we went to a local restaurant, met up with Nick Hoskins, who also lives in Leon and has been a friend and supporter of the Link for many years. We stayed at the Hotel Austria in Leon.

The following day we had a break and went to the coast at Poneloya, 20 kilometres west of Leon, and had a fabulous seafood meal at the Hotel Suyapa.

Carmela was a fantastic support to us throughout the visit. She was very enthusiastic about how well the project was going and demonstrated that she has an excellent relationship with all the teachers, as well as with the Council.

When we met with her at the end of our visit we acknowledged that her salary review was due and asked her for any comments on the issue of her pay and conditions. She asked us to consider paying her national insurance contribution, 6% of salary, so that she could make up her pension contribution, proportionately to the salary we pay her. We agreed to take her request back to the next meeting of the Committee in Norwich.

3. Meetings with the Mayor in El Viejo

On the first day of our programme in El Viejo, we met with the Mayor, Alcides Moradel, in his office within the Alcaldia (Town Hall). We explained that we wanted to discuss the 25th anniversary; the contribution of the World Bank, central government and local government to education; a European Union scheme for two people to come to El Viejo for a year and also a request from a student at the University of East Anglia to come to El Viejo.

a. 25th Anniversary

We began our first meeting by announcing that the Link Group had agreed to set aside \$2500 for an anniversary project. We hoped that the Council of El Viejo would be able to match this funding.

Alcides said that the Council could match this amount of money, he asked for reasonable flexibility in terms of achieving the matching through the provision of materials and labour as well as actual cash. On behalf of the Council of El Viejo his first preference was that we should, together, build two new classrooms at a school near the Monte Rosa sugar plantation. This was quite an urgent scheme, brought about by the current primary school known as Campirano Norte being in temporary substandard accommodation and on a site which would be very difficult to use once the rains came in July. The school had been moved from a previously unsuitable and also temporary site, because of the proximity to agricultural land, resulting in pesticides and other sprays blowing into the classrooms.

He suggested we went to see the site later in the week. He thought that \$5000 should be sufficient, but that if there was a small shortfall, then the Council could use capital funds from the national government's 2 million cordobas (\$91,000) funding towards school building repairs – held by the Ministry of Education (MINED).

We asked if there were any alternative projects. Alcides replied that we could contribute a sum of that size towards the roof on the market, which needed urgent repairs. We were subsequently shown the roof in the market – indeed part of the roof had a hole in it – fortunately away from the fresh meat, fruit and vegetable stalls.

Alcides undertook to provide us with a full report on each scheme by the end of the week.

b. Educational Funding

Based mainly on news summaries provided by the Nicaragua Solidarity Group we had become aware that the Nicaraguan government was providing more money for schools, that there were as a result similar schemes to our own in some other schools and that the World Bank had agreed to lend Nicaragua \$19.5 million to keep children in school. The latter is aimed at assisting 20,000 families, who have one or more children who have abandoned school to get into work and involves family scholarships for two years and support for keeping their children in school, including school meals.

We explained that whilst we were still committed to the scholarship scheme, following the review in 2009/10, we were always sensitive to the possibility that our scheme might not be needed in the near future, in which case our funds could be used on other projects.

Alcides explained that the Link is currently working in 8 schools, but there are 94 schools within the Municipality of El Viejo. Innumerable problems remain, arising from poverty for a high proportion of children in El Viejo's schools. Even though the Council is now providing an additional 80 rucksacks – 10 for each of the schools where we are working – the remainder of the schools have the same levels of poverty.

The message was clear – please continue with the schools project as it is, it is valued and needed. Alcides suggested we discussed the other government funding schemes with Sr Joel Carrillo, the local representative of MINED (Ministry of Education) at our meeting with him later in the week.

c. EU Sponsored Visit to El Viejo

We raised the possibility of two people coming over from the UK to work in El Viejo for a year, sponsored by the European Union, with all expenses covered.

Alcides replied that this would only work if the people who came spoke fluent Spanish and had a professional background – in other words so that they could contribute to local schemes, without taking up a lot of someone's time. He specifically requested someone with knowledge of building design and a civil engineer who could assist with bringing drinking water into communities.

We gave Alcides copies of the application form, translated into Spanish, which required him to sign on behalf of the Alcaldia. He did not give us this form back, despite reminders from us and we concluded that this was his way of saying that he was not keen on the scheme.

It is probably worth feeding back to the sponsors of this scheme that it is too one sided, not reciprocal – there is, for example, no provision for people from Nicaragua to come to Europe all expenses paid, and the task of supervision falls wholly on people at the local level in Nicaragua.

d. Student Placement from University of East Anglia

Just before we left the UK we were asked to seek a placement of about 6 weeks in July / August 2011 for a student from the University of East Anglia Development Studies course. This proved easier, given that the student had previously been to Nicaragua, and was suggesting options, such as helping the Council design a website and assisting with the introduction of computers into the schools.

Alcides suggested that the Alcaldia could benefit from such a placement and suggested she liaises with Carmela Hernandez, our Community Worker.

e. Update on El Viejo Councils Budget

Finally at this meeting we asked for an update on the Council's budget, so that we could compare the situation facing the Council with 2001, when we had asked for similar information. Alcides said that the budget had increased considerably, that they now receive 19,855,000 cordobas (\$902,500) from the government whereas in 2001 they had only received 200,000 cordobas, (\$9091) and he undertook to explain more at the meeting with the whole Council later in the week.

We also met with Alcides on the last day of our visit to El Viejo. We described how happy we were with the scholarship project, confirmed our agreement on the anniversary project and we were presented with a plaque, which commemorates the 25th anniversary of the Link, to take back to the UK. We also reviewed the whole visit and thanked him and all those who had been involved.

4a. Visits to Schools

The main part of our programme consisted of visiting schools, giving out rucksacks to the children and their parents, talking to the teachers and celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Link.

The format of each visit was very similar, we were greeted with banners celebrating the 25th anniversary, teachers and children welcomed us, we looked round the classrooms, took a look at the garden project at each school and asked questions about where the proposed computer would be kept. Before and after giving out rucksacks with exercise books, pencils and erasers inside, we were treated to exhibitions of dancing, poetry readings (reproduced as Appendix 3) and local folklore performances. At each school there was dancing from the children at the school, plus some dancing from older students who came out from El Viejo to perform. The Mayor came to each school except for one day when he was in Managua and his wife Julia joined us. We were also accompanied every day by one of the Councillors, Rosita, who was very supportive to us throughout our stay in El Viejo. Speeches were given at every school, by the Mayor and by David Trevanion as Chairperson of the Link, celebrating the 25th anniversary, there were also speeches of thanks from some of the parents and headteachers.

The programme of visits to schools was as follows:

Monday 21st March Visit to Francisco Morazán school

Tuesday 22nd March Visit to Norwich Community school; we were joined by pupils, teachers and parents from Hermana Maritza school

Wednesday 23rd March Visit to Evemilda Somarriba school; we were joined by pupils, teachers and parents from the school at Nuestra Senora del Perpetuo Socorro

Thursday 24th March Visit to Amigos de Holanda; we were joined by pupils, teachers and parents from Hermana Rosario Martinez and Hermana Rosario Mayorga schools

Friday 25th March Celebration of 25th anniversary in the park in the centre of El Viejo, near the Alcaldia (Council House). About 220 people attended, of which at least 160 were children and parents receiving rucksacks from the municipal Council of El Viejo. In addition to speeches, there was dancing, theatre and fireworks!

As the visits to the schools concentrated mainly on ceremony we decided to take photographs at each school and postpone our discussion of issues until we had a separate meeting with the teachers from each school.

4b. Meeting with Teachers

We had an excellent meeting with all the teachers' representatives from each of the schools, two from each school, together with Carmela Hernandez, our representative in El Viejo and Gill Holmes, our interpreter. In our opinion this was a particularly positive meeting, which illustrated the enthusiasm of the teachers for the scholarship scheme and the constructive way that they interpreted it.

We made it clear that, for our part, we were happy with the review of the scholarship scheme, which had been undertaken since Ralph Gayton's last visit, as we didn't want to cover the same ground and we wanted everybody to speak freely, without apprehension that any criticism might threaten the scheme. We asked if they were happy with the operation of the scheme and there was both general agreement that it is working well and several individual examples given of the scheme working well, in practice.

The teachers emphasized that the criteria are understood and do not lead to conflict with other parents, that attendance has improved by those in receipt of scholarships and that the \$10 per head given to the school is absolutely invaluable to them, because of the lack of resources available in schools. It was interesting that we were asked by Mauricio (Evemilda) if we could help in providing other materials such as geometry sets, dictionaries, display cabinets, etc. One of the other teachers stepped in and gave examples of the numerous different ways that they use the \$10 in their school; this seemed an excellent answer to the original request, which illustrated that the teachers group has a very good understanding of how the Link group operates. One of them actually said, by asking for more money you are asking the Link Group to raise additional money. This was all done in a very light-hearted manner.

Given that the wearing of uniforms to school in Nicaragua is now voluntary, we raised the issue of using the money for uniforms in different ways. There was unanimity amongst the teachers that they wanted us to continue with the uniforms, because otherwise many of those children would come to school in very tattered clothes or not come at all. There was also understanding and real appreciation of the work undertaken by Carmela to get the right sizes of shoes and clothing for all the children.

4c. School Gardens Project

We asked about the school gardens project and how this fitted in with the government's school food project (PINE – Programa Integral de Nutrición Escolar). It was explained to us that PINE was designed to give basic foodstuffs to each pupil, rice, beans, corn, oil and mixed cereals. Our garden project has the purpose of supplementing nutrition from fruit and vegetables, and to educate students in good agricultural skills, which have been, rather surprisingly, largely lost in rural areas, probably because of the concentration on single crop agricultural labour and a lack of available land. We concluded that our scheme dovetails rather well with the government's PINE scheme.

All schools had problems with the weather last year because the rain arrived late and then there was a deluge in the autumn. So production was affected. All of the schools were appreciative of the help we give. The Link provides tools and seeds as needed. Some discussion was had over the relative merits of watering cans over drip irrigation and it was generally accepted that watering cans offered a better learning experience for the children (more participation) and were cheaper, but it does depend on the size of the land available. We asked each school to describe how they were getting on with the scheme:

Evemilda Somarriba (Mauricio)

Have 4 years of experience. This year they got a tractor to break the ground (their school garden is big enough for this) and they have a drip irrigation system. Their well has an electric pump. So this school is the most advanced. All grades participate, with grades 1-3 helping to weed and water, while higher grades prepare holes and plant seeds. (This pattern was shared by most schools, so that maximum participation was possible). The second harvest (after the rains came) was fairly successful apart from the cucumbers.

Francisco Morazán (Paulo)

As with Evemilda full participation of students, but the weather meant no production last year, and Paulo was in his first year there (so still learning).

Hermana Maritza (Claudia)

Last year they planted cucumber, pipián (a kind of squash), and French beans but these were eaten by the animals in the village. They put a barbed fence round it but then the chickens got in!

Norwich School (Lizbeth)

They had problems with the weather plus lack of water in the well (the level got very low). 5th and 6th grades planted pipiáns, ayote (squash), sandía (water melon) and pepino (cucumber), but the local chickens and pigs got in and ate the seeds. This year things are better organised.

Amigos de Holanda

Planting pipián, beans, maize and cucumber this year.

Perpetuo del Socorro

Have limited space for a garden, but are planting herbs: basil, coriander, mint. They'll also plant green beans, but on a limited scale.

Hermana Rosario

Plantains have already been planted. Pomegranates (Gill thinks this was probably granadilla which isn't pomegranate but a large marrow shaped fruit which grows on a vine and is used for making drinks (refrescos) and pipián will be planted this year.

Norwich and Hermana Maritza schools have also asked for seeds, which we authorised, in line with the other schools.

Produce from the successful schemes is distributed amongst parents and children and benefits the whole school. There is a lot of enthusiasm about the scheme.

4d. Computers in Schools

We had already been told at the Alcaldia, that teachers from each school had been offered a very detailed computer course, which, in total, gave 120 hours of tuition and practice. This has been voluntarily provided in the Alcaldia by their Director of Finance, Sr J Sequiera. We stated that we were amazed by this, we had expected a much more basic course. It will be interesting to chart the effect of this course on those individuals – it potentially gives them new career options.

All the teachers were convincing in explaining that each school had teachers who were adept with computers (there are at least 3 internet cafes in El Viejo), and there were 5 teachers who will finish the 120-hour course provided by the Alcaldia in order to get qualifications (and higher pay!). 85-90 hours of this are already done. Another potential difficulty was experienced by the community of Norwich school where the teachers dropped out due to the distance to the city and this was echoed by others who had only done part of the course.

Only one school was definitely unsuitable for the introduction of computers at the moment - Perpetuo del Socorro has no electricity supply. Hermana Maritza has very recently acquired electricity. We were also informed at our meeting with the Ministry of Education (MINED) that Perpetuo del Socorro should have electricity by November 2011.

The teachers were both convinced and persuasive that there is sufficient knowledge of computers in every school and they were very enthusiastic about having one in each school.

Gill, our interpreter has had considerable experience of introducing computers and we relayed her advice about security, protection from dust, and regular maintenance. She also advised that a desktop computer would have a much longer life in Nicaraguan conditions, than a laptop and that a dot matrix printer is by far the most affordable kind for the schools. She also recommended that a regulator is essential, and that a back up battery although desirable is not essential.

The Mayor offered to include the computers in the maintenance contract they hold at the Alcaldia, at the meeting we had with him.

The main problems with security appeared to be at Norwich and Hermana Maritza (and, in future, at Perpetuo del Socorro). The teacher representative from Norwich said they would arrange for parents to help with security (on a rota basis).

We also learnt that the MINED are supplying a TV and DVD player to each school, mainly to enable educational packs to be displayed, but these are not as flexible as computers, in our opinion.

All the teachers were very appreciative of the long-term support we have been giving. Clearly the feeling was that we should carry on as long as possible, another 25 years, at least!

After the meeting we adjourned to a street café for an excellent evening meal at a very low price.

5. Meeting with the Ministry of Education

We met with Joel Carrillo, who is in charge of the El Viejo office of the Ministry of Education (MINED). We were joined by Julia Baca, who is responsible for the Citizen's Power Committees in El Viejo and Rosita, a local Councillor.

Joel started the meeting by suggesting that he sometimes missed meetings concerning the scholarship scheme, because of lack of notification of the date and requested that consideration be given to holding some meetings at MINED. These problems were not corroborated by Julia, Rosita (or subsequently) by Carmela, but nevertheless, we undertook to communicate and discuss his points with Carmela.

We raised the issue of the rucksacks, which are being distributed by the Government. Joel explained that these are just a very small number, when the number of schools and pupils in El Viejo is taken into consideration. He cited 128 schools with 24,000 pupils (MINED has slightly different boundaries than the Council) and there are only 380 rucksacks being given out, mainly through the government's Amor programme. So he felt that there was absolutely no overlap at all with our scheme. He made the same point about the government's programme of school gardens (Huertos) for schools – that it is on a very small scale and there is no overlap.

His basic recommendation was that we should continue with our scheme for at least another 5 years and evaluate the situation then. The government's policy is that primary education should be universal by 2015. However according to a newspaper report on the millennium goals in El Nuevo Diario (26.12.10), the current rate of attendance in primary education is 85% and government policy is to achieve 95% by 2015.

We also asked about secondary education and Joel explained that there are three secondary schools, Miguel Jarquín, 3000 pupils, Mother of Theresa and José Josefa, both about 1300 pupils. A further secondary school is planned for 2013. In addition there are 8 private schools.

6. Meeting with Municipal Council (Consejo Municipal)

We met the whole Council and received an outline of the Council's Budget. It has expanded considerably since 2001.

In 2010 the budget was 82 million cordobas (3.7m dollars, £2.5m). This compares with 24 million cordobas (\$1.1m, £733,000) in 2001. Inflation would account for a significant proportion of the increase, but it looks as though the overall amount available has approximately doubled. Staffing also appears to have doubled to 220 staff of which 210 are permanent staff. Given that overall expenditure on staff is 16 million cordobas (\$727,000, £484,000) this gives an average of \$254 per month for the Council employees (there is a 13 month year, i.e. double at Christmas).

The Council receives 43 million cordobas (\$1.9m, £1.3m) through local taxation of businesses, houses and cars; 5 million cordobas (\$227,000, £151,000) through charges for rents and services (e.g. rubbish collection) and 19.8 million cordobas (\$902,500, £602,000) from the government. Most of the balance of income was carried over from the previous year.

There is also a debt of 25 million cordobas (\$1.1m, £757,000), which costs 7 million cordobas (\$318,000, £212,000) to service.

Discussion of Anniversary Project at the Council Meeting

We gave a brief description of our scholarship scheme and also that we had offered \$2500 towards an anniversary project, which Alcides had agreed to match. One of the Liberal party Councillors asked us to consider an alternative school to the one at Campirano Norte. He described a school in the District of Rio Chiquita Arriba, known as El Parche, which translates as the Patch. Alcides stepped in to the debate and suggested that we visit this school the following day.

We visited as agreed and had just come into the small community, when we found that we were awaited by someone from the local Press. The Councillor with us, Rosita, consulted by phone with Alcides, who asked us not to speak to the Press. We therefore drove away from the school without taking photographs, but we could see that it was in a similar state to the one at Campirano Norte.

The following day when we met with Alcides, he explained that we had got enmeshed in local politics, for which he apologized, but effectively asked us to stick with the Campirano Norte scheme, because the Council owns the land there, but that is not the case at El Parche.

Apparently it is Sandinista Party policy not to speak to the Press, unless agreed at a very high level of the party in exceptional circumstances. Nothing appeared in the Press, while we were in Nicaragua, as far as we know. It is possible that local radio may have covered the issue, as, apparently the guy from the Press was a freelance who specialized in local radio.

Following the actual Council meeting we went to a restaurant called El Español, at Corinto, just South of Chinandega with all the Councillors to celebrate the 25th anniversary.

7. Conclusions

There is only one way to get the full flavour of life in El Viejo and in Nicaragua generally and that is to go there. We were privileged to go for the 25th anniversary of the Link, and certainly the hospitality we received from the Mayor Alcides Moradel, and his wife, Julia Baca, was exemplary.

We undertook a great deal of investigation of the scholarship scheme and our findings and observations confirmed the findings of the review, which we undertook two years ago. We found that the scholarship scheme is effective, good value for money and very popular with all concerned – pupils, parents, teachers, the Mayor, Councillors and the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education.

Similarly the relatively small amount of money we contribute to the school gardens scheme is highly valued by all who are involved in it and the teachers are looking forward to a computer being introduced by us into each of the eight schools which we support.

Life does appear to have improved for many people In Nicaragua over the last ten years, but only marginally, and Nicaragua remains the second poorest in the hemisphere of the Americas – second only to Haiti. This makes it very difficult for the government of Nicaragua to achieve the millennium goal of universal primary education by 2015; it is very unlikely to be achieved even by then.

Everywhere we went in El Viejo we were asked to continue our scholarship scheme for as long as possible – at least for the next five years.

Appendix 1

Extracts from 2010 World Bank Report on Poverty Reduction in Nicaragua

Poverty

Nicaragua is one of the poorest countries in Latin America. Its per capita income reached US\$1,022 in 2007, and according to the 2005 Living Standards Measurement Survey (LSMS), 48 percent of the population lived below the national poverty line, while 17 percent lived in extreme poverty. The country's poverty rate has remained stubbornly high despite improvements in average living standards. According to the Bank's last Poverty Assessment (Report No. 39736-NI)¹, while the country's poverty rate fell by only four percentage points between 1993 and 2005, per capita income levels grew by over 30 percent during this same period. Progress in reducing poverty (particularly in the rural areas) slowed during 2001-05, while improvements in intermediate indicators of education and health have been uneven and many of the MDG (millennium development goals) are off-track.

Governance

Political tensions and governance concerns have aggravated the situation. President Ortega's Sandinista party does not command a majority in the National Assembly. While the administration has been generally successful in forging political alliances, delays have emerged in the approval of key economic legislation largely due to a deterioration of governance condition.

Allegations of irregularities following the October 2008 municipal elections resulted in some civil unrest and the suspension of budget support from traditional donors (only US\$15 million was disbursed in 2009, compared to an average commitment of US\$70–90 million). In addition, some investment projects co-financed by donors were placed on hold, and multi-partisan agreements to pass important reforms in the national assembly became more difficult.

A Supreme Court decision that would permit President Ortega to seek reelection in 2011 reignited tensions in October 2009. Opposition parties and a broad spectrum of civil society and NGOs condemned the Court's decision and are pressing for reforms to strengthen electoral transparency. The issuance in January 2010 of a Presidential decree extending the period for judges and officials of key public sector institutions (Supreme Court, Electoral Court) increased tensions further.

Spending

The authorities' poverty reduction strategy has been revised, reflecting current political and economic realities, to emphasize increased access to basic services and productive support. Anti-poverty spending is projected to rise from an average of 11.8 percent of GDP during the previous administration (2002–06) to an average of 13.2 percent for 2007–11 (although this falls short

of the original target of 15.5 percent of GDP). The share of poverty-reducing expenditure is projected to remain above 40 percent of public sector spending, while improvements in targeting of programs will protect more vulnerable households. At the same time, the dependence on external financing for poverty reduction spending is projected to decline from over 65 percent during 2002–06, to under 50 percent for 2007.

Health and Nutrition

Improvements in child and maternal health remain key priorities. A national plan has been developed to reduce maternal mortality (which at 78 per 100,000 live births remains amongst the highest in Latin America) by expanding access to reproductive health services and maternal care centers.

Plans are in place to increase the number of Casas Maternas (Maternity Residences) located adjacent to hospitals to facilitate access to delivery in healthcare institutions and expand coverage through medical brigades and community organizations to identify pregnant women. The maternal health plan is expected to help identify women at risk early in their pregnancies, leading in lower mortality through better quality and regularity of care.

Greater efforts are required to reduce chronic child malnutrition. Monitoring systems are being strengthened - the Integrated Management of Childhood Health Protocols was recently updated, a Nutritional Monitoring Norm has been prepared, and a system for monitoring the growth and nutrition status of children under two has been developed. However, resource constraints have hindered the application of these standards, as numerous health units and communities still lack the necessary equipment for infant weight and height measurement. World bank staff recommend that the authorities develop a time-bound plan to address these resource constraints and to extend the nutritional baseline to children under 5 years of age (from 2 and under).

Water and Sanitation

An institutional and legal framework for the provision of water and sanitation, particularly in rural areas, is urgently required. Disputes persist between the state-owned water company (ENACAL) and the Emergency Social Investment Fund (FISE) over who is in charge of providing water and sanitation services in rural areas. This uncertainty affects the sector's ability to move forward in a strategic manner, constraining donors from pursuing a sector-wide approach. (World Bank) staffs recommend the development of a national unified strategy for water and sanitation with particular focus on establishing a clear institutional and legal framework, with special attention to rural areas. In the case of the Atlantic Coast regions, where construction costs are high, raising access to water and sanitation also will require investment in local capacity building.

Education

The triumph of the Government of Reconciliation and National Unity in 2007 marked the end of the privatization of education, opening school doors to the

entire population and initiating the process of change toward high-quality education that is inclusive and equitable, leading to the transformation of the human being and enabling them to emerge from poverty and underdevelopment. This process is being implemented through five educational policies: More Education, Better Education, Another Education, Participatory and Decentralized Educational Management, and All Educations.

The quality of education remains an important concern-70 percent of Grade 6 students did not know the minimum required in Spanish, while 88 percent did not know the minimum required in mathematics.

World bank staff welcome efforts to tackle adult illiteracy. According to government data, the national literacy campaign was successful in reducing illiteracy rates for individuals over 15 years of age, from 20.7 percent in 2007 to 4.1 percent in June 2009. The campaign relied on the involvement of over 50,000 volunteers in all of Nicaragua's 153 municipalities. The authorities intend to extend the program to adolescents and youths outside of the school to keep illiteracy at low levels.

The "From Martí to Fidel" National Literacy Campaign, begun in 2007, has taught a total of 246,209 citizens to read and write, decreasing the illiteracy rate from 20.2% reported in January 2007 to 7.5% at the end of 2008, surpassing the historic figures of the 1980s (12.5%).

Reference: World Bank Report No. 53710-NI
REPUBLIC OF NICARAGUA
JOINT IDA-IMF STAFF ADVISORY NOTE ON THE POVERTY REDUCTION
STRATEGY PAPER
April 14, 2010

Nicaragua's Recent Political and Economic Background

This Appendix is intended to answer the question: "What circumstances have led to Nicaragua being and remaining the poorest country in Central America, the second poorest in the American hemisphere after Haiti?"

The following is based almost wholly on a book, which I purchased in Nicaragua, called "Land, Power and Poverty – Agrarian Transformation and Political Conflict in Central America", Charles D Brockett, Westview Press, Colorado.

Some of the text below is summarized in my words, but it is virtually all derived from this book, notably Chapter Seven: "Nicaragua: from Obstruction to Revolution and Back Again" pp 156-184.

1. The coffee boom of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, followed by those in cotton and cattle after World War II strengthened and enriched a small elite and eroded any economic security of much of the rural population. During the years of the commercial boom, peasants lost land and their ability to compete in land markets; by 1975 the largest 1.8% of landowners held 47% of the land, whereas the largest 12% owned 75%. Only 13% of the economically active agricultural population had sufficient access to land by the late 1970s to meet subsistence requirements. Many rural people thus migrated to urban slums. Close to 40% of that population consisted of landless wage earners - most of whom could obtain only seasonal work (p157).
2. Foremost among the beneficiaries and largest of the landowners was the reigning Somoza family. The vast economic empire that the Somozas built was the result not of "honest work but of unchallenged conflict of interests, theft, embezzlement, and graft" based on autocratic political power. There was some agrarian reform stimulated by the Alliance for Progress in 1963. Overall under the reform, 16,500 families did receive land titles, and 63 colonies were initiated with 2,651 families on 70,000 acres (p158).
3. But when Anastasio Somoza Debayle became president in 1967 any remnant of a reformist impulse disappeared. Two events were key. Hundreds were massacred in 1967, when demonstrators were attacked by the National Guard, under Somoza's direction. Then, in 1972, the capital Managua was devastated by an earthquake. Rather than lead the reconstruction effort, Somoza used it as an opportunity for further enrichment (p 158).
4. The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) lead the resistance against the Somoza regime and was also successful in forging links with Catholic clergy in Nicaragua, especially the Jesuits.

5. The response of the National Guard was ruthless, Amnesty International reported in 1977 that the north-east was under “virtual military occupation ... with frequent, apparently arbitrary, killings, torture, massive detentions and disappearances, as was the confiscation of goods, occupational property, and the burning of crops, homes and farm buildings”. Many more peasants were detained and tortured; girls were raped. The repression resulted in a loss of support in all sectors of society for the Somoza dynasty.
6. The FSLN achieved power in 1979. Rural society in Nicaragua had incubated the FSLN, and there were a series of insurrections carried out by urban popular forces.
7. Having achieved power the government faced strong pressures from the peasantry for land redistribution; however, it also confronted production imperatives to meet urban consumption requirements and foreign exchange needs. The government’s policy response emerged gradually and in the end assumed a shape substantially at odds with the original objectives of at least some of the FSLN leadership.
8. Land previously owned by the Somoza family and the property of his supporters who fled the country enabled about 23% of the cultivable land to pass from the private to the public sector. Most of the confiscated lands were primarily large commercial operations devoted to export production. By 1984 there were over 1000 state farms employing close to 65,000 workers (p161).
9. The Sandinistas gave a commitment to a mixed economy as a necessary incentive to restore private production, given that both industrial and agricultural production had dropped sharply during the Civil War. The percentage of land in medium to medium-large farms remained almost constant across a decade of Sandinista government (p162).
10. The restoration of export production was more problematic; in 1980 total area planted in cotton, coffee, sugar was only 52% of the 1978 level, and in 1989 it was down to only 41%. The failure was worst for the most crucial crop, cotton, which in the mid-1980s was still at only about one half of the prerevolutionary level, and then dropped further, to only 19% in 1989. The decline in coffee production occurred more slowly, primarily the result of attacks by Contra forces. On the other hand the ratio of grain land to export crop land increased from 93% in 1978 to 259% in 1989.
11. Subsidised credit rates were used to encourage the formation of cooperatives. Membership in the cooperatives boomed, up to as much as 60% of peasant households by June 1980, but in many cases only with the shakiest of peasant commitment.

12. Once the 1979 transition of power was completed in Nicaragua, the Carter administration reconciled itself to working with the revolutionary government. Emergency aid was delivered and large appropriations for Nicaragua were requested from Congress.
13. This approach was altered substantially under the Reagan administration. In November 1981 the National Security Council approved a plan to build a counter-revolutionary force. Small groups of anti-Sandinistas were already forming in the region; US financial and organizational support was critical to their viability. By 1983 United States is known to have spent over \$100 million in building a Contra force of 10,000 to 15,000 soldiers.
14. Because the financial support agreed by Congress diminished in 1984 and 85, Reagan sought to fund the Contras by other means. Investigations into the Iran-Contra affair eventually disclosed that contrary to congressional intent and action, the Reagan administration had raised money secretly to keep the Contras alive as a fighting force during the period that Congress had suspended such assistance. Under the direction of Colonel Oliver North, the operation to finance the Contras raised \$34 million from other countries, \$2.7 million from private individuals, and - the most scandalous part - \$16.1 million from covert arms sales to Iran, all through actions later declared by congressional investigating committees to be based on "secrecy, deception, and disdain for the law"(p174).
15. The constraints faced by the Sandinista government were considerable. Nicaragua was devastated by the war against Somoza. Up to 50,000 people were killed in the last five years of struggle, and another 100,000 were wounded. All of the Central American economies contracted in the years after the Nicaraguan Revolution; in 1979 to 1983 per capita GDP for the region declined by 14.7%. Agricultural prices deteriorated through the late 70s and early 80s. As a result of these trends external public debt as a percentage of export earnings grew catastrophically: from 181% of export earnings in 1978 to 3200% for the last four years of the Sandinista period in the 80s (p168).
16. Per capita GDP fell steadily, so that by 1988 it was only 71% of its 1980 level with under and unemployment doubling to 32% from 1981 to 1989. Meanwhile inflation accelerated, from 300% in 1985 to 1300% in 1986 and up to as much as 33,000% in 1988. The economic crisis meant not only falling living standards but also shortages in all supplies, including beans, rice, sugar, and long waits in line for goods when they were in supply. Consequently, emigration increased, even among lifetime supporters of the revolution.
17. The Sandinista government estimated the war's economic cost as \$17.8 billion - about nine times greater than the country's peak annual domestic production.

18. By the end of the war some 6500 leaders and members of UNAG (agricultural workers union) had been killed. Co-operative members in particular paid a high price, making up just under two thirds of the Sandinista war dead (p175).
19. In 1989 the Sandinistas were opposed by 20 different political parties, including 3 to their left. 14 of these parties joined together in the United Nicaraguan opposition (UNO), which eventually selected Violeta Chamorro as its presidential candidate.
20. Chamorro's government got inflation down to 3.5% by 1992, but this did little for growth. In 1995 per capita GDP was still less than it had been in 1990. Consequently, unemployment in 1995 was double that of 1990 and as much as 10 times that of 1984. Extreme poverty was estimated at over 50% in rural areas midway through Chamorro's term and close to 90% in zones where conflict continued (p178).
21. After the Sandinistas lost the 1990 elections, but before handing over power, the Nicaraguan Congress passed a series of laws, including one that turned agrarian reform titles into individual property titles. But there was too little time remaining to implement the law. Subsequently Chamorro mediated between the Sandinistas and the former owners of confiscated properties. The property stability law of October 95 did not dispossess the beneficiaries of reform and prior owners were offered compensation. The major exception was the former state farms: 40% of the 800,000 acres were returned to former owners, 29% were converted to worker cooperatives, 15% distributed to former Sandinista soldiers, and 14% distributed to former Contra soldiers.
22. By 1996 only about a quarter of Nicaraguan farmland remained in large estates, about half of what it was before the revolution, whereas about 39% was in holdings of less than 87 acres, more than double the 1978 figure. It is clear that the rural majority intends to defend this more equitable distribution of the land.

The account given by Charles Brockett's book, from which I have been extensively quoting, comes to an end in 1997.

From newspaper accounts published while we were there in Nicaragua in 2011, it is apparent that the current Sandinista government is having to face several different ways at once.

It appears to be keeping in line with conventional economic policies, notably the relatively neoliberal policies favoured by the World Bank, in order to avoid the economic and political conflicts previously faced. At the same time it is using such limited resources as are currently available to reduce poverty, through, for example, expenditure on education and health. On the one hand this has led to recent growth in GDP, on the other hand, the proposed

proportion of expenditure on education expressed as a percentage of GDP has dropped slightly in 2011, compared to 2010.

A very recent economic report on poverty in Nicaragua, by Inide (Instituto Nacional de Información de Desarrollo), the National Institute of Development Information, quoted in El Nuevo Diario 28.3.11, shows only 35% of the working population in formal employment, 35% struggle to cope with intermittent informal occupations and the remainder are either underemployed or unemployed. Two thirds of the Nicaraguan working population “work from dawn to dusk, without hope of economic wellbeing, dignity or social security.”

The Sandinista government is preparing for the next November 2011 elections and their campaigning is already in evidence everywhere in Nicaragua.

The opposition remains split, but there is a daily onslaught in the press against President Daniel Ortega, because of his decision to seek a second consecutive term and third term overall, both of which are in conflict with the Constitution, and, recently, to refuse international observers being invited to the election. There is also opposition between the government and voluntary organizations, who accuse the government of not supporting civil society, for example by favouring their own supporters in terms of public employment.

Just before we went out to Nicaragua, new minimum monthly wage rates were announced by the Sandinista government. From August 2011 agricultural workers will receive \$91 plus food; for the fisheries industry, the minimum monthly wage will go up to \$141 in August; mine workers \$176, manufacturing \$125, workers in free trade zones \$141; construction, finance and insurance \$207; domestic work \$130 and government work a minimum of \$116. Teachers are paid a minimum of \$180 a month.

Summary

The FSLN enabled the Nicaraguan people to overthrow the Somoza dynasty and, in so doing, have been able to oppose a dictatorship, which concentrated wealth in the hands of a very small elite.

In so doing, the FSLN have brought about significant changes in land ownership and potential improvements to many people's lives. However the legacies of the war against Somoza, followed by the war against the Contras, have devastated the Nicaraguan economy and left it still in a worse state than all of their Central American neighbours.

Economic recovery since 1989 has considerably improved the lives of many Nicaraguan people, but most Nicaraguan people still live in dire poverty. In 2011 only 35% have formal employment, with associated benefits.

Nicaragua is still the second poorest country in the hemisphere after Haiti.

David Trevanion April 2011

Appendix 3

Children's Poems given to us to commemorate the 25th Anniversary

1. Love, Affection and Friendship

Grateful to the generous people,
Who carry good intentions in their souls,
The children of our schools
Are reaching grand goals

To our good friends we offer
Love affection and friendship,
We say this most sincerely
My Lord and the school my two witnesses

We'll fulfil our great responsibility
To learn and improve every day
And secure better living conditions
Full of great value and dignity.

Poem dedicated to the generous people of Norwich Link England.
Pupil: Susana Magdalena Selva Quiroz. Grade 4.
Evemilda Somarriba School
Community of Toro Blanco El Viejo

2011: Year of Unity for the Common Good

2. I get Beautiful Help

I get beautiful help
From a faraway country
Many giving people
Help the people of El Viejo

From Norwich to El Viejo
They've come to help
Many boys and girls
Who want to study

Ralph with his fellow members
Work hard to gain
Help for many children
They come to give grants

Eight schools in El Viejo
On this special day
We give them due honour
To these great people

Amigos de Holanda School – Thank you

3. Friends

You are my soul brother
Real friends
Because every year you help
Girls and boys here

Although you are just human
You think of all the children
You send care from afar
With much affection

We want you to always have
A great blessing
And in Norwich you seek help
For my education

We promise always to do our best
So you maintain your willpower

I want to say to you today
That we are grateful
But it is good to feel
That Ralph and friends are always with me

To this beautiful committee
We are grateful
In this town of El Viejo
We will always remember

From Amigos de Holanda greetings to Ralph, David and Simon