

# Impacts of School Construction Projects by Canadian NGOs in Nicaragua

Mary Anne Connell, MSc







# Do NGOs <sub>with</sub> Strong Participative Approach Have Greater Impact?

- Yes to Operating Participation
- No to Preparation & Implementation
- Does Strong Local Partner Have Stronger Impact? - Yes
- Depends on local leaders, presence/absence of leaders living in community
- Location of community to tourists, markets, employment, # of schools in community

# Impacts of School Construction Projects on Families & Comm.

- Positive Impacts - Dozens and dozens of students are now getting a basic education
- They have increased opportunities and hope for the future
- Families and communities have taken initiative to pursue other projects
- Relationships have been established between communities in Nicaragua & Can.
- Individuals have great pride in their comm.

# Negative Impacts on Families and Communities

- Government has become dependent on NGOs to provide schools
- Community is dependent on NGO to pay for operating expenses of school
- Can. & Nic. had to learn new methods of construction from each other
- *Indirect Impact* - school expenses cause financial hardship for families

# Impacts on Canadian Volunteers

- A heightened awareness of the benefits of aid, both for the recipients and the donors
- Greater understanding of poverty
- Canadian volunteers more appreciative of personal wealth, democratic Government
- *Negative* - Did not feel appreciated by the local leaders and NGO staff

# Causes of Positive Impacts on Local Families and Community

- *(a) Physical:*  
*School in each community*
- *Gifts: People received school supplies, clothes, household items, sports equipment*
- Building built together by Cdns & Nics.
- Cdn. staff informed volunteers of needs
- Volunteers took items donated by Canadians



# Positive Causes . . .

- (b) ***Economic:***
  - *Materials purchased*
  - *Employment for trades people*
  - *Employment for teachers*
- Purchases put money into economy
- Local people paid minimum amount for work
- Teachers are paid salary

# Positive Causes . . .

- *(c) Skills:*  
*Nicaraguans*  
*learned*  
*construction skills,*  
*especially women*
- *Nicaraguans taught*  
*Canadians*  
*construction skills*
- Women  
volunteered to help,  
learned  
construction skills
- Canadians helped  
Nicaraguans and  
needed to learn  
indigenous methods

# Positive Causes . . .

- *(d) Educ:Academic*
  - *Children/adults learning to read and write*
- *Social - learning politeness, music, games, socializing*
- *Health - learning hygiene/nutrition*
- Children attending school for first time
- Adults attending school or learning from children
- Children/adults socializing in formal setting

# Positive Causes . . .

- *(e) Relationships*
- *Local people with: each other, with leaders*
- *Local people and leaders with NGO staff*
- *Nics. with Cdns.*
- Community focused around construction project for several weeks
- NGO staff/leaders active in comm.
- Cdn. & Nic. volunteers worked together

# Positive Causes . . .

- *(f) Responsibility:*  
*Families take resp. for provid. children with school needs*
- *NGO responsible for contact with schools*
- *Individuals take resp. for own future*
- Children need supplies for school
- Schools have to be managed by people
- NGOs interested in success of schools
- Want to get out of poverty - some see educ. as way out

# Negative Causes . . .

- *1. Construction Methods Different - Volunteers had to learn new methods*
- Difficult to learn new methods because Canadians and Nicaraguans could not speak each others' language

# Negative Causes . . .

- **2. *Dependency:***
  - *Gov't dependent on NGOs to build schools*
  - *Schools depend on NGOs for salaries and supplies*
- Government has inadequate resources, and other priorities
- NGO schools receive partial or no funding from Government

# Negative Causes . . .

- *3. Relationships not maintained:*
- *Casa NGO staff not in regular contact with local comm. and volunteers*
- *Community wants support of Casa*
- Casa is a facilitator, not a sponsor
- Staff person new, learning resps.
- Casa does not keep good records of volunteers
- Comm. unaware of facilitator-sponsor



# Indirect Impacts . . .

- *4. Financial Hardship:*
- *Students need clothes, shoes, backpacks,*
- *Families have little or no money*
- *Education not a priority*
- No employment or low pay for work
- Some people don't view educ. as way of relieving poverty
- People spend money on immed. needs, I.e. food, vs long term educ.

# Recommendations for Action by Canadian NGOs

- 1. All three NGOs include the term “development” in their objectives
- 2. Summary of construction costs be communicated to Canadian volunteers
- 3. NGOs communicate with volunteers to keep informed of how project is operating
- 4. Schools and NGO staff encourage all families to make education a priority, including finding ways to pay for education

# Recommendations continued . . .

- 5. Schools have a School Site Council made up of parents, teachers and local leaders and that the Council be responsible for daily operation of school.
- 6. NGOs find effective ways to facilitate mutual transfer of knowledge between donors and recipients.
- 7. An interpreter be present at construction site.

