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Sida Decentralised Evaluation

Helen Dixon
Edurne Larracochea
Salvador García Babini

Evaluation of the Strategy for Support via Swedish Civil Society Organisations 2010-2014

Final Country Report - Nicaragua

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**Helen Dixon
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Authors: Helen Dixon, Edurne Larracochea and Salvador García Babini

The views and interpretations expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida.

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SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY

Address: S-105 25 Stockholm, Sweden. Office: Valhallavägen 199, Stockholm

Telephone: +46 (0)8-698 50 00. Telefax: +46 (0)8-20 88 64

E-mail: info@sida.se. Homepage: <http://www.sida.se>

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AMNLAE	Asociación de Mujeres Nicaraguenses/Nicaraguan Women's Association Luisa Amanda Espinoza
AMPRONAC	Asociación de Mujeres ante la Problemática Nacional/Association of Women faced with the National Crisis
ANDEN	Asociación Nacional de Educadores de Nicaragua/National Teachers Association
ASTC	Asociación Sandinista de Trabajadores de la Cultura/Sandinista Association of Cultural Workers
ATC	Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo/Agricultural Workers Association
CDH	Consortio de Derechos Humanos/The Human Rights Consortium
CIG	Comisión Interagencial de Género/Interagency Commission on Gender
COLOPRED	Comisión Local para la Prevención, Mitigación y Atención de Desastres/ Local Commission for the Prevention, Mitigation and Attention to Disasters
COMUPRED	Comisión Municipal para la Prevención, Mitigación y Atención de Desastres/Municipal Commission for the Prevention, Mitigation and Attention to Disasters
COMUSSAN	Comisión Municipal para la Seguridad y Soberanía Alimentaria y Nutricional/Municipal Commission for Food and Nutrition Security and Sovereignty
CONADETI	Comisión Nacional de Demarcación y Titulación/National Commission for Demarcation and Title Deeds
CoS	Church of Sweden
CPC	Consejos de Participación Ciudadana/Citizen Participation Councils
CSO	civil society organisation
CST	Central Sandinista de Trabajadores/Sandinista Workers' Central
CVF	Consejos por la Vida y la Familia/Councils for Life and the Family
FACS	Fundación Augusto Cesar Sandino/Augusto Cesar Sandino Foundation
FECONORI	Federación Nicaragüense de Asociaciones de personas con discapacidad/Nicaraguan Federation of Association of People with Disability
FETSALUD	Central de Trabajadores de la Salud/Health Workers Union
FNT	Frente Nacional de Trabajadores/National Workers Front
FSLN	Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional/Sandinista Front for National Liberation
GPC	Gabinete de Poder Ciudadano/Citizen Participation Cabinets
GVF/GFSV	Gabinetes por la Vida y la Familia/Cabinets for Life and the Family
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership
HRBA	Human rights based approach
INATEC	Instituto Nacional Tecnológico/National Technological Institute
JENH	Jovenes Estableciendo Nuevos Horizontes/Young People Establishing New Horizons
LPO	local partner organisation
LGBT	lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MEI	Mesa de Educación Inclusive/Roundtable on Inclusive Education
MINED	Ministerio de Educación/Ministry of Education
MINSA	Ministerio de Salud/Ministry of Health

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

NGO	non-governmental organisation
ONCE	Organización Nacional de Ciegos Españoles
PPDH	Procuraduría para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos/Human Rights Ombudsperson
PwD	people with disabilities
RAAN	Región Autónoma del Atlántico Norte/North Atlantic Autonomous Region
RAAS	Región Autónoma del Atlántico Sur/South Atlantic Autonomous Region
RC	reality check
RCA	Reality Check Approach
RMCV	Red de Mujeres contra la Violencia/Women's Network against Violence
RMSMC	Red de Mujeres por la Salud Maria Cavallieri/Women's Health Network Maria Cavallieri
SFO	Swedish framework organisation
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SOI	Secretariado de Coordinación de ONGs internacionales/Secretariat for Coordination between International NGOs
UNAG	Union Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos/National Union of Arable and Cattle Farmers

Executive Summary

This final report covers the findings and analysis from research carried out in Nicaragua from 2012 to 2014 to evaluate Sweden's civil society strategy.¹ This included reality check (RC) studies in specific communities that were compared with a 'meso-level' study with local and Swedish partners of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). Research findings were analysed in relation to three components of the Swedish CS strategy's theory of change: its four human rights based approach (HRBA) principles (based on participation, non-discrimination, accountability and transparency); strengthening the voice of people living in conditions of poverty and marginalisation to improve their living conditions; and strengthening a vibrant and pluralist civil society.

The report includes three RC narrative summaries from each of three very different communities. This research provides evidence of ten intersecting dimensions of poverty and marginalisation, people's survival strategies, and key factors enhancing resilience and change. Our findings suggest that while people living in conditions of poverty and marginalisation in Nicaragua have been exposed to international human rights discourse, this is frequently combined with other concerns and cultural understandings. These often form a hybrid sense of entitlement as a reward for loyalty to the powerful, through practices that may express disempowerment or resilience. In terms of the Swedish CS strategy's four HRBA principles, people in RC communities are involved in diverse forms of participation, non-authentic participation, non-participation, resistance or open disobedience as agency. They speak of multiple intersecting forms of discrimination, exclusion and violence expressed in common attitudes, cultural and institutional practices. Non-discrimination was implicit in people's positive personal change, greater recognition and inclusiveness in the family, the community and organisations; and also in changes to institutional attitudes, laws and policies on all levels of governance. Accountability and transparency tended to be associated with underlying criticism and dissatisfaction about governance and representation on all levels. In spite of implicit and explicit demands for change, very few proposals were made on how to counter these problems.

¹ Government Offices of Sweden (2009a) *Strategy for Support via Swedish Civil Society Organisations 2010–2014*, Stockholm: Sida (UF2009/28632/UP, 10 September 2009). We refer to this strategy as the 'Swedish CS strategy'.

Meso-level research provides evidence that Swedish framework organisations (SFOs) and their local partner organisations (LPOs) are working on advocacy, information and training to motivate people to demand their rights as part of the HBRA. One of the key challenges identified through this research is the need to balance institutional advocacy (focusing on legal frameworks, institutional spaces, and the state's responsibilities as a duty bearer) with social advocacy aimed at building and strengthening constituencies, public opinion and citizens' own spaces (focusing on legitimising self-representation, citizens' demands and changing discriminatory culture). All SFO and LPO strategies build participation, information and knowledge about rights and spaces for association. These alone, however, are a necessary but insufficient condition for agency. Positive examples show how personal transformations and belonging to independent citizens' networks can enable greater autonomy and agency across multiple aspects of people's lives. In the learning workshops, SFOs and LPOs proposed incorporating deeper lessons about non-discrimination into joint actions, as a part of the Swedish CS strategy. In some cases there is evidence of inconsistencies among stated principles, externally-focused strategies or results, and internal policies and practices. These inconsistencies may allow for the unconscious reproduction of different forms of discrimination. There are outstanding examples of accountability and transparency work, especially in relation to municipal and regional governance structures – although these are subject to tensions and even prohibitions in the current context. Most stressed upward accountability and transparency, especially strengthening administrative capacities. One SFO mentioned accountability with/within LPOs and towards communities. HRBA challenges include deepening shared understandings of: participation, agency and autonomy; participatory empowerment methodologies; democratic political culture, internal power and leadership analysis; and financial sustainability and management.

Since the withdrawal of Swedish bilateral aid, the Swedish CS strategy has made plausible contributions to positive changes in enabling conditions for Nicaraguan citizens and civil society to sustain agendas and practical advances related to poverty, marginalisation and human rights. Examples of this include legal and institutional changes but there have also been improvements in enabling conditions and contributions to societal change.

Our findings on 'strengthening a vibrant a pluralist society' demonstrate a need for further study on emergent participatory models of the state in Latin American. Currently in Nicaragua, all cooperation and civil society organisation (CSO) interventions must be implemented through spaces coordinated by the governing party from national to community levels. Some SFOs and their partners are working directly with these spaces and recognise their party/state links. Other SFOs feel their partners have achieved stability and support through legislative advances while acknowledging the problematic nature of the selective relationship between government and certain CSOs. Several LPOs avoid alliances with outspoken civil society actors for fear of compromising their relationship with government. A common strategy is to develop double or multiple discourses. Several SFOs feel that Sida and its partners should

examine in detail the current country environment and how it enables or limits the Swedish CS strategy and the HBRA, particularly given the government's position that rights to equality and participation have been 'fully restored'. Some SFOs and LPOs tackling deep structural issues of discrimination and exclusion face the closure of spaces for dialogue with national state structures. This creates obstacles for generating legal and institutional change. Another concern voiced by SFOs LPOs and other invited Nicaraguan CSOs in the first learning workshops² was the inclusion of the private sector as a 'civil society actor' and contributor to human and social development, given evident conflicts of interest and the lack of public accountability.

Regarding 'strengthening the voice of people living in situations of poverty and marginalisation', one SFO believes that supporting the most vulnerable in speaking out may actually increase their vulnerability and so emphasises those who have already have access to dialogue. Other SFOs emphasise holistic and relational approaches that strengthen people's voices by developing new democratic values and leadership practices, and supporting new, representative forms of participatory organisation that enable people to position themselves as independent citizens and/or CSOs. Other strategies include the creative and/or anonymous use of public space, and the participatory use of communications media. Our overall findings suggest that those in the most extreme situations of poverty are less likely to participate in community projects. However, where consistent attempts are made to reach out to the most excluded – to listen and reflect with them, and establish vehicles for their unmediated voices – our findings suggest that social organisations, including local partners of the Swedish CS strategy, can be recognised as having representational legitimacy.

The research also reveals issues involving the role of aid architecture. Across the board, SFOs and LPOs are concerned about how the new results-based report formats and the short periods required for measurable results, accountability and administration, may produce perverse consequences for their internal work and their relationships, and also demand an excessive burden of work. This undermines the HRBA and takes up valuable time needed for longer-term relationships and processes. Most partners stress the urgent need to revise the results-based approach, reduce the quantity of reports and simplify formats, promote more spaces for dialogue, and deepen understanding of norms and instruments for better downwards accountability systems³.

² Report from Learning Workshop June 7, 2014. Unpublished research report.

³ See, for example, HAP International and Keystone (2006) *Downward Accountability to 'Beneficiaries': NGO and Donor Perspectives*, London: Keystone,
<http://www.hapinternational.org/pool/files/downward-accountability-to-beneficiaries-keystone-study.pdf>

The findings of this research confirm the contribution to capacity building and organisational strengthening that lies at the heart of SFOs' and LPOs' achievements. The term 'capacity building' itself limits the concept to an 'acquisition' of abilities, skills, competencies and the 'replica of best practices'. This implies an *a priori* lack and the concept of power as an object. Positive examples indicate that the enhancement of citizen participation in the development of civil society goes beyond the 'delivery' of 'capacity development', especially in isolated strands based on the logic of project or programme interventions. It seems to occur more successfully when diverse actors are able to engage as subjects who cross-reference and cross-fertilise knowledge, ideas and energies in safe spaces with a view to developing a common cause. Questions arising from this include: how can spaces such as these be facilitated among social movements, networks and CSOs (including Sida's partners) under the present circumstances, who might convene them, and how might the Swedish CS strategy provide support for this type of initiative?

The Report concludes by analysing the strategy's relevance, alignment and feasibility with RC findings in the current context of Nicaragua's citizens and civil society. The overall focus (on voice, citizen actions and their representation through vibrant and pluralist CSOs) is highly *relevant* in the current Nicaraguan context. The emphasis on voice coincides with findings that identified a greater need for work on subjectivity, agency and self-esteem; this is essential for a HRBA aimed at helping people experiencing poverty and marginalisation access resources of all kinds and change their basic living conditions. The emphasis on civil society vibrancy and pluralism creates a benchmark for strategic discussions on how to overcome obstacles in the current context. Equally the HRBA is appropriate and relevant. The thematic focuses and strategies of SFOs and their partners are generally relevant. However, in some cases their work contributes to necessary but not always sufficient conditions for advancing rights, which suggests the need for more holistic, bottom-up approaches. One element that stands out in this sense is the issue of emotional responses to poverty, disasters, trauma and violence, and the need to expand work with methodologies to develop personal growth and resilience.

An excessive or unilateral emphasis on aid architecture *alignment* in the delivery of any strategy might counteract the diversity and flexibility needed to implement any human rights focus. The consensus is that social change involving citizens' empowerment requires the development of more horizontal face-to-face relationships and flexible grassroots processes. The tendency of the Swedish CS strategy to function in 'vertical slices' based on funding relationships runs the risk of diffusing alignment (between the intention of the overall strategy and its interpretation in specific organisational or contextual realities) and fragmenting or diminishing possible synergies across the strategy (among diverse actors working in a common direction in international, national and local scenarios). This can be seen in very different understandings of how participation in state controlled spaces relates to strengthening "a vibrant and pluralist civil society". In terms of non-discrimination, some misalignments occur in interpreting strategies for gender rights and women's empowerment in relation to

masculinities. All actors mention accountability and transparency, but few have a systemic focus that includes two-way, internal and public accountability, which could open up positive space for CSOs. This suggests that a deeper shared examination of theories of change grounded in the Nicaraguan context is needed overall, with a more intersectional approach and an examination of appropriate methodological processes.

Sweden's historic cooperation with Nicaragua provides a *feasible* solid foundation of intimate knowledge of the country and its history. This favours a medium to a long-term HRBA to developing citizens' voices and strengthening civil society that is based on developing and strengthening interrelationships rather than achieving project results. This includes key exchanges between organised social sectors in Sweden and in Nicaragua. However, partners perceive the recent aid architecture framework as undermining the feasibility of this approach. In addition, actors involved in the Swedish CS strategy identify vulnerabilities and risks due the current atmosphere of polarisation and hostility towards civil society. Among the population, widespread fear of marginalisation, exposure or exclusion reproduces hybrid forms of participation. Nevertheless, the experience of Nicaraguans as citizens in recent history contributes to creative, vibrant and audacious forms of organisation and communication that open up new methodologies, spaces for legitimate self-representation, and greater independence of voice. Learning events carried out as part of this research process have raised key questions that need further debate between those involved in the Swedish CS strategy at all levels: about the role of civil society in creating inclusive states, counteracting exclusion, creating effective participation and citizens' agendas. The report ends by making a series of recommendations for the strategy, Sida, SFOs and LPOs.

1 Introduction and Background

1.1 OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE OF THIS EVALUATION

This report presents the main findings and recommendations of a two-year evaluation of Sida's support to civil society actors via Swedish framework organisations (SFOs)⁴ in Nicaragua. It synthesises findings from the evaluation's inception phase and two rounds of fieldwork carried out between September 2012 and November 2014.⁵

The purpose of the evaluation was “to find out if, how and why/why not the support to civil society actors in developing countries via Swedish civil society organisations (CSOs) has contributed to the overall objectives of the support by creating conditions to enable poor and discriminated people to improve their living conditions and quality of life. The focus of the evaluation should be on learning aspects.”⁶

The evaluation focused on whether and how the Swedish civil society strategy,⁷ as put into practice by SFOs and their local partner organisations (LPOs), is *relevant*, *aligned* and *feasible*. The evaluation questions are detailed in section 1.4. Rather than evaluate the entire strategy, the study examined:

- The realities of people living in poverty and marginalisation, and their perceptions of what is changing in the enabling conditions needed to improve their lives.
- The human rights based approach (HRBA), and what its four principles – participation, transparency, accountability and non-discrimination – mean to people living in poverty.
- The theories of change and strategies of SFOs and LPOs, and how these organisations understand and pursue the four principles of the HRBA.

⁴ Swedish framework organisations (SFOs) are Swedish CSOs that have a framework agreement with Sida, and framework status under the Swedish CS strategy.

⁵ The evaluation was carried out by a consortium of three organisations: the Swedish Institute of Public Administration (lead organisation, Sweden), the Institute of Development Studies (UK) and International Organisation Development (UK)

⁶ Terms of Reference, GLOBAL/Unit for Civil Society, case number 2011-001257, 10 January, 2012.

⁷ Government Offices of Sweden (2009a) *Strategy for Support via Swedish Civil Society Organisations 2010–2014*, Stockholm: Sida (UF2009/28632/UP, 10 September 2009). We refer to this strategy as the ‘Swedish CS strategy’.

- The plausible contributions of SFOs and LPOs to creating changes in enabling conditions, and of CSO capacity development efforts.
- The relevance, alignment and feasibility of the theories of change, strategies and interventions of the SFOs and LPOs.

The evaluation used a learning process approach, in which key questions, methods and understandings evolve throughout the evaluation. Learning events and dialogue involving Sida, SFOs and LPOs took place in Nicaragua and Sweden (as well as the other two focus countries – Uganda and Pakistan) during each phase of the evaluation.

The evaluation used the Reality Check Approach (RCA)⁸ to understand the realities and perspectives of people living in poverty and marginalisation. RCA was combined with ‘meso-level’ and organisational inquiry into the efforts of diverse actors – notably the local partners of SFOs – to strengthen civil society and create enabling conditions for change.

The study explored the *theories of change, cooperation strategies, intervention logics and practices of SFOs and LPOs* in relation to *the realities and perspectives of people living in poverty*. Using a mix of methods, the evaluation assessed the Swedish CS strategy as implemented by SFOs and LPOs, considering coherence across the various levels of cooperation – including people living in poverty, SFOs and their local, national and international partners, and the Swedish CS strategy itself. This was not an evaluation of the performance or effectiveness of specific CSOs.

Comparing perspectives ‘from below’ with the strategies and approaches of these organisations, the evaluation assessed the *relevance, alignment and feasibility* of the Swedish CS strategy. It inferred the *plausible contributions* of Swedish support to creating enabling conditions for people to improve their lives. It identified opportunities for achieving greater capacity and alignment so that the prospects of achieving results within the strategy are increased. Understanding how change and *human rights based development* are perceived and supported by different actors, and how they align with the realities, perspectives and strategies of people living in poverty and marginalisation, is the central focus of this evaluation.

⁸ The Reality Check Approach (RCA) involves researchers living with families in communities for visits that last several days and are repeated periodically, in order to gain an understanding of the lives and perspectives of people living in poverty and marginalisation. Further details can be found in the Synthesis Report Section 2 and Annex 5, and <http://reality-check-approach.com/>

1.2 SWEDISH CIVIL SOCIETY POLICY AND STRATEGY

According to the *Policy for Support to Civil Society in Developing Countries within Swedish Development Cooperation*⁹, Swedish development cooperation aims to support “a vibrant and pluralistic civil society in developing countries that contributes effectively, using a rights-based approach, to reducing poverty in all its dimensions” and to create conditions that will “enable people living in poverty to improve their lives.”

The Swedish CS policy is made operational by the Swedish CS strategy¹⁰, which shares its aims, but also has two additional objectives:

Enhanced capacity of civil society actors in developing countries to apply a rights-based approach in their roles as collective voices and organisers of services.

*Enhanced democratisation and increased respect for the human rights of poor and discriminated people.*¹¹

Swedish cooperation’s HRBA is guided by four main principles: participation, accountability, transparency and non-discrimination:

The human rights based approach puts people who are poor first and helps development cooperation to better take into account the views of men, women, children and young people living in poverty. These approaches provide a clearer picture and better knowledge of local power structures in the provinces and sectors where Sida works. The human rights based approach is primarily a method of working, a ‘how’.

The human rights based approach encompasses the central elements of democracy, good governance and human rights, equality between women and men,

⁹ Government Offices of Sweden, (2009b), *Pluralism: Policy for Support to Civil Society in Developing Countries within Swedish Development Cooperation*, <http://www.government.se/content/1/c6/13/13/60/8c589318.pdf>. This is referred to henceforth as ‘the Swedish CS policy’. This policy was replaced in March 2014 by the *Aid Policy Framework - The Direction of Swedish Aid*. (Government Offices of Sweden, Government Communication 2013/14:131)

¹⁰ Government Offices of Sweden (2009a) *Strategy for Support via Swedish Civil Society Organisations 2010–2014*, Stockholm: Sida (UF2009/28632/UP, 10 September 2009). We refer to this strategy as the ‘Swedish CS strategy’. The strategy has been extended to 2015

¹¹ Government Offices of Sweden (2009a), *Op. cit.*, p.4.

and rights of the child. In combination with the human rights based approach, development cooperation shall be pervaded by the perspectives of the poor.

Sida has chosen to work with these principles as a starting point for both the human rights based approach and the perspectives of the poor. The principles constitute a basis for analysis and assessment and a common basis for dialogue, cooperation and follow-up. The human rights based approach shall strengthen individual empowerment, that is, the human right of individuals to influence their own situation and development.¹²

In Swedish cooperation, poverty is understood to be “a condition where people are deprived of the freedom to decide over their own lives and shape their future. Lack of power and choice and lack of material resources form the essence of poverty. Given that poverty is dynamic, multidimensional and context specific a holistic analytical approach is advocated.”¹³

These principles and definitions shape expectations about what should be changing if poverty is to be reduced and human rights are to be realised, and imply *theories of change and action* for organisations seeking to fulfil the aims of Swedish development cooperation. Understanding how these theories are perceived and supported by different actors, and to what degree they align with the realities, perspectives and change strategies of people living in poverty, is the central focus of this evaluation. Sweden is concerned with democratic, social, economic, environmental and civic change in favour of people living in poverty and marginalisation. For such changes to happen, it supports civil society actors to enhance meaningful forms of participation, transparency and accountability in relation to government, to contribute to creating the conditions for economic growth, to work towards gender equality, and to overcome other aspects of discrimination and marginality. Sweden promotes social cohesion through supporting effective interfaces between different social, cultural, religious, political and ethnic groups.

Sweden gives particular attention to groups that are discriminated against on grounds of ethnic origin, religion or other belief, disability, age, gender, sexual orientation, or transgender identity or expression. As such, Sida promotes capacity development for CSOs with similar priorities, emphasising a set of domains in which changes, including shifts in power relations and rights, are to be supported and anticipated.

¹² Sida (2012) *Results for Justice and Development: Report on Sida's Results on Democracy, Human Rights and the Human Rights Based Approach*, Stockholm: Sida

¹³ Sida (2002) *Perspectives on Poverty*, Stockholm: Sida

The Swedish CS strategy emphasises some aspects which this evaluation does not directly address, in particular the principles of aid effectiveness, which include donor harmonisation, predictability, long-term support, alignment with partner systems and procedures, and increasing the share of the local partner in core and programme support. The evaluation does however address the strategy's aim of seeing CSOs acting as the effective and representative voice of poor and marginalised groups, and enablers of good quality and fairness in provision of services such as health and education. This aim informs decisions about how support through the programmes of SFOs is directed and aligned, and underpins the *results orientation* of this evaluation.

1.3 FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

With reference to the Terms of Reference (ToRs), the Inception Report and the Swedish CS strategy, this evaluation aimed:

- To identify the priorities and perceptions of people living in poverty and marginalisation concerning the enabling conditions they need to improve their lives, and perceived changes in these conditions.
- To explore what the HRBA and its guiding principles mean to people living in poverty and marginalisation, and to civil society actors implementing the Swedish CS strategy.
- To infer the plausible contribution and the alignment, relevance and feasibility of SFOs and LPOs to creating the enabling conditions for people to improve their lives.¹⁴

The evaluation framework combined power analysis with a multidimensional perspective on poverty and vulnerability. The four principles of an HRBA were used as the primary lens for understanding the *theories of change and action* used by SFOs and LPOs to implement the Swedish CS strategy. To understand if the strategy is *relevant, aligned and feasible*, we posed the following broad questions:

- *Relevance – are the programmes, approaches and theories of change of the SFOs and LPOs relevant to people's priorities and perceptions of the changes that would enable them to improve their lives?*
- *Alignment – are the programmes, approaches and theories of change of the SFOs and LPOs aligned with the strategies of multiple actors at different levels, including actions being taken by local people themselves, to create enabling conditions to improve their lives?*

¹⁴ Adapted from *The Inception Report*, May 2013, p.10

- *Feasibility – are the programmes, approaches and theories of change of the SFOs and LPOs feasible in terms of their plausible contributions (and in relation to what other actors are contributing) to creating enabling conditions for people to improve their lives?*¹⁵

1.4 EVALUATION QUESTIONS

As this was a learning process evaluation, the questions evolved during the inception phase as methods and a sampling approach were developed and piloted.

The ToRs called for a qualitative, participatory, mixed methodology. Rather than attributing specific impacts to specific actors, the team's methods and sampling approach were designed to examine *relevance*, *alignment* and *feasibility*, and to establish the *plausible contributions* of Sida support to civil society. This focus required a purposive and non-probabilistic sampling method, and a reframing of the research questions as follows:

1. What are poor people's perceptions of the changes taking place, or not, in the enabling conditions needed to improve their living conditions – with regard to each key issue (e.g. workers' rights, young people's livelihoods)?
2. What actors, including the Swedish CSOs and their partners, can plausibly be inferred to be contributing positive changes in the enabling conditions?
3. What does a human rights-based perspective mean to people living in poverty and marginalisation?
4. What is the relevance, alignment and feasibility of the theory of change, strategies and interventions of the Swedish CSOs and their partners?
5. What plausible contribution can be inferred to the role of CSO capacity development and enhancement in the context, and in relation to the key issue?
6. (a) What are the theories of change and strategies of Swedish CSOs and their partners? (b) What do the four human rights principles of participation, non-discrimination, transparency and accountability mean in their practice, in the context of the key issue?

This report is presented in seven sections, including the present introduction and background as Section 1. Section 2 gives a brief overview of recent events in Nicaragua, some key background to civil society in Nicaragua and a summary of Sweden's support. Section 3 describes the methodological process. Section 4 describes our key findings from the reality checks (RCs) on a community level, through the lo-

¹⁵ *Synthesis Report, Round 1, January 2014, p.20*

cal/national and SFO meso levels. Section 5 analyses these findings through the lens of the HRBA in terms of the plausible contribution of Swedish CSOs and their partners to the overall aims of the strategy including building capacities among people living in situations of poverty and marginalisation and among civil society actors. This section integrates observations from the learning workshops. Section 6 presents the final conclusions of the research in terms of the current relevance, alignment and feasibility of the strategy, and Section 7 presents recommendations. These are followed by a series of Annexes that give wider background information.

2 Country and Organisational Context¹⁶

2014 was a critical year for Nicaragua.¹⁷ On 28 January, the Nicaraguan Congress ratified a reform allowing indefinite presidential re-election and the successful election of a candidate in the first round of voting with a simple majority, thus eliminating the second round of voting.¹⁸ This reform, and the prolongation of the current Supreme Electoral Council that has legally ended its mandate, facilitates President Daniel Ortega's continuation in the presidency.¹⁹

On 2 March 2014, regional elections were held across the Caribbean. While these resulted in a first-time majority for the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (*Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*, FSLN) on both autonomous regional councils, the elections were marred by protests over their lack of transparency. For the first time in history, the vote count was centralised in Managua rather than in the two Caribbean coastal cities of Bilwi and Bluefields, and no information was provided by electoral district and by polling station as required by law; other anomalies were denounced by Caribbean coastal organisations and parties.

Shortly after, on 8 March in Managua, the International Women's Day march by the independent women's and feminist movements was blocked by riot police.²⁰ They were protesting what they saw as setbacks in their rights. Women are concerned about the total ban on and criminalisation of abortion, as well reforms to the Law on Violence Against Women. These reforms introduce mediation in cases of violence against women along with new legal regulations which reduce the legal classification of femicide as a misdemeanour belonging to the private sphere, rather than its classification as a public crime that anyone can denounce. The regulations also establish community advisor councils—made up of religious leaders, family promoters and the

¹⁶ See Annex 2 for the general context in Nicaragua and for specific key issues from the Round 1 report.

¹⁷ Based on a review of *Revista envío* 2014, national newspapers *El Nuevo Diario* and *La Prensa*, among other sources.

¹⁸ This had already been made almost untenable by the 2006 pact between Daniel Ortega and ex-President Arnoldo Aleman who was imprisoned for a period on corruption charges. On 16 January 2009, the Criminal Law Chamber of the Nicaraguan Supreme Court lifted Aleman's 20-year sentence for corruption.

¹⁹ At the moment Ortega is in his third (and second consecutive) term, thanks to a 2010 Supreme Court ruling that enabled his candidature in violation of Article 147 of the Constitution.

²⁰ <http://www.laprensa.com.ni/2014/03/09/nacionales/185865-represion-contra-mujeres-en-su-dia>

Cabinets of the Family – for women who denounce violence. At the time of writing one of these councils has recommended marrying a young girl to her rapist²¹

The *Index of Economic Freedom*²² reports that over the last year Nicaragua has made “significant improvements in investment freedom and the control of government spending, [which is] offsetting declines in labour freedom and freedom from corruption”.²³ On 5 July 2014, Wang Jing’s China-based private company HKND began a 5-year project to build an interoceanic canal, which will cut through indigenous territories of the Atlantic and Nicaragua’s largest freshwater lake. Despite Wang’s announcement that “the canal will serve to bring development and prosperity”, there are increasing protests by the communities whose land is to be expropriated or affected by this route. The canal project also includes the creation of a giant dam and artificial lake in the Southern Caribbean region covering 400 km², the largest of its size in the country’s history. By December, the physical work was launched to a wave of vociferous protests along the route, resulting in actions by security forces and the imprisonment (and later release) of some protest leaders. At the same time, the development of the US\$280 million dollar Tumarín hydroelectric project is advancing in the Caribbean, with a consortium of Brazilian companies working with Nicaraguan government investment, and there are other extractive industries expanding in Nicaragua, such as B2Gold (previously Barrick Gold), a Canadian gold mining company. These developments have also faced protests.

The country’s agricultural sector has also had problems, due to disease and drought. The 2013 and 2014 coffee crops were seriously affected by a blight of fungal coffee rust (roya disease). Also, the supply of beans, a staple for the Nicaraguan diet, was also the subject of news items and protests from mid-year onwards, due to scarcity and soaring prices caused not only by widespread drought, but also the export of beans to outside markets.²⁴

In other news related to the environment, there was frequent and stronger than usual seismic activity since the Managua earthquake in April, including several events measuring 5–7 on the Richter scale. In association with the renewed earthquakes and tremors, several of the volcanoes along the Pacific region’s volcanic chain reactivated, especially San Cristóbal in the North Chinandega area. This year’s rainy season came very late, causing serious drought throughout the country, and October’s hurri-

²¹ Women and other civil society actors also objected to these regulations being developed in the President’s office and being passed to the National Assembly outside the legal time frame.

²² Annual guide published by *The Wall Street Journal* and The Heritage Foundation, a Washington think tank.

²³ <http://www.heritage.org/index/country/nicaragua>

²⁴ *Revista envío* No. 390. September 2014

cane season brought extremely heavy rains that resulted in a landslide in one of Managua's most poverty-stricken neighbourhoods, as well as in other towns and cities where rivers burst their banks and flooded urban and rural areas.

2.1 CIVIL SOCIETY AND CITIZENSHIP IN NICARAGUA

2.1.1 Brief characterisation of Nicaraguan civil society at present²⁵

A series of existing studies on civil society in Nicaragua²⁶ suggest that recent civil society history can be grouped into five broad periods: Pre-1979, 1979–1990, 1990–1996, 1997–2006 and 2006–present. Guadalupe Wallace²⁷ defines ‘civil society’ as: “all those organisations of a non-governmental non-profit nature, formed voluntarily to promote collective or public ends [that can be] differentiated from individual or private goals”.²⁸ She identifies organisations in five categories: cooperatives; trade unions; private sector organisations; non-governmental organisations (independent development organisations and other professional or member-based organisations with legal civil association status²⁹); and community organisations (grassroots or common cause groups, networks and movements, usually without legal status).

2.1.2 2006–2014

The re-election of Daniel Ortega's government signalled a welcome change for many people in the poorer sectors of the population, whose living standards and political influence had seriously declined under the previous three governments.³⁰ Also, the state developed selective relationships of coordination with local and national non-

²⁵ See Annex 3 for key historical references underlying the current context, and a brief characterisation of periods pre-1979 to 2006.

²⁶ Falisse, M. and Quintana, M. (2012) *Análisis Estratégico de los Actores No Estatales en Nicaragua*. European Union; Quiros, A. (2006) *La sociedad civil organizada en Nicaragua, composición y experiencia en la reducción de la pobreza*. KEPA Working Papers No. 9. Helsinki: KEPA; Borchevink, A. (2006) *A Study of Civil Society in Nicaragua*. Managua: NORAD/NUPI; Wallace, G. (2009) *Análisis del contexto de la sociedad civil en Nicaragua de: Estudio sobre las agencias holandesas y sus políticas de fortalecimiento de la sociedad civil en Nicaragua*, Managua: Ministerio de Asuntos del Exterior Holanda, <http://www.iob-evaluatie.nl/sites/iob-evaluatie.nl/files/deelstudie-maatschappijopbouw-en-gender-j.pdf>.

²⁷ Wallace (2009) *Ibid.*

²⁸ Wallace (2009) *Ibid.* p.7

²⁹ In Nicaragua, these organisations achieve legal status through the same body of law.

³⁰ During the campaign, Sandinista presidential candidate Herty Lewites, who according to polls was leading the race, suddenly died. An autopsy was never performed. His party, the Sandinista Renovation Movement, MRS (in alliance with the Movement to Recuperate Sandinista History), had made an alliance with the Autonomous Women's Movement. Faced with this, the FSLN declared itself as 'pro-life' and made a public pact with the Catholic and some Evangelical churches in order to ban and criminalise abortion.

governmental organisation (NGO) development programmes, based on an integrationist concept of joint work with those it considered its allies and a tendency to create totalising forms of citizen representation. The creation of the Citizens Participation Councils (*Consejos de Participación Ciudadana, CPC*)³¹ and Citizens' Participation Cabinets (*Gabinete de Poder Ciudadano, GPC*)³² as structures loyal to the government party, and through which national state programmes are channelled, indicates the re-emergence of earlier patterns in which differences between the State and organisations representing citizens are blurred. Because of this, during the current period, Nicaragua has seen progressively less autonomy for the NGO community and for independent social movements. In spite of this, given the country's associational history, there is still a vibrant, highly diverse group of organisations (NGOs, cooperatives and others), networks and movements focusing on a broad range of political advocacy issues including: women's and ethnic rights, civil and political rights, local development, health, youth issues, gender identity and sexual diversity, education, the economy, organic agriculture and the environment. Since the late 1990s, there has been a gradual emergence of new political actors including initiatives for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights; small non-party affiliated expressions of the student movement; independent political art, literature, theatre, performance, graffiti and younger generation protest singer-songwriters; and, recently, protest movements against extractive industries and the canal project. A number of these actors and organisations – especially those more highly organised in networks and movements, but also young people and old age pensioners involved in spontaneous actions – have come into sharp conflict with government policies and positions since 2007, arguing that they violate the Constitution and citizens' rights. Some recent confrontations have ended in police repression and violent reprisals from FSLN sympathisers and municipal governments in Managua and elsewhere. The atmosphere of violence, especially at the local level, is not only reducing space for political opposition, but is also threatening the very existence of independent civil society. Local initiatives linked to independent organisations and movements have been blocked unless they develop organisational links with party structures. This is now coming to a head with the canal project.

³¹ Now called Councils for the Family, Health and Life (CFSV). See Stuart, R. (2009) *Consejos del Poder Ciudadano y la gestión pública* Managua: CEAP/OAS, www.oas.org/juridico/spanish/mesicic3_nic_consejos.pdf

³² Now called the Cabinet for the Family, Health and Life (GFSV).

2.2 SWEDISH COOPERATION IN NICARAGUA AND ITS SUPPORT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY³³

2.2.1 Current Swedish support for civil society in Nicaragua through Swedish civil society organisations

At present Nicaraguan civil society partner organisations are supported and strengthened in a funding relationship with the Swedish civil society organisations (CSOs) involved in the Swedish CS strategy. These partners are CSOs that include local, regional and national NGOs, coordinating bodies, networks and movements, academic institutions, cooperatives, trade unions and churches.

Table 1: Thematic areas covered by the Swedish civil society strategy

Key issue areas	Specific issues identified
Emergency aid and disasters	<i>Emergency relief, subsistence food production, disaster prevention/mitigation, risk reduction and management</i>
Climate/environment	<i>Climate change including drought, climate justice, eco-sustainable development, alternative energy</i>
Livelihoods	<i>Ecological and organic agriculture, rural markets, production chains, entrepreneurship and market insertion, agro-industry, organisational representation as producers (women and men) and networks</i>
Basic resources	<i>Food security/sovereignty, water and participation, access to services</i>
Health	<i>HIV-AIDS prevention and attitudes, reproductive health and community strategies, sexual and reproductive rights, social psychology, mental and emotional health</i>
Education	<i>Literacy, ethnicity and gender in education, equality for people with disabilities, the environment, educational rights and alternative educational models</i>
Citizenship and democracy	<i>Advocacy: participation strategies, alliance-building, social movements</i>
Gender	<i>Women's rights and citizenship, empowerment, non-violence, masculinity, organisation and media, gender mainstreaming</i>
Youth and children	<i>Citizenship rights, children's rights, youth at risk and gangs, violence, drug abuse, personal and organisational development, networking and inter-institutional coordination</i>

³³ See Annex 4 for an overview of Sida's history of support for civil society in Nicaragua

People with disabilities	<i>Organisational strengthening and democracy, legal and human rights, service access, sign language</i>
Indigenous peoples' rights	<i>Autonomy, territorial rights and governance, indigenous solidarity in Central America</i>
Cooperativism	<i>Self-management, business/labour and competitive capacities, exports, production, fair trade, gender and organisational strengthening, housing, self-help, finance and credit</i>
Labour and community rights	<i>Organisational development for trade unions, neighbourhood movement, recreation, leadership, migration</i>
Churches	<i>Institutional strengthening, strategic planning, church advocacy and alliances, ecumenical networks.</i>

3 Methodology and Process

3.1 METHODOLOGY

In this section we outline key aspects of the methodology, which need to be understood for engaging with the evaluation's findings, analysis and conclusions. The methodology evolved through the tendering process, the inception phase and two rounds of field work, giving rise to much discussion, and some doubts and differences in understanding.³⁴ Here we provide a brief overview of how our methods and sampling processes developed during the course of the evaluation³⁵. Nicaragua was one of three countries selected by Sida before the tender award. The evaluation was conducted in nine 'sites', three per country, selected to represent a diverse set of the key issues, population groups and partner organisations covered by the Swedish CS strategy.

The ToRs for the evaluation called for a qualitative, participatory, mixed methodology that would combine the RCA with other methods. RCA involves researchers immersing themselves in the daily realities of people living in poverty, in order to understand their lives and perspectives. Given the original research questions presented in the TORs, the evaluation team tendered a research design combining RC visits at the household and community levels with 'meso-level' research and 'organisational inquiries' to document the theories of change and practices of actors at the local, national and international levels. These meso-level and organisational inquiries focused primarily (but not exclusively) on LPOs and SFOs, and sought to establish how Sida's support to CSOs made plausible contributions to achieving the objectives of the Swedish CS strategy.

An evaluation team of three to four researchers in each country conducted fieldwork, with one person leading the RC visits, meso-level studies, organisational inquiries and analysis for each site. The teams were trained and methods tested during the inception phase (July 2012–January 2013); the *Inception Report* formed the foundation for the two rounds of fieldwork (March–September 2013 and March–September

³⁴ For example, there have been differences of opinion between the commissioner of the evaluation and the evaluation team about the criteria for site selection.

³⁵ A full explanation of the methodology and its validity is provided in the Global Synthesis Report, Annex 5.

2014)³⁶. Fieldwork and subsequent analysis, validation and learning, was conducted as follows:

- *Pilot and Round 1 RCs* (four to six days each in Nicaragua) were conducted in one community per site. Each RC involved the researcher staying with a family, observing and interacting with household members, neighbours and a wide range of people in the community, taking detailed notes, and making preliminary analysis. Once the homestays were completed, the information gathered was shared within the team and the analysis developed collectively. These initial findings informed the focus of the meso-level and organisational inquiries.
- *Meso-level inquiries* involved semi-structured interviews with civil society, state and other actors at the local and national levels, including LPOs and networks supported by SFOs. SFO representatives or their intermediaries were interviewed in countries where they were present; where they were not, they were interviewed by Skype or in Stockholm. Organisational documents were collected and reviewed.
- *Round 2 RCs* (two to four days each in Nicaragua) followed the same pattern as the first round, and were conducted with the same families and communities in order to build a deeper understanding and to observe any changes over time.
- *Organisational inquiries* with selected LPOs per site (two local and one national level) were carried out in the second round, in recognition of a need for more detailed information about their theories of change and interventions. The team used qualitative research methods including semi-structured interviews, observation of activities, conversation with beneficiaries and allies and observation of the daily activities of LPO staff.
- *Analysis* of findings was carried out after both rounds of fieldwork, in face-to-face workshops and during report drafting by each country team, in synthesis workshops involving the lead country researchers and other country research team members, and, to engage stakeholders, in validation and learning events.
- *Validation and learning events* were held in all three countries after the second round of fieldwork, and in Stockholm with representatives from civil society, LPOs, SFOs, Sida and Swedish Embassies. These events were vital in

³⁶ RC research from the pilot process onwards involved on-going conversations with 33 key sources (whose stories contributed to the narratives), another 176 people (including community leaders, neighbours, family members and others in the community and/or surrounding communities), and the observation of five community activities. Meso-level research in Nicaragua included: 94 structured and semi-structured interviews (with LPOs, SFOs, beneficiaries, allied organisations and thematic experts), a desk study of 51 relevant documents, three appreciative inquiries with selected partner organisations, a validation workshop of the first round report with selected SFOs and LPOs, and two in-country reflection and learning events with SFOs, LPOs and other Nicaraguan civil society actors.

feeding back interim findings, seeking clarifications and corrections from key informants, and deepening the analysis. Drafts were reviewed by Sida, the PAG and the SFO methods network, and then revised by the evaluation team.

- *Quality assurance*, following the standards of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, has been provided by Professor David Lewis, University of London, an experienced anthropologist and RCA practitioner.

3.2 SITE SELECTION

Table 2 is a summary of the site selection approved by Sida for Nicaragua in the inception phase, with some updating on the basis of Rounds 1 and 2. SFOs and LPOs shown in bold were the priority focus, while the others listed in the tables were involved as interviewees or as participants in dialogue and learning events. Discontinued programmes or partners are indicated where known.

Table 2: Nicaragua: Selected key issues, SFOs, LPOs and sites, by country

Reality check #	Key issues	Swedish framework organisations	Local partner organisations	Geographic sites
RC1	Indigenous and Afro-descendent rights; <i>Other issues: gender and youth economic rights; governance and power; education</i>	Diakonia	CENIDH, CEDEHCA, CEJUDHCAN, CEPREV, CEIMM, IPADE, Wangky Maya, CCER, RMCV, Iglesia Morava	North Atlantic Autonomous Region
RC2	Food security and sovereignty <i>Other issues: trauma and violence; health and the environment; migration; gender and young women; citizen participation and leadership</i>	Church of Sweden (via Lutheran World Federation) We Effect	Local: Asociación Joven Siglo XXI, ADEES, Proyecto Miriam National: Centro Humboldt, Foro ACT , Iglesia Luterana, AMNLAE, UNAG, CMR, FEMUPROCAN Local: Women's Cashew Production Cooperative (discontinued) Regional: PECOSOL (discontinued)	North Pacific
RC3	People with disabilities and access to education <i>Other issues: mobility, access and autonomy (rural/urban); economy, sexuality and gender; recreation; organisation and representation</i>	My Right	FECONORI, OCN-M, ASCN	Managua

3.2.1 Selection criteria

The team used purposive or selective sampling – a common technique in mixed-method qualitative research designs – to select respondents for the evaluation. The main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on the characteristics of a population that are relevant to the research questions. As the questions in the evaluation ToRs were designed to assess the *alignment, relevance* and *feasibility* of the support provided to CSOs through the Swedish CS strategy, we needed to purposively sample the sources that would give us the best insights, seeking out people affected by the issues that the Swedish CS strategy and SFOs address. If the evaluation had been focussed on as-

sessing the impact of specific projects or organisations, a probability sampling approach – taking a statistically representative random sample of those benefitting from Sida-supported projects – would have been needed instead. Purposive sampling methods are discussed further in Annex 5.

Given the use of purposive sampling, judgements about the validity of the evaluation findings must take into account whether data was drawn from a set of individuals, actors and organisations purposively sampled to comprise those affected by the issues that the Swedish CS strategy addresses. This set includes not only people living in areas of direct intervention, but also those affected through advocacy, watch-dog, policy-influencing and mobilisation activities.³⁷ Given that a probability sampling approach was not used, judgements about the validity of the evaluation findings cannot be made on the basis of whether data was drawn from a representative sample of the population of each country, site or project, or on the three countries being representative of all countries where the Swedish CS strategy operates.

3.3 ANALYSIS, VALIDATION AND LEARNING

The evaluation set out to be a learning process, which the evaluation team pursued in a context of finite resources and wide-ranging stakeholder expectations. We recognise that the outcome is a trade-off between competing priorities. The two validation and learning events held in Nicaragua (two days of workshops in June and one day in November 2014) were designed to be the main learning moments for key stakeholders who participated in interaction with the research team. The evaluation team designed and co-facilitated customised processes involving presentation of findings followed by focused, small-group discussions of particular aspects of what had been presented. The intention of these processes was to validate – or complement, or correct – researchers' interpretations and analysis. They were also designed to deepen understanding of the methodology, and stimulate reflection and learning from the findings in ways that could enhance participants' practice as researchers, development professionals, civil society activists and advocates³⁸.

³⁷ *Evaluation Terms of Reference*, p. 8

³⁸ See Annex 5 for details on the learning workshops

4 Key Findings

The RC studies in all three sites is concluded with the selection of 16 final narratives that reflect the development of the situations in the households and communities, covering key thematic issues and other aspects arising from the complex stories that have unfolded in each place. This section includes summaries of three key narratives per site, a synthesis of the multiple dimensions of poverty found, and a summary of people's strategies for survival – with their perceptions about the enabling conditions for change. This is followed by the meso-level and appreciative inquiry findings about the theories of change and logics of intervention by partners involved in the Swedish CS strategy.

4.1 KEY SUMMARISED NARRATIVES BY SITE

In this round, the team revisited the three RC sites to deepen the understanding and detail of people's stories, and to observe any changes in comparison to last year's visit.³⁹ The first RC sought to learn from people with disabilities (PwD) living in a marginalised urban community. Some of the issues that arose from the narratives are PwD's difficult access to formal education; their strategies for income generation and economic survival; the differential access to education and health for PwD in urban versus rural contexts; the prevalence of clientelist networks through para-party structures to gain access to benefits and services; the relevance of trauma and different coping strategies, such as religion; and the importance of leisure and sports as strategies to overcome discrimination and strengthen self-esteem.

The second RC took place in an indigenous community in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region. Some of the issues that appear in the narratives are issues of local governance, leadership, lack of transparency and accountability and corruption; territorial conflicts in a complex setting characterised by the presence of mestizo⁴⁰ settlers, inter- and intra-community conflicts, as well as the economic exploitation of natural resources; economic survival strategies, with a prominence of agriculture; the difficult access to secondary and university education; and gender discrimination in community leadership and decision-making spaces.

³⁹ Fuller versions of these narratives can be found in Annex 6.

⁴⁰ Mestizo is a Spanish word meaning mixed race and here refers to Spanish speaking settlers probably from the Pacific regions of the country.

The third RC took place in an isolated rural community within the North Pacific. Some of the issues that arose were food security and sovereignty; migration and youth; the unequal sexual division of labour in a rural setting; issues of violence in general, but in particular of violence against women; the role of magical beliefs as a coping strategy; issues of citizen participation in a community development project; and the role of para-party structures and non-accountable leaderships in the reproduction of clientelist networks, especially relevant in the distribution of governmental programmes.

4.2 MULTIDIMENSIONALITY OF POVERTY AND MARGINALISATION

The RCs across all sites, including two distinct sites from the pilot study, offer abundant evidence of a series of key dimensions of poverty and marginalisation. Most of these arise from the multiple and combined effects of histories of exclusion and disempowerment, in which the theme areas and group identities defined by external actors intersect with the actual particularities of people's lives in their socio-political, economic, cultural and natural environments.

Monetisation of livelihoods: basic subsistence needs cannot be satisfied without money, and increasing problems of conflict, exclusion, food insecurity and the vulnerability of livelihoods.

Across all sites, people's access to health and well-being is severely limited by the monetary cost of transport, basic goods and medicines. This is especially true for those living in more isolated rural areas. Having money (or not) determines the quality of goods and services they can access. In this sense, monetisation undermines people's basic human rights. Our findings also show how migrant remittances and diverse market pressures can drive the deterioration and disappearance of cultural strategies and practices for subsistence, such as autonomous food production, bartering and sharing that remain expressions of traditional solidarity economies. Consumerism tends to: increase people's perceived need for goods and services that require money; provoke negative changes in the food and nutritional culture (with the introduction of bought fast foods and carbonated drinks); and create greater indebtedness and dependency, which undermine the ability or interest of families to maintain food production cycles in rural areas. On the Caribbean coast, the increased exploitation of forests to supply large forestry companies is growing as an economic strategy by communities and their members; this is leading to the destruction of the environment and overuse of resources, and has promoted increased conflicts within and between families, as well as new inter-community and inter-territorial conflicts. The monetisation of local economies also generates and feeds corruption among traditional or established authorities within the communities, as well as in local, regional and national government structures; this leads to greater inequalities and exclusions. When families lack access to land, paid work is usually given to men; this widens the gender gap and further reduces women's status in the rural economy. Rural projects based on the

logic of rapid monetary gain over sustainability attract corruption, increase competition and resentment among community members, and may result in failures that undermine the potential of new leadership.

Unemployment and migration: emerging patterns of rupture and social deterioration, along with abandonment of traditional local productive systems.

Across the sites, the evidence indicates that education does not guarantee access to employment, especially for young women, PwD, and anyone facing obstacles because of marginalisation and/or discrimination. Migration, especially to other countries, is seen as a way in which people can have access to money in order to improve their lives, (short-term improvements through acquiring desirable goods and/or long-term through reinvestment in land and crops, renewable energy, etc.). Our findings show it can also produce indebtedness and deplete families' and communities' much-needed labour force. Migration produces social economic and emotional ruptures in the lives of families and communities, and it can expose people to the influence of gangs, organised crime and institutional violence. Young men and women in border areas are especially at risk of being trafficked for labour and sexual exploitation. The phenomenon of migration and the increasing contact with organised crime is 'normalising' criminal culture and extending the social acceptance of mafias, especially in the mass media. If and when migrants return from other countries with additional experience, knowledge and/or resources, and when this reinforces the family and community workforce, it can contribute to qualitative changes in the conditions of poverty and marginalisation. However it also creates alienation and instability, a desire for living in other circumstances and a rejection of rural ways of life.

Internal migration is a frequent occurrence due to the need for money and paid labour, and it has important negative impacts, similar to external migration. However, moving to the city can mean greater mobility, opportunities, and access to health, education and support services – especially for PwD, who tend to be much more isolated and marginalised in rural areas.

Absence of and/or decline in the quality of public services: where the privatisation and commercialisation of public services such as health, education, electricity and potable water may lead to them no longer being considered rights, but instead as commodities.

According to RC evidence, local and national state authorities are not responding to the basic health, educational and service needs of the more isolated rural communities, including health centres, ambulance services, medicines, schools, water and electricity. In some cases schools and health centres exist but are unstaffed or understaffed and/or have no basic furniture or equipment. This means that people with health problems in isolated communities run much higher risks and must pay to travel long distances in order to get medical attention. In addition, people are frequently not given proper information about their bodies, their health problems or the causes of

death of family members, and many are exposed to medical malpractice. Mental ill health continues to be stigmatised. There is evidence of major deficits in public mental health services in a population seriously affected by trauma and violence. There are some small-scale privatised services, mostly through NGOs.

Basic services for daily life, such as water, electricity, fuel for cooking, and tele-phones are mostly privatised. Where there is access to national services, people are exposed to indebtedness, sanctions and abuses by companies owned by multinationals or national investors, often running poor-quality services with little or no investment in infrastructure, and charging high costs relative to people's incomes. The state has deferred its responsibilities for services not covered by large private companies to external projects and/or communities themselves, including labour and financial resources.

Lack of access to education: *tendency towards privatisation and cutback in state budgets, low pay to teachers*

Public education is more accessible in urban and semi-urban areas, although the quality is poor, class sizes are high, and teachers are paid extremely low wages and receive insufficient support and training education. There is a general tendency towards privatisation and the payment for key services at public schools. In rural areas, especially in more isolated communities, there are very few teachers who are extremely low paid and forced to give multi-level classes in single classrooms. School buildings exist, but they are often not maintained and the climate (along with incidents due to climate change) contributes to the rapid deterioration of infrastructure, which ends up being underused and semi-destroyed. In all sites, we found families in which people see education and literacy as irrelevant to their well-being – or even prejudicial to their health. In the Caribbean, secondary education is also limited by the lack of bilingual systems. In both cases, there is a lack of ownership of the education system and its infrastructure, and this appears to be passed from one generation to the next. In rural areas, there is no access to specialised education, while in the city there is access but the organisations that offer educational services must assume responsibilities for all support services and for teaching, Braille, sign language etc. However, access to vocational course through the National Technological Institute (Instituto Nacional Tecnológico, INATEC) as a public institution is valued as positive.

Gender discrimination and violence: discrimination, exclusion, harassment, violation of basic rights and threat of femicide.

All sites show multiple examples of gender discrimination through strict sexual divisions of labour, women's and girls' unpaid and undervalued work, their exclusion or marginalisation from economic decision-making in the family, their lower status or, at worst, total exclusion from community decision-making spaces in which male decision-makers dominate. Gender hierarchies in families and the lack of women's knowledge about and control over their bodies, sexuality and reproductive capacities

all place women's health at risk. Women face social prejudices, which are even greater for those with intersecting discriminated identities – language; rural origins; ethnic, linguistic or racial identities; age; disability, etc. – that undermine the recognition of their capacities at all levels. Women with power and/or leadership are susceptible to stereotyping, ridicule and sabotage. Men also face bullying and homophobia aimed at reinforcing heterosexual norms and machismo as the only possible models for masculinity. The RCs show that all these forms of gender discrimination are legitimised by the media and by conservative cultural and religious traditions and practices, and they are enforced by the use of extreme violence. In the relatively short visits to the sites over time, the research team documented traumatic histories of war and extreme violence of all kinds, especially by men against women of all ages (exclusion, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, social isolation, economic deprivation, physical and psychological violence, attempted femicide, sexual abuse and rape) but also between men (physical violence, homophobia, sexual exploitation, gangs/organised crime, murder).

Discrimination and violence against PwD: violation of basic rights and barriers to basic welfare, personal, social and economic development

The RCs in all sites found abundant evidence of systematic discrimination against PwD. This was evident in urban areas and even more so in rural populations, which face greater levels of poverty, social marginalisation barriers to accessing opportunities and services, and violations of their basic human rights. This discrimination takes the form not only of social exclusion but also paternalism. The research team also documented how discrimination has an extended effect on the family (stigma, the lack of basic services and support), and this creates further obstacles in the struggle to improve living conditions for PwD and their families living in poverty.

Discrimination due to language and ethnic origin against Indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples

The RCs in Caribbean communities show evidence of the marginalisation faced by the Indigenous and Afro-descendent populations on the Caribbean coast. This is especially so for those in isolated rural areas, who face difficulties resolving their basic living conditions and achieving fundamental rights in areas such health, education, roads and transport, employment and telecommunications, among others. The RCs identified ways in which Caribbean communities face subtle and more overt forms of discrimination from the state through inequalities that affect people's opportunities to exercise their rights and citizenship, connected to historical racist and linguistic hierarchies based on differences between the Pacific and Caribbean regions and ethnic/linguistic differences. There is also evidence of inter-ethnic discrimination, in terms of the power dynamics arising at particular historical moments. Internal dynamics of power and discrimination inside ethnic groups and communities were very evident, including exclusive privileges based on economic and family status, nepotism and corruption, violence against women (especially domestic violence), abandonment

of responsibilities for children, women's exclusion from public office, and the use of Spanish as an instrument for exclusion, especially of women.

Psychological stress and vulnerability: depression, mental illness or trauma because of poverty, violence, disasters and wars.

A significant part of the population with whom the research team conversed – especially those facing greater levels of discrimination and violence – suffered from depression or resignation, ill-health, low self-esteem and low perception of their own capacities to generate individual and collective change. Across the RCs we perceived a lack of hope, which fed into feelings of disempowerment. Much of the coverage in the mass media also reflects and contributes to an atmosphere of fear and insecurity, cynicism, alienation and escapism. In addition to traumatic experiences of war and violence, people living in conditions of extreme poverty are more vulnerable to loss through accidents (loss of capacities, loved ones), environmental disasters (floods, drought, hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions) and emotional ruptures (through economic, political and interpersonal conflicts). Given the lack of other options, the population's resilience is often based on trying to 'forget'. However, the evidence indicates that the memory of these painful experiences continues to have repercussions in the form of cumulative grief, in the way people deal with conflict, in how relationships are structured and in people's own subjectivity, sense of self-worth and outlook on life. In spite of this, there are remarkable cases of positive resilience and self-improvement. The RCs reveal that some people use magical beliefs (elves, curses) as a way of giving meaning and resolution to negative experiences and illness. They also turn to organised religion (Catholicism, Protestantism and Evangelical Christian churches) as a refuge, a physical and psychological space of rest and a place to make sense of life and access support. Some use religion as a way of maintaining the hope that God will provide, or of resigning themselves to his will under difficult circumstances.

Leadership and socio-political relations: traditional and recent models for community organising reinforce relations of dependency that demobilise independent rights discourse, authentic participation and mobilisation of citizens.

Across the sites, people in the communities constantly refer to projects as 'coming' into the community from outside, through channels under the control of key leaders from the community and others, whom many denounce as practising corruption or nepotism. Many people with whom the research team engaged during fieldwork were either accustomed or felt forced to barter their loyalties and labour with the powerful (dominant families, land owners, political leaders etc.) in order to achieve benefits. While these benefits were often named as 'rights' they were not generally assumed as innate human rights principles but rather as entitlements or rewards in exchange for fulfilling certain requirements imposed by those in positions of power. In this loyalty-for-rights bartering relationship, there is evidence that people are exercising self-censorship for fear of marginalisation by those in positions of power, and the use of

insincerity or double-discourse serves as pragmatic way to access benefits and achieve basic rights. However some people criticise the tendency towards political expediency and away from basic ethical values; they see the reduction of space for participation as a form of control, and refer to the Constitution and its protection of the right to participate, be listened to and be elected.

Vulnerabilities: *to climate change, disasters and additional environmental factors contributing to food insecurity and health*

The communities on the Pacific Coast and near the capital city are extremely vulnerable to volcanic-seismic activity, and there is evidence that in some communities, their proximity to a large volcano is simply ignored. On the Caribbean Coast, despite people's experience of vulnerability to hurricanes, no one in the site community spoke of measures to prepare for future events. Yet people in rural areas are keenly aware of the vulnerability of their livelihoods to drought, unpredictable seasons and heavy rains. Other aspects mentioned – albeit not necessarily as vulnerabilities related to climate change and disaster risks – include: the fragility of housing; the weak infrastructure of roads; the lack of a health centre or any adequate response in ordinary emergencies; corrupt community leaders; gendered power relations; and the particular vulnerability of PwD. In one site there was ample evidence of the dangers of environmental contamination from gold mining and from agricultural chemicals. Experience with disasters included earthquakes, drought and flooding, destruction of crops and the loss of historic family livelihoods. In one site the community benefited from a post-hurricane humanitarian relief and developed a successful community project with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations to build new houses, with which they are very satisfied.

4.3 STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL AND PERCEPTIONS ABOUT ENABLING CONDITIONS FOR CHANGE

Resignation and conformity. Many of the people in the RC sites expressed that they had no expectations of change. The team documented ample evidence of conformity, passivity, dependency, apathy, mistrust, conflict avoidance and resigned pragmatism as strategies for surviving difficult situations. This includes bowing to figures with hierarchical authority in the family and the community. However, underlying many attitudes of conformity were hidden criticisms, complaints and genuine non-conformity. Some people openly admitted feigning loyalty for instrumental purposes to access benefits or achieve advances that are, in fact, basic rights.

In terms of gender, most women who demonstrated these attitudes, especially older women and those experiencing violence, saw economic dependency on men as their only option for survival. Many younger women, although proportionally less than the older generation, visualised change only through marriage and had difficulty imagin-

ing themselves doing anything other than unpaid domestic work and childcare at home.

Hard work and self-reliance. The importance of people's own work in generating economic change in one's life was emphasised across all sites, and there was a general opinion that the state and governments are unreliable, and that one cannot depend on any external entity or project to provide enabling conditions to emerge from extreme poverty. This work may be directly in producing or transforming food for subsistence or as a way to earn money, and to improve living standards. Some families save money or become indebted in order for one of its members to migrate illegally by paying a 'coyote'. The RCs documented positive changes and great determination by one person with a disability, who saved money from their own work in order to buy land towards their aspirations for independent housing. Nevertheless, in most cases changes through self-reliant work were slow and represent middle- to long-term projects, which are also vulnerable to change in external circumstances.

Autonomy, interdependence and access to land. Historical strategies for survival in rural and indigenous communities include key practices of economic solidarity (among family members and among community members) such as sharing food, bartering, sharing community work and mutual reliance or interdependence. In the rural area of the Pacific site, people living in conditions of extreme poverty point to ownership of small-scale individual lands (5 manzanas⁴¹), independent control over livelihood, autonomous food production, and the use of locally adapted seeds as strategies for change and greater food sovereignty. Autonomy from the family and control over her own decision-making was also a key issue for one young woman with a disability, whose determination to achieve this allowed her great success and recognition, along with a supportive relationship in which her partner assumes half of the responsibility for childcare.

Education and training. While some families see little point in education, many people value academic studies and training as pathways to change, not just for the student but also for the family. Some informants have created improvements in their own and their families' lives through vocational and professional training and by apprenticing to learn a trade. Others focus collective efforts to cover costs and buy materials for young family members to study, with the assumption that access to secondary school and technical or university careers will bring better access to higher-paying employment – something that the evidence shows is a necessary but not always sufficient condition for employment among discriminated groups such as women and PwD.

⁴¹ 1 manzana = 0.704 hectares

Adult and young women in the rural Pacific site complained that girls who finish high school have few or no opportunities beyond marrying and having children. Access to education (specialised or further/higher education) required people from all three RC sites to move from rural to urban areas, either by travelling frequently or by permanently migrating to the city.

Access to cash. While access to money is difficult and problematic, many RC informants consider that change will only happen through money and commerce, by sowing cash crops, doing occasional work as migrant in the region, and selling natural resources as raw materials (e.g. gold and timber). In the Pacific, people expressed aspirations or have raised their economic and social status by creating small businesses, having access to consumer goods, and by migrating (themselves or family members) beyond the region to the United States or Spain.

Inclusive organisation with fairness and honesty among leaders. A minority of people in the RC sites referred to participation in organisations (as a geographical community or as collective representation) as a source or potential source of change. While many have serious criticisms of the current CPC (Consejos por la Vida y la Familia, CVF) structures as dominated by government party leaders and interests, participation in organised spaces has allowed some people access to gender training, specialised education, services and material benefits (government programmes and externally supported projects), along with greater social interaction. One person with a disability indicated that belonging to an organisation of PwD had given her a sense of belonging to a community.

Some key conditions for improvement mentioned by people across the sites are: the inclusion of the whole community in meetings; transparency in communication and information; adherence to ethics and values; an end to corruption, nepotism and *machismo*; the establishment of fairness according to need; the recognition of people's commitment; non-discrimination and gender equality; the election of honest leaders with independent criteria; greater access to knowledge about constitutional rights; respect for critical awareness and individual interpretation of politics and religion; and respect for the community by outside agents in resolving internal issues of leadership. Other key aspects mentioned were the preference for political dialogue as a mechanism for resolving conflicts, freedom from violence and freedom of expression.

Personal growth. Across the sites, personal growth – through participation in organisation (including leadership), education, gender rights and vocational training, sports, employment and travel – was seen to be important in generating a greater sense of self-esteem and confidence, especially among young women. In one case, a woman advanced personally, socially and economically by refusing to subordinate herself and daring to confront family and social prejudices about her sexuality, partners and the possibility of having children. Others stressed the importance of taking up challenges to traditional gender roles, taking control of their own lives and becoming examples for their community.

4.4 LOCAL PARTNER ORGANISATIONS: THEORIES OF CHANGE AND LOGICS OF INTERVENTION

The following section gives an account the results of our appreciative inquiry with selected LPOs involved in the Swedish CS strategy.

4.4.1 LPO: Organisation of people with disabilities

Theory of change. At the centre of the theory of change of this organisation, as a member of a national federation of PwD organisations, is for “people with disability to become the owners” of their organisations and “our own spokespeople”.⁴² In particular, this organisation has prioritised access to education as the main factor for discrimination and marginalisation faced by its PwD constituency, based on the assumption that greater access to education will enable greater social integration of its members and increase their ability to demand recognition and fulfilment of their rights. This is part of a wider theory of change that places importance on the personal strength and collective action of PwD in demanding and exercising their rights, and on a legal framework that defends and promotes these rights in society as law and through state policies.

Logic of intervention. This PwD organisation defines its logic of intervention as four strategies:

- Membership development
- Political/policy advocacy
- Dissemination about the organisation
- Institutional development.

During the appreciative inquiry, three key issues were emphasised. The first was education. The organisation’s starting point was identifying the low level of schooling of PwD as the central problem of its constituency. A recent study claims that 44% of PwD in Nicaragua are unable to read or write, compared to 22% of the general population. In addition, people in the organisation explain that this situation is much worse in rural areas; since there is no access to education for disabled people, there is greater discrimination, social shame and over-protection by families which leads to extreme social isolation and the elimination of opportunities for personal develop.

⁴² Siles, F.(2014) *Taller Participativo de Validacion, Reflexión y Aprendizaje Mutuo Sabado*, IDS, OED/PARC, SIPU and Sida

The current commitment of this PwD organisation – along with the other organisations and their national federation, all of which are working within the Swedish CS strategy – is to inclusive education. This means that the greatest effort being made at present is in advocacy with the Ministry of Education (MINED). Although the Federation of PwD organisations has invested more in a strategy in relation to the blind, all federation members and partners of the SFO are involved in the inclusive education roundtable (Mesa de Educación Inclusiva, MEI), along with national NGOs, cooperation and development agencies, and the government. While the MEI has achieved important goals, it seems that over the last year it has been inactive due to the lack of interest by the Ministry.

In addition to its work in advocacy, the organisation also works on other components related to education. For example, it supports members by facilitating access to grants financed by the SFO consisting of support materials such as Braille boards, recorders and batteries. At present it is supporting 70 students. Another key component is the support for the sound library and Braille writing equipment. All of the students can ask for the free conversion of texts to audio format (a service used especially by university students) or to Braille (used mainly by pre-university students). The sound library has also been funded by the SFO. The national organisation also has a computer room equipped with headphones and screen reader software to facilitate information technologies and the Internet, and this room is mainly used by university students.

The second key issue in organisational documents and observed during the appreciative inquiry is *inclusion in the workforce*. The organisation's focus in achieving this is to work on professional and vocational training, based on the premise that the lack of inclusion is due to PwD's lack of preparation. However, it is clear from this research that a major problem also resides in the social conditions people face, and in society's lack of adaptation and integration. The main strategy for this aspect centres on giving access to training through agreements with the Ministry of Labour and the National Institute of Technology (Instituto Nacional Tecnológico, INATEC). Concretely, the *Ágora* programme of the Latin American Foundation of Spain's national organisation for the blind (Organización Nacional de Ciegos Españoles ,ONCE) has an agreement with INATEC for the integration of blind people into the workforce through which INATEC provides training and support in looking for work. This programme's aim for 2014 was for the government to take on 100% of its responsibilities. The *Ágora* programme has also promoted the inclusion of blind people into the workforce through agreements with tobacco companies from the Estelí area, and at present is also promoting the creation of micro-businesses. This is because the National Committee for the Blind (made up of the LPO and two more local organisations) has influenced a change in the programme, given evidence that there are well-educated and -trained blind people who require access to higher qualified employment than that offered by the tobacco companies.

The LPO has also made efforts to establish agreements with businesses to hire the visually impaired. Now that the Law on the Rights of People with Disabilities - (*Ley de los Derechos de las Personas con Discapacidad*) – which requires one in 50 employees to be a person with a disability – has finally been regulated, people in the organisation hope that the Ministry of Labour will comply with its responsibilities in ensuring that businesses respect the law. In terms of professional training, the organisation also has an agreement with a university specialised in Japanese medicine to ensure its members can take a 2-year diploma course in massage techniques.

The third key issue for the organisation and that was strongly represented in the RC site, is sports. As the LPO explained, work in this area has been seen as a way of promoting inclusion and integration, especially for young people. It is a way of motivating and increasing self-esteem. In sports, the LPO is promoting goalball – a team sport designed specifically for blind athletes – and there is a small team of chess players. The practice of goalball began in Nicaragua in the 80, when a foreign embassy donated some equipment. The LPO was one of the first to form a team. There are now 26 teams that participate in the national league. In 2001, several organisations formed an alliance to create the Nicaraguan Paralympic Federation (*Federación Paralímpica de Nicaragua, FEDCOPAN*). They achieved reforms in the Sports Law and a budget from the government for the Federation. Presently, the government gives FEDCOPAN a 400,000 córdobas (less than US\$15,000) annual budget. International cooperation agencies do not support sports, but the Federation has received funds from the International Paralympic Committee. Nicaragua is the strongest country in goalball in Central America, but this seems to be due to the fact that blind people are less integrated into the workplace and have more time to dedicate to sports activities. For example, in the north of the country where there is now more employment in the tobacco factories, the number of people participating in goalball has declined.

There are other issues that the LPO is beginning to address with the intention of building them into the new strategic plan: gender, the environment, and work with children and teenagers. In terms of gender, and thanks to the support of the SFO, the organisation now has an institutional gender policy. Gender equality is included as a cross-cutting theme in the strategic plan that will end this year, but now the organisation hopes to incorporate it in a more direct way. There is also the Gender Equality Commission (previously called the Women's Commission). This year's plan included revising campaign materials in order to eliminate sexist language. Members have also received training on sexual health and sexuality in coordination with women's organ-

isations such as Ixchen and Si Mujer.⁴³ In relation to the environment, the SFO has facilitated training with the aim of replicating this model. An environmental network has been created, but more alliances need to be made. Finally, in terms of children and adolescents, the organisation has detected a weakness in that currently it works predominantly with adults; it hopes to change direction with its new plan to incorporate a focus on youth.

In spite of not appearing as a theme area as such, there was abundant evidence during the appreciative inquiry of the importance of the organisation as a space for blind and visually impaired people to socialise. Everyone who comes to visit is offered coffee. In the entrance there are four rocking chairs and a sofa in the reception area. There are almost always people chatting and resting in these areas. This is not a focus of their work, but the Board of Directors is aware of the importance of offering this space for members.

Positive examples. This organisation for PwD, along with other PwD organisations and members of the Federation supported by the SFO, achieved important successes in the field of access to education for PwD. Through their participation in the MEI – a space in which National NGOs, international cooperation organisations and the government are involved – these organisations have made important changes over the last few years. One of these has been the decision by the Ministry of Education to include 80 hours of training for all teachers on educational attention to students with disabilities as part of the teacher training curriculum. The Federation has developed a toolbox to accompany this process on education for PwD, with specific support materials for teachers.

Another achievement is that since 2011, work was begun through the MEI to update the instruments and registry system for the inclusive registration of students with disabilities in regular schools. As a result, a system and form for inclusive registration have been in use since 2012.

At the moment, as part of advocacy work with the state in favour of the recognition and promotion of inclusive education, work is being done to develop a reform of the General Education Law. During the appreciative inquiry, the researcher participated in a meeting held by the federation of PwD organisations, in which three Board members of the LPO participated. This meeting was to prepare the next day's presentation of the reform proposal to the National Assembly (equivalent of the parliament in Nicaragua). This proposal has been developed over the last few years under the

⁴³ Women's clinics that also have social outreach programmes.

leadership of the Federation. The reform aims, among other things, to ensure the specification of inclusive education in the law and to institutionalise the MEI.

The work being done in this direction emphasises the importance of the strategy for advocacy in public policy – not only for blind people, but also for the entire sector of PwD. Under the current government, openness to the rights of PwD has increased, and this window of opportunity has been seized by PwD organisations to achieve improvements in the legal framework that protects and promotes PwD's rights.

4.4.2 LPO: Organisation working on human rights and autonomy with the Caribbean Coast population

Theory of change. For this LPO, access to information and political organisation are central. The assumptions behind its strategies are that the members of the population need to know their rights and duties before they can strengthen their roles as individual and collective actors, with the aim of promoting positive change in their social arena and in public policy. The LPO's understanding is that the lack of information about rights limits people's political awareness and their possibility to modify social relations. They consider that the creation of new leadership with improved values is crucial for citizen participation. For this reason, the LPO develops educational campaigns and accompanies diverse organisational processes, such as the creation of leadership networks for young people.

Logic of intervention. This LPO, which works on human rights and autonomy, has the following strategies:

- Community education and organisation to generate awareness and grassroots mobilisation
- The defence of human rights and autonomous rights to ensure actions based on rights and the rule of law
- Political lobbying and policy advocacy to generate and institutionalise change.

The Caribbean Coast is a multi-ethnic region in which six different ethnic groups interact. Taking this into account, the organisation works with all cultural populations applying the principle of non-discrimination with an intercultural approach, both of which are crosscutting in the above strategies and in all issues addressed by the institution.

The LPO has also identified four overarching key issues that are relevant to its work. While these are presented as separate issues for methodological reasons, in practice they are interwoven in all of the work carried out by the LPO.

Child rights, it was explained during the appreciative inquiry, has been one of the most complex aspects to address because children are extremely vulnerable, yet their rights are invisible among the population and in the institutions. Workshops have been held with adults in the communities, but one colleague from the LPO pointed

out that there tends to be resistance in recognising situations of violence within the family, since many violent practices became normalised during the parents' own upbringing. In order to address this, meetings have been promoted with local community structures, as well as at municipal, regional and national levels. The aim of these meetings is to sensitise actors and advocate for change in, for example, the reception and attention to cases of rape, sexual exploitation, discrimination and domestic violence. In meetings with the Ministry of Education, the LPO has worked in coordination to include human rights content in the primary school curriculum as a way to transmit these values from an early age.

Training for young leaders is a key area for this LPO. According to the last national census in 2005, approximately 70% of the Caribbean Coast population is under 30 years of age. This means that the inclusion of young people in the struggle for human rights becomes a highly relevant and strategic concern. The LPO is developing young people's capacities for leadership and is promoting their active participation in decision-making spaces in communities and institutions.

Violence against women is the third key issue flagged in the LPO's strategic plan. It recognises that even when laws include women's rights, there are insufficient conditions in their day-to-day context for these rights to be exercised. Both in the rural communities and in urban environments, cases of violence against women are rising, including domestic conflicts, adolescent pregnancies, rape and femicide. The LPO has established coordination with the Women and Children's Commission of the Autonomous Regional Councils, and the Women's and Children's Police Commissariats to develop an integrated strategy to address this problem and to guarantee, among other things, psycho-social care for victims of violence and support for the shelters that receive them. The LPO affirms that the situation that women are experiencing is under-registered, to a large extent as a consequence of women's position of social vulnerability. The LPO's female outreach staff say that the geographical distances involved are not the only limiting factor; a series of conditions also coincide to produce impunity for offenders and a sense of resignation among women.

The fourth key issue discussed during the appreciative inquiry is *autonomy* in the Caribbean Coast. The LPO understands this as representing a model for regional democracy with local perspectives, which means that the defence of human rights is associated with the consolidation of the autonomy process. Because of this, *rights education and community organising* are key strategies for strengthening the autonomy project. This perspective is supported by the organisation's theory of change, by focusing on capacity building, educating the population about rights and obligations, and creating awareness so that people can have more influence toward making necessary changes.

Positive examples. The LPO has made important contributions to the social fabric of the Caribbean Coast. One contribution has been the training of young leaders from rural and urban areas to influence their environment and defend a range of human

rights. One of their greatest achievements has been in accompanying the creation of the Movement of Youth Establishing New Horizons (Jovenes Estableciendo Nuevos Horizontes, JENH), which currently has more than 500 members in 13 municipalities in both Autonomous Regions (Región Autónoma del Atlántico Norte, RAAN and Región Autónoma del Atlántico Sur, RAAS). As part of their leadership training, young people replicate the workshops they attended through the LPO with people they select from their neighbourhoods or communities. This methodology has produced positive results for the organisation and is one of the cornerstones of their strategies.

The JENH – accompanied by the LPO – has played a key role in monitoring municipal, regional and national elections on the Caribbean Coast during the last 15 years. The electoral observation carried out by their commissions has been an important experience in learning about the meaning of citizen participation. Their reports on voting are presented to the public and represent a local contribution to governance. The LPO feels that, by promoting transparency in the political system and other values, this type of monitoring exercise contributes to generating positive change to the poverty that much of the population in the Autonomous Regions experiences.

In coordination with the health authorities (Ministry of Health - MINSA and the Local System for Integration Health Care- SILAIS), the JENH movement has also facilitated workshops on sexual and reproductive health with young people in rural and urban settings as part of a strategy for the creation of generational affinities. In addition, the movement has carried out consultations with young people from different places across the Caribbean Coast regions, to formulate and present youth agendas with the sector's main demands to the municipal and regional governments so that these demands can be included in the definition of public policies. The possibility of incorporating the concerns of young people in governance at different levels strengthens their voice, which is normally silenced by adult discourse and by the interests of political parties.

The LPO has also facilitated training courses for JENH members to introduce them to disaster risk management and to train them to give psychosocial attention to Indigenous, Afro-descendent and mestizo girls and boys in vulnerable communities.

Finally, the organisation has worked with the Academic Secretariats of the Caribbean Coast Universities (BICU⁴⁴ and URACCAN⁴⁵), to produce educational materials on

⁴⁴ Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University

⁴⁵ Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense/University of the Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast

Human Rights and Autonomy Rights, which are being incorporated into the university curriculum. This material aims to ensure that the new generations are aware of the diverse rights that protect the Caribbean Coast population, with respect to their histories, cultural particularities and duties as citizens. These new spaces for dialogue about aim to contribute to a more dynamic and pluralist society.

4.4.3 LPO: Working on integrated eco-sustainable development

Theory of change. This LPO aims to help Nicaraguans achieve a dignified life and a better world for themselves, with a just and equal society, and equitable and eco-sustainable development. Its theory of change is based on the assumption that this requires the conscious participation of men and women, and will be achieved through strengthening local entities and encouraging synergies (mainly with community organisations) to improve, in an integrated way, the social and economic conditions of the poorest sectors. This is reflected in its overall aim, and in four specific aims, which focus on improving the quality of life through: improving water and sanitation infrastructure, reducing environmental and socio-economic vulnerability, promoting social and gender equality and solidarity, and preventing and mitigating disasters.

Logic of intervention. In order to achieve these changes, the LPO is working to strengthen community participation and municipal governance structures. The LPO “coordinates its work in the communities with the Citizens Power Councils (CPC), the Cabinets of Citizen Power (GPC), the Women’s House, the National Union of Farmer and Cattle Owners (Union Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos, UNAG) the Women’s Secretariat, local CSOs, NGOs and government institutions.”⁴⁶ Its goal populations, or beneficiaries, include “the rural family, rural women and young people, community structures and leaders, as well as local municipal authorities and state functionaries”.⁴⁷

It develops training programmes and actions in the following areas:

- *Water and sanitation:* involving the design, construction and management of water and sanitation infrastructure
- *Food security:* including eco-agricultural development and advocacy and co-ordination on food and nutritional security and sovereignty
- *Institutional strengthening* for municipal institutions in eco-sustainable territorial planning and social, administrative and management capacities
- *Local risk management* involving climate change adaptation and the prevention and mitigation of disasters

⁴⁶ Interview with LPO Director 2012/2013 and Programme Coordinator, 2014

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

- *Citizen participation* in municipal lobbying and accountability spaces.

Gender and masculinities are considered to be transversal themes in all these aspects.

The specific work being supported by the Swedish CS strategy focuses on *food security*, defined by the project coordinator as: “to have sufficient quantity and social and economic distribution of health and nutritional food in the family and as a result, the community”.⁴⁸ This project began with a baseline study applied through random sampling in two municipalities to identify the problems of the area and potential participants. The key problem areas included: human rights, violence, food security, risk management and citizen participation. The beneficiaries were selected based on their willingness to work in teams, as well as their ownership of land or ability to rent.

One of the main problems of small producers was identified as access (or lack thereof) to good seeds. Thus, the project worked on the creation of creole seed banks by collectives of small-scale producers. These seeds produce better and hardier crops and can be administered at the community level, lending to other producers at a rate of 2 to 1 according to the set of regulations in place for the seed banks (e.g. if 50 lbs is lent, 100 lbs is returned). This is also a way to avoid the introduction of genetically modified seed. The project is also promoting vegetable growing in small plots, creating greater awareness about the use of agricultural chemicals and motivating producers to use organic fertiliser they can make themselves, supported by training and a manual. These plots were established with 33 people per year, and each year another 3 plots were added, for a total of 99 people over 3 years. The environmental team is in charge of follow-up.

People are also taught how to use grafting on plants and trees and the project is promoting seed-gathering from trees such as the ojoche (the seeds of which are very high in protein) and others for reforestation, for silviculture, shade, and water filtration in soils. The plan is to contribute to the organisation of municipal fairs to demonstrate these and other products. The LPO also has a radio programme in which to disseminate diverse aspects of the project.

The project includes environmental awareness campaigns and 4 events for training in masculinity and gender using play-based methodologies to question hegemonic models of masculinity, reduce violence and improve paternal responsibility. The group is gender-mixed and intergenerational. Any physical contact or identification of gender

⁴⁸ Interview with Programme Coordinator, 2014

characteristics is done in separate groups first. Changes in attitudes and behaviour are monitored by the technician.

One technician, who also coordinates the project, does all of the outreach work, using a motorbike borrowed from the NGO's other project areas. The project covers the cost of one person's time, the fuel, maintenance, office materials and invitations, irrigation systems, vegetable seed and material for the seed banks that are bought from local producers including corn, sorghum and sesame seed.

The project is also contributing to strengthening the Municipal Commissions for Food and Nutritional Security and Sovereignty (COMUSSAN) to improve planning and coordination with local state and non-state actors as well as with established community leaders in several municipalities. Its also involves coordinating with Zona Seco group of NGOs, which have different specific focuses. The LPO's approach and its intervention strategy with the Sida-funded project on food security seems to be fairly consistent with that of the supporting SFO.

Positive examples. During the appreciative inquiry, the coordinator for the specific Sida-funded project was in the process of writing his report to the donor, and had no planned field activities or training events. However the researcher was able to attend a citizen participation workshop from a course funded by another donor in partnership with a women's organisation in the area's main city. The workshop was the last in a training course on social auditing for women leaders (the wrap up and evaluation session). The LPO coordinator for this project admits it is a hot topic for the local authorities who, she says, are following orders from the national government in boycotting independent NGOs, including the partner women's organisations and have "out-lawed terms such as policy/political advocacy and social audit"⁴⁹.

The course was facilitated by two independent feminist consultants from another part of the country. The 50 participants were from communities in six municipalities, and many were or had been community leaders in the CPC structures. Their research action approach used participatory methodology to combined technical training with work on personal and collective reflection. The participants presented the final plans for community social audits on municipal and community planning and budgets focusing on issues from road infrastructure to women's health issues. It was evident from the workshop that the course strengthened most of the participants' capacities in research, planning, budgets and gender analysis. The last part of the workshop was an evaluation of the course; there were many testimonies affirming that the process was

⁴⁹ Conversation during appreciative inquiry with the LPOs citizens' participation programme.

key to bringing about life changes by facilitating a space for women to develop self-esteem, self-empowerment and critical awareness about their rights as women and citizens, both at home and in the wider community. In presenting their plans for social audits, many women confidently voiced criticisms of the way in which projects are implemented by local authorities in their municipalities and by their community leaders, and they pointed to widespread corruption and a lack of accountability and transparency as central problems. The participants also now are members of an ongoing cross-municipal network.

The coordinator and the facilitators felt that they were successful in challenging stereotypes among the participants about women's organising and about gender and power. They also shifted the perception – derived from the current political context – that critical awareness and accountability are political threats toward an understanding of these as enhancing community organisation and citizen participation. At the same time, the coordinator, the facilitators and the participants took “the bull by the horns by working with officially approved community and municipal structures”⁵⁰, without ceding to municipal prohibitions or the culture of absolute loyalty to the top-down leadership. In this sense, the course evidently contributed to changes to women's sense of power within themselves, and within these structures. It also helped them change their ideas about political culture and citizenship and strengthened the network as an autonomous space for future actions.

4.5 SFOs THEORIES OF CHANGE AND LOGICS OF INTERVENTION

4.5.1 SFO: Working with people with disabilities: MyRight

Theory of change. The SFO has clearly defined access to education as its priority. The theory of change behind this coincides with that of the LPO: education is seen as the best way to emerge from poverty, since it pre-supposes building capacities for integration, the advocacy and defence of rights, and the achievement of economic goals through access to employment.

On the other hand, the SFO's triple strategy – (a) strengthening the individual capacities of PwD; (b) strengthening PwD organisations; and (c) creating public opinion and influencing public policy – make the organisation's theory of change evident. It identifies four spaces/actors in need of change: PwD themselves, their organisations,

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

public opinion, and the state with its laws and public policies. The emphasis of MyRight's theory of change is in strengthening the organisation of PwD with a view to strengthening not only their capacity for advocacy, but also their ability to defend their rights. Because of this, in addition to its actions centred on inclusive education, this Swedish organisation has also contributed to local partners' improvements in transparency, internal democracy, participation and administrative mechanisms.

Logic of intervention. MyRight develops three complementary strategies:

- Strengthening the individual capacities of PwD
- Strengthening PwD organisation
- Creating public opinion and influence on public policies.

MyRight's aim on a global level for the 2011–2013 period was defined as: “people with disabilities in programming countries will increasingly be included in society, in accordance with the United Nations International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”.

In practice, in Nicaragua, the SFO and its partners identified two key issues: access to education and entry into the workforce. However, all the organisations consider that work on employment could not begin before fully addressing the issue of inclusive education. Because of this, the country programme for Nicaragua, under the title ‘More education, more inclusion’ defined a 10-year goal for development:

Contribute to changes in attitude of the Nicaraguan State and society with respect to people with disabilities, from a rights-based approach and in accordance with the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

This aim mentions the state and society as the two spaces in which to advocate a change in attitude with an HRBA. The overall aim defined for the next three years is:

The Nicaraguan State has formulated policies and programmes that contribute to the implementation of the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, especially with respect to inclusive education, on all levels and with all measures – both formal and informal.

Four organisations directly implemented this programme, and three others also carried out programme actions in this framework. The four LPOs directly working with the programme developed their own projects on inclusive education, within the country programme framework agreed between the SFO and LPO.

Positive examples. The programme was developed between the SFO and the LPO in a participatory way. In 2010, the country office was created and in 2011 the country programme was launched, with a 3-year duration under the name ‘More education, more inclusion’. In order to be part of the country programme, MyRight's policy re-

quires the Nicaraguan organisations wanting to participate to be peer partners – in other words, to have the support of one of its Swedish partners. A CPC made up of Nicaraguan partner organisations and the national coordination of MyRight, was formed to execute the programme. The idea behind this committee was that it should be a horizontal space, but an evaluation later pointed out that in practice it had ended up becoming confused with the directorate of MyRight. The Committee identified two key issues for discussion: access to education and entry into the workforce. However, they agreed that access to employment could not occur without first addressing inclusive education. In this way, the Programme focus was the result of the joint analysis of all the organisations that had been working with MyRight.

Another positive example also has to do with the SFOs participatory approach and the attempt to create space for analysis and dialogue among all those involved. To this end, MyRight organises country conferences every year and a half, bringing together local partners and their Swedish counterparts. These spaces are important for exchanging experiences and for defining strategies. In the current year, the space was used to work on the concepts behind the projects for the following 3 years. One of the aims for the next stage is for the partner organisations to take a more active and autonomous role to avoid dependency. This aim arose out of complaints from PwD organisations about the lack of sufficiently frequent communication, and their requests for closer support from the SFO. This is in the process of being negotiated.

4.5.2 SFO: Working with communities on the Caribbean Coast: Diakonia

Theory of change. Diakonia's theory of change is based on a series of political transformations through which individuals: gain access to information about their rights; become aware about what this means; take responsibility for their reality; acquire capacities; organise themselves in groups to mobilise and make demands on the state; and advocate change in unjust situations inscribed in social relations and structures. In other words, the organisation aims to influence individual capacities and through these contribute to the transformation of the social conditions in which people live. This logic coincides with the theory of change of the LPO. Diakonia points out that its decision to support any given partner organisations is a political choice based on sharing a vision for change in the world. Within this, the four HRBA principles are fundamental to guaranteeing their strategy for change.

Logic of intervention. Diakonia's work with partners has logic of intervention based on three strategies.

1. Strengthening organisational structures
2. Training about rights and other significant knowledge
3. The creation of alliances among the organisations and diverse key actors.

Diakonia has been working in Nicaragua for 25 years. Its first mission was in the Caribbean Coast, linked to the return of Miskito communities who were displaced by the war. Since then, the Caribbean region has continued to be a priority area. Currently

they have relationships with 20 civil society partners, including NGOs, networks, civil associations and two universities in 65 municipalities across the country. The Diakonia Nicaragua country programme, with a strategic plan until 2015, has four overall strategic focus areas that aim to address current situations in the Nicaraguan context:

1. The consolidation of citizen participation, which aims to strengthen the organisations and their actions in building active citizenship and an autonomous civil society.
2. The promotion and defence of the rights of Indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples, with special emphasis on the situation of women and young people. In addition to working in the autonomous Caribbean regions they are incorporating the Chorotega indigenous people from the North Pacific coast. They have not covered other territories, since part of Diakonia's overall strategy is their geographical focus.
3. The promotion and defence of human rights, with emphasis on women's rights, gender equality and the prevention of violence. This is the broadest of its programmes, involving nearly all its partners, and it is based on the idea that the lack of guarantee of these rights by the state is what generates poverty.
4. Humanitarian aid and climate change. This programme began a year ago and is applied to emergency situations and in territories where there is a high degree of environmental vulnerability.

Positive examples. Diakonia has dedicated much of its efforts to supporting Nicaraguan civil society with projects aiming to strengthen capacities. Its work with the Committees for Water and Sanitation (CAPS) – community organisations formed to guarantee the water supply in places where there are difficulties in access. They have supported the development of water supplies of people coordinating the CAPS in 36 communities in six municipalities. In evaluating the positive results that have been achieved, the population that they have received useful information about climate justice and the creation of spaces for dialogue and advocacy with municipal structures.

Other positive examples include: the support given to projects working on women's and young people's rights in several municipalities of the Autonomous Caribbean Regions; strengthening and promoting the Autonomous Regions' Education System (SEAR); creating the education programme with intercultural and gender perspectives that is offered at the two Caribbean Coast universities; and their support for the activities of the JENH young leaders' movement.

4.5.3 SFO: Working in North Pacific area: Church of Sweden via Lutheran World Federation

The Church of Sweden (CoS) is the Swedish CSO that participates as an SFO in relation to this particular site. Its vision is: “life in the Realm of God, a healed Creation and Humanity in communion, justice, freedom and peace”.⁵¹ The Church’s international policy goals are focused on five areas: *pastoral development, health, gender justice and equality, sustainable livelihoods, and peace and reconciliation*. The CoS’s global long-term development cooperation aims “to help establish sustainable and inclusive societies in order to create people’s belief in the future and in their own abilities”,⁵² with children and young people as priority target groups. The CoS executes its Swedish CS strategy projects in Nicaragua through its membership in, and joint work with, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), a global organisation that brings together 145 member churches, with headquarters in Geneva. The federation also belongs to the ACT Alliance, which is a global alliance of protestant churches and Christian faith-based non-governmental organisations and networks that are focused on climate justice and emergency humanitarian response.

Theory of change. The CoS’s overall theory of change is based on an HRBA to strengthen civil society that “can be summarised as working on different levels (actors) along the spectrum of *Empowered and organised rights holders => organised and strengthened local civil society => accountable duty bearers*, in order to contribute to sustainable change for the people we aim to assist”.⁵³ The Church aligns with the LWF in believing that change can be made by building capacities and exchanging experience (with emphasis on South–South exchange), by strengthening organised rights holders and local CSOs, and by working on advocacy with partners and allies. The LWF theory of change in Nicaragua is based “on a Human Rights Based Approach, on Actions without Damage and with a gender focus”,⁵⁴ which prioritises coordination, articulation and alliance for advocacy with movements and community organisations to achieve sustainable livelihoods, conservation of natural resources, inclusive public policies and better disaster risk management and response.

Logic of intervention. Each CoS country programme defines its context-specific theory of change. Its regional strategy for Central America 2014–2016 (focused mainly on Guatemala and Honduras) aims to deepen regional initiatives and develop long-term

⁵¹ CoS (2013a) *Church of Sweden Strategic Plan 2014–2017*, Uppsala: Church of Sweden

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Interview with Julissa Aguirre, LWF Nicaragua representative, Round 2 meso-level research, 2014

strategies to strengthen grassroots organisations' advocacy capacities and abilities to raise their own voices. This is based on the following overall goals:⁵⁵

1. *Pastoral development*: Collaboration with churches and theological educational institutions has deepened.
2. *Gender equity and equality*: a) Women and men have improved conditions and opportunities for equal participation, voice and leadership in church and society and b) people's right to bodily and sexual integrity in church and society have been strengthened.
3. *Sustainable livelihoods*: People living in vulnerability have the right to secure livelihoods and have strengthened their social and economic power.
4. *Peace and reconciliation*: People have greater security, opportunities and power to face conflicts and participate in processes of peace and reconciliation.

Specific changes are articulated through overall outcomes and bridging outcomes (“how we, together with partner contribute to change for an intended target group by working towards different actors”⁵⁶). The bridging outcomes express the changes that are needed in the different actors (rights holders, civil society, duty bearers) in order to achieve the desired change (overall outcome)⁵⁷. These are related assumptions and risks behind projected changes, which indicate “what needs to happen in order to fulfil the BO”.

The LWF's world service work has distinct geographical and regional focuses. The specific regional strategy for Central America includes work in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. The four pillars of the Central America strategy are: sustainable livelihoods, risk management, capacity building and human rights.

LWF relatively recently changed from direct intervention as an international organisation to one based on strengthening local partners. A key aspect of its capacity-building component is to strengthen its partner organisations – especially their accountability, transparency and administrative mechanisms – within the framework of HAP norms and mechanisms. Human rights, gender, and especially sexual and reproductive rights continue to be “complex topics”⁵⁸ for the CoS and the LWF. In terms of its gender focus, the CoS representative affirms that there are diverse approaches to gender rights and feminism, and they prefer to take a careful approach through studies and evaluations of specific contexts when creating new relationships with organisa-

⁵⁵ CoS (2013b) *Central American Objectives Matrix 2014–2016*, Uppsala: Church of Sweden

⁵⁶ CoS (2013a) *Op. cit.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Interviews with CoS and LWF representatives, Round 2 meso-level research, 2014

tions working on gender. Their focus on gender and masculinity combines women's training mostly in mixed contexts with masculinity work to "open up... possibilities for women to have greater participation and representation". The LWF prefers to rely on its own partners as providers of gender and masculinity training and to take a low-key approach based on its theory of change of action without damage, "seeking gender equality in the family, recognising the role of the woman in the family and that the man can change."

The LWF has been present in Nicaragua for more than 30 years and has been involved in the municipalities in question since 2006. With an aim to improve the quality of life of the population, reduce vulnerability and establish environmental balance, the LWF's intervention in the arid Nicaraguan northwest⁵⁹ has centred on strengthening work with watersheds and contributing to the sustainability of production systems through four theme areas: food security and sovereignty (recently changed to sustainable livelihoods); advocacy and conservation of natural resources; promotion of inclusive public policies; and risk management and disaster response. Human rights is a cross-cutting aspect and, at the same time, has its own aims and lines of action; these involve strengthening civil society and ensuring training, and LWF takes a role in facilitation and in accompanying empowerment processes.

At the national level, in addition to its actions as part of the ACT Alliance, LWF's intervention strategy involves working with a series of entities for coordination between cooperation agencies and with state and governmental institutions. These entities include the Human Rights Consortium (Consortio de Derechos Humanos, CDH) the Secretariat for Coordination between International NGOs (SCOIN), the Inter-agency Commission on Gender (Comisión Interagencial de Género, CIG) the Humanitarian Network (Red Humanitaria), as well as other forms of coordination with United Nations agencies and specific state structures such as the Supreme Court, some women's secretariats and the National Police.

At the local level, LWF's work is focused on civil society partners working on LWF's thematic priorities (and one working on gender based violence) and their coordination with existing municipal and legally established entities such as the structures for disaster prevention (Comisión Local para la Prevención, Mitigación y Atención de Desastres, COLOPRED and Comisión Municipal para la Prevención, Mitigación y Atención de Desastres, COMUPRED) and food and nutritional security and sovereignty (Comisión Municipal para la Seguridad y Soberanía Alimentaria y Nutricional, COMUSSAN). The espoused concept of civil society strengthening involves working

⁵⁹ Information based on meso-level interviews with representatives of LWF and partners

with local NGO partners and the existing community and municipal governance structures. The main spaces for discussion about strategic issues are the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in place with projects. The LWF in Nicaragua has modest resources, and their levels of funding for partners vary from US\$15,000 to US\$20,000–50,000.

Positive examples. The LWF is working on a multi-focused approach to local development through the Zona Seco geographical area meetings between national and local partners with different specialisms, that are intervening in the area. The specific co-operation with the LPO studied during the appreciative inquiry involves: capacity building; donation of seed and other plant materials for work on collective and individual vegetable plots; community seed banks and nurseries; crop diversification; soil conservation; and small-scale irrigation systems. While further dialogue may be needed about issues of food sovereignty, including land ownership and biodiversity, these measures are key to addressing some of the problems of food security highlighted in the RC. Such strategies include: strengthening smallholder farmers' control over producing their own food in an increasingly monetised economy; valuing and building on local seeds and knowledge about food resources; introducing organic agricultural techniques; and water and soil conservation.

5 Analysis of Findings

5.1 MEANING OF HUMAN RIGHTS BASED PERSPECTIVES TO PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY AND MARGINALISATION

5.1.1 Concept of rights

[W]hen the elections come you have to go and vote for the mayor and the council and the government, because it's a duty. But when it's a matter of rights, when you need something, they don't even see you ... [even so] the leaders are grateful I took my wife and daughter to vote.

– RC participant, North Pacific site

Given the Nicaraguan historical context, people living in situations of poverty in Nicaragua have had more exposure than others in the region to international rights discourse. This means many Nicaraguans, especially those with greater access to education and organised political spaces, speak of women's and gender rights, the rights of PWD, Indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples, child rights and more.

In our RC research, we were able to observe how this discourse exists among people living in situations of poverty and marginalisation; however, this is often combined with understanding informed by experiences with external actors and development projects, and by underlying historical influences expressed in socially structured power relations within communities dating back to diverse colonial influences and patronage systems, and/or pre-Colombian forms of social organisation. This hybrid tends to combine an understanding of rights with the entitlement to material benefits, political space or status, as a reward for loyalty to a dominant social group, a powerful family or leader. This is also often related to ideas about rewarding sacrifice based on religious beliefs or political militancy. This hybrid concept of rights can be traced across the RC sites and in people's practices when claiming or ceding rights, dealing with conflict, and managing everyday activities and relationships in the communities studied.

5.1.2 Participation

Given the lack of expectations of change among most of the people we encountered, the nature of their participation is mostly linked to pragmatic concerns and is often accompanied by a sense of resignation and by expressions that are different between public and private or safe spaces.⁶⁰ Many people in the Pacific region sites (Pacific north and Managua) are critical of the meaning of participation in which space for dialogue and participation is determined by others (*invited space*⁶¹) by inequalities (due to gender, age, economic status, disability, religion and other factors) and conditioned by family and/or political loyalties. They express frustration with the lack of *benefit* from these spaces, showing conformity and resignation to avoid conflict while maintaining criticisms and non-conformity, or feigning loyalty so as to access benefits that in fact are basic rights. In the Caribbean, the difference between public and hidden discourse can be observed in the exclusion of women and their use of space to speak their dissent, and in the occasional upsurges of violent threats by the men (machete clanging, kidnapping a regional leader), which then subside into apparent passivity, silence and resignation, with the resulting lack of change in the community and in regional governance. The evidence of double discourses may simply be a sad reflection of disempowerment. However, it could also be interpreted as a form of resilience – a way in which people’s sense of disempowerment is tempered by a sense of dignity in maintaining authentic expressions of discontent behind a mask, shielded from the powerful who at the same time may be well aware of this discontent.⁶² It also may reflect an underlying sense of vindication in disguising one’s intentions in order to use those in power to achieve one’s own ends and disrupt power on a small-scale against an oppressive structure, as in the Nicaraguan play *El Gueguense*.⁶³ Both these forms of resilience, conditioned by diverse intersecting forms of power relations, may be long-term strategies for survival, and they also may gradually build towards the revelation of hidden discourse, either through the opening of pluralist spaces or through political violence. It also means that women and men in situations of poverty and marginalisation are not only using participation but also forms of non-authentic participation, non-participation, resistance or open disobedience as forms of

⁶⁰ See Scott, J. (1990) *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven, CT, USA: Yale University Press.

⁶¹ See Gaventa, J. (2006) *Finding the Spaces for Change: A Power Analysis*. IDS Bulletin, 37(6).

⁶² See Scott, J. (1990) *Op. cit.*

⁶³ A traditional Nicaraguan satirical masked play with dancing from the Pacific region, first documented in the 18th century but with earlier origins. The story describes how an older indigenous merchant creatively undermines the Spanish governor’s power over him by feigning loyalty, using subterfuge, ingenuity and plays on words (between Nahuatl and Spanish) to fool and ridicule the authorities, avoid colonial taxes and achieve his ends, including marrying his son to the governor’s daughter (who, significantly, is silent throughout). See Blandon, E. (2003) *Barroco Descalzo*, Managua: URRACAN

*agency*⁶⁴ in surviving difficult situations or in responding to closed or exclusive spaces.

At the same time, some of these same people and others used international and constitutional rights discourse in describing their demands about fair access to knowledge about rights, timely information and full, inclusive and equal participation in decision-making that affects them. In some cases, changes were observed when community leadership was altered by the introduction of independent leaders considered to be trustworthy. In other examples, people made choices about where they felt it was preferential or more dignified to intervene. Other positive experiences of *participation* include spaces for reciprocal agricultural production or exchanges in which food and drink are given freely, joint work for mutual benefit, and solidarity (maintaining the image of the community and doing public good). These positive spaces may also include life-restoring or spiritual refuges from daily pressures, discrimination and violence. While these spaces require participation, they are not necessarily democratic spaces for citizen participation. *Active participation* (as *agency*) is related more directly to a sense of self-esteem, self-empowerment, ownership/belonging, and a commitment to individual or collective action for change. In this sense, the more people face the violence of exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination for diverse reasons in intersecting power relationships, the more key becomes the focus on these latter elements involving subjectivity and collective identity.

5.1.3 Non-discrimination

In general, people spoke about *discrimination* (rather than non-discrimination) and identified forms of exclusion and violence in their daily lives when being at a disadvantage in terms of power. There is ample evidence of subtle to extreme forms of discrimination and violence in the RC communities, especially directed at women. People across the sites identified multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination based on one or more of the following: gender (against women), disability, socio-economic status (situation of poverty, rural origin) ethnic status, language (against non-Spanish speakers or those with specific Indigenous or Afro-Caribbean languages as their first language), religious affiliation, national origin, and being identified as a migrant (especially lacking legal documentation).

Some examples of discrimination and exclusion perceived by people and observed by the research team during the RC communities include *common attitudes and cultural*

⁶⁴ Individual capacity to act and engage with social structures (as discussed by, for example, P. Bourdieu, A. Giddens, O. Dreier and M. Archer). See also citizens' agency in Lister, R. (2003) *Citizenship. Feminist Perspectives*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 39, citing. Doyal L. and Gough, I. (1991) *A Theory of Human Need*, London: Macmillan

practices. Some interpersonal attitudes include: unsolicited ‘help’ or attitudes of charity that assume incapacity; not listening, and/or assuming knowledge of what another person is saying; emotional ‘punishment’, distancing or rejecting someone who decides based on their own criteria. There were multiple forms of social discrimination, including stereotyping of PwD and women; pressure by dominant social groups to speak or act in a certain way or to desist completely from speaking/acting; and gender discrimination that undervalues domestic labour done by women and girls; family hierarchies for the order and quantity of food to be served; a lack of respect for women’s decisions about her body, sexuality and maternity; and homophobia used to impose traditional machismo as the only possible masculine behaviour. There were also extreme forms of violence, including verbal and physical aggression; extreme cruelty, abuse and violence in the family against women, children and PwD; sexual violence including sexual harassment and attempted femicide, and the exposure of children to trauma and violence.

Other forms of discrimination identified include *institutional practices and exclusions*. Some of these were mentioned in reference to social exclusion related to international, national, regional and municipal governance, such as facing institutional abuse when crossing borders, non-consultation by authorities on decision-making affecting communities; lack of access to conflict resolution and justice, access to schooling and training, support for income-generation or access to paid work and the abandonment of responsibilities by authorities, especially in rural areas, for attending to PwD, general and specific health needs, and basic services. Observations about the communications media make evident the reproduction and even promotion of discrimination such as homophobia, misogyny and discrimination against children/young people, as well as reproducing an atmosphere conducive to violence and fear. In addition, leaders of religious institutions are signalled as using selective interpretations of the Bible to justify gender-based discrimination. On a community governance level, older male leadership tends to dominate, and in some places the community discourages women to take on leadership; if they do they are subject to having their opinions disparaged or undermined and even sabotaged if they are elected to positions of responsibility. In some cases women and young people have felt they have been used (as figures or votes) without being listened to with genuine respect for their opinions and demands. Across the sites there are experiences of people being excluded from information, participation and decision-making for having a critical or different opinion from those in positions of power and authority.

Given this situation, some implicit expressions of *what non-discrimination means* to people in situations of poverty and marginalisation include: taking on equal rights through personal changes such as having self-esteem; self-respect; not feeling you have to subordinate yourself to discriminatory attitudes in order to guarantee future support when needed; the non-acceptance of charitable or paternalistic gestures; adapting to being mobile and autonomous (self-reliance); trusting yourself in making your own decisions (self-esteem and self-determination); control over one’s own money and mobility (autonomy); shifting traditional gender roles and stereotypes;

and daring to exercise distinct forms of masculinity. This also requires recognition in the family and the community, involving: changes in values; equal control over the family economy inclusive community organisation; independent and trustworthy collective representation; greater access to information, training and reflection; being able to question authority and express one's own interpretation of religious beliefs or ideology without reprisals; acceptance of one another's differences; equal rights to participate, decide and speak in community and public spaces; and access to being elected to decision-making positions and being respected as leaders. Other changes of attitudes, laws and policies in institutions at municipal, regional and national levels of governance include: positive reforms on recent changes to laws negatively affecting women; access to general and specialised (language and disability-specific) education; and equal access for all (gender equality; PwD) to employment and income generation.

5.1.4 Accountability and transparency⁶⁵

There was a great deal of underlying or quiet criticism and a generalised lack of satisfaction across all sites about the way in which the community leadership and municipal and regional governance structures work. Most people complained about widespread corruption, favouritism, nepotism and a general lack of accountability and transparency among community leaders, project organisers (churches and NGOs), representative organisations, municipal authorities and the national government towards people in the communities. While in all sites mention was made of problems of transparency and its importance as a *value*, there were very few direct references to ways of countering this situation *in practice*; instead, there was a sense of widespread cynicism and resignation due to accumulated negative experiences over generations. These experiences, as pointed out in the previous discussion of the concept of rights, also relate to historical top-down structures of colonial patronage and political practices of *caudillismo/cacicazgos*.⁶⁶

Criticisms about lack of transparency were especially levelled at pro-government CPC community and neighbourhood structures in the Pacific regions, whose leaders were questioned as being motivated by opportunism, nepotism and self-enrichment. The government party and its municipal structures were criticised as being top-down and controlling, while having double standards and participating in large-scale corruption. NGOs in general were criticised by some people as not being genuinely rep-

⁶⁵ In the RC narratives these two concepts tended to be directly associated.

⁶⁶ *Caudillismo* = populist and authoritarian strongman leadership, and *Cacicazgo* = 'chiefdom', from the word *cacique* (Ka-Chi-Ka), which in pre-Hispanic times was not gender-specific, but after colonisation became understood as the male chief of a clan.

representative of the population and establishing lifelong leaderships that manage funds with very little transparency.

In the Caribbean, the population expressed a general disgruntlement towards their traditional authorities, produced by the lack of transparency in people attaining political positions. There is no accountability among the authorities (the *wihita*, the *sindico*⁶⁷ and the council of elders.) and the community once they achieve elected positions. The judge receives a varying amount of money in the name of all the inhabitants as a tax for the exploitation of the community's natural resources. This is paid by people in the community and those who come from outside, but no one in the RC community knows with any certainty how much money comes in and how this is used. Another problem was the way in which one family dominates and shares out elected terms in office using mechanisms to co-opt young people with money and alcohol, and using their relationship with the *sindico* and some counsellors from the regional government to manipulate the community assemblies.

A change based on transparency did occur in one site where community participation increased, including two members of the host household, due to greater trust in the honesty of an independently elected board for a water project. The board demonstrated its intention to give regular financial and operational accounts to project participants, as observed in one of its meetings by the researcher. However, the new leaders needed closer organisational support to organise the meeting with a clear agenda, ordered participation and the revision of agreements sufficient to sustain the community's trust over time.

Overall, the findings indicate that accountability and transparency are closely linked to the possibility for developing self-esteem and agency, the ownership of stand-alone rights, authentic participation, inclusive democratic practices and non-discrimination. The current findings suggest that, while there is an implicit demand for accountability, the concept itself and any possible concretion of a system and/or culture of accountability seems to be a long way off, requiring long-term strategies from civil society actors to unpack and transform the prevailing political culture.

⁶⁷ *Wihita* in Miskito refers to the elected community leader and judge. *Sindico* refers to the person in charge of the community's territory and natural resources.

5.2 RIGHTS, NON-DISCRIMINATION, PARTICIPATION, TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY: MEANINGS AND CHALLENGES FOR SFOs AND THEIR PARTNERS

5.2.1 Rights

All SFOs and their partners (including those not directly connected to the RC sites) can clearly be seen to be working on strategies for advocacy, information and training, to motivate people in situations of poverty and marginalisation from different communities to demand recognition of their rights. Much of the evidence of successful work has focused on advocacy around *legal frameworks* and *influence through institutional spaces* for coordination and dialogue (see section 5.3). However, some SFOs and social sectors coincide in that where “spaces for dialogue with state structures are totally closed ... it is very difficult to generate changes in the legal framework”⁶⁸.

Insofar as SFOs and LPOs are clearly pointing to the state’s responsibility as duty bearer, they are helping to counteract the current tendency towards forms of substitution and privatisation of the state’s role in providing for its citizens (e.g. by NGOs assuming roles as duty bearers rather than facilitators, through the management of services by private companies or other non-accountable external actors, or by leaving responsibility for basic services to the communities themselves).

One of the challenges for SFOs and their partners – even those with programmes that explicitly mention their goal in further developing advocacy work – is the *need for more diversified strategies to influence both the state and society*. In our findings, there seems to be more emphasis on coordinating with and influencing the *state*, and a lesser emphasis on influencing specific sectors of the population, public opinion and society at large, and on strengthening and expanding the legitimacy of self-representation for citizen agency. A greater emphasis on the first society-focused strategy would contribute to changes in discriminatory values, attitudes and cultural practices in specific sectors and in society at large. Greater emphasis on the second society-focused strategy, especially through work focused on self-esteem, campaigns, media and cultural work (among other methods), would reinforce advocacy work with the state by building stronger, more independent constituencies. While the cur-

⁶⁸ Interview with SFO, 2014.

rent imbalance is understandable given the present-day political constraints, a lack of emphasis on independent constituencies runs the risk of reinforcing existing ‘hybrid’ concepts of rights, patterns of exclusion, and totalising tendencies of representation, as identified by the RC findings.

While most SFOs and their partners feel they have advanced in their own human and citizen rights based approach, one of the difficulties pointed out by SFOs in the learning event was a need for greater dialogue and sharing analysis and strategies among themselves and with Sida about the meaning of a HBRA as a Sida policy and its implications for the Swedish CS strategy in the complex Nicaraguan context. This dialogue, they all feel, would help ensure effective strategies and foster exchanges and learning.

5.2.2 Participation

Some of the positive examples from the RC sites and LPO work have focused on processes to strengthen from the inside out; that is, from people themselves into their organisations and beyond, in order to place people as *subjects* of rights, which are inalienable.

In some of the most successful examples of this, participants express having undergone key personal transformations in their awareness, which have enabled them to take on greater personal autonomy – an active critical role in all aspects of their lives. This has been especially important in developing women’s and young people’s leadership. These examples, along with key comments from some SFOs, suggest that knowledge about rights and spaces for association are not enough in and of themselves to ensure active participation. They indicate that there is a need for the further development of participatory, ‘bottom-up’ approaches that: respect diversity of voices and leadership within communities; connect public and private dimensions including the intimate; and work on the self, life storytelling and internalised power (power from within). These strategies for participatory processes may prove to be more successful in achieving a sense of self-empowerment and may result in more authentic forms of participation in organisational and public spaces.

Other examples show the importance in the current context of independent local, regional networks and representative organisations (for example, young people in the Caribbean, women in the North Pacific, and PwD by sector, department and nationally) in ensuring collective actions that create a sense of belonging and develop new values and critical awareness about existing expressions of political culture that contribute to participation in collective action as citizens.

Within most representative or sector-based organisations there is a strong sense of common cause, shared actions, protagonism (as a political subject, taking centre stage) and voice as subjects of rights, and shared knowledge based people’s own experience and self-generated theories combined with outside influences and exchanges

(such as PwD exchanges and twinning with Swedish PwD organisations or with feminist facilitators from women's networks in other areas). When this common cause becomes a *single discourse* however, albeit for external consumption, this may downplay internal diversity and the equal participation of emerging voices and leaders. At the June 2014 learning event, a discussion of advances in the local organisation of small producers (*campesinos/as*) pointed to the value of “advocacy and dialogue among people themselves”⁶⁹ as something that had “permitted the creation of stable structures to establish a platform and make their projects sustainable”⁷⁰. They also pointed to important advances in the participation of women in these processes.

The space for participation in specific education and training, awareness-raising, information and communication on self-esteem, and knowledge of rights for individuals, families and communities has been a cornerstone of all SFOs strategies. Some people point to the way in which these spaces have been more successful when taking into account local experience and conditions and enabling the “incorporation of new practices”⁷¹ that generate successful experiences to share, and which function as a stimulus to replication.

Some challenges for work involving citizen participation and organisation include issues of leadership and methodologies for participation and empowerment (especially the practice of leaders selecting some participants, or ‘empowering’⁷² others), leadership renewal, issues of agency and autonomy (from community structures, LPOs and SFOs), financial sustainability and management, internal democracy, and the issues involved in leadership through voluntary work and paid positions.

Another key challenge is that the results-based project framework has been identified as impeding rather than enhancing a more relational HRBA, by creating obstacles for adequate face-to face and longer-term participatory processes for citizen participation that contribute to greater reflection, personal growth, accountability and social transformation. This affects many CSOs working with cooperation agencies and NGOs – not only those working with Sida: our findings also indicate that it has undermined

⁶⁹ Siles, F. (2014) *Op. cit.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² In the view of the Nicaragua country team, the concept of empowerment comes from the idea of power being a process in which an individual's agency emerges and strengthens the self from within. This is very distinct from the idea that someone else who has power can transmit power to another by ‘empowering’ them, which reinforces the idea of the powerlessness of the receiver. As such, we feel that no-one can ‘empower’ another, but can only facilitate space for people to take on (or not) their own empowerment processes.

previously more flexible and understanding relations among Sida, the SFOs and their partners.⁷³

5.2.3 Non-discrimination

While all SFOs have espoused HRBAs in practice, their vision, strategies and methodologies vary widely. According to participants in the June 2014 learning event, there is a need to incorporate deeper debates about non-discrimination related to strategic identity and intercultural issues, gender and women's empowerment approaches, and other key forms of social and political exclusion and stigmatisation. This reflects evidence in our findings of some timidity in addressing key human, citizen and gender rights. In part, this is due to the closure of space for independent critical citizens and civil society, witnessed in the RCs and discussed in the meso-level inquiry and learning workshop (see section 5.3), but it is also dependent on the particular perspectives and belief systems of the personnel and constituencies of the SFOs and their partners.

In some cases, there are inconsistencies between theories or strategies for change and internal institutional policies and practices. This can take the form of continued discriminatory attitudes in organisations working with a 'gender perspective' that result in the omission of explicit internal practices to ensure non-discrimination, and stereotyping of work for women's individual and collective empowerment. It can also be derived from internalised discrimination. In some organisations in the PwD sector, for example, our findings indicate that further work is needed to develop internal policies to improve PwD's access to training and employment as support staff. Also, while PwD organisations are advancing on changing sexist language in their campaigns, our findings suggest there is still little discussion of the diverse intersecting forms of discrimination within the PwD community.

Further discussion of intersectional approaches, taking advantage of work in the Caribbean, could benefit all actors in the Swedish CS strategy in Nicaragua. Only one SFO involved in this research demonstrates sensitivity to historical and intercultural approaches that focus on Indigenous and Afro-descendent people's rights in both the Caribbean and Pacific regions. This suggests that these rights continue to be made invisible, partly due to a tendency to think of them as only applicable in the Caribbean context. It seems there is still insufficient learning from Caribbean experience in relation to land rights, autonomy and diversity, and the possibility of recuperating key elements in traditional economic and agricultural practices that might contribute to

⁷³ See later discussion of aid architecture in this report.

greater sustainability. This also suggest an opportunity, as yet unexplored, to build a more critical vision of the historical roots of the Nicaraguan state and its exclusion of Indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples and women as political subjects and Nicaraguan citizens.

In some common cause constituencies such as churches – as the CoS notes – people and their institutions may be competitive, feel threatened or have disagreements about democratic, human rights based and gender approaches, “sometimes in a less than pacific way”⁷⁴. As a result, this SFO has emphasised dialogue under the theme of peace and reconciliation, rather than democracy and non-discrimination.

In assessing non-discrimination in relation to women at the June 2014 learning event, participants stressed advances in public policy in relation to land distribution to women, their visibility in agricultural producers organisations, and recognition for the work of feminist organisations in facilitating successful learning processes on the construction of gender and social identities. While some participants from the Caribbean felt that women’s greater knowledge of their rights is manifested in their increased participation and leadership, the group of organisations from the Caribbean could not come to consensus about whether or not greater knowledge of the rights of women has been achieved in the communities where they are working.

In the Caribbean, the LPO involved in the appreciative inquiry felt it has been a challenge to address rights in Indigenous communities, especially with issues such as violence against women, and child rights. They feel it is important to adapt the demands of donors to the realities of the communities. In many cases, they find that the authorities themselves are the ones who are violating the law, and thus feel questioned or defensive. They tend to create obstacles for the organisation’s work and justify practices as “part of their cultural tradition”⁷⁵. When this occurs, the LPO looks for other allies such as teachers, reverends or someone from the elders’ council. They also point out that the work with young people tends to open doors in the communities for adults to begin to trust in the organisation’s proposals. One of the institutions that funds the LPO’s gender work asked them to work specifically with girls in a child rights project, but the LPO explained that excluding the boys may create tensions.

5.2.4 Transparency and accountability

There are some outstanding examples of work in social audits, citizen participation and electoral observation in the Pacific and Caribbean regions as mechanisms for

⁷⁴ Interview with CoS representative, 2014

⁷⁵ Appreciative inquiry with LPO, 2014

demanding accountability and transparency, especially in relation to municipal and regional governance structures. In the case of the PwD organisations, they also have the opportunity to exercise accountability on a national level through the establishment of the Human Rights Ombudsperson for PwD (a national state institution responsible for horizontal accountability within the state). However, there are serious tensions around issues of accountability and transparency in the current national context, and in some departments of the country municipalities have been instructed to “ban the terms ‘social audit’, ‘political/policy advocacy’ and ‘citizen participation’”⁷⁶. This situation is of extreme concern when our findings give ample evidence of widespread levels of corruption from community levels upwards.

In general there is little evidence in our findings of internal accountability within LPOs, and in some cases there are tensions between the dual roles of leaders as board members and as paid project staff. At the same time, most SFOs have worked with their partners on ‘upward’ accountability and transparency, especially in strengthening administrative areas by facilitating capacity building in this area.

At least one of the SFOs – Diakonia – believe there should be a ‘downward’ accountability system towards partners, for which they propose to use the logic of the HAP certification process (created as a system of control and good practice in humanitarian aid frameworks) to generate the participation of local actors from the very beginning of initiatives in designing processes for accountability and carrying out project monitoring. They also comment that it would be important for the national office to be publicly accountable to its partners and to invite the communications media as a way of vindicating, making visible and “decriminalising the work of civil society”⁷⁷ in public opinion. One of the LPOs also believes that they should be accountable by telling local partners and participants about how funding is used, both to establish greater transparency about how projects are implemented and to develop a relationship based on the same rules for all.

According to our findings in Nicaragua (from interviews in the pilot, first and second RCs, the organisational inquiries and discussion in both learning events) there is almost unanimous criticism of the results-based formats for the accountability and administrative reporting chain from LPO to SFO and SFO to Sida. These require an excessive amount of work and takes time away from fieldwork. SFOs say they are forced to reproduce this logic with partners, as they are required to fill in charts, reports and baselines that also affect partners’ time and availability for direct programming work. Overall there is a clear demand for transparency in both directions and a

⁷⁶ Appreciative Inquiry with LPO, 2014

⁷⁷ Interview with representative of Diakonia 2014

general sense that, to achieve this, there needs to be greater downward accountability from the aid chain in relation to the SFOs and Sida.

5.3 WHAT ACTORS, INCLUDING THE SWEDISH CSOs AND THEIR PARTNERS, CAN PLAUSIBLY BE INFERRED TO BE CONTRIBUTING POSITIVE CHANGES IN THE ENABLING CONDITIONS?

Based on our findings we can confirm that since the withdrawal of Swedish bilateral aid, support for Nicaraguan civil society has become vitally important in contributing to sustaining agendas and practical advances related to poverty, marginalisation and human rights. In this context, the Strategy has been important in contributing to efforts by a wide variety of Swedish and Nicaraguan partners, whose logics of intervention respond to the multiple problems and approaches to supporting people living in poverty and marginalisation to strengthen their voices and improve their living conditions.

5.3.1 Legal and institutional change

Examples of the positive results of the Swedish CS strategy include the involvement SFOs and partner in establishing new laws, regulations and state budget allocations that recognise the rights of PwD (Laws 763 and 675 on sign language) and in ensuring the inclusion of PwD in the government's social agenda through representation by their own federation (Federación Nicaragüense de Asociaciones de personas con discapacidad, FECONORI). In terms of the rights of Indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples from the Caribbean Coast, the intervention has contributed to monitoring the implementation of legal frameworks and regulations of the region's Autonomy Law (Law 28 from 1987) and Territorial Demarcation (Law 445), contributing to the elaboration and approval of the Autonomous Regional Education System and achieving a positive legal judgement on the exclusion of the regional political party Yatama from municipal elections in 2000. SFOs and their partners have also worked to strengthen advocacy by the population and the regional councils and, thanks to these and other efforts, there is now greater national government recognition of ethnic groups (even if some LPOs consider this is merely to calm or appease discontent on the Caribbean Coast). In other arenas, SFOs and their partners have contributed to advances in creating a favourable legal framework to further work on the right to food security and sovereignty, and in questioning national production models unfavourable to small agricultural producers.

5.3.2 Societal change to improve enabling conditions

Through Swedish support and CSO exchanges with PwD organisations, the Swedish CS strategy is contributing to organising PwD by sector to take action through their federation. This contributes to giving PwD a sense of ownership of their organisa-

tions' work against discrimination and for the recognition of their rights as citizens. Their awareness of the importance of representing themselves and in being their own spokespersons is clear from their slogan "Nothing about us without us"⁷⁸. In addition, the SFO has provided direct forms of support through funding from the Swedish CS strategy to PwD that has contributed to improving individual self-esteem, well-being, mobility and access to education, vocational training and sports.

The work of SFOs and their partners is also: contributing to making women's and young people's rights visible; strengthening their participation; and building their leadership capacities as citizens in local organisations of small producers focused on the rural economy, in their communities, and through independent networks and educational institutions and initiatives, in the Caribbean and Pacific regions.

In terms of food, while an important debate needs to take place about the difference of emphasis between food security and food sovereignty, including, among other issues, land reform and the impact of mining on health and biodiversity, the Swedish CS strategy's SFOs and partners have established contributions to small-scale ecological solutions that build resilience based on local knowledge and resources and serve as a replicable model at community, municipal and national levels. Their work is also contributing to awareness about climate change and disaster preparedness.

SFOs and their partners working on cooperative-based agriculture have contributed to strengthening local producer's organisations and developed new best practices aimed at better and more secure food supply and income, including centres for the collection and distribution of surplus production, which guarantee to producers a better price for their products.

5.3.3 Strengthening a vibrant and pluralist civil society

The Swedish CS strategy, in the view of one of its SFOs, coincides with its own vision in seeking to strengthen a civil society, which includes community and grass-roots organisations and progressive churches and "that becomes increasingly active, [as citizens and organisations] capable of influencing their own contexts... subjects of their own destinies"⁷⁹. This definition would also include NGOs, while emphasising the distinct characteristics of those ranging from very powerful national institutions to local-level associations and those working through networks. In the view of this SFO representative, a definition of civil society could only include political parties only if they are in opposition to the governing party in a particular period.

⁷⁸Siles, F. (2014) *Op. cit.*

⁷⁹ Interview with SFO representative, 2014 (not identified due to confidentiality).

According to a Latin American representative, “even when citizens’ and human rights and mechanisms are legislated, in practice these can be deviated or distorted and end up with the state co-opting civil society work”⁸⁰. This SFO recognises that the vision for democracy and civil society of most agencies for international cooperation is based on European and North American models, which would benefit from opening up to debates about emerging democratic and participatory models of the state in Latin America. “At the same time there is concern about the need for greater maturity in Latin America in ensuring the independence of civil society, and concern about how some progressive governments’ fusion of the state and the citizenry tends to create a totalising form of representation of its citizens.”⁸¹

In this vein, some SFOs believe that the Swedish CS strategy should be reviewed in order to examine Nicaragua’s current environment and to recognise what it is enabling or limiting. “Although it no longer has dramatic situations of war, like other contexts, there is an adverse national context with closed spaces that create a complex challenge for CSOs to act as propositive entities.”⁸² In taking a HBRA, approach SFOs and LPOs face difficulties when the official posture of the government of Nicaragua is that equality and participation are rights that have been ‘fully restored’. They feel the seriousness of this situation has not been fully understood by Sida.

Currently, any officially approved intervention, coordination or engagement must be carried out through spaces controlled by the governing party from national to local and community levels. Participation in these spaces is conditioned by loyalties, prohibitions and control over alliances. This means that CSOs feel obliged to bow to authorities or be vulnerable to being ‘tarred by the same brush’ when they are involved in partner relationships tied to international cooperation programmes, or if they choose to make an alliance with a CSO that has dared to speak out. Some have avoided any form of alliance with other civil society actors, especially the independent women’s and feminist movements. This means that a common survival strategy is to develop double or multiple discourses similar to those observed among people in communities during the RC.

Some SFOs feel their partners have achieved important advances in legislation and a certain level of stability and support in the current context, but they acknowledge that in the existing polarised environment, the close relationship between the organisations and governing party is problematic, especially in limiting alliances with other

⁸⁰ Interview with SFO representative, 2014 (not identified due to confidentiality).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Interview with SFO representative, 2014 (not identified due to confidentiality).

sectors of civil society. Faced with this, they are concerned that their partners are turning inwards and becoming closed groups. Therefore, over the next 3 years the SFO will work with them to develop their network.

Other SFOs and their partners working in local and national spaces coordinated by the state feel that they have “the obligation to work in coordination with the Citizen Participation Councils and Cabinets (CPC/GPC now CSFV/GSFV) *defined by the government as civil society*”⁸³, even while they recognise that these structures are directly linked to the political secretaries of the FSLN, who are in charge of orienting both the municipal and community governance structures. One SFO representative in Nicaragua felt that their partners have a complicated situation given the context. The name ‘project’ is given to everything that arrives in a community, and care must be taken to avoid confusion between government projects benefiting party members and SFOs’ own work, especially when both are channelled through the same leaders.

The experience of those SFO and LPOs tackling deep structural issues of discrimination and social exclusion has been that the spaces for dialogue with national state structures are totally closed. Without spaces for dialogue and access, it is very difficult to generate changes in legal frameworks or institutions. On the other hand, in order to establish a project on a municipal level, CSOs must count on the approval of the party structure, “but cannot mention gender equality,⁸⁴ citizen participation, social audits and more”. This means that many SFOs, their partners and other Nicaraguan CSOs have had to establish discursive strategies to avoid mentioning certain terms or face a boycott of their work by governance and community structures. This has created an atmosphere of fear and apprehension. The result is that any civil society work, even when self-censoring and limited to approved spaces, is vulnerable to “possessiveness and competition for protagonism between leaders” and may be attacked by representatives of the party in power or its loyal supporters. This situation severely restricts any denunciation of corrupt practices within governance structures.

Another major concern of most SFOs is a tendency in Europe and elsewhere towards inclusion of the private sector as part of civil society and/or as an actor in human and social development, something that is perceived by some partners (LPOs and SFOs) to be entering into the language and models for engagement in the relationship with Swedish cooperation. For many, the inclusion of the private sector in either sphere is

⁸³ Interview with SFO representative 2014 (not identified due to confidentiality).

⁸⁴ The SFO interviewed refers here to space for NGO projects working independently from government-approved spaces. The government has incorporated the language of gender equality and has developed work with women through its community structures; however, at the same time, it has been heavily criticised by independent international and national women’s rights and feminist organisations for rolling back women’s rights legislation on reproductive rights, as described in Section 1.

problematic in the Latin American region because of the powerful and often negative connotation of multinational corporations and large-scale private sectors (in areas such as the privatisation of water supplies, extractive mining and labour exploitation). “Their central role is not precisely to improve society and strengthen the voice of citizens and civil society, and their accountability is also problematic”.⁸⁵ One SFO considers that only in certain cases and under certain limited conditions (e.g. community benefit, control of resources and decision-making) the private sector may help to advance situations where there are serious delays in public sector support or levels of abandonment by the state. All agree that forcing civil society actors to depend on private sector funding runs the risk of distorting or co-opting their work because of their opposing or conflicting interests.

In the June 2014 learning event, participants from diverse CSOs, groups and movements⁸⁶ expressed their interest and appreciation of the Swedish CS strategy’s approach, relevance, realism and even urgency in the current context. They also welcomed the opportunity to talk about these and other issues outside of the spaces they normally inhabit. This clearly suggests the need for creating safe spaces – among actors involved in the strategy and also more widely among Nicaraguan civil society actors – where these and other issues can be discussed in a cross-referenced, non-polarised debate.

During the discussion on civil society, questions for future discussion emerged on three issues: civil society’s position in relation to the state; relations between civil society actors (who is part of civil society, who is not part, what interests to defend, and how?); and the link between the political agenda of civil society in Nicaragua and technological advances. The following questions arose:

- What is the role of civil society in creating inclusive states, taking into account that the forms of state that exist currently reproduce exclusion?
- How should effective participation of individuals and organisations take place so that the state includes everyone, and is not an anti-nation state?⁸⁷

In relation to this discussion, some participants expressed a concern about how the civil society strategy in Nicaragua could work more harmoniously with the government, and emphasised the difficulty in overcoming the idea that civil society is working against it. However, participants affirmed that there are internal contradictions on

⁸⁵ Interview with SFO representative, 2014 (not identified due to confidentiality).

⁸⁶ These include actors working on issues such as migration, integrated rural community development, gender, feminism and masculinities, as well as national rights advocacy networks, academics and others.

⁸⁷ Understood as a state apparatus that does not position itself in opposition to the interests of the country as a whole.

this and other issues among civil society actors themselves. While objectives, strategies and working methods are diverse, this does not necessarily lead to conflict. There is a shared perception that emphasis is often placed on what separates rather than on what is in common. To overcome this difficulty, it is necessary to avoid idealising the concept of civil society, and conceptualise it in the specific context of Nicaragua.

Thus:

- What *is* the agenda and what *should* be the agenda of civil society in this country?
- How can civil society act on for the public good that needs to be built?

Participants agreed that a strategy is needed that analyses, both for Nicaragua and the present context, the nature of this agenda and how it is to be promoted.

While the closure/conditioning of spaces for dialogue with the state presents obstacles for the development of the strategy, it also presents three clear directions for relevant, aligned and feasible future support based on three dimensions of CSOs and citizens' relationships to influence the state and society:

1. Collaboration in invited spaces on joint state-civil society and citizens initiatives
2. Transformation of officially provided or approved spaces by challenging established paradigms
3. Co-creation of independent initiatives and networks for social movement to strengthen self-representation and voice and influence society.

One SFO opened up other key issues by stating that even a representative organisation usually works *for* rather than *with* people living in the most marginalised situations of discrimination, extreme poverty and isolation because of the very nature of their position and the obstacles they face. In addition to raising questions of representational legitimacy, this also demonstrates the shortcoming of the associational way of understanding civil society. Our observations in doing this research also bears witness to the great diversity of actors in Nicaraguan civil society, not only as NGOs or other forms of associations but also as citizens intervening in the public arena to influence decision-making, policy and deeper cultural paradigms. Since space for dialogue among CSOs continues to narrow, the current emphasis on an associational vision of civil society may need to be broadened to include the public arena if the strategy is to continue to be feasible. Taken together, these two notions of civil society present a more dynamic way to understand how actors, diverse forms knowledge, spaces and actions interact to further citizens' rights through organised collective action. However, individual citizens or small spontaneous groups can also channel unmediated voices and take important public space through communications technologies, the arts or public acts that create ruptures or provide symbolic gestures that help shift the way people make sense of themselves and the world around them.

5.3.4 Strengthening the voice of people living in situations of poverty and marginalisation

One SFO⁸⁸ considered the issue of strengthening the voice of people living in poverty to be fraught with complexity. This SFO expressed the concern that by supporting the most vulnerable and marginalised in speaking out, they may even increase their vulnerability. For this reason, this representative feels it is better to strengthen existing spaces for dialogue. “It would be good to be clear about Sida’s expectations in relation to what the organisations should do [to strengthen people’s voices]”⁸⁹, when project capacities are limited and when they aim to “work without damage to bring people out of vulnerability”.⁹⁰ This, she argues, would be contingent on having established laws and instruments with which to defend the rights of the most marginalised.

Another SFO believes that a more holistic and relational approach is needed. Organisational strengthening should be promoted as the key to positioning organisations in relation to other actors and the government. Independent spaces and networks for groups facing marginalisation and discrimination should be strengthened by creating new values and leadership practices to enhance the possibility for new social movements from exchanges, dialogue and alliances between spaces of this kind. This is especially true where LPOs are also providing services in a more client-based relationship that may reproduce unequal power relationships or narratives in which ‘clients’ perceive themselves as victims or dependent beneficiaries, rather than potential agents of change in their own histories. Other strategies complementary to an organisational focus include the creative use of public space and forms of anonymous expression, as well as the participatory use of the communications media – especially radio – as a direct channel for people to speak out.

In the learning workshop, in relation to the construction of an agenda for civil society, an observation was made of the distance between the social issues most linked to unachieved basic rights, and scientific and technological issues. On the one hand, it is necessary to reconceptualise ways of making claims on the state, but on the other hand, taking into account that technology can be a driver of discrimination, “if you aren’t connected you aren’t a citizen of the network society”⁹¹. In Nicaragua, levels of internet access and use are low, creating a dual society of the ‘information-included’ and ‘information-excluded’. How can these disparities be addressed?

⁸⁸ Interview with LWF representative in Nicaragua, 2014

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Learning workshop participant. See Siles, F. (2014), *Op. cit.*

In terms of working with ‘the poorest of the poor’ and the most vulnerable populations, our overall findings suggest that those living in the most extreme situations of poverty and marginalisation are the least likely to be participating in projects and spaces established by the SFOs and their partners, due to the very nature of their living conditions. This especially affects women who invest long hours each day in labour-intensive reproductive and productive tasks. For people in extreme poverty and dealing with trauma, discrimination and violence, the very conditions of their marginalisation and poverty contribute to their continued exclusion by others, both within their communities and beyond. Guaranteeing daily survival while living amidst violent and unequal power relations also limits people’s abilities (again with an emphasis on women) in being able to give time and energy to longer-term strategies, and in mobilising beyond their immediate community. For this reason, a reflection expressed by one of the SFOs seems pertinent and frank: “In order to participate in an organisation with a rights based approach, a person must have resolved certain basic material needs. However we work *for* the poorest of the poor, since all work in advocacy done from a HRBA has an impact on the entirety of the population [affected]. The idea is ‘to work *for* but not necessarily *with*’. The main focus ... is to strengthen the organisations ... so that these can work in favour of the rights of all.”⁹² In this sense, most LPOs are focusing on already established change agents (especially on a national level) and/or on developing new local leaderships (such as among young people and women) by creating enabling conditions for those with easier access to educational or training opportunities to act as a bridges into communities.

It is clear that grassroots organisations, elected leaders and municipal level advocacy by LPOs have been able to achieve certain levels of representative legitimacy where there are attempts to: reach out regularly and listen with sensitivity to people on a community or local level; agree on strategies to create space, conditions and actions that genuinely reflect and respect their perspectives and; provide vehicles for marginalised people’s unmediated voices and encouragement for authentic participation. On a national level, the legitimacy of advocacy work is evidently most successful where different citizens’ constituencies from communities, departments or regions – especially creating voice from beyond the focus on the capital city – are democratically organised and capable of taking collective outspoken action in public spaces and in the media to support demands made on the institutions. This reinforces the need for greater emphasis on society-focused advocacy in building democratic constituencies ‘from the bottom up’ as a strategy for achieving greater success in advocacy carried out by existing change agents in institutional spaces.

⁹² Interview with representative of MyRight, 2014

5.3.5 The influence of global aid architecture on Sida's contribution

Sida representatives in the final learning workshop stressed, among other aspects, that its guidelines focus on core funding and long-term strategies, and that its requirements do not involve short-term results of particular reporting formats. This highlights the need for greater dialogue to address differences in perceptions about recent focuses and requirements of recent aid architecture. According to most SFOs, the strategy has been key in supporting Swedish CSOs' contribution to their partners' work in Nicaragua. However, over the last few years Sida is no longer felt by them to be the flexible donor that it was before. SFOs sense harsh and sudden changes have been passed down to them through Sida which they have been forced to transmit to their partners. This has generated discontent among LPOs, since some continue to think of Sida as an extremely flexible organisation and they see the SFO as responsible. New reporting formats require many more hours of desk work for LPOs. Many feel this increase and express the feeling that their qualitative relationship with SFOs has been affected. This is especially acute where LPOs are supported by multiple donors with different reporting demands and formats, and where SFOs are contributing small-scale funds with little flexibility in demanding short-term results.

Most SFOs, however, highlight an urgent need to: revise the results-based way of working with partners, projects and reports; reduce the quantity of reports, and simplify periods and formats; create more time and space for greater quality and dialogue; and deepen their understanding of accountability instruments (such as the Human Accountability Partnership (HAP) norms and mechanisms) and how they might play out in particular contexts. SFO representatives say they are trapped in a constant dynamic focused on actions, reports, monitoring and evaluation, and are left with insufficient time to open up space for more strategic discussion and analysis, which is especially urgent in the present day context. SFOs also complain that there seems to be more emphasis on receiving input and carrying out strategy and programming analysis through consultations with existing Sida partners and allies such as United Nations agencies, rather than inputs from national or regional human rights workers, gender experts, and/or civil society leaders and analysts.

Our findings suggest that some LPOs are also trapped in this dynamic and spend a great deal of time ensuring report with different deadlines and formats for diverse donors. They complain of having little time to prioritise core strategic discussions and planning. As a survival strategy, some LPOs seem to function based on funding availability and tend to work on a fragmented project-by-project basis. In other LPOs, project funding helps to guarantee the investment of elected leaders' time in developing organisational actions and tasks, and as these positions become associated with paid time from projects, this limits the renewal of democratically elected leadership.

Most LPOs coincide in feeling that during the last few years the profile of international cooperation has been changing along with more stringent budget itemisation, which, for example, no longer includes salaries. This limits staff stability and the hir-

ing of new personnel. They also coincide in reporting difficulties with the high levels of administrative work required for small amounts of money. The results-based project relationship appears to be creating serious limitations in the capacity of the organisation to broaden its scope and impact, even when LPOs maximise their use of resources between projects as a survival strategy.

Some SFOs appear to be using a core-funding approach with LPOs, however according to our findings this is not the most common approach. Sida representatives say they have actively encouraged SFOs to work through core support, but the interest has been very low. Several SFOs in Nicaragua relate this to the specificity of the results-based formats required as reporting mechanisms. Another reason, in the case of the CoS, may relate to the existence of established systems in the LWF, which, as a global actor, responds to multiple donors beyond the bounds of Sweden. This is an area that evidently requires deeper reflection, discussion and coordination between Sida and its partners to reach an agreement that defines partners in relationship to Swedish civil society, and opens up dialogue on funding and reporting policy issues in order to maximise the effectiveness of the CS strategy.

Overall these limitations, in the light of our research findings, seriously hinder the development of relational approaches to human rights based work and the implementation of participatory methodologies that would favour deeper and more meaningful long-term strategies in developing a vibrant and pluralist civil society that takes into account the voices and proposals of people living in situations of poverty and marginalisation.

5.4 WHAT PLAUSIBLE CONTRIBUTION CAN BE INFERRED TO THE ROLE OF THE SWEDISH CIVIL SOCIETY STRATEGY IN CSO CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AND ENHANCEMENT WORK?

Capacity building and organisational strengthening are the espoused strategies at the heart of the SFOs' and LPOs' achievement of the concrete contributions mentioned above. The findings of this research confirms the contribution to some of the capacities developed by SFOs and their partners through the strategy's framework, including:

- Information, reflection and empowerment processes related to the HRBA, international rights conventions and legal frameworks (e.g. women's rights, gender and masculinities, young people's and PwD's rights, Indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples rights, autonomous territorial rights from an intercultural approach);
- capacities in advocacy, accountability of the state to citizens (social audits, electoral observation, follow-up on legal frameworks);
- knowledge about organic food production and collection, silviculture, conservation of local seeds, water and soil, climate change, and disaster risk reduction;

- citizen participation, democracy and leadership, internal organisation;
- HAP certification techniques monitoring, evaluation and learning; management and administrative skills and knowledge, among others.

However the term ‘capacities’ disguises a much broader range of phenomena generated or circulated by SFOs, LPOs and other actors working to strengthen citizen participation, civil society and the voices of people in situations of poverty and marginalisation. The term ‘capacity building’ tends to be limited to describing the ‘acquisition’ of abilities, skills, competencies and the replica of ‘best practices’, and as such suggests an a priori *lack* and a concept of *power as an object*. This does not do justice to the deeper work highlighted in some of the positive examples in this report, work that involves processes, methodologies and spaces for action that have contributed to combining knowledge and awareness among participants through subjective processes often involving sharing/comparing and re-shaping their own histories.

These types of moments are occurring not just in facilitated workshops but also – sometimes surprisingly – in small user groups, such as the women’s weaving group we encountered in one of our RCs. The safe space established by this group created conditions for participants to discuss politics, defective male leaderships and other issues that under other circumstances are treated as taboo and are silenced. This is an example of a moment in which hidden narratives come to the surface and break with the previously established public versions of the ‘truth’ that have been masked by double discourses.

These processes, moments or spaces could be described as facilitating a *circulation of power* through energy, ideas, self esteem, action and reflection that contributes to participants’ transformation of their sense of themselves and their agency. In this sense, the recognition of local or national understandings or reinterpretations of particular experiences, cultures and histories (with or without freely selected external influences), through the circulation of power seems to contribute more to changes in active citizenship and organisational strengthening on which SFOs and their partners are working.

These examples suggests that the successful enhancement of citizen participation in developing civil society perhaps goes beyond the tendency to conceive of the ‘delivery’ of ‘capacity development’ in isolated strands based on the logic of project or programme interventions. Rather, this seems to be occurring more successfully in spaces in which diverse actors are able to engage subjectively, to cross-reference and cross-fertilise ideas and energies in safe spaces with a view to developing common-cause actions. In effect, the learning event held in on 7 June 2014 opened up a space that simulated this and contributed new energy to the discussion, partly because, as one participant commented, people from organised spaces came together in an environment of critical thinking and mutual acceptance who, in the present polarised and violent context, rarely talk to one another. The question might then become:

- Is Sida, through the Swedish CS strategy, the appropriate convenor of this type of space for cross-fertilisation among civil society actors in Nicaragua?
- If not, how can spaces such as these be facilitated under the present circumstances, and who might convene them?
- How might Sida and the Swedish CS strategy provide support for this type of initiative?

6 Conclusions: Relevance, alignment and feasibility

6.1 RELEVANCE

The findings and analysis of this research process confirm that the overall focus of the Swedish CS strategy – on voice, citizen actions and their representation through vibrant and pluralist CSOs – is highly relevant in the Nicaraguan context by enabling people living in poverty and marginalisation to improve their living conditions and gain greater recognition of their rights. In fact, it is urgently needed now that Sida no longer has bilateral aid programmes there.

The strategy's reference to *voice* places emphasis on the autonomous agency of citizens in speaking for themselves, communicating with others, exercising authentic forms of participation and creating ruptures with silence and resignation. This process of finding voice underscores the importance of work on subjectivity and self-esteem to bring to the fore a discussion of the invisible forms of power underlying exclusion and marginalisation, while helping to reveal people's hidden or unspoken sense of reality, their experiences, ideas and proposals. This is essential in achieving greater accountability and transparency in access to resources of all kinds for people undergoing poverty and marginalisation to change their basic living conditions. It also contributes to a timely critique emerging from *civil society actors* about rights, discriminatory practices and hybrid forms of participation and patronage, thus contributing to a deeper re-visioning of Nicaraguan society and the relationship between citizens and their community, local, regional and national governance structures.

The emphasis on civil society *vibrancy and pluralism* creates a benchmark for strategic discussions on how to overcome current problems such as conformism, and the uniformity or polarisation of spaces, while encouraging and at the same time recognising the rich diversity of actors and citizen actions that make up Nicaraguan civil society. Equally, the HRBA is appropriate and relevant for developing this work.

Within this, the thematic focuses of the work being done by the Swedish CS strategy through SFOs and their partners are generally relevant to the themes that emerged from the RC research, as they fall within and address the multiple dimensions of poverty mentioned by people in the communities revisited during the course of this study. Similarly, the theories of change and strategies of SFOs and LPOs are relevant to concrete situations of marginalisation and poverty and the aspirations for change mentioned by people in the research site communities. This is especially true for work on: strengthening people's self reliance; fostering fair, transparent and more inclusive

forms of economic interdependence, organisation and decision-making in their communities; and improving access to quality education with focuses that counteract discrimination and exclusion. The research team heard life stories and saw first-hand evidence of change in people's sense of hope and willingness to engage in processes of transformation (hence in the improvement of their circumstances over time) when some of these key elements changed. Unearthing the assumptions behind these theories of change, we saw that in some cases LPO and SFO strategies are helping to contribute to creating the necessary – but not always sufficient – conditions for advancing rights. One element that stands out is the issue of emotional responses to poverty, trauma and violence and the need to address these more effectively with methodologies that strengthen personal growth and resilience.

While some theories of change were explicit and effective, others tended to be diffuse or too narrowly focused with room for further work on deepening discussions about theories of change. There are also marked differences in the interpretation and depth of understanding of these themes across the strategy and between actors in the same funding stream. This gives a sense of fragmentation in the way in which these themes are framed conceptually and methodologically. This may be due partly to the way knowledge tends to circulate more vertically than horizontally within the aid architecture (see section 6.3). These differences, however, are rich sources for discussion and mutual learning with which to enhance the strategy's multifaceted vision and shift into a new stage of greater dialogue, learning and synergy.

6.2 ALIGNMENT

The term 'alignment' refers here to the congruence of the systems, processes, relationships and dynamics through which the Swedish CS strategy is delivered. It could be argued that an excessive or unilateral emphasis on the uniform delivery of any strategy might counteract the diversity and flexibility needed to implement any human rights focus that aims to strengthen marginalised voices, or encourage vibrancy and pluralism.

During this research process, many of the participants (SFOs, partners and actors in Nicaraguan civil society in the learning event) expressed concern about the establishment of a private enterprise logic in international aid circles in general, including Sida. Among other things, this exacts measurable results over very short periods, which then function as evaluative parameters for refinancing. Most SFOs and their partners feel this is producing perverse consequences for their work in terms of internal organisation and in their relationships, because of the diverse nature of CSOs and the complex dynamics of human rights based and community development, empowerment and social change. A further concern emphasised by workshop participants and interviewees is the way this logic tends to transform the framework organisations and partners themselves. It demands accountability through uniform organisational and operational structures, and by reinforcing a marketing dynamic based on matching yet competitive discourses within an increasing tendency towards monetised and top-down relations.

The consensus of SFOs and LPOs is that social change involving citizens' empowerment requires the development of more horizontal face-to-face relationships and flexible grassroots processes that take into account the particularity of social and political contexts as sensitive ecosystems. This relational and flexible approach, they stress, is what enables interventions to contribute to facilitating spaces and opportunities for people to address and gradually overcome the multiple challenges they face in developing their individual and collective voice and agency. This suggests that one of the greatest challenges to the alignment of the HRBA focus of strategy delivery is in fact the results-based system of project management.

In terms of the alignment within the country, the strategy tends to function in 'vertical slices' based on funding relationships – in one case through the structures of a global organisation- before reaching LPOs. Comments were repeatedly made in the learning workshops about how they welcomed what for many was the first opportunity for local partners and SFOs to meet and discuss the strategy, learn in more depth about the HRBA and discuss the current situation of civil society in Nicaragua. This lack of joint spaces for discussion highlights the risk of the emphasis on vertical funding relationships (over more horizontal strategic debate), which appear to be diffusing or fragmenting alignment. This also means that Sida and its partners may be missing possible synergies, between the overall strategy and its expression in specific organisational or contextual realities, and among diverse actors working in a common direction in national and local scenarios. This is especially difficult to overcome when time and space for strategic dialogue between SFOs and their partners (favouring greater *two-way vertical alignment*) is limited by the working context and by pressure to produce and report short term results, and where opportunities are few for debates that might contribute to *greater horizontal alignment on a country level*, including with other civil society actors or donors. Where greater emphasis is placed on administrative relations and upward accountability to donors, the absence of these spaces for deeper dialogue and alignment may also reinforce expressions of resigned pragmatism among LPOs. Potentially, it may reduce political transparency and reinforce gaps in which double discourses emerge between the particular local or national agendas of actors and Sida's universal human rights vision as a strategy for international cooperation. On the other hand, if these internal obstacles and risks are jointly addressed on a country level among the different actors, this would in all likelihood lead to a much more effective and aligned country strategy.

Nicaragua is at a historical moment, in which work to strengthen independent civil society and citizens rights is viewed with suspicion by the state. Selected coordination and decision-making structures are established as *closed or invited spaces*, to the exclusion of citizens and organisations with more outspoken critical voices. This has been evidenced and has implications from RCs to national levels, and it has implications at every level. There is a noticeable lack of alignment on a country level among the different actors in the Swedish CS strategy about what participation in these closed or invited spaces implies for the strengthening a vibrant and pluralist civil so-

ciety. Moreover, a discussion is clearly pending about how, under the present circumstances, to strengthen the voices of citizens who are being marginalised and discriminated against for diverse reasons. One country representative questioned whether or not this effort might even be viable or desirable, given their concern that it would create greater vulnerability for people already facing marginalisation in their communities. This suggests that there may be underlying incongruences between the stated principles or focuses of the strategy and its actors, and the way these are put into practice or decisions are made on people's behalf, in the present political climate.

There seems to be closer alignment with the intentions of the strategy, when transformative dynamics are developed through participatory processes with methodologies combining personal growth and self-esteem in spaces for sharing histories/ideas and exchanging/developing specific skills and abilities for collective action. This is especially true where it contributes to creating or strengthening inclusive spaces for self-representation and therefore a greater sense of belonging/ownership and hence legitimacy. We can see this from several positive examples, particularly the social auditing course facilitated as part of the integrated strategy of one of the LPOs.

In terms of alignment, all actors involved in the strategy are working from different angles on non-discrimination. Given the strategy's focus on voice as an implicit reference to empowerment and agency, there seem to be some misalignments between the strategy and some of the actors in terms of the analysis of gender rights, women's empowerment and/or masculinities. This is particularly evidenced in the way power dynamics in traditional family structures, and particular communities are addressed. In this sense there seems to be little overall strategic discussion of how to ensure women's protagonism in developing *claimed or created safe spaces* from which to represent themselves and strengthen their voices. Equally, there needs to be more alignment between this latter understanding of women's empowerment and the complementary work being done on deconstructing patriarchal forms of masculinity, in order to ensure that the work with men and in mixed groups does not substitute women's *claimed spaces*, by creating *invited spaces* in which male hegemony continues to go unchallenged in spite of reformed discourses. Considering the different constituencies in which SFOs and LPOs are involved in Nicaragua, greater alignment needs to be achieved between these actors across the strategy in the application of an intersectional approach to gender, disability, age, sexuality, ethnic/language and rural/urban identities, among others, in order for them to be engaged with dynamic interactions that occur in particular ways throughout Nicaraguan society on the Caribbean and Pacific coasts.

In terms of accountability and transparency, all actors mention this work, but only some with a rigorous focus involving up-front participation and/or using methods such as those involved in the HAP certification (which is suggested as a possible framework beyond humanitarian relief contexts). This raises questions about alignments in the understanding and practical application of accountability mechanisms, and the evidence suggests that some actors place more emphasis on upwards account-

ability to donors rather than accountability to communities and internal horizontal accountability. The same can be said about participation as it is applied both between LPOs and communities and in advocacy with the state. Since participation can be a “cosmetic label, a co-opting practice or an empowering process”,⁹³ greater conceptual and practical alignment is necessary in actors’ approaches to participation, especially in Nicaragua’s current complex context. This also requires greater discussion and alignment to ensure synergy among the different actors in their advocacy strategies and efforts to influence on public opinion. This discussion should take into account evidence from the present evaluative study about how advances have been made in influencing the state, but also about the ways in which the state influences civil society, and the importance of strengthening all citizens’ awareness of their position and potential agency and voice as rights bearers.

The learning workshops included in this research process were welcomed almost unanimously by participants as space for aligning understandings and for engagement in key strategic debate that many felt has been lacking until now. Participants also mentioned how the critical discussion of the research reports was useful not only for exchange within these workshops but also for reinforcing reflective practices in their day to day professional work.

6.3 FEASIBILITY

The Swedish CS strategy is anchored in processes to restore people’s human rights through enabling conditions, voice and vibrant and pluralist civil society. According to the findings and analysis of this research process, these processes represent a feasible way to support civil society actors in addressing a complex national context. Sweden’s historic cooperation with Nicaragua provides a solid foundation and intimate knowledge of Nicaragua and its history, and this favours its relational medium to long-term HRBA to developing citizens’ voices and strengthening civil society. Some SFOs and partners also mentioned the importance of the interrelation between organised social sectors (SFOs and other local and national actors) in Sweden and in Nicaragua in exchanging experiences and sharing ideas beyond the funding relationship. In the view of the research team, discussion of this issue and the way Sida could take a role to support exchange programmes - possibly in coordination with other Swedish support to civil society in the region as well- could contribute to the deeper sustainability and feasibility of the strategy. However, the current aid architecture framework as described above tends to undermine this type of approach to the detriment of the strategy. The strategy’s feasibility could increase if shifts occurred in the

⁹³ Chambers, R. (1994) *Paradigm Shifts and the Practice of Participatory Research and Development*, IDS Discussion Paper No. 2, Sussex: Institute of Development Studies, p. 1

aid architecture to open up space and time and develop greater shared understanding, strategic alignment and synergies.

At the same time, actors involved in the strategy identify vulnerabilities and risks due the current atmosphere of polarisation and hostility towards civil society, especially its most independent expression. The research carried out during this study has found evidence of widespread fear of marginalisation, exposure or exclusion by the state, and the corresponding reproduction of hybrid forms of participation based on historic patterns of dependency and loyalty. This emerged not only in the RC sites, but also among civil society actors, including some of those involved in the strategy framework. In this sense, the feasibility or sustainability of the strategy may well be limited by working exclusively with legal entities that must report to governance structures, and/or by reinforcing the professional NGO model of organisation. The challenge then becomes how to draw strategic discussions from the diverse histories of Nicaraguans as citizens – in the past and in the current context – that have contributed to establishing creative, vibrant and audacious forms of organisation and communication, and that continue to develop rich empowerment methodologies and innovative spaces for voice, agency and greater democratic legitimacy.

7 Recommendations

This research process and the two learning events⁹⁴ that accompanied it have opened up a process of reflection and have produced a broad series of recommendations from participants on every level. The research team has selected and synthesised some key recommendations from this process. The recommendations in Sections 7.1 and 7.2 are for Sida and SFOs, and those in Section 7.3 are for Sida only.

1. Create a permanent space for dialogue

This space should involve all SFOs and LPOs involved in the country strategy with input from selected allies, external researchers, analysts and specialised practitioners to:

- Design an iterative process that can be sustained over time to foster joint analysis, exchange, learning and ongoing reflective evaluation in-country, establishing agreements on methodologies, logistics, etc. This process should count on adequate resources for inclusion in terms of language (Spanish and Caribbean languages, Braille, and sign language) and physical and geographic accessibility (possibly rotating meeting places to familiarise actors with diverse national contexts).
- Enable space for all actors to familiarise themselves with the strategy's overall principles (including discussion of all seven of Sida's HBRA principles), concepts, aims and focuses, and discuss their interpretation in relation to the actors' own theories of change, strategies and methodologies.
- Create a safe space with external facilitation to carry out a reflective and participatory power analysis that addresses the difficulties, communication gaps, and issues of ethics and accountability (among others) in the relationship between actors as part of the aid architecture, including a critique of the emerging role of the private sector in development cooperation. The aim of this space would be to discuss proposals that shift current project management and results-based paradigms towards fostering greater effectiveness, transparency and trust, through dialogical ways of working that contribute to developing more horizontal relations and flexible synergies.

⁹⁴ See reports from learning workshops in separate documents.

- Carry out an in-depth political, economic and socio-cultural analysis of the current national context, integrating a gender and intersectional perspective and a positive but critical analysis of the NGO model within the heterogeneity of CSOs and spaces for citizens' agency. The aim should be to discuss the implications of this analysis for the strategy, and the possible inclusion of, or alliances with, a greater diversity of civil society actors.
- Share and discuss critical issues in intersectional and gender analysis along with the differentiated strategies, approaches and practices being used by participants in particular contexts.
- Share and discuss different organisational models (from Europe, Latin America and the global South) for participation, representation, democracy and accountability in civil society, in social movements and in citizens' relationships to state structures.
- Share and discuss alternative economic and ecologically sound rural and urban models for livelihoods – including co-operative, community-based, social and solidarity economies, access to land and basic food production – that foster greater food sovereignty and improve environmental and human health.
- Share learning and discuss among actors, with input from experienced and specialised practitioners, how to integrate more fully into educational and empowerment methodologies focuses on personal growth (working on emotional and psychological aspects, grief, trauma, marginalisation) for building self-esteem and strengthening individual and collective resilience, autonomy and agency. These methodologies work 'from the inside out' towards creating collective empathy, identification and independent action, and as such they should begin with the actors themselves: the professional staff and community activists who will be involved in the implementation and development of these methodologies with other people in situations of greater poverty and social exclusion.
- Exchange experiences of successful practices and develop joint proposals that help actors increase the inclusion of grassroots organisations locally, and locally-rooted leaders nationally, as part of an effort to reach out regularly and listen with sensitivity to people on a community or local level; agree on strategies to create space, conditions and actions that genuinely reflect and respect their perspectives and; provide vehicles for marginalised people's unmediated voices encouragement for authentic participation.
- Develop an in-country internal and external communications strategy, including a critical approach to the use of new communications technology and participatory media, especially radio, which is the most accessible medium for people living in conditions of extreme poverty and marginalisation.
- Share experiences of the use of advocacy tools combined with personal and collective empowerment processes for building social constituencies and public awareness (including social audits as key strategies for developing criteria and information for accountability) in support of demands for institutional and legal change.

2. Examine alternative strategies for Sida support to space for ongoing dialogue involving academic researchers, practitioners and activists in Nicaraguan and Swedish civil society

One proposal that emerged from the learning workshops carried out in this research process is the creation of a civil society forum or yearly conference, which could connect and circulate knowledge and experience among the distinct realities and focuses of Nicaraguan civil society, while at the same time benefit from ongoing one-to-one exchanges with similar Swedish entities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SIDA

3. Organise a global conference among civil society actors

This should be supported by Sweden with an international organising committee. Its aim should be to foster north–south and east–west dialogue, exchange and mutual learning based on the issues outlined above, among others.

Annex 1- Map of Nicaragua



Annex 2 Country and key issue contexts

Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America, with an extension of 129,494 square kilometres and a population of 5.7 million. Geographically, it is divided into three main regions: the Pacific lowlands, characterised by largely flat terrain with a ridge of active volcanoes along the Pacific coast; the eastern Caribbean lowlands, constituting almost half of national territory and largely covered by tropical rain forest, pine savannahs, and swampland linked to the river deltas; and between the two, the central and northern highlands, with sharp relief and numerous, small, mountainous valleys. Nicaragua has been historically affected by intense volcanic activity as it is situated above two tectonic plates, and is highly vulnerable to regional tropical storms and hurricanes. In addition to high quality agricultural land, Nicaragua has considerable geothermal, hydroelectric, and mineral resource potential, as well as the two largest freshwater lakes in the region. Coffee (18.9%), meat (18.7%) and gold (16%) constitute Nicaragua principal exports⁹⁵, with annual remittance incomes totaling approximately US\$800 million.

Despite its economic potential, Nicaragua continues to be the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere after Haiti and Honduras, with 48% of the population living in poverty. Of the nation's poor, 17 per cent live in extreme poverty, earning less than US\$185 per year. In the UN Human Development Index, Nicaragua ranks 129 out of 187 countries⁹⁶. Despite sweeping political and economic change over the last four decades, Nicaragua continues to face significant challenges in governance and poverty reduction, as a product of its turbulent political history. Continued social conflict, exclusion and uneven distribution of economic resources and political power have constrained any efforts towards sustainable development.

Like its neighbours in Central America, Nicaragua's history⁹⁷ was tightly linked to the development of agricultural export commodities, an agrarian-based elite, the suc-

⁹⁵ UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2011.

⁹⁶ UNDP (2012) *Human Development Report 2012*, New York: United Nations Development Programme

⁹⁷ The very different contours of the history of Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast, characterised by the cultural distinctness of Coast's ethnic groups, its unique economic and social formation, the historical tensions with mestizo national majority, and the aspirations of the Coastal population for autonomy, have con-

cessive military regimes required to maintain them, growing popular resistance and the role of the US as a key actor in the Central American region, due to economic and geopolitical interests. The pressures accumulated over the previous half century erupted in 1979 with the Sandinista Revolution, which overthrew the long-standing Somoza dictatorship and set in motion wide ranging social, economic, political and cultural changes. The new government pursued a policy of economic self-sufficiency and initially sought to transform the distribution of wealth and structures of power within the context of a mixed economy. Nationalising the financial system and the foreign trade sector, they embarked on programmes for agrarian reform, agricultural development, literacy, education and health by mobilising broad sectors of society that had previously been excluded. Growing US hostility to the Sandinista project led it to impose a trade embargo and finance a counterrevolutionary insurgency (known as the Contras). These factors combined with raging inflation, an unpopular obligatory military draft, severe shortages, strict foreign exchange measures, the beginnings of structural adjustment and differences over the use and abuse of power and contributed to the Sandinistas loss at the polls in 1990.

The following three governments of Violeta Chamorro, Arnoldo Aleman, and Enrique Bolaños placed Nicaragua on an economic policy path firmly in line with the “Washington Consensus” and IMF policies linked to the renegotiation of Nicaragua’s US\$9.9 billion foreign debt. In 1991 structural adjustment was deepened with privatisation of state programmes. In 1999, unsustainably high levels of external debt qualified Nicaragua for the *Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative* (HIPC), which eased the debt burden and committed Nicaragua to a continuous IMF economic reform agenda. While the economy grew steadily from 1990 to 2010⁹⁸ with an average annual GDP growth rate of 3.24 percent, its impact on poverty was limited, as both poverty and extreme poverty declined by only 7.8 percent and 5.2 percent respectively, from 1993 to 2009. From 1990 onwards the country’s insertion into economic and cultural globalisation increased the population’s personal debt load through increased consumerism and access to credit. This especially affects young people, even when most cannot afford to consume imported goods. As in many parts of the globalised world, corruption is growing and the gap between the rich minority and the poor majority is expanding.

During this period the FSLN was in the opposition, but in 2000 established a political pact with President Arnoldo Aleman of the Constitutional Liberal Party. Through a series of constitutional reforms, this pact enabled the two leaders to divide up political control of key state institutions between them, and thus dominate the Supreme Court,

tributed to the contrasting features of the development challenges faced on the Atlantic Coast.
⁹⁸ Except in 2009, during the global crisis.

the Judiciary and the Supreme Electoral Council among others. The six-year duration of “The Pact” was marked by continual political crises and is widely analysed as having undermined democratic governance, transparency and accountability, while compromising the separation of state powers as a fundamental constitutional principle. The Pact also led to a renegotiation of the electoral law, which resulted in the 2006 re-election of FSLN candidate Daniel Ortega as President with only 38 percent of the vote, without being forced to a second round⁹⁹. Highly questioned municipal elections followed in 2007, sharply dividing public opinion, which was further polarised by a Supreme Court decision breaking with the 1987 constitution to enable the re-election of Ortega in 2011.¹⁰⁰

The principal strategic objectives and broad goals of Nicaragua’s 2007 *National Human Development Plan* (PNDH) were stated as “macroeconomic and financial stability, restitution of rights that generate social welfare and equity, strengthening of a production strategy for economic growth, environmental protection, and the development of the Caribbean Coast, with the support of good public management¹⁰¹”. While conforming closely to IMF macroeconomic policy requirements, the Nicaraguan government implemented a range of policies focused on the poorest population groups, including implementation of a food security strategy in rural areas (Hambre Cero); seeking to ensure free health and education services; introducing a new National Social Welfare System; and creating diverse anti-poverty programs. Some policies have shown results. In their 2010 report, the FAO¹⁰² and the WFP¹⁰³ stated that Nicaragua had already met the first of its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with regard to the reduction of malnutrition. Other policies have been criticised as being welfarist (“assistentialist”) in nature, as well as showing political bias in the allocation and distribution of productive inputs and services.

Nicaragua has historically been highly dependent upon international aid, with the attendant consequences for indebtedness, and with disappointing results for economic growth and social welfare. By 1991, Nicaragua’s total foreign debt was US\$9.9 billion, US\$6.7 billion owed to foreign governments, and 3.2 billion to multilateral lending institutions, commercial banks and other lenders. Later that year, Nicaragua emerged from negotiations with the Paris Club with a 75% debt reduction, although

⁹⁹ It also led to the lifting of legal sanctions against Aleman who had been accused of stealing more than 10 million dollars US from public funds

¹⁰⁰ Hansen, I. M. and Riba. C. (2012) *El Strengthening del Programa de Diakonia en Nicaragua*. Stockholm: Diakonia

¹⁰¹ IMF (2010) *Nicaragua Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, Washington: International Monetary Foundation, p. 57

¹⁰² Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the UN World Food Programme

¹⁰³ UN World Food Programme

total debt payments for 1992 were still half of export income. Between 1992 and 2009, Nicaragua received almost US\$10.6 billion in loans and donations, again raising serious questions as to the long-term effectiveness of such significant transfers. With the election of Daniel Ortega in 2007, and Nicaragua's inclusion in the ALBA¹⁰⁴ regional system, the donor landscape, and the pattern and structure of international aid, were significantly reconfigured with strong new actors such as Venezuela, China (Taiwan), Korea, Mexico, Russia, and Argentina, with distinct approaches. Very substantial Venezuelan aid (estimated at US\$600 million a year) was channelled through the private company of ALBANISA¹⁰⁵ and other mechanisms, provoking significant public debate about the political implications and lack of transparency of this privately managed discretionary budget outside parliamentary control. By 2009, signs of "donor fatigue" had set in for some members of the traditional donor community, with a deceleration in aid, attributed to a variety of factors including continued governance concerns and institutional weaknesses in the separation of state powers; perceived corruption in the public sector; lack of political dialogue; discontinuity in governmental programs; limited progress in poverty reduction and a general migration of bilateral agencies away from Latin America. The departure of key historical European donors, such as the Nordic countries, had a significant impact on the NGO community, some of whom had been recipients of strong support since the early 1990s.

The two successive FSLN administrations have been characterised by the subordination of state institutions to the hegemonic and centralised power of the governing party. In 2007, the FSLN government created a new model of citizen participation by Executive Decree, known as the *Councils of Citizen Power* (CPCs), which sought to provide a new structure for social participation and "direct democracy". From the outset, the creation of the CPCs was a source of controversy. Key civil society actors and other national and international researchers observed that the CPCs duplicated structures already established in 2003 under the Citizens Participation Law. These criticisms increased when the CPCs were expanded into 16 member Citizen Power Cabinets (GPC) that duplicated the legal functions of municipal and community councils and violated the Municipal Autonomy Law by creating mechanisms for decision-making through national FSLN leadership structures. They were also criticised for their use as channels for political clientelism and as a centrepiece of FSLN policy in promoting its electoral objectives and expanding its political hegemony. The CPC community leadership structures have now been reduced in size from 16 to five members and re-named as "Councils of the Family" and "Cabinets of the Family, Health and Life" (GFSV). Over the last year the government's vision of citizen inte-

¹⁰⁴ The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America

¹⁰⁵ ALBA de Nicaragua, SA

gration into the governing party and into community governance structures responsible for the delivery of state benefits has been strengthened. However, criticism has been made that these structures blur the distinction between active citizenship in civil society and state governance structures, and that spaces for dialogue have been narrowed to include only those organisations recognised by the government as civil society organisations, with the tendency of excluding independent and critical voices.

Key issue: Food security and sovereignty

On a world scale, increased globalisation and the shift toward large-scale export agriculture, bio-fuels and biotech crop production, have generated a growing international debate on the implications for food supply and the issue of *Food Sovereignty*.¹⁰⁶ In Nicaragua this issue is central as the agrarian sector has always been of critical importance in the national economy. Even so, there is a food deficit, and imports of foodstuffs represent 16.3 percent of merchandise imports. The structural poverty in which especially rural households are immersed is exacerbated by high global food prices; the unequal impact of climate change and loss of biodiversity on the fragile land of many basic grains producers and subsistence farmers; and the precarious, poorly paid, and informal character of much of the available employment.¹⁰⁷ The IFAD has noted “Households headed by women, young people under 15 years of age and Indigenous people are among the poorest and most disadvantaged groups in rural Nicaragua”. The Nicaraguan *National Survey of Demographics and Health* (ENDESA 2007) states that 23 percent of children under the age of 5 are undernourished, percentages that rise to 28-38 percent in the departments of Nueva Segovia, Matagalpa, Madriz, Jinotega and the RAAN or North Caribbean. The impact of structural adjustment policies in the 1990s on the small farming sector has been characterised as largely adverse, due to a reduction in credit, technical assistance and access to land; rising input costs and lower prices; and through its broad exclusion from the benefited agro-export sector due to lack of resources.¹⁰⁸ Several studies have suggested that DR-CAFTA, agreement¹⁰⁹ that went into effect in 2006 largely benefited the traditional agro-export sector, and “came at the expense of incomes and jobs among small

¹⁰⁶ Altieri, M. (2009) ‘Agroecology, small farms and food sovereignty’, *Monthly Review* 61:3, <http://monthlyreview.org/2009/07/01/agroecology-small-farms-and-food-sovereignty/>

¹⁰⁷ UCA/Oxfam/Crece (2013) ‘Desafíos desde la Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional en Nicaragua’, <http://www.oxfamblogs.org/lac/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Desaf%C3%ADos-desde-la-seguridad-alimentaria-y-nutricional-en-Nicaragua.pdf>

¹⁰⁸ Hendersen, H. (2012) *Nicaragua, the Food Crisis, and the Future of Smallholder Agriculture*, PhD thesis, American University, Washington DC.

¹⁰⁹ Signed between five Central American countries (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua), the Dominican Republic, and the United States in 2004

holders”¹¹⁰. Under the present government some limited gains have been made in meeting the first Millennium Development Goal. The centrepiece of their food strategy is the *Zero Hunger Productive Food Programme (Hambre Cero)*, which seeks to provide basic production inputs to 75,000 small producer households, with women and Indigenous people as a priority. While *Hambre Cero* has been recognised as an advance, numerous analyses have pointed to deficiencies in design and execution.¹¹¹ Among the issues raised are: 1) lack of public transparency with respect to resource use, financing, contracts, the purchase and provision of goods and services, and results; 2) limitations in the efficiency of the technical assistance; 3) clear political bias in the allocation and distribution of productive inputs and services; and 4) limited sustainable economic impact. Civil society efforts to place the issue of food sovereignty in the arena of debate had been underway since 2004, spearheaded by the *Interest Group for Food and Nutritional Sovereignty and Security (GISSAN)* that has over 30 member organisations. GISSAN and other sectors undertook extensive consultative and lobbying to promote *Law 693: Nutritional and Food Sovereignty and Security (SSAN)*, passed in 2009. While the legal framework may offer a useful institutional structure, the government appears not to be using it for policymaking, preferring to prioritise the programmes that form part of its own human development plan.

1. Key issue: People with disabilities

10.3 % of the Nicaraguan population over 6 years of age, or 461,000 Nicaraguans, have some form of disability,¹¹² and according to FECONORI, the federation of PwD organisations, 4% of the population have a severe disability, of whom 75% experience problems in mobility. The Disability Ombudsperson office (PDDHH) has stated that these figures must be understood in their widest sense because “the special problems and the need for support cover not only the disabled member of the family, but the whole family itself, creating a chain of specific needs that must be satisfied.”¹¹³ While there is greater visibility, leadership and participation than ever before, PwD continue to face diverse obstacles in achieving respect for their rights that tie them to situations of poverty. These include daily and institutional forms of discrimination that complicate access to education, health, transport services and adequate employ-

¹¹⁰ Sánchez. M. and Vos, R. (2010). ‘Nicaragua’, in Anderson, K., Cockburn, J. and W. Martin (Eds.) *Agricultural price distortions, inequality, and poverty*, Washington, DC: The World Bank, cited in Hendersen (2012) *Op. cit.* p. 29

¹¹¹ IEEPP (2011) *Hambre Cero: Avances y Desafíos Tercer Informe de Evaluación del Programa Productivo Agropecuario*. Managua: Instituto de Estudios Estratégicos y Políticas Públicas Nicaragua; Larracochea, E. (2010) *Las mujeres en las nuevas políticas sociales de América Latina: el caso del “Hambre Cero” en la Nicaragua actual*, Matagalpa: Grupo Venancia

¹¹² ENDIS (2003) *Nicaraguan Survey of People with Disabilities*, Managua: Encuesta Nacional de Discapacidad

¹¹³ Ombudsperson for People with Disabilities, Rosa Salgado

ment. The barrier to education is a decisive factor in social and economic exclusion. While illiteracy among the population as a whole is 22%, this reaches 44% for PwD. Only 38% finish primary education and 10% secondary¹¹⁴. While 46% of the population are unemployed, this reaches almost two thirds among PwD¹¹⁵. Women with disabilities face a double disadvantage with respect to public services and are exposed to diverse forms of violence. According to FEMUCADI “In the region where the highest number of cases [of violence] occur, 40% were against women with disabilities.”¹¹⁶

In addition to the rights enshrined in the Constitution, Law 202 was approved in 1995 for the “*Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Establishment of Comparable Opportunities for People with Disabilities*¹¹⁷” aimed at ensuring the “*The state and society at large must take up and guarantee opportunities for people with disabilities in equality with the rest of the population.*” By 2006, organisations of PwD developed a series of initiatives to reform the law, which was seen as having a biomedical focus rather than an integrated focus with mechanisms for implementation. In 2011 the law was reformed by the passing of the Law for the Rights of People with Disability¹¹⁸, which establishes these mechanisms through the creation of the *Secretariat for Promotion and Articulation* (part of the President’s Office), a *National Council*, and regional and municipal bodies. It also established planning and budget resource assignment for all state entities to guarantee the application and compliance with the law. To date, these mechanisms have not come into effect. Civil society organisations for the disabled continue to be active in this arena.

2. Key issue: Indigenous rights in the Caribbean Coast

The colonial presence of Spain in the Pacific region and England in the Atlantic marked distinct histories in terms of relations between the internal population and these external agents. This later became consolidated in Nicaragua as two large territories, each with particular cultural social, political and economic dynamics. The Caribbean region, covering approximately 50% of national territory, is home to three Indigenous peoples (125,869 Miskitos, 19,370 Mayangnas and 1,290 Ramas), two Afro-descendent peoples (27,197 Creoles and 4,069 Garifunas) and a mestizo popula-

¹¹⁴ Shia (2011) *Programa de Pais – Nicaragua 2011–2013/4*. Stockholm: Shia

¹¹⁵ Martinez Garcia, A. (2011). *La discapacidad en Nicaragua –una realidad*. London: Department for International Development, p. 28

¹¹⁶ Martinez Garcia, A. (2011) *Op. cit.*

¹¹⁷ Ley de Prevención, Rehabilitación y Equiparación de Oportunidades para las Personas con Discapacidad - Law No. 202, Approved 23 August 1995

¹¹⁸ Ley 763 Ley de los Derechos de las Personas con Discapacidad 2011

tion (560,747)¹¹⁹ that is not recognised by the state as having cultural particularity nor collective rights, but is classified mechanically as an ethnic group in the Autonomy statutes.

Indigenous rights have only been recognised recently. Since halfway through the 19th Century until the FSLN overthrew the Somoza dictatorship and took power in 1979, the laws and decrees related to Indigenous Peoples were fundamentally impositions of land control, purchases, sales and ownership. This was understood as an issue of *national territory* in which the state supervised and granted limited benefits, for example the right of each Indigenous family to have four manzanas of land.

In 1981 the literacy campaign by the new Sandinista state was implemented in the communities using their own languages, as a first gesture of respect for Indigenous rights. However, territorial administration and natural resources continued under the ethnocentric control of the national government. This situation worsened in the following years with the “Contra War” and the forced evacuation of the Coco River, generating a vicious circle of discontent, mistrust, military raids and even greater territorial control over the population. Peace negotiations in the region were accompanied by a Sandinista governmental discussion of the Autonomy Law that, for the national government, meant transferring the armed conflict into an exclusively political terrain and this enabled Indigenous representatives to ensure, at least in discourse, the mention of cultural and collective rights. For most of the Indigenous communities, the autonomy project generated the expectation of improving living conditions, legitimising their cultural differences faced with abuses by the state, but above all, the possibility of thousands of refugees returning to their original communities and being able to move freely within their territories.

In 1987 the Autonomy Law 28, was approved. For the first time in the country’s history the ethnic diversity of the Caribbean Coast population was recognised as a constituent of national identity and formed the legal basis on which the RAAN (North Caribbean) and the RAAS (South Caribbean) were created as administering entities for certain levels of self-government. Nevertheless, little was said in the new law about how this was to be implemented in practice. Regulations for the Autonomy Law were not approved until 2003. This same year Law 445 was approved that established the communal property of the indigenous and ethnic communities of the autonomous regions and of the Bocay, Coco, Indio and Maize Rivers. By 2007, 17 of 24 ‘territorial blocks’ were defined, mapped and their titles were registered. These titles give the communities a certain legal security faced with external agents, as well as specifying the functions of community authorities institutionalised as a new political

¹¹⁹ See González, M., Bovollen, H. and Fruhling, P. (2007) *Etnicidad y Nación. El desarrollo de la autonomía de la Costa Atlántica de Nicaragua (1987-2007)*, Guatemala: F&G Editores

entity – the GTI or Indigenous Territorial Governments, although in pre-existing territorial blocks these functions were carried out by community leaders known as the *Síndicos*. The process of restructuring (*saneamiento*) to ensure these changes has yet to be implemented throughout the territories¹²⁰, an essential step to ensure effective collective rights and to halt the invasion of outside agricultural and cattle farming interests.

In 2006, the General Law on Education was passed which created the Autonomous Regions' Educational System (SEAR), to implement bilingual education in the communities and to guarantee teaching in the maternal language in Primary Schools. Paradoxically the main problem in the communities is that most teachers don't speak Spanish, and for this reason students that finish their basic education don't learn this language. This implies a barrier for their study at secondary and post-secondary levels, or in communicating with outside agents. In 2007 the UN approved the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Nicaragua voted in favour and while this is not a binding agreement it represents a key reference for the Nicaraguan State when establishing policies or other measures that affect the indigenous population. In 2010 the government ratified Convention 169 of the ILO, which establishes a long-term instrument for the legitimacy and defence of collective rights of indigenous populations and their recognition as peoples, with the implication this has in terms of self-determination.

¹²⁰ Following Claus Kjaerby (2013: 90) who states that restructuring (*saneamiento*) refers to the process of conflict resolution with third parties about land ownership within the perimeter of territories that have already been designated to indigenous communities.

Annex 3 Historical references and brief characterisation of civil society and citizenship in Nicaragua

The concept of citizenship and its relationship to the nation state in Nicaragua is marked by its pre-Columbian, colonial and post-colonial history. According to linguistic analysis the territory that today makes up Nicaragua was home to indigenous populations with ancient Mesoamerican and South American origins and in the pre-conquest period they were subject to invasions from but also trade with the Aztec empire, especially along the Pacific coast and the Segovias. After the Spanish conquest of the Pacific the remaining territory (Taguzgalpa and Tologalpa, covering most of the central and Caribbean regions) was the site of fierce indigenous resistance to the Spanish and their descendants (until 1881 in Matagalpa)¹²¹. In the area stretching east to the Caribbean coast during this whole period, there were also fully-fledged battles, uprisings, skirmishes, negotiations and alliances with the different European nations vying for power, especially the British and the Spanish. Colonisation also brought with it the massacre, enslavement and transportation of the indigenous population, and later of a mostly West African population from different ethnic origins and languages, who were enslaved and died in their thousands on being brought forcibly and sold to provide labour to the colonisers on their Caribbean coast plantations. In the late 19th century a population of Chinese migrants also settled on the Caribbean coast, becoming part of urban and rural communities and some of whom moved later to the Pacific region.

The state established at the time of Nicaraguan independence from Spain (1821) echoed 18th and 19th century European models for the state along with their racist and patriarchal hierarchies of citizenship. The struggle for independence was led by the Nicaraguan-born Spanish creole elites who had themselves been part of colonial rule but had developed contradictions with the peninsular Spanish representing the Crown.¹²² The independent nation guaranteed equal citizenship only to white men of

¹²¹ Tellez, D. (1999) *Muera la Gobierna – Colonización en Matagalpa y Jinotega (1820-1890)*. Managua: URACCAN Managua

¹²² Torres, S. and Olvares, M. (2001) *La nación es femenina los ciudadanos masculinos, Nacionalismo y feminismo y Nación nicaragüense*, Managua.

European descent, and established a “Patria Criolla”¹²³ or ‘Spanish Creole Fatherland’ similar to other Central American nation states that excluded their Indigenous, Chinese, Black and Female populations from being recognised as citizens. The national territory known today as Nicaragua did not come into being until the military annexation of the Mosquitia¹²⁴ led by Rigoberto Cabezas under the government of Jose Santos Zelaya in 1894. Spanish was established as the national language and this affirmed the reign of “internal colonialism, which meant the political and economic subordination of the different regions of the country under the control of the Pacific region’s hegemonic classes”¹²⁵. Despite women’s participation in the independence struggle, the circulation of early feminist ideas in the mid 19th century and the struggles of women such as Doña Chepita Aguerri de Toledo¹²⁶ in the Liberal Revolution, women did not gain the vote until 1954.

Pre-1979

According to Borchegevink (2006) conditions under the Somoza regime did not favour autonomous and vibrant expressions of civil society and he points to its weakness particularly in the countryside. However he stresses the use by the Somozas of certain forms of unions, and also “organisations of youth, students, women, farmers, retired soldiers and community organisations” that were benefited through clientelism and co-opted to serve as social support for the regime called ‘white’ organisations by the opposition. Most organised opposition faced repression. There were seven main trade unions linked to different currents of the political opposition¹²⁷. He also identifies 15 to 20 ‘NGO-like’ organisations. Quiros (2006)¹²⁸ specifically mentions that most of these early NGOs had a marked Christian orientation¹²⁹. Many of these were influenced by liberation theology in Latin America and this also gave rise to the development of Christian Base Communities towards the end of period. New organisational forms sprang up in opposition to the dictatorship in the mid to late seventies such as AMPRONAC, the Agricultural workers association (ATC) the José Benito Escobar Civil Defence Committees (CDC) and others, most of which had some form of links to semi-clandestine and clandestine organisational structures, especially the

¹²³ Severo, M. (1970) *La Patria del Criollo: Ensayo de Interpretación de la Realidad Guatemalteca*, Guatemala

¹²⁴ Formerly a British protectorate with a Miskito government

¹²⁵ Blandon, E. (2003) *Barroco Descalzo*, Managua: URACCAN, our translation.

¹²⁶ A teacher and champion of women’s rights born in 1866 in Chontales. González-Rivera, V. (2004) ‘Nicaraguan feminist Josefa Toledo de Aguerri (1866–1962): Her life and her legacy’, *Revista Electrónica de Historia*5(1)

¹²⁷ Socialist, Communist, Marxist-Leninist, Christian Democrat and Sandinista.

¹²⁸ Citing her source as the 1991 NGOs Directory of the Centre for Support to Programmes and Projects

¹²⁹ Including CARITAS, INPRHU, CEPA, Instituto Juan XXIII, CEPAD, Escuelas Radiofónicas.

FSLN. This last period was also well known for spontaneous graffiti (pintas) and popular revolutionary music expressing the voice, feelings and ideas of the population as they struggled under dictatorship.

1979 – 1990

The revolutionary period gave rise to the massive organisation of the population in transforming society and defending the revolutionary process once the *Contra War* began. This level of organisation enabled impressive collective efforts such as the literacy and vaccination campaigns and in the first years was nourished by popular spontaneity and enthusiasm. This enthusiasm was also expressed through a flourishing arts and cultural scene including poetry and song, muralism, theatre, dance, cinema and craftwork supported by the state. During this decade the FSLN also created the FACS as a channel for international NGO donors, and Quiros (2006) mentions a few other, somewhat independent NGOs¹³⁰ with affinity to the revolution that were founded in this period, along with the creation of the FONG (NGO Federation) which organised campaigns and was formalised in 1983.

The revolutionary process gave priority to *mass organisations* representing the main social sectors¹³¹ Borchegevink and others point to issues of legitimacy that arose across most of these mass organisations, as the selection of leadership by the FSLN and the use of mass organisations as channels for executing party orders created difficulties or contradictions in their ability to represent their constituencies especially before the state. “In the corporatist Sandinista model the lines between the state, party and mass organisations were blurred”¹³² Women’s organisations were particularly affected by this.¹³³ But women’s organising spread and the 80s saw the emergence of women’s secretariats and women’s houses which addressed women’s specific demands in different sectors of the population. The first organisation for LGBT rights was also organised among people sympathising with the revolution during this period but its members were arrested and penalised.

¹³⁰ Including CISAS, Cantera, Ixchen and Cenzontle

¹³¹ The largest of the mass organisations was the CDS neighbourhood defence organisation, (the new name for what was called CDC during the struggle against Somoza) claimed over 600 thousand members in the mid-eighties. This also took on state functions in channelling food rationing cards around the same time. In 1988 the CDS took on a new more representative role of neighbourhoods when it became the Communal Movement.

¹³² Borchegevink, A. (2006) *A Study of Civil Society in Nicaragua*. NUPI Working Paper 699, Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, p.6

¹³³ According to Randall, when AMPRONAC became AMNLAE in 1979, its leadership was decided by the FSLN’s all male national directorate and “even though it underwent a series of changes over the years, proposing itself as an organisation and then as a movement ... it always remained under the auspices of the party led by men” Randall, Margaret, *Las Hijas de Sandino: Una historia abierta* Ana-Mana Managua 1999 P. 30 Our translation.

The opposition also sought to develop some forms of social organisation “but the existing polarisation enveloped them and they were also unable to express their social agenda, or their denunciations of ‘abuses by Sandinistas’ with clarity.”¹³⁴ The main opposition was armed and outside the country, the logic was that “‘either you are for the Revolution or against it’”(Borchegrevink). Caribbean coast organisations - especially after the FSLN’s 1982 evacuation of the Coco river- were also caught up in this logic and “by 1983-84 the most important organisational expressions of indigenous interests had joined the counterrevolution”¹³⁵. This left the diverse Caribbean communities divided in dealing with the new state, which enacted the Autonomy Law in 1987, making Miskito, Sumo, Rama, and Creole English have equal status with Spanish in the Caribbean.

1990 – 1996

This period opened with the defeat of the revolutionary government, systemic changes, the expansion of neoliberal social and economic policies and a more individualist political culture on all levels of society. The lack of state support for the arts resulted in a decrease in artistic output. During this period war veterans re-armed and disarmed, fighting for rights and benefits, and some political refugees were forced to leave while others were deported. The mass organisations also lost support, reduced their staff and lost their dominant position. While they remained loyal to the FSLN and their leadership continued to be party militants, they developed measures of representational legitimacy through internal elections and development of sectoral agendas.¹³⁶ Some breakaway organisations took on NGO status, and new forms of representation emerged for maquila and domestic workers. As students fought to defend the education sector from cutbacks and privatisation, internal disputes emerged over representation and party affiliation in student unions. In the trade union sector, the FNT (National Workers Front) was formed in 1990, but didn’t achieve independence from party until 1998/7. The trade union movement participated in mass protests in 1990 and 94, but they gradually became fragmented and the FSLN strengthened its position in negotiated their demands with the government which further weakened their direct participation (Borchegrevink, Wallace). Many state farms and agricultural cooperatives disbanded, and there were extensive conflicts over property rights. In self-defence, some state farms were established worker owned and run by the ATC.

134 Quirós, Ana (2006) *La Sociedad Civil Organizada en Nicaragua, Composición y Experiencia en la Reducción de la Pobreza*. Kepa Working Paper No. 9, Helsinki: KEPa, our translation

135 Borchegrevink, A. (2009), *Op. cit.* p. 19

136 They also were present in key moment of the transition such as the counter agrarian reform, the demobilisation of the army and armed groups, the privatisation of state institutions in a “fluctuating linkage with the FSLN” (Wallace 2009).

The remaining cooperatives created new forms of organisation in UCAs (Agricultural Cooperative Unions) and Federations, and rural women's organisations were strengthened within and in parallel with support for international cooperation. In contrast, this period was marked but a huge upsurge in independent organisations¹³⁷ many formed by people with experience in the revolutionary state, including NGOs of different kinds¹³⁸ along with new small scale economic initiatives and collectives¹³⁹. This was due among other things to the social and labour needs created by the state's abandonment of key social programmes; to the opening up of space for self-representation; to the way the legal framework favoured NGO model and to the influence of relations with donor agencies who continued or expanded funding through new non-governmental sectors. These non-governmental actors formed networks such as CODENI Coordinator for Child Rights (*Coordinadora de la Niñez*) and the MAN Environmentalist Movement (*Movimiento Ambientalista de Nicaragua*) and the campaign for the prevention of HIV-AIDS among others. In this context, local, regional and national women's organisations mushroomed organising urban, rural and young women's collectives. Many of these became "hybrid" common cause NGOs to access resources over time. They gathered as a representative movement¹⁴⁰ and soon declared themselves as autonomous from ALMNLAE & FSLN affiliation with the creation diverse women's and feminist spaces¹⁴¹. New organisations also arose for development and common cause work on the Caribbean regions as well as for strengthening regional autonomy. Two new universities with innovative community engagement approach were born: URACCAN (University of the Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast /Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense) and BICU (Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University). In addition, when in 1992 homosexuality was punished with three years of imprisonment under a draconian law on 'sodomy' the beginnings of a new movement for LGBT rights was set in motion, which would emerge in the next period through various initiatives.

¹³⁷ From 1990 to 1997, 1,729 organisations applied for and achieved legal status compared to only 114 from 1980 to 89. Borchegrevink, A. (2006), p.22

¹³⁸ Including development NGOs, NGO offering private services, common cause organisations that took on legal status as NGOs, and others in both the Pacific and the Caribbean

¹³⁹ Among them, new organisations of PwD beyond those already representing people wounded in the wars

¹⁴⁰ In two national events in 1991 (Fair of the (female) 52% - *Feria de las 52%*) and 1992 (Women's gathering United in Diversity - *Encuentro de Mujeres Unidas en la Diversidad*).

¹⁴¹ Initially a series of thematic networks were formed, the strongest of which were the Women's Network against Violence (RMCV) and the Maria Cavalleri Women's Health Network (RMSMC). Shortly afterwards the National Feminist Committee and other geographical networks were also founded including the Matagalpan Women's Network/ed de Mujeres de Matagalpa (1992), Women's Network of the North Ana Lucila/Red de Mujeres del Norte Ana Lucila (1996).

1997 – 2006

The period of government of Arnaldo Aleman was marked by greater privatisation and foreign investment, a deepening of the neoliberal economic and social agenda, political polarisation and social conflict, increased corruption, and a populist discourse with strong authoritarian and patriarchal overtones. Aleman saw all NGOs as loyal to the FSLN, and his government waged a campaign to discredit and undermine most organised expression of civil society. Due to this situation, the renewed FONG was strengthened. The government campaign reached a peak when it attacked a women's clinic in an isolated northern town, accusing it of performing abortions and persecuting a 70 year old Chicana nurse who has worked there since the 80s who was forced into hiding. NGOs and the women's movement convened a series of national cross-sector mobilisations, for the first time in recent history without party flags. 1998 was marked by the shocking denunciation of sexual abuse by Zoilamerica Narvaez against Daniel Ortega and the women's movement supported her, while the FSLN closed ranks in his defence. In October that year Hurricane Mitch occurred and the CCER (Civil Society Coordination for Emergency and Reconstruction) emerged, which soon took on a representative role in denouncing the misuse of emergency funds and widespread government corruption. The CCER also helped to establish the right of civil society to participation in national planning through CONPES the National Council for Economic Planning (*Consejo Nacional de Planificación Económica*).

The government that followed, was from the same party (PLC - Constitutional Liberal Party) but led by Enrique Bolanos, who proceeded to expose massive acts of corruption and Aleman was briefly jailed. However a pact was made between Ortega and Aleman to divide up the state between the two forces, isolate the government, ensure Aleman's eventual freedom and the re-election of Ortega in 2006 through changes in the electoral laws. The CCER and the autonomous women's movement, while critical of the Bolanos government, took leadership in making a stand against this pact. This period was also key for the development of concepts and practices of local power with the development of widespread training on the Municipalities Law (Law 40 originally established in 1988) and its relationship to Law for Citizens Participation in 2003. Another interesting aspect of this period is the appearance of spontaneous but graphic actions of citizens using symbolic representations: such as the bakers who chained themselves (*los encadenados*); male and female agricultural workers who protested naked (*los desnudos*); and banana plantation workers victims of cancer due to agricultural chemicals (*los del Nemagon*) who made permanent camps in front of the National Assembly buildings, dug their own graves and lay in them to protest their abandonment by uncaring authorities.

Annex 4 Brief overview of Sida support to civil society in Nicaragua

The relation of cooperation between Sweden and Nicaragua¹⁴² began immediately after the Sandinista defeat of the Somoza dictatorship in 1979, based on a political commitment made by Sweden during the struggle leading up to this historic event, similar to that made in the same period with liberation movements in Southeast Asia and Southern Africa. This cooperation began with support for reconstruction and health, and soon expanded into agricultural production, as Nicaragua officially became a country programme for Swedish Aid in 1982. With the election of Ronald Reagan as U.S. President and the ensuing escalation of armed conflict, Sweden rapidly increased its support for production and Nicaragua's short-term survival strategy, focusing on economic growth, increasing exports and supporting importing inputs for agricultural and industrial development. The main sectors strengthened through this strategy were forestry, mining and energy, but it also included aid for education, health and women. There was also a noticeable presence of Swedish CSOs.

With the change of government in 1990, the country transitioned from war to peace, social revolution to traditional democracy and centralised economic planning to a free market economy and a reduction in social spending. Swedish cooperation was reoriented accordingly from productive to social sectors, strengthening democracy and other longer-term development goals, while continuing support for imports and new actions to address the external debt and the national balance of payments. With the marked change in leadership under the 1997 Aleman government and the ensuing bipartite pact (between the FSLN/Daniel Ortega and the PLC/Arnoldo Aleman), Swedish aid shifted its support to strengthen the judiciary, continued work in favour of democracy and social organisation, while reducing direct support for imports and the balance of payments. With the disaster of Hurricane Mitch, Sweden provided additional aid for reconstruction.

¹⁴² Translated and summarised from: Öström, N. and Lewin, E. (2009) *30 años de cooperación de Suecia con Nicaragua* Stockholm: Sida, with input from other sources

The Bolaños government took power in 2002 and declared a fight against poverty and corruption that was soon curtailed by the bipartite pact and other economic interests. Another key event was the abolishment of therapeutic abortion (2007) and the criminalisation of any form of abortion in 2008. During this decade Sweden focused its aid on poverty reduction and democracy while concentrating its focus historically on the most successful programmes in health, the National Police and in scientific research. Funding for other key sectors, such as the women's movement were channelled through Forum Syd and other Swedish civil society organisations.

During these three decades Sweden also took on an advisory role to the state and leadership in the community for international cooperation, especially in the 80s at a time when other bilateral and multilateral sources of support were limited. In the 90s and 2000s Sweden facilitated its international contacts and played a vital role in coordinating cooperation after Hurricane Mitch and helped to create the basis for multi-donor support to key sectors. Between 1979 and 2008 Swedish aid totalled 6,600 million Kroners (£580 million GBP approximately).

The Swedish decision to withdraw its aid to Nicaragua was announced at the end of August 2007, due to changes based on the 2005 DAC *peer review* under the Persson government (1996-2006) and the reduction of country allocations from 70 to 33 countries under the Reinfeldt government. This decision was also influenced by changes in Nicaraguan Swedish relations,¹⁴³ and changing attitudes towards international cooperation and accords.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Schulz, N. (2007) *Nicaragua: a rude awakening for the Paris Declaration*, FRIDE Comment, p.6 "Two MPs from the most important political parties in the National Assembly, including the president of the Commission of Economic Affairs (the most important parliamentary body dealing with new approaches towards aid), felt no compunction in offending the Swedish ambassador, Eva Zetterberg, responding rather undiplomatically to her statements in favour of therapeutic abortion"

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Page 5 "...efforts to implement the Paris Declaration in Nicaragua are mired in a crisis following the refusal of the new Sandinista government to continue the process of constructive coordination with donors. The Sandinistas' interpretation of "ownership", and particularly the authoritarian tendencies that this has entailed, has caused a certain anxiety amongst those donors who are committed to the process of aid harmonisation and alignment in Nicaragua, which had been until 2006 a genuine test case for donor coordination. The withdrawal of aid from Sweden — the country that in many ways pioneered the aid effectiveness agenda in Central America — is a further element in the crisis, and has been met with a contemptuous response from the Managua political establishment"

Annex 5 Additional methodological information

Approach to selection of research location, focus and respondents

In the inception phase, the pilot research focus was not limited to single themes, but rather the themes were allowed to emerge from our interactions with key informants. After this pilot process, the Nicaragua team reviewed the process of site and informant selection and made some changes (type of disability, particular community in the North Caribbean). This was also influenced by the fact that we were asked to reduce and focus the key issues of concern to one key issue per site.

Sites were examined in contexts where there had been some form of intervention (one or more) by local partners and Swedish CSOs under the Swedish civil society strategy, but not necessarily directly in the communities or households selected. This was based on the understanding that the purpose of the RC is to gauge processes of change in people's lives, and among civil society actors (locally, regionally and nationally) and check this against Sida's contribution to change, through its Civil Society strategy via framework support of Swedish CSOs. For these reasons the remit was to talk to people in common situations beyond those established as "beneficiaries" of projects and the team was clear that the entry into the communities should be as direct as possible to avoid predetermining our participants/key informants in relation to the organisations. Team members were also very conscious that during the immersion they had to take critical account of the influence of their own positionality and as much as possible try to leave preconceptions behind. This was done in order to be open to all aspects of "messy reality", to engage spontaneously with people and to avoid interfering in, steering or "skewing" their narratives. In searching for particular households, the Global IDS/IOD-PARC team agreed to seek out those people living in marginal situations in comparison with the rest of the community. These narratives are less visible, and serve to highlight perspectives that have gone unnoticed and are more likely to challenge existing perceptions/biases, including those of the researchers.

Researchers approached with care to explain the purposes of the RC part of the study while avoiding the creation of any expectation of direct benefits from the relationship with the researcher, beyond the opportunity of creating a channel for the experience, thoughts and voice of respondents. As the RCs progressed the key respondents emerged fairly naturally from interactions in the household, and among close neighbours and family members as the researcher gained people's trust over time. The selection of narratives involved identifying those with the greatest emotional and situa-

tional significance in the particular reality of the key household and the community. This was validated as the researchers deepened their understanding of the stories and events, of the environment in which these were taking place, and of the interconnection between the different stories that gave meaning to people's understandings of their reality.

Ethical considerations for researchers

Similarly to other types of ethnographic research, the RC methodology offers an opportunity for understanding the situation of people living in situations of poverty and/or marginalisation by beginning from their analysis as social subjects. The immersion as researchers requires sharing daily life and tasks, engaging in conversation, observing the environment and actions taking place, and listening to people expressing their hopes, concerns and achievements, their analysis of the context in which their situation is embedded and the changes they have or have not experienced, and the enabling conditions they perceive as necessary. The researcher also has the duty to reflect critically on non-verbal interactions, unspoken evidence of power relations in lived experiences as well as the way the spaces for these are constructed and codified, including their presence within it. This requires researchers to be knowledgeable and culturally sensitive about the place in which their relationships are established and thoughtful about their position in this invited space. They must be willing to question their own assumptions and at the same time be responsible and ethical in the way issues arising in the narratives are brought to the discussion table where informants are not present. Because of this the narratives in this report have been compiled, selected and critically analysed as respectfully as possible but inevitably from the perspective of the team as independent researchers, and cannot be considered to be "pure" narratives. Also, all names of individuals and specific places have been changed as a measure aimed at ensuring anonymity.

The meso level study enabled researchers to hear the perspectives of CSOs and SFOs in Nicaragua and compare the different ways of focusing problem areas and learning that come into play in the Sida civil society strategy. By comparing the relationship between these different narratives from the community "upwards" the research team examined the assumptions implicit in the theories of change at different levels, and reflect about the realism, alignment and relevance in order to contribute this as a learning exercise for all those involved. The relationship initially created with meso level actors also required a process in which they felt at ease and shared their experiences and thinking beyond project and institutional documentation of their work. This was key in understanding the assumptions behind their espoused theories of change and the difficulties involved in putting these into practice. This changed after the first round report which was seen as exposing some LPOs in spite of allowing for certain levels of anonymity (the names of the local organisations involved in the meso level were left as "generic" as possible in the account of the "upward threads" followed with CBOs, LPOs and SFOs in order to try to ensure an overall vision of the strategy rather than criticisms of particular organisations). The appreciative inquiry approach

in the second round enabled the team to respond to this criticism, and the response to the first draft of this final report was positive in this regard.

Approach to key issues and others

In the first round the teams were asked by Sida to focus on three known key issues, one per site. The Nicaragua team did so while at the same time being careful not to overly direct conversations and interactions. The team also remained open to observing the interrelationship between these issues and other thematic threads that emerged in the different phases of the study. This was also the logic used throughout in the meso level research with actors from CBOs, LPOs and SFOs, and other key CS actors.

Learning workshops

The methodology for the learning workshops combined presentations and reflective processes in plenary sessions, with group work which facilitated the participation of all. The workshops aimed to validate the Round 1 and Round 2 draft report with those directly involved, and they provided important criticism that was taken into consideration for the final report. A wider range of SFOs, LPOs and other key civil society actors participated in the second and third workshops, which provided input from research findings and in the second, a panel presenting core issues in discussing citizenship, civil society and human rights. Each workshop led into group work to open up arenas to discuss findings and analyse the strategy and its current context.

Appreciative Inquiry

Researchers drew important positive examples, new findings and key elements for analysis in Round 2 from the Appreciative Inquiry into three selected LPOs, along with a series of interviews with SFOs. In this Round the specific key issues studied in Round 1 were integrated into the overall findings and analysis in order to ensure that the study reflected and gave a balanced view of the complex interrelation of multiple dimensions of poverty. Additional findings and reflections about aid architecture from the meso level study were also incorporated. A draft of the final report in English and a summary in Spanish was presented and discussed in the final learning workshop. All material and questions were organised for purposes of analysis in relation to the three main axes of the strategy's theory of change: its HRBA; strengthening of the voice of people living in conditions of poverty and marginalisation in order to improve their living conditions; and strengthening a vibrant and pluralist civil society.

Annex 6 Extended summary of key narratives

RC site: People with Disabilities

The *first narrative* focuses on two siblings, Moisés (30) and Darling (29), who grew up in a small rural community. Moisés was born with glaucoma in one eye, and was left with impaired vision following badly executed surgery. Darling was born later, with serious visual impairment. When she was four, it was necessary to remove her eyes and replace them with prostheses. Since childhood she always wanted to leave the community, and in 2001 at 18 years old she took the opportunity offered by the support of an NGO to go to Managua and change her prostheses. There she enrolled in a Braille course. Although her father objected, she stood firm and stayed in the capital. Moisés left the community more recently, in 2010, but not on his own initiative like Darling, but because of an accident that obliged him to undergo eye surgery in Managua. Both eyes had to be operated on, and he was left completely blind. This plunged him into a deep depression. However, thanks to an education and training centre for the blind he learned to read Braille, make macramé belts and restore wicker chairs. At first he sold junk food snacks to generate some form of income although his aunt gave him free room and board. After two years he began selling sweets, chewing gum and pens on city buses. He now no longer lives with his aunt but with one of his sisters and her family, whom he pays for room and board including laundry. With what he earns he manages to maintain himself, send money once in a while to his parents, and has even accumulated savings with which he is buying a small site where he hopes to live when the government, through the CPC¹⁴⁵, gives him the re-fabricated house they have promised him. With his savings from selling on the buses, and what he has earned in the first four months of the year, Moisés has already paid more than a third of the price of the land. He hopes to pay it off in about two years. Darling is buying the adjacent site. A year ago, during his working day, Moisés visited the Municipal Library for the Blind, about five or six times a day, not to read but to rest, charge his mobile phone, drink water, use the toilet, wash his prosthesis and chat with other library users. The library was on his working route. A year later, the

¹⁴⁵ CPC (Consejos de Poder Ciudadano) the 16-member neighbourhood and community Citizen Power Councils. These have now been reduced to a 5-member CVF (Consejos por la Vida y la Familia) Councils for Life and the Family, although most people continue to refer to them as the CPCs.

library has changed location. A month ago they moved to another neighbourhood library building, where they occupy only half of one of the rooms. The Easter earthquake tremors damaged the Municipal Archive building at the Mayor's office, and the authorities decided to move the Archive permanently to what had been the Library for the Blind. The people working in the old library building, now the Municipal Archive, continue to allow Moisés to use the toilet, they give him water and keep his food for him. However he no longer meets and chats with the other library users. The *second narrative* focuses on Darling, a young blind woman who left her rural community at the age of 18 to settle in Managua with one of her brothers and his wife. Once there, she became an affiliate of an organisation of the blind and attended several different education and training centres where she completed her primary and secondary schooling and studied various courses, such as Braille, mobility and professional massage. During that time she was earning money by selling packaged commercial snacks to cover her personal needs. She studied psychology for several years, but didn't complete her degree. She is now studying a shiatsu diploma at a well-known university, thanks to a two-year scholarship she obtained through her affiliation to an organisation of blind people. Alongside her study, Darling is a federated Paralympic athlete and has travelled to several other Central American countries to compete in sports events. Despite demonstrating her capacities, Darling has never felt supported by her family. When she fell in love and wanted to marry, at first her father opposed the marriage. Finally he agreed, though the relation between Darling and her family has become much cooler. Darling's husband supports her to be able to continue training and studying the diploma. In the morning, when he goes out to work as a teacher in a religious school, she takes care of their two year old daughter. In the afternoon, he is the one who looks after the girl, so that Darling can study and train. In relation to motherhood, Darling had never planned to have a child, but her partner wanted to and she agreed. Although the child has limited her freedom, it's clear that she enjoys her company and thinks that she will be of help in the future.

The protagonist of the *third narrative* is María, a 43 year old woman living in the city of Managua, who is partially paralysed. She shares her house with her 18 year old daughter, her son of 16 and her two year old granddaughter. Following the birth of her daughter, her feet began to swell and she developed lesions, to the point where she couldn't walk independently or work. She gets around the house thanks to cables fixed to the roof. She believes her health problems resulted from witchcraft done by her ex-sister in law because of jealousy. Apart from the problem with her legs, María says she has had lung and liver cancer. Because the doctors gave up on her as a lost cause, she sought the help of God and joined an evangelical congregation. She is certain that the Lord operated on her and her health improved after her brothers and sisters fasted for 21 days. She also swears that her character has improved since she came to God, and she feels like a better person. María spends weekdays shut inside her house, but on Sundays her daughter takes her to the evangelical service in a wheelchair donated to her by the government, through the CPC neighbourhood structure. She has also been given a cooker and receives a monthly quota of basic products and foodstuffs. Her son is the one who brings money into the house, although her

daughter also earns a little washing clothes from time to time. However María says that her main source of support is the solidarity of neighbours and the brothers and sisters of the congregation.

RC site: North Caribbean

The *first narrative* focuses on Sergio a 33 years old Miskito born in Raiti, a community on the River Coco, and the trades that he has learnt in the course of his life, as part of an economic survival strategy. After the armed conflict that forced him into exile with his family in Honduras, Sergio returned to the country as an adolescent, and settled for a few years in a mining town. There he not only found his first job, but learnt the importance of having a trade as part of an economic strategy. Later he continued to migrate and during those years worked in the military and as a private security guard, lobster fisherman and finally bricklayer, which is the trade he continues to practice. Throughout this period he kept in contact with his family of origin and, whenever he could, travelled to Raiti at key moments in the agricultural cycle, to help with different production activities. Now that he no longer travels, because he has formed his own family, he periodically sends money to his mother. Eight years ago he arrived in Krabu to build wells and there met Rosmeri, his current partner, a 29 year old Miskito woman with whom he has had five children. When his work as a bricklayer coincides with the need to carry out certain agricultural activities on his land, such as preparing the ground, planting or harvesting, Sergio and Rosmeri prefer to pay another community member to do the job, rather than interrupt Sergio's work. Like most rural families on Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast, Sergio and Rosmeri maintain their food security on the basis of agricultural activity, fishing and hunting. However they need occasional cash income, to ensure this security doesn't enter crisis. In the *second narrative*, Miguel Wilson, the wihta, or community leader/judge of Krabu, talks about several conflicts involving the community's territory. One of the disputes is with the nearest community -Tasba Suklin- whose residents are originally from Krabu and moved closer to the main highway because of the commercial opportunities offered there. Miguel says he was also thinking of moving there but had insufficient resources to do so. In the recent demarcation and land titling, Tasba Suklin was established as a separate community and was annexed to another territorial block. The inhabitants of the new community were considered to be "children of Krabu" by the old community, and its land included part of the territory that Krabu people had designated for communal use. Miguel explains that meetings were held with representatives of Tasba Suklin to no avail. In our most recent visit the current wihta - Ernesto, Miguel's nephew- says they intend to continue their claim, but lack sufficient funds to cover the costs of a possible lawsuit. There is also a conflict with the neighbouring Mayagna community territory, where some community members are selling Krabu land to mestizo settlers. Ernesto has been to see the site, and calculates that there are about 30 settler families who he thinks will bring others and gradually take over the Mayagna's land. Their other conflict is with the Miskitos of the neighbouring Tawira block, who for months have been entering Krabu lands to cut timber. The Krabu leaders' complaints were staved off with the argument that "God provided

resources for all”. Miguel insists other communities are “stealing our territory” referring to the timber, water, sand, stones and even land as property whose exploitation can generate income. The issue, he says, has been manipulated on a political level by regional leaders who have made agreements without consultation. Miguel explains how the community had decided to kidnap a regional leader as a way of pressuring for their demands. The kidnapped leader said they had to accept the maps and new titling and people got angry. They didn’t let him go until he signed a piece of paper saying he would review the issue with other authorities. On our last visit Ernesto says he and Krabu’s other leaders have requested a meeting with the presidents of the regional blocks involved in these conflicts, but they’re still waiting for a concrete response. They feel their voices aren’t being listened to, and that the non-governmental organisations with which they have contact don’t have enough power to influence the regional government and CONADETI, the national body responsible for territorial demarcation.

The conflicts are not only external. Elena, a bright young 25 year old woman tells us the wihta and the sindico use the community’s money for personal gain and drinking alcohol. When she asked the judge for money to buy medicines for her sick daughter he refused. On our first visit a community weed clearance day a protest occurs. People demand that the wihta give them the files for sharpening machetes that were bought with the proceeds of community’s stumpage tax charged by him to outsiders for the exploitation of natural resources. There are rumours he has sold them in his brother’s store. He refuses and an argument ensues and some of the people bang their machetes against a hard surface making a threatening clanging sound. After half an hour people take out their own files and go and cut weeds but discontent is still brewing. Some complain in loud voices that the wihta should give the example and work alongside everyone instead of supervising everyone notebook in hand. He ignores this. When a truck goes by and is charge a toll for the use of the road, the wihta makes a gesture to transparency by waving the money for all to see. With this money he buys refreshments for the community at the end of the work session. Afterwards the men improvise a meeting about the community workday and how to improve it the next time. The women don’t participate in the meeting. Several women in the community, including Brenda, the owner of a small shop and a women’s weaving group, tell us their participation is restricted to the assemblies where their opinions aren’t valued or included in decision-making. When they complain about some issue in the community, the leaders tell them to shut up and say women know nothing. Because of this they often prefer to remain silent for fear of verbal abuse. They even ask us not to say anything to the men, about what they’re telling us. On our last visit to Krabu, several women explain that the community had elected Maricela, a female judge, who tried to limit the level of logging by the family of the former judge. This family got upset and ran a smear campaign against her to get her removed. The pressure was so great that, in order to avoid trouble, Maricela decided to resign, and the assembly, dominated by the former judge’s family, elected the nephew of the former judge, who shared out the timber business among family members.

In the *third narrative* we hear from Fresia Omier, an 18 year old Miskito woman, who was raised by her grandmother. Her mother was forced to migrate for a long period because her father abandoned them and as a single mother she was alone in guaranteeing the family's livelihood. Fresia became pregnant at the age of 16, and was abandoned by her partner, who didn't want her to continue studying. So she continued her life as a single mother, and thanks to the support of her family studied to fourth year of secondary school. She dreams of going to University and becoming a doctor, but to achieve this she would have to go to live in Bilwi, after finding someone to care for her son, and ensuring economic support to live in town. Her situation is similar to that of two other young people from the Morales family. Ángel and Jorge were studying in Bilwi thanks to the support of their family, but had to abandon their studies when their father died of an illness. Both returned to the community to take care of their family and work the land. Neither was able to continue their secondary schooling. Jorge says that his great dream was to study medicine in Bilwi, but since the plan was cut short he wants to support his younger sister so that she can achieve her dream of completing school and then studying a career. Sergio's wife, Rosmeri, also studied at secondary school in Bilwi, thanks to the help of her mother and an aunt who lived in town and gave her accommodation. She studied three years until her mother suffered an accident in which she lost her sight. As she had no other sisters who could help out at home, and her brother was little, Rosmeri had to return to the community to help her mother and brother. What she learned during those years helps her to do homework with her older children, who are already at school in Krabu. She sometimes sells bread to try to make ends meet. She says she no longer regrets having stopped studying, but she would like one of her children to have the chance to go to university. For the moment she dreams of having many more children, so that what happened to her doesn't happen to them.

RC site: North Pacific

The first narrative traces the story of Ena and Domingo's food economy. They rely mostly on their own production and processing of corn (maize) and barter or buy other foodstuffs and basic household supplies. They also buy expensive agricultural chemicals for their food production. The gendered division of labour in the household means that Domingo works in agricultural production (with his son David when he is home) and is the only one with an income. Domingo decides alone over the family economy. Ena and Catalina, transform the corn and other foodstuff into the daily meals and also ensure other household work, with no income of their own. Also, as Catalina explains to me later there is a customary order for serving food: first the men, then the small children, then anyone who is older or sick, and the adult women, leaving till last the mother, or the women who prepared the food. In the same order, the portions served diminish in size and quality. David has access to money when he migrates and works in El Salvador, but has had experiences of being arrested and jailed with men from gangs, and being badly mistreated by police and immigration officials. He now has a good farm where he can work on in El Salvador, but this last

year he didn't go. While he misses having more money he says he feels more relaxed at home with his family.

When they have the chance (observed once in three visits) the family rears small livestock and poultry in the yard to improve their food supply. They have also planted fruit trees around the house. Domingo considers that the main reason for their situation of poverty is the lack of access to land ownership. He believes firmly that self-reliance is their guarantee for survival. Ena and Catalina are resigned to economic dependence on men. Similarly to some of their neighbours, Domingo keeps the custom of giving away or bartering foodstuff, which is a traditional way of maintaining and cultivating social relations in the community. The family relies on these relations, especially on the only woman landowner in the community, for Domingo's paid work as an agricultural labourer and for renting fields for producing corn for food. With the return of their son they have an increased workforce allowing them to make improvements around the house and to sow a high value crop that will produce cash to reinvest. While Domingo appreciates the use of cash remittances to introduce useful technologies such as solar panels, he criticises the way access to money and consumer goods have affected the cultural expectations and work habits of people in the community and feels people are no longer satisfied with "country things". He also criticises the way productive projects have worked in the community to favour only certain families and says if they depended on outside projects they would die of hunger. But he is also worried about weather patterns that are no longer predictable. The lack of sufficient rains means the food crop may be lost and he says, only half joking, "*We will be too*".

The *second narrative* gives us a glimpse into trauma and violence in the community. Many men, like Domingo, have fought in at least one of the last two wars. Domingo was in the army reserves along the dangerous northern border, managed to avoid combat, but had to go in afterwards and has seen a lot of "*dead bodies of men, women, children, animals, all sorts of things*". At the beginning he had nightmares he says, but bit-by-bit "*one gradually forgets*". Sexual harassment in the community is rife and the researcher herself was harassed by Ena's son and cousin among others. The media provides a daily background of violent newscasts (murders, a child blamed for his own drowning, forced marriages, gangs, military exercises, territorial conflicts and homophobic mockery) and a historic radio series with a religious debate in which women are referred to as "*treacherous and murderous*".

When she was 8 or 9 years old, Ena witnessed her father's murder by her uncle with a machete. All of the men with whom Ena has had relationships have been violent and/or alcoholics, including Domingo. In all she has had 11 pregnancies and 7 surviving children with six different men. Most of them beat her up, and abandoned her homeless with pregnancies or children. After a string of bad experiences and with five kids, she decided to marry Domingo. They live together but sleep separately. When he complains she reminds him that he left her for another woman when she was pregnant with Catalina. Ena says he was good at the beginning and assumed responsibility

for her children, “*but afterwards he would drink and beat me because he was jealous*”. He was also violent with her sons. He forbade her to dance. Once he hit her with the flat side of a machete. When she tried to take it from him, he pulled it and cut her fingers. With the blood the fight ended. He stopped drinking when Catalina was born and the violence lessened. Ena has conflict with almost all her family, who are mostly neighbours. She constantly says that they don’t like her. She claims Maritza, her sister-in-law next door, tried to strike her in the face with a rock. Each of Ena’s doors is marked twice with the sign of the cross in the black soot from the fire. She says for a time she was attacked regularly by elves that threw stones and soil at her, even inside the house. To solve this, she threw ash over them, made the signs of the cross on the doors and asked a Catholic priest to come and bless the house. Since then, the elves have stopped bothering her.

Maritza tells a horrific story about how her husband (Benito, Ena’s brother) tried to kill her with a machete in front of her daughters. She claims Ena is partly responsible because of suggesting to Benito that he wasn’t the father of one of Maritza’s children. A group of women neighbours called in a women’s project, and Maritza had some psychological support but she became angry when they tricked her into talking to the police. She is still with Benito, in spite of her family’s worries. On the last visit, Maritza says she asks God for peace, so far her husband hasn’t beaten her again. He is outside with his stepfather. Her eyes seem to contradict her words.

Domingo says in the *third narrative* he doesn’t know what it means when the party people talk about citizenship or citizen power. He just knows that *when the elections come you have to go and vote... because it’s a duty. But when it’s a matter of rights, when you need something, they don’t even see you. The leaders are grateful I took my wife and daughter to vote. Beforehand they promised me fruit trees, barbed wire and cows.... and nothing!* Domingo thinks the best way to support people is by determining everybody’s needs and having everyone in the meeting, *but they say we’re not interested, but they don’t notify us. And if you go to ask or make demands, they marginalise you.* On the last visit, however, he is participating in the new community water project funded by a U.S. evangelical church organisation called Friends of Jesus to supply metered potable water (at a monthly rate equivalent to one two days paid labour), a septic tank, flushable ceramic toilets and showers (for quotas adding up to the equivalent of two full months of paid work). People don’t know the details of the support being given but a lot of the households are participating and the “*gringos*” have formed an independently elected community board of directors from the participants to manage the project on a local level. The official local leaders are included as lesser board members, while the community has elected independent people for President, Vice President and Treasurer. No women are included. At meetings, decisions are recorded in one book, each household’s work and quota contributions in another and the financial bookkeeping in a third book. The treasurer reports back in the meeting and insists on the importance of transparency. As the discussions evolve people interrupt and talk over each other. As the representative of the municipal council Tomás clarifies the project is not governmental so must be developed by the

community and the sponsoring foreign organisation. But if the mayor's office doesn't lend them a machine to dig the meter deep mains trenches in four days, it will take them 8 months by hand. No one asks. A neighbour said before the meeting that the mayor has said no and will ask the families with migrants to pay for it at a cost of 90 dollars a day. The women complain, without receiving a response, that their work hauling water to fill a huge tank for drilling is not being valued and is more difficult than keeping night watch. There is an obvious division between those who have money and land and those who do not. Domingo speaks up and questions the better-off community members for neither giving their time for night time guard duty for the broken down drilling machine, nor wanting to pay for people like him, who are doing it. While some agreements are these are not clear for everyone and there is no summing up. People drift away as it begins to rain. Even so, the meeting marks a change in the community's way of managing projects and in Domingo's participation.

Selena, who has been active in community organising, says one of the biggest problems in the community is *machismo*, which people justify using the gospel, and the male rivalry for leadership between Hermes and Tomás which was solved at a party level instead of consulting with the community Selena comments. She is a Sandinista and a Catholic *in my own way*, she says, as *there are different interpretations of the Bible that may or may not favour gender equality*. She's had training from a women's project on gender equality in a mixed group. She was a member of the *Gabinete de Poder Ciudadano* (GPC, Citizen Power Cabinet) community structure when it had 16 members. It was reduced to 5 when the government replaced it with the *Gabinete de Familia* (Cabinet for the Family). Selena's not happy with this reduction and sees it as a form of control that limits wider citizen participation. For her, a citizen *is someone who lives in the country, and is registered. According to the constitution, citizens, women and men, have the right to participate and be listened to and elected*. She complains that she hasn't been able to read the constitution. *The people up top just give us what suits them*. She feels leaders don't decide fairly who should have access to the benefits of government programmes and some keep the benefit for themselves, their families and friends. She criticises Hermes [the main local leader] for only using his old state security networks, allowing his unelected wife to decide over loan funds for women's investment and his adolescent daughter to receive a government agricultural bonus.¹⁴⁶ *There are Sandinistas who sacrificed themselves in the war and have been left with nothing*, she says. Most community members complain that NGO and church projects are channelled through Hermes.

¹⁴⁶ A package of donations to support household food production, in the framework of the Zero Hunger programme.

In the last visit another change is evident at Hermes' house. He has a roofed extension and terrace on one side of the house, with plastic tables. It's a new bar. David and Domingo explain that on July 19th (the anniversary of the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship) there'll be music and drinks there, and they'll be bringing "*three whores*" and "*three cochones*"¹⁴⁷ so that "*the men can have their drinks and right there.. [have sex with them]*". Hermes' daughter is selling advance tickets at 100 cordobas each.

¹⁴⁷ A discriminatory name for "effeminate" gay men.



Evaluation of the Strategy for Support via Swedish Civil Society Organisations 2010-2014

Final Country Report- Nicaragua

This report shares the findings and recommendations from an evaluation of Sweden's Civil Society Strategy 2010–2014 as implemented by Swedish civil society organisations and their national partners in Nicaragua, as one of three country studies.

The purpose of the evaluation was to find out if, how and why/why not Sweden's support to civil society organisations has contributed to the overall objectives of the strategy.

The Reality Check Approach was used to understand the realities and perspectives of people living in poverty combined with 'meso-level' and organisational inquiries. The findings were used to explore the theories of change of the organisations in relation to people's realities, in order to analyse the strategy's relevance, alignment and feasibility.

SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY

Address: S-105 25 Stockholm, Sweden. Office: Valhallavägen 199, Stockholm

Telephone: +46 (0)8-698 50 00. Telefax: +46 (0)8-20 88 64

E-mail: info@sida.se. Homepage: <http://www.sida.se>

