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UNESCO Country Strategy (UCS)

Nicaragua 2019 – 2023



UNESCO Office in San José

**Representation for Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua
and Panama**



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FOREWORD



Ms. Esther Kuisch Laroche
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It is my pleasure to present the UNESCO Country Strategy (UCS) for Nicaragua, covering the period 2019-2023. The UCS aims to situate UNESCO's work in each Member State within the country's development context. This document is grounded within the overall framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

The UCS for Nicaragua is also closely aligned with the development priorities of the country and UNESCO's Medium-Term Strategy, which is structured around the following two Overarching Objectives:

- Peace – contributing to lasting peace
- Equitable and sustainable development – Contributing to sustainable development and the eradication of poverty

As a specialized agency within the UN system, UNESCO's mission is to support the efforts of Member States in adhering to international standards and norms adopted by UNESCO's General Conference, and fostering international co-operation between Member States, scientific bodies and civil society organizations involved in UNESCO's fields of competence.

Building peace in the hearts and minds of people remains the primary mission of UNESCO. In collaboration with our partners in Nicaragua and worldwide, we hope to provide platforms for dialogue and cooperation that will enable the benefits of development to reach all, especially the most disadvantaged, women, youth and children, to shape a sustainable future for the world – a world of unity in diversity.

Esther Kuisch Laroche
Director and Representative
UNESCO San José

PART I: STRATEGIC VISION

Nicaragua is located in Central America, bordering both the Caribbean Sea and the North Pacific Ocean, between Costa Rica and Honduras. Its territory covers 130,370 sq km, including 910 km of coastline. Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America and contains the largest freshwater body in Central America, namely Lago de Nicaragua.



Nicaragua has a population of around 6.3 million people. An estimated 27.24 per cent of the population is between 0-14 years old, and 21.26 per cent are between 15-24 years of age. Over 62 per cent of the population lives in urban areas (3,960,712 people in 2019). The overwhelming majority of the population lives in the western half of the country, with much of the urban growth centered in the capital city of Managua.

Nearly 70 per cent of the population identifies as *mestizo* (mixed Amerindian and white). Afro descendants make up 9 per cent of the population. According to the 2005 Population Census, 8.6 per cent of the total population of the country self identifies as belonging to an indigenous group or ethnic community.

Nicaragua is a diverse country and home to 24 volcanoes, several lakes, rivers, and lagoons, rainforests, dry forests, and mangroves. It is also highly prone to natural hazards, such as earthquakes, volcano eruptions, landslides, hurricanes, and tsunamis. The Cerro Negro (728 m), which last erupted in 1999, is one of the country's most active volcanoes. Its lava flows and ash have caused significant damage to farmland and buildings. Other historically active volcanoes include Concepcion, Cosiguina, Las Pilas, Masaya, Momotombo, San Cristobal, and Telica. In addition, Nicaragua also faces

several environmental challenges, including deforestation, soil erosion, water pollution and drought.

In recent years, Nicaragua has given increased focus to protecting the environment. The country has 68 ecosystems, which represents around 60% of the total ecosystems in the Central American Isthmus (MARENA 2014, p.9)¹. The National System of Protected Areas is comprised of 74 protected areas and 63 private wildlife reserves. This represents 24.6% of Nicaraguan land (State of the Nation Report [PEN] 2014, p.78)². Nicaragua has nine sites recognized as Wetlands of International Importance by the Ramsar Convention³ and three UNESCO Biosphere Reserves (Bosawas 1997, San Juan River 2003 and Ometepe Island 2010).

Nicaragua is the Central American country that has one of the most recent legislations on water resources. The General National Water Act (Law 620) and its regulation (Decree 106-2007) were approved in 2007. The law states the public domain of all water resources and favors its use for human purposes. It also creates instruments and institutions, and introduces planning and management tools as basic aspects for the protection and use of the resource.

Nicaragua is a lower middle-income country with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP worth 13.81 billion US dollars in 2017. The GDP value of Nicaragua represents 0.02 percent of the world economy. GDP in Nicaragua averaged 4.02 USD billion from 1960 until 2017, reaching an all-time high of 13.81 USD billion in 2017. Due to social unrest in 2018 and the imposition of new US sanctions, the economy is expected to contract this year.

Despite being one of the poorest countries in Latin America, Nicaragua has made important economic and social progress in recent years. The country significantly improved access to potable water and sanitation, and has ameliorated its life expectancy, infant and child mortality, and immunization rates. However, income distribution remains uneven, and the poor, agriculturalists, and indigenous people continue to have less access to healthcare services.

Nicaragua has made important progress in several areas of the education sector, including in reducing the number of poor children who have never been to school, increasing access to pre-primary and primary school, significantly improving the literacy rate, and guaranteeing equal access for boys and girls. Education expenditure represents 4.35% of GDP (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2017).

However, the country still faces a number of challenges in increasing the enrolment rate of secondary and technical education, as well as vocational training. Educational access

¹ MARENA - Ministerio del Ambiente y de los Recursos Naturales 2014, V Informe Nacional de Biodiversidad de Nicaragua (V National Biodiversity Report Nicaragua), viewed October 2015, <https://www.cbd.int/doc/world/ni/ni-nr-05-es.pdf>

² PEN- Programa Estado de la Nación en Desarrollo Humano Sostenible 2014, Estadísticas de Centroamérica 2014: Indicadores sobre desarrollo humano sostenible (Central American Statistics 2014: Indicators about sustainable human development), viewed 17 September 2015, http://www.estadonacion.or.cr/images/stories/biblioteca_virtual/otras_publicaciones/ECA-2014.pdf

³ <https://www.ramsar.org/es/humedal/nicaragua>

and quality also vary depending on geographical location and vulnerability status. For example, secondary level attainment and quality are significantly lower in rural areas, indigenous communities, and among persons with disabilities.

Total fertility rate has fallen from around six children per woman in 1980 to below replacement level today (1.87 children born/woman), but the high birth rate among adolescents perpetuates a cycle of poverty and low educational attainment.

Reducing the inequalities between urban and rural areas and between rich and poor is an important imperative for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Internet use in Nicaragua is unrestricted, which provides opportunities for providing greater access to information, including for persons with disabilities, and increasing the quality of education and other social services. However, socio-economic factors, including poverty and geographic location affect the ability of many Nicaraguans to access the Internet.

Finally, Nicaragua has two cultural sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List: the León Cathedral and the Ruins of León Viejo. The language, dance and music of the *Garífuna*, and the play *El Güegüense* are part of the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Yet, in spite of the cultural diversity of Nicaragua and its rich heritage, the country spends less than the suggested 1% of its total expenditure on culture.

Challenges, Opportunities, Successes, and Lessons Learnt

Nicaragua does not currently have a United Nations Partnership Framework for Development. The last UNDAF, which was co-signed by UNESCO San José, covered the period from 2013-2017. The pillars of the UNDAF were defined as follows:

1. Reduction of multiple inequities and poverty to achieve sustainable human development.
2. Guarantee the right to food security, health, education and well-being of the Nicaraguan people.
3. Protection of the environment and risk management for sustainable human development
4. Strengthening institutional capacities for technological innovation and industrialization.

In the absence of an UNDAF, the Government of Nicaragua has agreed upon an annual work plan with UNESCO.

UNESCO's 2019 work plan is focused on the following strategic areas:

1. Quality education – with a specific focus on Education for Sustainable Development and disaster risk reduction
2. Safeguarding of cultural heritage and the promotion of cultural diversity and creative industries

3. Prevention of violence and the management of social transformations
4. Biodiversity conservation and water management
5. Preservation of documentary heritage and indigenous languages

The key challenge facing UNESCO in Nicaragua is its status as a non-resident agency (NRA), as well as the limited regular resources of the UNESCO San José Cluster Office, resulting from budget constraints at the level of the Organization as a whole.

A significant opportunity rests in the fact that UNESCO, although not a resident agency, is a well-known and respected UN agency in Nicaragua. This positive image can be attributed to the overall work of UNESCO and the interest of the Government of Nicaragua in the different areas of UNESCO's mandate, particularly culture and education.

Since the establishment of the UNESCO San José Cluster Office in 1984, the Office has introduced and expanded its programmes in Education, Sciences, Culture and Communication & Information in Nicaragua. Key focus areas and partnerships have been created around strengthening the education sector; environmental sustainability and biodiversity conservation; disaster preparedness and mitigation; preservation of cultural heritage, and institutional capacity building of the media.



Education

In the past five years, significant progress has been made in primary and secondary education in Nicaragua in terms of ensuring free access, expanding coverage and improving quality. According to information provided by the Government, between 2007 and 2018, the gross average enrolment rate in early childhood education for children aged 3 to 5 years increased from 53.6% to 69.5%. Between 2010 and 2016, for primary education, the gross enrolment rate was more than 100 per cent (indicating capture of children of all ages, including underage and overage children) and the enrolment rate for secondary education increased from 67.9 per cent to 76.5 per cent⁴. Data of the Government of Nicaragua show that the retention rate of students in basic education has improved, from 85.5% in 2007, to 89.4% in 2018. Given the absence of secondary level institutions in many rural locations, the Government initiated in 2014 the programme “*Secundaria a Distancia en el Campo*”, in which currently 57,353 students are enrolled.⁵ Education expenditure in Nicaragua has increased slightly from 4,08% of the GDP in 2014 to 4,35% of the GDP in 2017.⁶

Strengthening the quality of education remains a challenge for the education system and requires further improvements to school infrastructure, teacher training, updating of teaching materials, and expanding and strengthening existing flexible modalities of education (for example, distance learning in rural areas).

Nicaragua participates in UNESCO’s periodic Regional Comparative and Explicatory Study on Education (ERCE), which examines learning outcomes at primary level in mathematics, language and natural sciences, and associated factors in most Latin American countries. In the Third Regional Comparative and Explicatory Study (TERCE 2013), where 19 countries participated, Nicaragua was among the group of countries with results below the regional average.⁷ However, when comparing the results of Nicaragua in the TERCE with its results in the second study (SERCE 2006), an improvement can be observed in the results in “reading” and mathematics in third grade students.⁸

While retention rates in secondary school have slightly increased in recent years, ensuring that all children and adolescents stay in school and the reinsertion of excluded youth and adolescents into the formal systems remain important challenges.

Enhanced teacher training is another priority, directly associated with the quality of education. It is estimated that around 4.26 per cent of initial education teachers, 12.96

⁴ UNICEF Country Programme Document Nicaragua 2019 – 2023. E/ICEF/2018/P/L14. Retrieved from: https://www.unicef.org/about/execboard/files/2018-PL14-Nicaragua_CPD-ODS-EN.pdf

⁵ Information for 2018, received from the Government of Nicaragua. April 2019.

⁶ Retrieved from UNESCO UIS Database <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/ni>

⁷ UNESCO (2015) Informe de resultados TERCE: logros de aprendizaje. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000243532>

⁸ UNESCO (2014) Comparación de Resultados del Segundo y Tercer Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo SERCE y TERCE. 2006 – 2013. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000244239/PDF/244239spa.pdf.multi>

per cent of primary school teachers and 5.03 per cent of secondary school teachers do not have a teaching qualification⁹. It is therefore essential that teachers receive initial training and ongoing refresher training in the use of educational technologies and tools, including strategies and materials to transform teaching practices to favor learning with an inclusive and equitable approach.

Challenges also remain in strengthening education statistics and indicators, evaluating learning outcomes, and monitoring the initiatives and strategies implemented by the Ministry of Education. In order to strengthen Education statistics and indicators, UNESCO San José and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) have supported CECC/SICA (Central American Educational and Cultural Coordination of the Central American Integration System) in the development of a series of education indicators, based on the 43 thematic indicators of SDG4. This was done as part of the project “*Fortalecimiento de los Sistemas de Información Educativa para Centroamérica y República Dominicana*” implemented by CECC/SICA. Nicaragua has participated in this process through the Ministry of Education. Within the framework of the same project, UIS is also offering the Ministry of Education an evaluation mission to review the quality of the education information system.

Lastly, it is important to note that Nicaragua is the only Central American country that is a member of the Regional Steering Committee for the Education 2030 Agenda in Latin American and Caribbean. This is part of a regional coordination mechanism, which defines the main lines of action for regional cooperation that will jump start the formation of the working groups, and formulate an action plan for 2019-2021 in the context of the Roadmap approved in the last ministerial meeting in Cochabamba in July 2018. The Regional Steering Committee’s role is to ensure strong regional coherence, coordination (within the region and between regional and global levels) and collective work, so that countries and education partners in Latin America and the Caribbean move together towards achieving the Education 2030 targets. Country membership is on a rotational basis for 2 years.

Culture

Nicaragua has accepted or ratified all UNESCO Culture Conventions, except the 2001 Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage.

The country currently has two sites inscribed in the World Heritage List: The Archaeological Site of Ruins of León Viejo (inscribed in 2000) and the León Cathedral (inscribed in 2011).

⁹ Figures from research by the Ministry of Education, July 2017. From UNICEF Country Programme Document Nicaragua 2019-2023. E/ICEF/2018/P/L.14, p.3. Retrieved from: https://www.unicef.org/about/execboard/files/2018-PL14-Nicaragua_CPD-ODS-EN.pdf

During the past years, UNESCO has supported the *Instituto Nicaragüense de Cultura* (INC) in strengthening institutional capacities for the management and conservation of World Heritage Sites.

UNESCO is currently also implementing the project “Youth involvement in World Heritage Sites”, which aims to involve youth from local communities in the promotion and protection of World Heritage Sites.

Regarding the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), Nicaragua has two elements inscribed in the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage: Language, dance, and music of the Garifuna (inscribed in 2008) and *El Güegüense* (inscribed in 2008).

UNESCO San Jose, in cooperation with the Nicaraguan National Commission for UNESCO and the *Instituto Nicaragüense de Cultura* are currently planning the implementation of a national workshop on the strengthening of ICH safeguarding practices.

In 2009, Nicaragua ratified the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) and the country has expressed a keen interest in developing and promoting creative industries.

UNESCO San José has offered technical assistance to Nicaragua for the development of its first report on the 2005 Convention. In this context, two workshops will be organized with the INC in 2019.

Nicaragua has not yet ratified the Convention on the protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (2001), but has expressed an interest in moving towards ratification. As part of the 2019 annual workplan, UNESCO San José is planning to organize a two-day national workshop on the 2001 Convention, as ratification of this Convention by Nicaragua is of great importance for the entire region.

Nicaragua also participated in the Regional Meeting on Underwater Cultural Heritage in Panama from 25- 27 March, which brought together countries from Latin America and the Caribbean to discuss the main topics regarding the implementation of the 2001 Convention.

Natural Sciences

UNESCO works on water security and, through the International Hydrological Program, promotes a process of dialogue on environmental flows, as a mechanism to protect natural ecosystems, livelihoods and well-being as a tool to face the impacts of climate change.

In collaboration with authorities of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources and INETER, UNESCO SJO, plans to develop a National Workshop on Environmental Flow and Integrated Management of Water Resources in 2019. The national workshop aims to strengthen water policies, rules and regulations, and harmonizing the water supply and consumption within the framework of a holistic conception of environmental flows.

UNESCO San José, in collaboration with the UNESCO Chair for Biosphere Reserves and the natural and mixed World Heritage Sites (hosted by the University for International Cooperation) is also working on better understanding the use of natural resources of indigenous people in Central America according to their culture and values. Many of the indigenous territories are included in Biosphere Reserves, where the maintenance or improvement of ecosystem goods and services are closely related to the sustainable development and practices of local communities and indigenous peoples. In Nicaragua, UNESCO will be working closely with the Miskitu and Mayangna indigenous peoples in Bosawas, Rama and Kriol (Afro-descendants) in Río San Juan and Nahora, Nicarao or Nahuatlel in Isla de Ometepe.



Nicaragua participates actively in UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Program through its three Biosphere Reserves: Bosawas, Río San Juan and Isla de Ometepe. Nicaragua also participated in the first meeting of the Central American Network of Biosphere Reserves, in Copán, Honduras (6-10 May 2019).

With regard to the International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme, Nicaragua has submitted the application dossier for the designation of the Coco River as a UNESCO Global Geopark. The proposal includes the municipalities of Somoto, Totogalpa, San Lucas, Las Sabanas and San José de Cusmapa. UNESCO San José intends to work with the relevant authorities and local communities to strengthen the management of the Geopark in the years ahead. Nicaragua has been actively involved in UNESCO activities related to disaster risk reduction and preparedness. The project "Strengthening early

warning and response capacities for tsunami and other coastal hazards in Central America” has been implemented by UNESCO-IOC and UNESCO SJO in six Central American countries, including Nicaragua.

National counterparts were the National System for Disaster Preparedness (SINAPRED), the Institute of Territorial Studies (INETER), and the Ministry of Education. Activities to consolidate national and local early warning standard operating procedures are currently being carried out and two local communities (Bluefields and Corn Island) have been certified as “Tsunami Ready”. These activities have been accompanied by interventions in the education sector in order to ensure that schools in coastal areas



receive adequate training on tsunami preparedness.

Lastly, Nicaragua hosted the 28th session of the Intergovernmental Coordination Group for the Pacific Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (ICG/PTWS-XXVIII) in Montelimar, Nicaragua.

Social and Human Sciences

UNESCO’s SHS programme in Nicaragua is focused on the prevention of violence, management of social transformations and youth empowerment for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Through the regional initiative “Comprometidos”, UNESCO has been empowering youth for the past four years to develop concrete projects for the achievement of the

Sustainable Development Goals. UNESCO San José is working with different national partners in Nicaragua to involve as many young Nicaraguans as possible in this initiative. In 2019, UNESCO will organize a youth hackathon focused on the development of ICT applications for the prevention of violence.

The Government of Nicaragua has also expressed an interest in the implementation of a national MOST school. MOST Schools are capacity-building activities focused on strengthening the competencies for evidence-informed decision-making in Member States. They help develop the capacity of researchers and decision-makers to translate knowledge into action. Their primary goal is to support long-term sustainable development in contexts where capacity gaps may be a major constraint to translating research into action. The training sessions are conceived on the basis of bottom-up demands arising from specific needs in concrete contexts, mainly in low- and middle-income countries. MOST Schools contribute to enlarge the pool of qualified young professionals from different backgrounds (academia, government and civil society). This is another means by which MOST helps to strengthen the research-policy interface in the context of the 2030 international development agenda.

Representatives from Nicaragua will participate in a regional MOST school, focused on the issue of inequality, and following that experience, UNESCO SJO will support the development of a national MOST school in Managua.

Communication and Information

UNESCO strives to foster freedom of expression, media development, and access to information and knowledge in line with UNESCO's mandate to "promote the free flow of ideas by word and image".

A strategic approach to addressing this issue will be pursued through working with national authorities to sensitize all relevant stakeholder on this topic. UNESCO also intends to work with universities on journalism and communication curricula, and developing courses to better prepare future journalists to tackle these challenges.

The launch of a Regional Charter on Journalism Education and the Safety of Journalism in 2016 provided a framework and planning tool for closer cooperation with all relevant stakeholders in Central America. This will also involve developing formal and informal mechanisms, including review meetings, to promote coordination and collaboration with respect to initiatives to promote freedom of expression, freedom of the press and the safety of journalists in the region. UNESCO also hopes to promote this Charter in Nicaragua.

Linked to the issues of freedom of expression is that of media pluralism. Continued efforts will be placed on promoting the use of the Gender Sensitive Indicators in Media (GSIM) and working with media entities and platforms to develop plans to promote gender equality, including in media content. This is being driven by cooperation with the national telecommunication authorities, associations of journalists and community

media workers, the UNESCO UNITWIN Network on Gender, Media and ICTs and the Global Alliance on Gender and Media.

In 2016, the San Jose Office, along with its counterparts, launched the Regional Charter on Media and Gender Equality. Through this Charter, UNESCO and universities seek to build cooperation in several areas, including the inclusion and strengthening of the journalism and communication curricula regarding gender equality. A focus on media pluralism will also involve capacity building for journalists in reporting on natural disasters. The Office will continue to work with counterparts across the region to conceptualize, develop, and submit proposals on media development. Relevant support will also be provided during the implementation phase.

Another crucial aspect of the building of knowledge societies is the access to technology. Following the organizing of the Regional Conference on ICTs for Persons with Disabilities in 2016, focus was placed on assisting countries, including Nicaragua, develop policies to improve the lives of persons with disabilities through access to ICTs.

The 2019 annual work plan agreed between UNESCO SJO and the Government of Nicaragua focuses on two main lines of activities in the CI programme: the preservation of documentary heritage and the preservation of indigenous languages in the framework of the International Year of Indigenous Languages.

UNESCO will organize a national workshop on the preservation of documentary heritage in 2019 and will support the Government in the development of an action plan and road map for the preservation of indigenous languages.

PART II: COOPERATION FRAMEWORK AND PARTNERSHIPS

In the absence of an UNDAF, UNESCO's envisaged interventions are anchored on annual action plans agreed upon with the Government of Nicaragua.



The broad goals and concrete objectives of the international community – as set out in the internationally agreed development goals, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals – underpin all UNESCO's strategies and activities. UNESCO's unique competencies in education, the sciences, culture, and communication and information contribute towards the realization of those goals. UNESCO SJO seeks to

contribute specifically to the achievement of SDGs 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 13, and 15 in Nicaragua.

UNESCO's work in Nicaragua is guided by the Organization's mission to "contribute to the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information".

Further, UNESCO's cooperation and technical assistance framework promote inter-sectoral approaches in formulating responses to complex development issues through UNESCO's five core functions: a laboratory of ideas, a standard setter, a clearinghouse, a capacity-builder for Member States and a catalyst for international cooperation.

In order to identify opportunities for joint programming and resource mobilization, UNESCO actively builds and sustains strategic partnerships with government counterparts, UN agencies, the Nicaragua National Commission for UNESCO, development partners, private sector, civil society organizations, UNESCO Headquarters, UNESCO Regional Bureaus, UNESCO Category 1 and 2 Institutes, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, and UNESCO Chairs.

PART III: MONITORING AND EVALUATION

This section outlines the approach to monitoring and evaluation of programme implementation, with a strong focus on monitoring, data collection, analysis and reporting as the 2030 Agenda has strongly increased data demands. Monitoring and evaluation is critical to assess progress towards achievement of the outcomes underlying UNESCO support, but also for accountability.

With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) has been clearly recognized as the “the official source of cross-nationally comparable data on education”, as confirmed in the Education 2030 Framework for Action. The UIS national database for Nicaragua can be used as a source of data, analysis and evidence to track UNESCO San José’s Cluster Office contributions towards national results.

UNESCO San José will issue a bi-annual activity report at the end of each biennium and will also report on the implementation of its activities in Nicaragua against what was agreed upon in the annual work plans.

