

NICARAGUA NOW

Nicaragua
Solidarity
Campaign

Issue 1 Autumn 2013



Volunteering

A school of
awareness raising

Interoceanic canal

Key to prosperity?

Women's unpaid work recognised

Engaging young people

In politics... and football

Another way is possible

Nicaragua and ALBA

UK–Nicaragua solidarity past and present



CONTENTS

- 2 **Editorial** Nicaragua Now replaces Central America Report
- 3 **Interoceanic canal** Nicaragua Now discusses the pros and cons of the megaproject
- 4 **Recognising the unpaid work of gender** Felicity Butler reports on how this is being recognised in the costing of coffee and sesame
- 5 **Soap operas with Nicaraguan twist** Raising awareness of women's rights through soap operas: Andrea Brandt von Lindau interviews Amy Bank
- 6 **Another way is possible: the example of Nicaragua and ALBA** What difference does ALBA make in addressing poverty? Tortilla con sal explains
- 7 **Legal office helps to defend workers' rights** Liz Light interviews beneficiaries of a Unison-funded legal office in Managua
- 8 **Enthusiasm and engagement of young people in politics** Tamara Barreda talks about the ways in which Nicaraguan students engage in politics
- 9 **Raleigh International in Nicaragua** Liz Light talks to Julian Olivier about how Raleigh's programmes have evolved in Nicaragua
- 10 **UK – Nicaragua solidarity: past and present**
- 12 **Nicaragua to send team to Street Children World Cup 2014** Liz Light talks to Nicaraguans about the Street Child World cup

NICARAGUA NOW

Published by Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign,
86 Durham Rd, London N7 7DT
www.nicaraguasc.org.uk tel: 020 7561 4836

EDITORIAL AND CONTRIBUTORS

Andrea Brandt von Lindau, Felicity Butler, Jeremy Dear, Sarah Irving, Liz Light, James Poke, Amy Porter, Georgina Rennard, Megan Rowling, John Wallace, Helen Yuill

COVER PHOTOS

Chris Smith MP sends off NSC's second coffee brigade to Nicaragua, 1986, by Steve Smith
Progressio volunteers from Nicaragua and the UK helping to build a 'Casa Gastronomic' in Totogalpa, July 2013. The 'Casa' will be run by the community to boost the economy and support cultural traditions.
Credit Julie Asis

DESIGN

Tom Lynton www.tomlynton.com

The articles in this magazine should be taken as having been written in a personal capacity unless otherwise stated.

EDITORIAL

Nicaragua Now replaces Central America Report

Way back in those distant days of the 1980s one of the bloodiest periods of the cold war unfolded in Central America. The policies and actions of the Reagan administration, determined to root out 'communism' from the 'backyard' of the US, resulted in the deaths of an estimated 300,000 people and untold destruction and misery. Globally, including in the UK, numerous solidarity and human rights organisations emerged to denounce and isolate US military and economic aggression and to provide political and practical support for those affected. The Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign (NSC) and the Central America Human Rights Committee (CAHRC) were two such organisations.

From 1987 until 1996 CAHRC published a magazine called Central America Report (CAR). Towards the end of the cold war peace negotiations brought an end to armed conflict in Central America. CAHRC decided to close but a grouping of UK organisations working on Central America – NSC, the Environmental Network

for Central America (ENCA), the Central America Women's Network (CAWN), the Guatemala Solidarity Network, the El Salvador Network - decided to continue publishing CAR.

However, all organisations now have their own publications, websites, and social media which means there is less need for a Central America wide print publication. For this reason NSC will now publish Nicaragua Now twice annually. It will provide coverage of issues affecting Nicaragua combined with features and interviews with Nicaraguan organisations that have links in the UK through NSC, Wales NSC, twin towns, trade unions and other UK based organisations with projects and volunteering programmes in Nicaragua. It will also include a section on the many and varied forms of UK-Nicaragua Solidarity. Meanwhile CAR will continue to exist as a website www.central-america-report.org.uk

We would much appreciate your feedback and suggestions on our first issue including any ideas you have about developing the magazine.



The Interoceanic canal: the key to prosperity or an environmental disaster?

Nicaragua Now discusses the controversy surrounding what would be one of the largest infrastructure projects in Latin American history.

In June 2013, Nicaragua's National Assembly approved a bill to grant a 50-year concession to the Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Development Investment Co (HKND) to conduct a feasibility study and build a 250km inter-oceanic canal across Nicaragua. The US\$40billion canal would be able to handle the world's largest ships, including the 10 percent of the global merchant fleet that are already too large for even the new set of locks being constructed in Panama. The project would include the construction of two deep water ports, free trade zones, a railway, oil and gas pipeline and two airports. After the first year, Nicaragua would have a 1% stake in the canal consortium, with its share increasing by 10% a decade so that it would control 99% of the shares after 100 years. Meanwhile, it would receive the sum of \$10 million a year for the concession.

Despite significant economic growth and reductions in poverty as a result of government programmes, Nicaragua remains the second poorest country in the Americas after Haiti. The Sandinista government sees such mega projects as critical to Nicaragua's economic and social development. President Ortega's Secretary for Public Policy Paul Oquist claims that the canal would mean reductions in dependence on foreign aid, an increase in GDP growth rate from 5% this year to 10% next year and to 15% in 2015 and the creation of up to 600,000 jobs. Trade unions also welcome the canal as a way out of poverty for tens of thousands of unemployed Nicaraguans.

However, thirty environmental NGOs affiliated to the Nicaragua Climate Change Alliance have expressed serious doubts. They claim the canal represents 'the gravest threat in history to the country's environment' and risks 'rendering the Nicaraguan population unable to meet

“ In an uncertain world what alternatives exist for addressing centuries of under-development and high levels of poverty and insecurity? ”

its basic water and food security needs.' Their greatest worry relates to the fate of Lake Nicaragua, through which all of the potential routes would pass. The projected depth of 28 metres would mean dredging the lake to create a channel 500 metres wide by 80km long in order to accommodate the larger ships. Where would the 832 million cubic metres of sediment be deposited? What would happen to the habitat of the aquatic species? An added concern is that excavating the lake and keeping it dredged could cause so much pollution that water would be undrinkable. These and many other concerns will be addressed in environmental impact studies to be completed over the coming year.

Following the approval by the National Assembly, 32 suits were filed with

Nicaragua's Supreme Court alleging that the HKND contract is unconstitutional because it violates national sovereignty by handing over control of natural resources with no protection or guarantees, the population was not consulted, and the canal firm is being granted rights over any and all properties required for its construction. One of the first suits was filed by the Miskitu and Ulwa indigenous peoples and the Rama-Kriol territorial government authorities of the South Atlantic Autonomous Region claiming that the canal law violates the Constitution and the Autonomy Statute that recognises the rights of the coast peoples and ethnic communities.

Others question the project from a global economic standpoint. Is there really that much more shipping in the world to justify such a large-scale project and investment? Critics also note that new summertime shipping lanes are about to open up in the Arctic Ocean as a consequence of global warming.

In October 2013, a delegation of twenty-two Nicaraguan business people, politicians, academics and others traveled to China to meet Chinese businessman Wang Jing of HKND and others involved in plans for the canal. On their return to Nicaragua Jose Adan Aguerrri of the Superior Council on Private Enterprise (COSEP) stated: 'We saw on this trip that the Chinese firms have the technical capacity to build the canal and that the will exists to make the environmental impact study the factor that determines whether the canal will be built.' He added that COSEP is creating a special commission to undertake various studies: an economic feasibility study by McKinsey and Company, an environmental impact study by British Company Environmental Resource Management (BRM), and a technical study by the China Railway Construction Company (CRCC).

In an uncertain world what alternatives exist for addressing centuries of under-development and high levels of poverty and insecurity? Are mega projects such as the interoceanic canal the way forward or are the associated risks too high a price to pay?

Recognising the unpaid work of women

Fair trade practitioner and PhD student **Felicity Butler** reports on a project that aims to kick start a “race to the top” in ethical trading.

Despite decades of feminist campaigning, work traditionally done by women remains invisible, undervalued and unremunerated. However, a new initiative involving Nicaraguan cooperatives, the Body Shop and academics in the UK moves beyond recognition of this injustice by exploring ways of including women’s unpaid work in the pricing of sesame and coffee.

Within fair trade, paying a fair price and a ‘fair wage’ is equated with empowerment. Yet there is no agreed definition or price calculation of what this actually means. Neither is there a fair trade standard that defines the true cost of sustainable production in relation to gender or unpaid work. But recent studies demonstrate the importance of women’s work both to sustainability and the quality of crops.

An innovative pricing model that incorporates traditionally unpaid work by women is being pioneered by the sesame-producing Juan Francisco Paz Silva (CJFPS) cooperative in Nicaragua and the Body Shop. It is

based on the argument that unpaid work - mainly done by women - represents an important input into production, which should be valued and remunerated. The hope is that this recognition will empower women, and provide a fresh demonstration of the power

“With this initiative, we are becoming empowered, you no longer have to lower your head and wait for the man to tell you what to do.”

of cooperatives and fair trade to innovate in supply chains, improving conditions for the poorest workers.

Unemployed and underemployed women contribute to development with unrecognised, unpaid work. This takes various

forms: assistance in agricultural production and family businesses; labour that supports a family’s main income such as making meals and washing clothes; and labour that contributes to household and community stability, including cooking and looking after children and elderly relatives. This initiative is innovative because it takes into account all three types of work.

But how should this be calculated? A pilot study of time use carried out by Catherine Hoskyns, a gender advisor with the ethical trading and investment company ETICO and the CJFPS, found that unpaid labour by women contributes 22% of total labour inputs in sesame production. The results have been used to apply an additional cost to the price of sesame oil for Body Shop cosmetics, as well as sales of coffee from Nicaraguan cooperatives.

The cooperatives have channelled the extra income into organising activities that empower women such as education, and savings and loans schemes. They report an increase in female members and economic activities led by women. This has led to significant changes in family income and expenditure, a shift in family dynamics, and more choices and access to resources for women.

The initiative has also demonstrated that making women’s work visible, and recognising it and accounting for it in the supply chain can increase sustainability. Bringing women into the agricultural supply chain boosts yields, stability, participation and resilience, to the benefit of all.

The outcome of this project could have much wider implications. “The Body Shop has a long history of being a pioneer in ethical trading,” said academic expert Dorothea Kline, who works with the company. “This project will give us a chance to jointly explore the case for recognising women’s unpaid labour in community and fair trade pricing. If there is evidence that this case can be made, and the Body Shop takes some recommendations on board, other companies might follow - ultimately we want a “race to the top” for ethical trading.”

Further information:

www.womenincommunitytrade.org

Women in the JFPS cooperative, Achuapa



Soap operas with a Nicaraguan twist

Puntos de Encuentro is a Nicaragua-based feminist organisation, working with women across Central America to help them develop their capacities and exercise their rights. Puntos works through TV and radio shows and the magazine La Boletina, alongside community training and discussion groups. Andrea Brandt von Lindau interviewed Amy Bank who worked with Puntos for 20 years and was the Executive Director/Producer of two very successful telenovelas (soaps) broadcast on prime time TV, *Sexto Sentido* (Sixth Sense) and *Contracorriente* (Crosscurrent).



Puntos de Encuentro

How did the idea of creating a soap come about? After the Sandinistas lost the 1990 elections, the women's movement continued to blossom, but government was becoming more and more conservative. We were looking for ways to conserve the gains of the women's movement and to promote progressive ideas as mainstream. Puntos was involved in a live TV show highlighting debates at the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. The show created lots of interest, so we thought a prime time TV show, watched by the whole family, would be a good way to promote our ideas. So we started to produce *Sexto Sentido*. The format was 30 minute weekly episodes with three main female and three male characters, similar to the American series *Friends*.

What issues does *Sexto Sentido* deal with and who watches it? It's oriented towards young people and deals with issues such as teenage pregnancy, contraception, first time sex, alcohol and drugs, violence and sexual abuse, racism, disability, gay rights and HIV. It screened from 2001 – 2005. At that time there weren't as many TV stations; we found that 90% of young people surveyed had seen the show and

“ During the airing of the soap *Sexto Sentido*, we had agreements with over 100 community groups who use our materials based on the soap. These connections are essential to our work. ”

60% watched it regularly. It's been shown several times on Nicaraguan TV and in ten other Central and South American countries.

What is the main focus of *Contracorriente*? After 80 episodes of *Sexto Sentido*, we felt that we needed to develop something new to put into practice what we had learnt and the feedback we had received. *Contracorriente* deals more with family dynamics and has several adult characters with their own storylines. The main themes are sexual exploitation of girls, human trafficking, economic struggles, power relations and sexual abuse in the family, gay rights, and women's employment rights with a particular focus on the maquilas.

What kind of reactions have you had? When we started, we expected an outcry because these things had never been discussed on TV before, but in fact the only problem we had was a storyline about emergency contraception which one channel thought was about abortion. We were eventually able to air the episode and even included an abortion story in the next series.

What impact have the soaps had? A survey of young people who regularly watched *Sexto Sentido* found they were more open to having gay or HIV positive friends, practicing safe sex, or supporting gender equality. The soaps represent an important connection with the work of community services. Some of the storylines have been combined into a movie which is used by community groups alongside educational packs and discussion guides.

A Puntos film entitled *En la casa, la cama y la calle* (At home, in bed and in the streets), about the making of *Contracorriente* and its use in schools and the community, premieres at the London Feminist Film Festival on 29 November. It will be also be available online.

Further information: www.puntos.org.ni/

Another way is possible: the example of Nicaragua and ALBA

ALBA – ‘the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America’ – is made up of Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Dominica, Antigua and Barbuda, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. It is an alliance based on social, political and economic integration that promotes human and economic development through solidarity, mutual trust and respect.

When the Sandinistas returned to power in 2007, one of their fundamental commitments was to address inequality and to improve the lives of nearly 50% of the population who suffered chronic and persistent levels of poverty. Nicaraguan organisation Tortilla con sal looks at the solidarity approach to trade, developed through ALBA, and how this has helped reduce poverty in Nicaragua.

But what does this mean in practice? Nicaragua buys oil from Venezuela and pays half of the cost within 90 days, either in cash or in the form of food exports such as beans and beef. The other half is converted into a 20 year loan at 2% interest. Nicaragua invests these funds into social programmes.

ALBA funded social programmes include:

- The zero usury programme which provides low interest loans and training for 130,000 urban women to set up micro businesses
- Solidarity bonuses for 15,000 low paid public sector workers
- Transport subsidies for 800,000 people per day
- An affordable housing programme and home repair support
- Credits and training in the production of basic grains for 100,000 small farmers, as part of the reactivation of the agricultural sector to improve food security

The ALBA funded Zero Hunger programme, which benefits rural women and their families, has been particularly important in reducing poverty. Between 2007 and 2011, Zero Hunger helped 100,000 women by providing them with pregnant cows and sows, sheep, goats and hens as well as materials to house these animals and free technical support. Beneficiaries are required to eventually repay 20% of the value of these goods.

Zero Hunger programme in action

Farmer Marta Gutierrez lives with her family in the rural community of El Limón, near Estelí. Her husband Alberto is a casual worker, earning US\$2-3 a day when he finds work. Before 2010, the family's income averaged US\$50 a month, well below the poverty line.

For the past three years, Marta and 19 other women in her community have participated in the Zero Hunger programme. Each of them initially received animals and other inputs worth about US\$1,500. Marta received a pregnant cow and sow, some chickens and building materials. As part of their commitment to the programme, participants had to repay US\$300 each, an amount which they have used to set up a chicken-fattening cooperative. The government supplemented the capital with a grant of US\$16,000 and provided technical and marketing support.

Participation in Zero Hunger has meant

that Marta's family's income has doubled to US\$100 a month. An additional benefit has been improved nutrition through fresh eggs and milk. Marta comments: "For us the programme has made a big difference because little by little, we have increased our daily income. For example, when the sow had its first piglets, I set aside 20% of what I earned as a contribution to the co-operative and the rest was for my family; the same with the cow when she calved.....We're all very enthusiastic because we know the co-operative is going to work out well."

The UN Development Programme Coordinator in Nicaragua, Pablo Mandeville, praised Nicaragua's social policies, in particular the Zero Hunger programme, for enabling enormous progress towards the Millennium Development Goals which include the eradication of extreme poverty.

Extreme poverty in Nicaragua has fallen from over 20% in 2006 to just over 7% now. Poverty in general has dropped from 60% to just over 40%. ALBA programmes have played a fundamental role in these achievements, helping the country to develop alternatives to the counter-productive debt and international aid cycle.

Further information: www.tortillaconsal.com



Marta Gutierrez

Legal office helps to defend workers' rights

Unison and the Nicaraguan public sector union UNE have a long history of mutual solidarity dating back 30 years facilitated by the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign (NSC). Since 2010 Unison's International Development Fund has supported a UNE legal office, the first office of its kind in Nicaragua.

As well as providing advice and advocacy for workers whose rights have been violated, the office has enabled UNE to negotiate collective agreements more effectively and provide training for its leaders on the implementation of a new labour code. According to UNE general secretary Domingo Perez the results have been excellent: "a legal office is a decisive factor in trade unionism, enabling unions to effectively defend workers individually and collectively against abuses of employment rights."

What difference does the legal office make?

Eddy Real Hernández delivers medicines for the Nicaraguan Social Security Institute (INSS). Eddy is a member of the Simón Bolívar-UNE union and was sacked unjustly from his post. The UNE legal office is supporting his demand to be reinstated and to be paid wages owed to him.

"I was sacked because I missed a day's work on Saturday 5th January 2013. My contract says I work Monday to Friday and that I have to work on Saturdays if they ask me to. The day I missed I had to accompany my wife to hospital for a cancer operation. My personal situation was very traumatic. When I went back to work on the Monday I was sacked. They didn't take into account the extra hours I had worked in December...the one day I didn't turn up because of personal family problems they sacked me. There were two other agents sacked at the same time for the same reason.

My union wasn't able to do much so they recommended I came to the UNE legal office who have supported me 100%, whatever doubt or misunderstanding I have they have clarified. I'm here today to clarify a legal notification I received about my case. They have given me tremendous advice and counsel. The doors are always open, they always answer the phone and I can come to the office whenever I need to. They also accompanied me during the hearing when the court ruled in my favour. Now the UNE lawyer and I are working with the Ministry



Lawyers Maria Luisa Marquez and Henry Rodriguez, legal assistant Lisette Lopez lawyer and Domingo Perez, UNE general secretary

Gill Holmes

“If this office didn't exist we would have to pay high legal fees for an independent lawyer. Now the union can use these resources for other purposes. So as union representatives we listen to the concerns of the workers, explain the situation to them and then work hand in hand with the UNE lawyer.”

YARITZA ARAUZ
trade union leader

of Labour (MITRAB) to see why the INSS is not complying with the court judgement. Today I have a meeting with MITRAB and INSS so I came here to get advice on what I should say at the meeting.”

Trade Union leader Juan Urbina Méndez came to the office to get help with legal documents related to negotiating a collective bargaining agreement.

“I work for the Executive Board of the Secretariat of the National System for the Prevention and Mitigation of Disasters (SINAPRED). Our union is part of UNE-FNT. We have used the UNE legal office on different occasions for different topics. One current case is to do with using the national labour code to establish a collective bargaining agreement between the union and the management of SINAPRED.

Last year we tried to sign a collective bargaining agreement but it was impossible as there was no willingness on the part of SINAPRED...now we are looking for a way through established legal procedures to find the space in the law that allows us to organise this. The lawyers are helping us draw up the necessary paperwork and will also accompany us during negotiations at meetings with MITRAB and the institution.”

Further information about solidarity linking between UK and Nicaraguan trade unions: www.nscag.org

Enthusiasm and engagement of young people in politics

Georgina Rannard talked to **Tamara Barreda** about the dynamism and belief in their ability to effect change that she found among the student movement in Nicaragua.

When Tamara Barreda decided to spend some months volunteering in Managua, little did she realise she would be witnessing the effects of the death of a Latin American political giant, Hugo Chavez. Sandinista Nicaragua shares Chavez's vision for a politically and economically empowered Latin America, and so when Chavez died in April, the Sandinista Youth gathered in central Managua to hear President Ortega react to the tragic news.

Tamara was born in Nicaragua, and went back to work with the Federation of Secondary Students (FES), a movement loosely affiliated with the Sandinista Youth. The FES consists of eight sections, each organising student-run events and activities in schools and neighbourhoods. Tamara worked first with the environmental section, going to neighbourhoods to talk about recycling, pollution, how to protect the environment, and planting flowers. But it was the cultural section that really captured her interest. It aims to revive elements of Nicaraguan culture that are neglected today, and Tamara helped to organise a display of the evolution of Nicaraguan dance, from folklore to modern dance and salsa. Another activity involved turning old films from the Revolutionary period into digital format. Many old reels had been destroyed in the turmoil of the Revolution or were deliberately destroyed for political reasons. The weekly community screenings brought together older people who had lived through the Revolutionary period with young people who enjoyed seeing on film what they had previously only heard about.

“ On the bus I received a text about an emergency speech. Later there were people silently listening to the news on the radio...we went with the Sandinista Youth to the Casa de los Pueblos to hear President Ortega speak about the death of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. ”

It is this engagement and enthusiasm for politics on the part of young people that drew Tamara to return to Managua. The failure of the UK student movement in 2010-11 to protect higher education is bemoaned by many young activists, and Tamara wanted to see if things were different elsewhere. She came back greatly impressed by the stark contrast between the political apathy and alienation among young people in the UK and the passion and engagement of Nicaraguan youth with political and social issues.

As with any student movement affiliated to a political organisation, the Sandinista Youth is not free to campaign on any issue it chooses. Sexual diversity and abortion are controversial issues in much of Latin America, and Nicaragua is no exception. However, the FES has a small section promoting sexual education for young people, with growing recognition in the wider organisation. More broadly, Tamara feels that taking part in FES activities changes the way students see their education. For example, Caleb, a student she became friends with, had become disillusioned by the formulaic teaching culture in school. Tamara believes that helping organise FES activities fundamentally changed his attitude and gave him a reason to stay in school and continue his education.

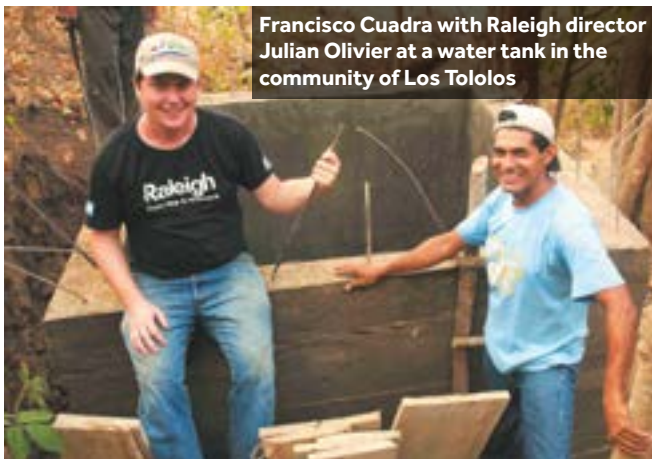
Tamara is optimistic about the future of the movement, believing that the core values of political engagement and democratic, student-led activity will ensure that it flourishes. Every year they write an education manifesto for the coming year, stating what youth education should achieve. It is this type of engagement that gives Tamara faith in what young people can achieve in Nicaragua. She explains: ‘Their priorities are different. They are concerned about politics, world events, their society, their future...Not with which dress should they buy for a party on Saturday’. Will Tamara go back? ‘Definitely. But only once I finish my own education!’

Volunteering, a school of awareness raising: Raleigh International in Nicaragua

Liz Light, NSC's representative in Nicaragua, talked to **Julian Olivier**, Raleigh's director for Nicaragua and Costa Rica, about how Raleigh's work has evolved and what makes the NGO's volunteer programmes so unique and effective.

Julian explained that Raleigh's most long term and successful partnership with the Cooperative Juan Francisco Paz Silva (JFPS) in Achuapa, came about as a result of NSC putting Raleigh in touch with the Cooperative in 2001.

Initially Raleigh volunteers built a storage area for sesame seed production. After reflecting on this experience Raleigh and the Coop concluded that to have a greater impact the volunteers needed to focus on encouraging greater community participation rather than just building things. Since 2004 Raleigh volunteers have worked on a very successful clean drinking water programme in 37 communities: thousands of people have gained access to clean water for the first time ever. However, an evaluation of the programme concluded that the focus was still too much on infrastructure and not enough on people's ability to manage their own water systems. For the past two years Raleigh and the Coop have developed a more holistic approach that involves more emphasis on raising awareness, and building skills and capacities in the communities. As Julian



Sarah Elliott

explained 'it is important that our work is integrated into that of the coops in such a way that they develop their own capacities and secure access to a sustainable income.'

Nicaragua is the third most vulnerable country in the world to climate change. So Raleigh is also working on a project to mitigate vulnerability to climate change by looking at how communities manage their natural environment and how to minimise negative impacts. This includes improving food security and productivity so they can withstand the impact of extreme weather.

Volunteers also work with young people by helping them to set up ecological youth groups and find other ways to engage in the development of their communities. This

Since 2001 Raleigh has placed 5,400 18 – 25 year old volunteers in Nicaragua and Costa Rica: 4,400 from the UK and 1,000 from the host countries. Of these 180 UK volunteers and 180 Nicaraguans have participated in *ICS programmes.

Raleigh runs two types of programmes. Expedition volunteers do conservation and community work along with outdoor activities such as trekking to develop leadership skills. *ICS volunteers follow a programme that has three main aims: project impact, volunteer personal development and the creation of active citizens. This includes an 'Action at Home' programme putting the skills to use on their return to the UK or Nicaragua.

Raleigh's partners include the Juan Francisco Paz Silva Cooperative in Achuapa; UCA Mirafior and El Foro Mirafior in Esteli; UCA San Ramon in Matagalpa; ANIDES in Matagalpa and INPHRU Totogalpa in Somoto.

can be through raising awareness, building consensus around issues, building skills or actually undertaking physical infrastructure work.

What is unique and very effective about the approach is that Nicaraguan and British volunteers live and work together with local communities. The skills and experiences of the two cultures complement each other, with the Nicaraguans bringing an understanding of the local context, how people work and how to get things done. For Nicaraguans from rural or urban areas and different educational backgrounds it is a way to get involved in the development of their own country, while those from the UK use their experience to do the same back home.

* The International Citizen Service (ICS) provides volunteering opportunities for 18 to 25-year-olds to fight poverty at home and abroad through a UK government backed programme. www.volunteersics.org
Volunteering opportunities in Nicaragua: www.raleighinternational.org and www.progressio.org.uk

“ What is unique and effective about Raleigh's programmes is that teams of Nicaraguan and British volunteers live and work together with local communities. ”

UK–Nicaragua Solidarity: past and present

As London's temperatures soared above Managua's, dozens of activists gathered to celebrate 35 years of UK-Nicaragua Solidarity. The NSC-organised event in July brought together 1980s activists who supported the Sandinista Revolution during the cold war days of Thatcher and Reagan, with those who had visited Nicaragua more recently – in particular Raleigh International and Progressio volunteers – on ten-week community development programmes. They shared a passion and commitment to Nicaragua, for some going back over 30 years.

The opening session focused on the achievements of the 1980s Sandinista government and the attempts by the Reagan administration to overthrow the Sandinistas: for the US, the means, however murky and reprehensible, justified the ends.

Jason Blalok's film 'American Sandinista' was a stark reminder of the reality of the period: the hopes and expectations of a better future combined with the horrors of the US-backed contra war. The film tells of Ben Linder, one of thousands of international volunteers who went to Nicaragua in the 1980s to support government social programmes. Ben, an engineer working on a rural electrification programme, died in a contra attack.

Carmen Barreda, a Sandinista student activist in the 1980s, spoke of the anguish of the loss of loved ones, the destruction of the war and what international solidarity meant. Particularly important was political and moral support, mutual learning, raising of awareness of what was happening in the rest of the world, and above all, the feeling of not being alone.

Helen Yuill and Stella Embliss who went to Nicaragua on coffee and building brigades, described what motivated thousands of British people to participate in a global solidarity movement in the 1980s. Sixty-five local solidarity groups were organised; more than 100,000 people signed a petition condemning US aggression against Nicaragua; high profile political and cultural events featured politicians, actors,



Julio Echart

Building a broad international movement to isolate US attempts to overthrow the democratically - elected Sandinista government was a critical part of 1980s solidarity. Lawyer Harry Spooner and actors Alfred Molina and Maggie Steed outside the US Embassy, 1987, demanding the US uphold the World Court verdict finding them guilty of illegal acts of aggression against Nicaragua.

writers, musicians; and more than 1,000 people went to Nicaragua on brigades, delegations and study tours. The legacy of this period survives in NSC, Wales NSC, twin towns, and in the Central America Women's Network (CAWN), and the Environmental Network for Central America (ENCA).

A brigadista in 1989 Rita Drobner described the dramatic contrast between her expectations and the reality of living with impoverished farm labourers on a coffee plantation. The family was proud of the achievements of the Sandinista revolution and the improvements it brought: a new one room hut with piped water, a latrine and membership of a co-operative. However, the children suffered from worms, the crops had been partially destroyed by pests and the oldest son had lost his legs in a land mine explosion. To the outsider, the Revolution that had cost Nicaraguans so dearly appeared to have achieved little. Yet, for impoverished Nicaraguans, there had been major advances in organising and making best use of available resources... all achieved amid a war.

Solidarity Now

Explaining the political and practical links forged between trade unions, churches, community and educational organisations, Ben Gregory announced a new Wales NSC initiative, the marketing of Wales' fairest coffee – Tecafe – sourced from Nicaraguan co-operative SOPPEXCCA. A Wales NSC delegation visited Nicaragua earlier this year and, in these politically gloomy times, came back with a message from the Nicaraguans, who lived through 16 years of austerity after the 1990 Sandinista electoral defeat – don't give up hope.

The common interests between Fairtrade activists in the UK and Nicaraguan Fairtrade producers were described by Helen Yuill from NSC and Alix Hughes from the Bristol Link with Nicaragua. One of the legacies of the Sandinista Revolution is a well organised cooperative and Fairtrade movement that has been at the forefront globally of changing the way primary products are traded, providing opportunities to insert a Nicaraguan perspective into wider UK networks for social and economic justice. Speaker tours of the UK and study tours to Nicaragua involving more than 80 people have provided opportunities for exchanging ideas and information and advocating ways of making Fairtrade fairer.

Alix summarised the successful experience of the Bristol Link working with Bristol Fairtrade Network, coordinating visits by Nicaraguan women Fairtrade coffee and honey producers during Fairtrade Fortnight. Their programmes have included talking to thousands of school children – taking the message to a new generation of Fairtrade consumers and potential activists.

Rita Drobner talked about the commitment of UK trade unionists to internationalism. In the case of Nicaragua this includes supporting the Sandinista Revolution and

“ **Solidarity is about mutuality of values, common understandings, friendships, and uniting to redress imbalances of power.** ”

Progressio, living with local families and working alongside young Nicaraguan volunteers on community projects.

Helen Yuill gave an overview of UK twinning links with towns, communities, schools and universities. Thousands of people who visited Nicaragua in the 1980s returned deeply affected by the experience and committed to ongoing solidarity. Some chose to set up twinning links with the towns and communities they had visited. These range from formal twinings between local councils to small informal groups raising funds for a particular community or project. Activities include supporting projects related to community development, health, education and the environment; coordinating exchange and volunteer programmes; and facilitating links, particularly between



Nicaragua giants bring a message of solidarity to UK trade unionists, TUC march, 2012

Steph Heathorne

the current focus on union-to-union links. Having lived through the debilitating effects of austerity from 1990 to 2007, Nicaraguan trade unions identify closely with the situation of their UK counterparts. The relationship of mutual solidarity between Unison and the Nicaraguan union UNE is exemplary. Thanks to Unison funding, UNE has an office providing legal support and training – representing members, interpreting law and lobbying and training activists. See page 7.

Fiammetta Wegner and Emma Blakey described working on a volunteer programme in Nicaragua for 18-to-25 year olds, part of the UK government-funded International Citizenship Service. They volunteered on a ten-week programme organised by

schools and universities.

Claire Plumb presented the Leicester-Masaya Link Group's programme called 'Food for Thought' which helps primary school children explore the journey of crops grown in Nicaragua – from the farmer's field to the local and international marketplace. The children discuss how these plants are used in food, drinks, medicine and crafts. They then take on the role of Nicaraguan farmers, millers, cooks, craftspeople and herbalists, and turn the plants into products to sell, ensuring they cover their costs and make a small profit to reinvest or buy luxuries. The day finishes with a fiesta using the products they have made to decorate the room and to eat and drink.

Get in touch, get involved

NSC www.nicaraguasc.org.uk

NSCAG www.nscag.org

FB Nicaragua-Solidarity

Wales NSC www.walesnicaragua.wordpress.com

Twin towns and other groups with projects in Nicaragua
www.nicaraguasc.org.uk/solidarity/twin-towns

Nicaragua to send team to Street Children World Cup 2014

Following their third place in the Street Child World Cup (SCWC, www.streetchildworldcup.org.uk) in South Africa in 2011, Nicaragua will play in 2014 in Rio against teams from 18 other countries. The SCWC is a global movement to protect and provide opportunities for children living on the streets. It's not just about football but uses a variety of ways to challenge negative perceptions, social isolation, and the invisibility of street children worldwide. The Nicaragua team is organised by the international NGO Casa Alianza*.

Liz Light, NSC representative in Nicaragua, interviewed **Marcia Rodriguez**, goalkeeper in the 2011 Nicaragua team in South Africa, and John Antony Rivas who hopes to play for Nicaragua in Rio.

How did it go in South Africa? It was wonderful. I used to see planes in the sky and say to myself 'one day I'll go on a plane' and I did. We got a wonderful reception and shared experiences with teams from the Philippines, Ukraine, India, Tanzania, South Africa, and Brazil. We did really well in the tournament and won third place; we even beat India! We talked about Nicaragua and showed people where it is and learnt about languages and cultures we never heard of before. Afterwards we travelled to Britain and saw that there are kids on the streets in these rich countries too.

How did the experience change you?

Don't think that the Marcia here talking seriously with you is the Marcia that arrived in Casa Alianza. I had a very difficult character. My time in Casa Alianza and South Africa helped me learn self control. I became a person who knows that there are times for laughing and times to be serious. Psychologically I learned that when you put your mind to it you can achieve what you wish for. It motivated me to be more respectful to adults and responsible with myself. I now help my mother with chores around the house and don't run away.

What happened after you returned to Nicaragua? I went back to school and I'm finishing my 5th year of secondary school.



The Nicaragua team that won third place in the Street Child World Cup in South Africa 2011

I'm living at home but Casa Alianza continues helping me with psychological support. My goals are to finish high school and go to university to study law.

The road to Rio 2014

Casa Alianza has been working with 43 boys and 19 girls, potential members of the Nicaraguan teams. As well as football training, preparations involve strengthening leadership skills and self esteem. The two teams of nine players – one girls, one boys - will be chosen in November and undertake intensive training. **John Anthony Rivas**, 15, lives with over 100 children in the Casa Alianza house in Managua.

Can you tell me a bit about the preparations? When I arrived in Casa Alianza five months ago they asked if I wanted to

participate in football practices, which I did and I liked it. It has helped me because I've learned to be more disciplined, to support my team mates, that we have to be there for each other during good times and bad. I make the maximum effort for my team so as not to let them down. This is also for myself, so I can win the right to participate in courses. Right now I'm also learning printing and how to operate a till.

If you are selected what would you teach people you meet about Nicaragua? I'll tell them about the beautiful places, about what we have, but also about what we don't have. Nicaragua is a rich agricultural country despite the economic situation. If I'm selected I will give my best. I wish luck to all my team mates – what I wish for myself, I wish for my team mates too.

*Casa Alianza is an international NGO dedicated to the rehabilitation and defence of street children in Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico and Guatemala. It works with 10,000 children a year, most of them orphaned, abused or abandoned and further traumatised by the indifference of their societies. www.casa-alianza.org.uk