

Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign (NSC) Annual Report January–December 2007

What we do

NSC works in the UK to support organisations in Nicaragua committed to social and economic justice. We carry this out through organising study tours to Nicaragua, speaker tours in the UK, campaigning and lobbying activities and distributing reports and briefings. We also support Wales NSC and 12 towns and communities with twinning links in Nicaragua. The focus of our work in 2007 was on Fairtrade and the development of an education campaign.

All work on trade union linking was carried out through the non-charitable company limited by guarantee Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign Action Group. See separate report.

Introduction – Gay Lee, secretary and acting chair of NSC

I have been secretary and acting chair of NSC over 2 years now. This dual role is a small illustration of how few people do so much in NSC and I would like to thank them all very much and hope the numbers of Nicaragua activists will increase over the next few years. There are reasons for optimism as well as doubts about this.

The optimism - during this year when NSC has started to reevaluate its role - is about the many, many people in the UK who work for and care about Nicaragua not only in NSC but also in many other organisations. They may be working on issues dear to NSC but in more general campaigns such as Fairtrade and the environment. Or they may be working in town twinning groups maintaining local friendship and solidarity links and raising funds for development projects. NSC is a source of information and coordination for these groups and hopes to develop this role further through the education campaign

The doubts are about profound polarisation in contradictions within the Sandinista government and between the government and civil society organisations. NSC has strongly opposed the law making abortion illegal in almost every circumstance and causing women's unnecessary deaths. The government constantly has to juggle issues and alliances because it lacks an overall majority in the National Assembly. And it is buffeted by forces beyond its control - global inequality of resources and power and the devastating force of Hurricane Felix. The government has encouraging words - and some deeds - about redistribution of material resources and power, like the beginnings of the Zero Hunger programme, the move to cut high level public servants' and politicians' salaries, and debate around repaying the internal debt to private banks. Since 1990, civil society organisations have developed and matured in response to the hardships of neoliberalism, which demand respect. The citizen participation the FSLN seeks to foster requires government to be more transparent about its aims and policies.

NSC made its second year (rolling) strategic plan. Networking aspects of the education campaign were developed and - thanks to Martin Roger's work - we put the finishing touches to our lottery application for an after-schools project. Our Fair trade work continued as a high priority.

Liz and Julián in the Managua office continue to do excellent work, their skills and experience complement each other beautifully, and communication is good with the hard-working London office staff, two of whom changed in 2007. Debbie Mace was replaced by Susie Steven as our finance worker and Sam Maher, our trade union worker, by Anna Cooper

Once again thank you to everyone who is helping the work of NSC in so many ways.

Key achievements

- A successful study tour on the involvement of women in Fairtrade cooperatives. We made further links with Flores Del Café (women coffee producers' movement) and hope to work with them in 2008.
- We established good working links with the FEDH, supporting the development of their communication network (see Education section)
- Two very successful appeals were made, for the education campaign and to support reconstruction following Hurricane Felix. Money has been sent to grassroots projects in Nicaragua with whom NSC has good contacts – fulfilling our goals of solidarity with, and material aid for, partner organisations and communities in Nicaragua.
- We ended the year in a healthy financial state and continue to fulfil NSC's aim of getting more project funding, such as that obtained this year from the Amicus Foundation to fund training for teachers and parents of special needs children.

Fair trade

'NSC's work has been vital for the cooperative organisations, linking us with the international market, working to achieve through fair trade prices the social, political, organisational and environmental demands of our communities, and the visible integration of women in work and in life. NSC represents for organisations of small producers our solidarity ambassador. This is why we appreciate NSC...' Fatima Ismael, SOPPEXCCA

Nicaragua Context

As one coffee co-operative director said, 'Fairtrade is not just a chance to get higher incomes but also to have contact with consumers...We can change the relationship between consumers and producers and the relationship between prices, so that it is a relation that allows us to live.' However, in 2006 coffee prices on conventional markets began to rise to the point where the Fairtrade price was only marginally higher than the market price, resulting in producer demands for higher Fairtrade prices.

UK Context

Our stakeholder status in the Fairtrade Foundation (FTF) opened opportunities nationally and locally to promote the perspectives of Nicaraguan producers on fair trade. However, Fairtrade's expansion of the market raises new questions. In particular, Nestle's launch of its own Fairtrade coffee in October 2005 highlighted the dilemma of how to expand the Fairtrade market without losing sight of the original ethos of fair trade as part of a wider movement for trade justice.

In Nicaragua: SOPPEXCCA, CECOCAFEN, PRODECOOP, CAFENICA (Umbrella organisations of coffee co-operatives), Flores del Café (movement of women coffee producers).

In the UK: Fairtrade Foundation (NSC is a charity stakeholder), Wales NSC, and twin towns.

Activities

* Evaluated and submitted a final report to DfID on our Fair trade Partnerships projects. The main outcome in Nicaragua was establishing a forum of women coffee producers through Flores del Café, with the potential to become a valid voice for small coffee producers in national and international forums, especially emphasising the role of women. Flores del Café organised a second meeting of the International Alliance of Coffee Women on March 8th where they aim to secure a position on the Executive Committee.

In addition this has helped consolidate direct links between UK Fair trade activists and producers in Nicaragua, allowing institutional and personal exchange of information and experiences and improving coordination of advocacy actions. There is better awareness and understanding of the lives of small coffee producers and the issues the Nicaraguan cooperative movement faces at national and international levels.

* Liaised with Bristol Link with Nicaragua (BLINC) on a visit by Flores del Cafe representative, Melba Estrada during Fairtrade Fortnight. NSC organised a programme in London for Melba, including two public meetings and an interview for a US business magazine. One of the meetings was organised jointly with Central America Women's Network to celebrate International Women's Day. More than 100 people attended.

* Also worked with Flores del Cafe on developing a funding application for capacity building.

* Continued to distribute copies of information leaflets on women and Fairtrade and the film 'Coffee Take it Fairly' particularly during Fairtrade Fortnight.

* Organised a study tour of 5 women to Nicaragua in August. The study tour followed on from the speaker tour in that the group stayed in the community where Melba lives.

* Participated in Fairtrade Foundation internal discussions highlighting the views of the Nicaragua producers, particularly women.

Education

Nicaraguan context

Early progress in education has slowed. Midway to the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of complete primary education for all by 2015, Nicaragua lags seriously behind. Abolishing school fees dramatically increased access, but rocketing food prices and growing poverty have increased pupil drop-out. Expectations that education would be prioritised over internal debt payments were disappointed, and the IMF still caps salary increases to 12%. The need to respond to natural disasters further drained the budget. Over 400,000 children are still out of school, and education quality is threatened by overcrowding and undervalued teachers.

Partner organisations

Political polarisation between civil society organisations and Sandinista government participatory structures makes developing partnerships in Nicaragua delicate, so relationships at local grassroots level are crucial. Here, links through UK town twinning groups are becoming key. We have also consolidated our relationship with the Forum for Education and Human Development (FEDH), currently engaged in empowering people at community, municipal and regional levels to participate effectively in government consultations on education policy.

Activities

- Education campaign leaflet designed, produced and distributed, sponsored by the NUT
- Funding obtained from the Amicus Foundation to train after school club teachers in the Nicaragua Education, Culture and Arts Trust) for work with special needs children.
- Urgent action letter campaign organised around negotiations on Nicaragua's new IMF economic programme and linked to the UK government's 'Education for Every Child' campaign.
- After school clubs project designed, to be run with five Town Twinning and community groups and the Centre for Educative Services in health and the Environment CESESMA, and concept note submitted to the Big Lottery Fund.

- Support initiated for development of FEDH's public and internal communication network. Julián Guevara, one of the NSC representatives in Nicaragua, helped create a new FEDH website (www.fedh-ipn.org/); £600 from NSC's last general appeal was assigned to creating content for the site and to designing a printed bulletin for non-internet circulation.
- Work initiated on developing an NSC role as a support, documentation and coordination network for UK groups – NSC and others – running education projects in Nicaragua.

Promoting Nicaragua through collaborating with other organisations

- Two Nicaraguan trade unionists, Carlos Tinoco and Freddy Fritoria participated in a Latin America conference in London in 2007 organised by the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, Justice for Colombia and the Venezuela Information Centre.
- We participated in regular meetings with NGOs working on Central America to co-ordinate our work.
- We supported Wales NSC and twin town groups by providing information on the situation in Nicaragua, news bulletins, Central America Report, through our campaigning work and by giving them advice as and when appropriate

Website

* We developed the website further through improving the quality of the content and ensuring regular updates. More people accessed the events listings, the online shop, the news briefs and other pages.

Financial Summary

Our gross income on all activities was £141,977 representing an increase from £129,181 in 2006. Our gross expenditure was £115,748 representing a decrease from the figure £123,917 in 2006. This gave us a net income of £26,229 compared to £5,264 the previous year. For a full set of audited accounts contact the office.

Fundraising & sales

- ran two appeals:- the January appeal raised £3,253 of which £600 was allocated to the Education Forum (FEDH) in Nicaragua and £2,466 to NSC core funds. A fantastic £27,900 was raised from the joint NSC and Hurricane Felix appeal. See below for further details.
- received a very welcome legacy of £14,000.
- claimed £10,873 in Gift Aid on membership fees and donations.
- other fundraising activities included a Club Sandino dance night, Spanish lessons, the lotería, London marathon, sales (including at Glastonbury) and bar work with the Workers Beer Company. We provided servers for 10 events, raising £5,243. Sales raised £6,293 including donations.
- total raised through fundraising and sales (excluding funds for projects in Nicaragua, the legacy and Gift Aid) was £21,754.

Emergency Fundraising Post-Hurricane Felix

An appeal was mounted in September and by the year end over £20,600 had been raised for Nicaragua – a sizeable amount given the number of NSC members and donors. The money consisted of individual donations, trade union and local group donations. Funding undertaken by other groups and individuals but channelled through NSC included a sponsored fast, sponsored runs, a banquet, dances and a press appeal. The Gift for Nicaragua on the sales catalogue was also a success. Funds were allocated to a crop-rehabilitation project set up by the Atlantic Coast University URACCAN, who are still providing support to devastated rural communities, and to the Maureen Courtney School for children with disabilities, in Puerto Cabezas. With donations still coming in more funds will be transferred in 2008.

Membership

All members receive regular mailings including Central America Report, news from Nicaragua and information about our activities in the UK. We also email the Nicanet News Hotline to members who request this service

- Income from affiliations and donations was £20,970.
- The number of members fell and during the year there were only 28 new members. An important factor is the diminishing number of study tour participants (who then join NSC) over the years. Sadly the new Education affiliation leaflet has not yet attracted new members either.
- More positively, we are continuing our efforts to ensure greater income stability through standing orders and at the end of 2007 63% of individual members were paying by standing order compared with 51% at the end of 2005.

Membership	Dec 05	Dec 06	Dec 07
Individuals	712	585	558
Local groups & Wales NSC	16	14	14
Project-based groups	0	3	3
Trade Unions: national, branches / regions & TUC's	103	99	86
All groups	119	116	103
TOTAL	831	701	661

See the NSCAG Annual Report for more detailed information on trade union affiliations.

Board of Trustees

NSC is governed by a voluntary Board of Directors/Trustees, which develops NSC's overall strategic plans and monitors activities and outcomes.

2007 Board members

Ruby Cox, Joan Neary (Treasurer), Jane Freeland, David Godson, Robert Hardie, Gay Lee (secretary and acting chair), Christine Oddy, Anna Ridehalgh, Martin Roger (Vice-Chair), Bernard Roome, Jessica Russel, June Plymen, Carmen Barreda

NSC Staff

London Offic: Stella Embliss, Debbie Mace (until October 2007), Susie Steven (from October 2007, Helen Yuill

Managua Office: Julian Guevara, Liz Light

NSCAG

Samantha Maher (under September 2007), Anna Cooper (from October 2007)

Note that all staff are employed on a part-time basis.

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