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NICANOTES

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NicaNotes: Profound Advances in Education and Culture

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Since 2007, when the Sandinistas returned to power, until 2023, Nicaragua's education budget has increased by a staggering 457%. Nicaragua places children and families at the center of all its educational policies. An inclusive multicultural model at all levels of education has been developed from preschool through technical and/or higher education, to build sustainable and resilient communities.



36 inmates of the Bluefields Penitentiary System graduated in May as high-level technicians in administrative information technology after studying on Saturdays for two years. The technical classes were organized so that these men and women can contribute to society once they complete their sentences. (Photo: Radio La Primerisima)

The number of teachers has increased two-fold and teachers enjoy continuous training to ensure high quality education.

The Ministry of Education has particularly concentrated on education in the rural, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant communities and prioritized the preservation of languages and Indigenous cultures. The installation of internet and provision of computers in schools has increased dramatically. Support for English as a second language has increased.

The education curriculum and teaching in multiple languages in the autonomous Caribbean regions of Nicaragua are also a government priority.

Education from primary through university education has been free since President Daniel Ortega returned to the presidency.

At the beginning of the 2023 school year, 24 renovated schools were inaugurated, improving the learning environments for students and teachers. The rehabilitated and expanded schools are in Nueva Segovia, Madriz, Río San Juan, Chinandega, Estelí, Zelaya Central, Las Minas, Boaco, León, Carazo, and Chontales. The investment of US\$2.85 million included construction and renovation of classrooms, storage units for the food for school meals, administrative offices, and libraries as well as water and sanitation improvements, playground equipment, desks, acrylic blackboards and more.

Another example of the commitment to education are the 14 new schools that were inaugurated in April with a cost of more than US\$1.1 million. The schools are in the Departments of Matagalpa, Río San Juan, León, Managua, Jinotega, Estelí, Rivas, Chinandega, and Boaco. Also, four other school infrastructure projects are starting in the municipalities of Santa Teresa in Carazo, Ciudad Antigua in Nueva Segovia, and Mulukukú on the North Caribbean Coast.

British teachers have highlighted the quality of the education system in Nicaragua. British educator Heather Marcano said that the integral education that

students receive reflects the reality of a country rich in culture, natural beauty, and generosity. During the annual conference of the National Educators Union of the United Kingdom (NEU-UK), in April, members of a recent delegation to Nicaragua shared their experiences. Labour MP Christine Blower confirmed the Union's commitment to continue the teacher exchanges with the Nicaragua Teacher's Association (ANDEN) to support English as a second language education and deepen relations of friendship and solidarity between the two teachers' unions.

School meals, a flagship program of the government, strengthens the educational system and is undoubtedly an example for other countries to follow in terms of investment in education. A school meal is guaranteed for more than 1.2 million children including preschool and primary students and secondary distance learning students and ensures a plate of food in the classroom. The school meal program reaches the farthest corners of the country such as Ometepe Island in Lake Cocibolca, which can only be reached by water or air.

The emphasis and availability of technical education has grown enormously. The Nicaragua Technological Institute (INATEC) report on the results of the 2023 Professional Training Plan stated that, between January and August of this year, 24,484 students were trained in 167 trade courses, 11 technological courses, 17 tourist

services programs and 58 empirical work certifications. INATEC is offering enrollment in 66 technical areas in its 153 centers throughout the country and, for the sixth consecutive year, five technical areas will be taught online. Of the students trained this year, 74% are women and 26% are men. The schools had graduated 13,265 students nationwide as of September 12. This program is promoted by the government through INATEC and the Mayors' Offices to strengthen the knowledge, skills and talents of young people and adults. At a national level, more than 500 courses are being developed, among them: Motorcycle Repair, Barbering, Cooking, Pastry Making, Creative Sewing, and Handicrafts, among others.

On Feb. 27, the Monimbó Heróico Agricultural Technical Center opened to serve more than 3,000 students. Technical classes on agriculture, livestock, agronomy, agroindustry, and animal husbandry, in addition to 15 courses related to the production of fruit pulp and nectar, sauces, liqueurs, among others. This is the third technological center to serve the Masaya Department and is the first agricultural and livestock center promoting production, trade, and entrepreneurial and productive culture which will generate more development opportunities. The government invested US\$5.6 million in the Institute.

On May 29th the Women's Technical Training Center of El Cuá, in the Department of Matagalpa, where more

than 2,000 young women are now being trained by the National Technological Institute, opened its doors. The school has classrooms and research labs, training, and technology development areas “to obtain better results for production with the energy of the women.” Work will be done on production of seeds, composting vegetable matter for coffee crops, non-traditional crops, and courses for agrotourism. And, in June, US\$3 million was invested to expand the Masaya Departmental Technical Center, ensuring greater access for 6,415 students to free, quality technical training.

The government has established cultural schools in 159 communities, where courses are taught in areas such as dance, singing, choir, guitar, drawing, painting and more. The mayors’ offices contribute to the restoration of the right to culture of children, young people and adults, guaranteeing art for all in urban and rural areas.

In August, September 8 was declared the National Day of the Nicaraguan Huipil by presidential decree. The huipil is a garment used in festivities and traditional dances and reflects the culture and pride of being Nicaraguan. The declaration said that it is the duty of the State to promote the rescue, development and strengthening of the national culture, based on the participatory creation of the people. The identity, traditional values, symbolic and artistic aspects of the

huipil were declared as intangible, artistic and cultural heritage of the nation.

Public Servants are being trained on inclusion and accessibility of people with disabilities. In July INATEC reported that US\$400,000 has been invested in the Carlos Fonseca Center in Managua to train public servants with methodologies that guarantee visibility, inclusion, and accessibility for people with disabilities. INATEC General Director Lloyd Barreda stated that “The center will offer 20 academic courses to public servants that will be taught by specialists from the medical care for people with disabilities to the inclusive special education programs that Nicaragua is implementing to guarantee the promotion and restitution of rights of people with disabilities. These courses are essential requirements for teachers, police officers, firefighters, members of the army and other public servants.”

The Museum of the Great National Literacy Crusade (CNA) of 1980 was inaugurated on August 23 at the Heroes of Nicaragua History Institute of the Casimiro Sotelo National University. At this site is housed the history of the CNA embodied in documents, books, images, paintings, and other resources that are symbols of this great deed. The reopening of the Museum and the reinstallation of the Institute of History made it a historic day for Nicaragua and for this University, since they are spaces that rescue the true history of the country.

The smallest citizens have not been neglected either. Over the past 16 years, 244 government child development centers have been created. The neo-liberal governments from 1990 to 2006 privatized or closed most of the day care centers created by the Sandinistas during the 1980s. As a result, thousands of families faced the dilemma of finding care for their children. Often, one of the spouses, almost always the wife, opted to stay home to care for the children, and income decreased. That situation has changed radically. Child Development Centers (CDIs) have multiplied and from the 32 that barely made it through the fateful 17 years of neo-liberal governments after 1990, they have now grown to 276, all subsidized by the state, all with trained personnel, all with specific programs to instill values and knowledge in the children. These centers serve 16,500 children under age six who receive comprehensive care, food, weight and height monitoring, early stimulation, education and more.

Education in Nicaragua's penitentiary system was recently highlighted by the international news channel Russia Today (television and web). The outlet broadcast a report describing the Nicaraguan program to introduce education for men and women at all levels in the country's penitentiary centers as an example to the world. "In Nicaragua," said the Russian television report, "the government initiative to provide the right to education in the penitentiary sector is progressing

successfully. This increases the chances of a better future for inmates.” For example, 36 inmates of the Bluefields Penitentiary System graduated in May as high-level technicians in administrative information technology after studying on Saturdays for two years. The technical classes were organized by the URACCAN University and the Ministry of the Interior so that these men and women can contribute to society once they complete their sentences.

Teacher education is recognized as important. Seven hundred new teachers will graduate this year from Nicaragua’s eight teacher training colleges, reported Professor Alina González, General Director of Teacher Training at the Ministry of Education (MINED) in October. She said that the young people will graduate with specialties such as early childhood education, special education, inclusive education, and bilingual education for the Caribbean Coast. “These students will return to their territories where we have great demand. We have five specializations among which Bilingual Intercultural Education stands out, since it allows children of native peoples of our Caribbean Coast to receive classes in their mother tongues from early education on,” explained Gonzalez. The current enrollment in education courses is 6,000 young people, most from rural and remote areas.