



Food sovereignty, agroecology, climate justice



Co-ops & peasant feminism

Agroecologists of the future

Post hurricane rebuilding

Social economy & rural development

Next generation of trade unionists

NSC & NSCAG News

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NICARAGUA NOW

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COVER PHOTOS Landworkers representing La Via Campesina protesting at COP26 against corporate control of food systems. Credit: Land Workers' Alliance

Grown in Nicaragua: the country grows 80% of the basic foods that it consumes
Credit: Friends of the ATC

DESIGN Tom Lynton

The Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign has taken all reasonable care to ensure that the information in this issue of Nicaragua Now is accurate at date of publication.

Biodiversity, food and climate justice

The title of COP26 in Glasgow attended by over 40,000 people was 'Together for our planet.' But despite scientific evidence, despite the general acknowledgement that the climate crisis is greatest threat to human beings and the planet, COP26 failed to address the scale of the emergency. This raised the question of together for who, for the benefit of who.

Six months on, following another International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, UN General Secretary Antonio Guterres has warned in ever more stark terms that the world is "sleepwalking to climate catastrophe".

Delegates of the UK Land Workers' Alliance and La Via Campesina (LVC) took part as observers in COP26, and organised activities both inside the official conference and outside where grassroots movements worked and mobilised around holistic ways of addressing climate, economic, and social justice.

Founded in 1992, LVC is a global movement bringing together millions of peasants, landless workers, pastoralists, fishers, and small and medium sized farmers. LVC argues that food systems have been forced down the path of intensification and mono-cropping by agribusiness, supermarkets and other multinational corporations. This industrial farming model has led to widespread pollution, severe loss of

biodiversity, and dangerous levels of carbon emissions.

LVC demanded that food and land use should be central to COP negotiations, and that agroecological farming and food sovereignty be recognised as real solutions that would reverse biodiversity loss and soil depletion and contribute to cutting carbon emissions. Carbon offsetting and 'farming without farmers' type technical fixes that do nothing to cut emissions at source, are fraught with risks, and serve to increase corporate control over food systems.

"We are the ones who feed the world. We provide 70-80% of the food you eat yet our voices are missing. Only the voices of agribusiness are allowed to speak, what we are witnessing is corporate capture of UN systems. Private finance, not governments are making the decisions". LVC

NSC's Nicaraguan partner is the Rural Workers Association (ATC), a founder member of LVC. With 47,000 members, the ATC defends the rights of agricultural workers in banana, tobacco, coffee industries, works with rural co-operatives and associations using agroecological farming methods, and runs training programmes including the Latin America Agroecological Institute Ixim Ulew. In this issue of *Nicaragua Now* we highlight examples of their work. See pages 3,4, 5 and 6.

NSC and the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign Action Group (NSCAG) work with Nicaraguan organisations and social movements fighting for economic, social and environmental justice by promoting and seeking support for their work in the UK. We carry this out through: * UK speaker tours by representatives of Nicaraguan partners, * information campaigns to raise awareness about Nicaragua from the perspective of partner organisations * collaborating with and providing support for towns and communities in the UK with twinning links and projects in Nicaragua.

GET IN TOUCH, GET INVOLVED

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The next generation of agroecological activists

Thirty – nine students of IALA Ixim Ulew from Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and the Dominican Republic graduated in January, 2022 after completing a two year course. The pandemic meant adapting to new technologies and studying techniques: this presented challenges but opened new possibilities for developing distance learning. Bryan Vásquez, a Nicaraguan graduate, commented that the IALA agroecology training is ‘training for life’ in that it encompasses social, economic, political, and cultural aspects as well as technical training. He also spoke of the vital importance of rescuing ancestral knowledge through the peasant-to-peasant methodology.



IALA Ixim Ulew

The first Latin American Agroecological Institute (IALA) was set up in 2006 in Venezuela through an agreement between La Via Campesina (LVC) and then Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez. Since then eight other IALAs have been established across the region to provide training for young people.

Each IALA has its own characteristics but all are dedicated to training agroecologists who return to their organisations and communities to apply what they have learnt. The training they provide is based on the holistic LVC popular education method that combines technical, political and ideological training.

For LVC, as a global movement, this training is part of the decolonisation of

‘The future of healthy, sustainable agriculture is in the hands of young people and the way forward is through agroecology.’

DIONYS MELGARA
Rural Workers
Association (ATC)

a model of food production dominated by the power and wealth of transnational corporations and deconstructing the mindset that goes with this model.

IALA Ixim Ulew (land of maize) in Nicaragua was founded in 2018 by the ATC for young people from Central American and Caribbean organisations. The campus, located in Santo Tomas, Chontales, is a 130 hectare farm school: sixty per cent of the area is forested and the rest is cultivated with fruit, vegetables, basic grains, and pasture for animals.

Like all like other IALAs, the students follow a methodology of alternating periods spent on campus and time spent living and working with communities and co-operatives that are part of the ATC and allied organisations to share and apply what they have learnt.

The technical curriculum is certified by the Nicaraguan Technological Institute (INATEC).

NSC activities and plans

As with all organisations we are emerging from pandemic mode, retaining the best of remote working while gradually returning to participating in hybrid and in person events. Since 2019 we have been working in solidarity with the Nicaraguan Rural Workers Association (ATC) through promoting their work in videos, webinars, posts on our website and social media and developing contacts with likeminded UK organisations.

Building mutual solidarity has been a basic principle of the work of NSC since it was set up in 1978. This model of working has focused on annual visits to Nicaragua and UK speaker tours of representatives of our partner organisations. In autumn 2022, for the first time since 2019, we look forward to being able to co-ordinate a UK speaker tour by an IALA graduate and representative of the ATC. This visit will form an important contribution to building LVC as a global movement.

Our other area of work is providing support for a network of young Nicaraguan reporters through publishing their point

of view on the reality of daily life in their communities, a perspective completely ignored by the mainstream media.

Over our 44 year history we have accumulated a huge volume of materials. One major 2022 project is creating an inventory and digitalising these materials in order to make them available online.

Festivals (including Glastonbury) and sponsored events are back! Fundraising through our volunteers and runners will complement funds raised through affiliations, donations, our online shop, and other activities.

Community building: involving the next generation

Dolores Esquivel is a founder member of the Gloria Quintanilla women's co-operative. Winnie Narvaez interviewed her about the integration of young people into the co-op, what the term 'community development' means to them, and preventing the drift from the countryside.

Founded in the 1990s the co-op is in the community of Santa Julia, south of Managua. Its origins lie in the long struggle by the Rural Workers' Association (ATC) for recognition for their land rights.

Co-op members grow coffee, basic grains, vegetables and fruit using agroecological methods. They are part of the Rural Workers Association (ATC) and the ATC Rural Women's Movement (MMC).

WINNIE NARVAEZ At a time when there is so much misinformation around and much of what is happening in the real Nicaragua never gets publicised, how can the country move forward through the work of grassroots organisations like yours?

DOLORES ESQUIVEL Community work is fundamental because that's where people's daily experiences are played out, especially through the work of women and young people.

There are seventeen of us with leading roles in our community. Since the 2018 attempted coup and the pandemic, we have been focusing on involving young people. Before, they didn't produce crops, they didn't get involved in planting, nothing, because they felt that these were jobs for adults.

Now, encouraged by the community leaders, young people understand that they have to produce, to work the land in order to take care of it.

Something that suddenly became 'the done thing' about a year and a half ago was the urge to go and work in the US, Spain, Costa Rica: but we don't want young people to leave, if they leave then what will happen to the land we have here, to the crops?

In other countries they say that we are in danger, that there is no work, that there is persecution, but this is a strategy by those Nicaraguans who have left, who want asylum in other countries, portraying Nicaragua in a bad light.

So, as community leaders, we have been working with young people. We want a sustainable, productive community, but the most important thing is to make them aware that they don't have to leave the country, that here there is wealth in land, in our knowledge, in the methods we use, and in our seeds.

Right now we have 38 young people organised, with a young woman in charge and they are creating their own ways of working. Last year in the first planting cycle, 28 young people took part, now in the second cycle there are 31. Two years ago they didn't take part at all, so this is a very healthy sign.

But it's not only about production. How can we guide them ideologically? How do

we teach them: look, this is your land, this is your community?

Starting at the end of last year we have organised workshops on entrepreneurship. For example, we are looking at how you can make dragon fruit marmalade and sell it; how you can make and sell a local drink called atol; how you can make carrot boxes and grow your own vegetables next to your house. These are all new things for young people.

Everyone has their own talents. All these young people are doing different things and I think that we women are making an important contribution too as adult leaders, promoting these experiences, because these youngsters are the future of our community.

WN And they are going to sell their products locally or in (the capital) Managua?

DE They take part in a producer-to-consumer initiative run by Friends of the ATC from the ATC national office in Managua. They publicise what we are doing through WhatsApp, manage the



Friends of the ATC

solidarity shop's Facebook page and deliver products to customers. Right now we are making some shopping bags to sell in the shop. So we have already expanded the range of what we do.

The young people always have three things in mind:

- This is the place we come from and where we were born.
- We need skills and products so we can earn a living.
- We have ideas and we want to be able to try them out.

They say 'we are not just going to go around with a machete planting beans and maize, we want to do more'. And they are succeeding. For example, if dragon fruit were plentiful in the past, I would give them away, but now we don't because we have ways to transform the product and generate more income.

WN But working the land is also vital?

DE Yes, everything is integrated: the land, advocacy, marketing and sustainability.

WN Co-operativism is also a model that offers an alternative to the banking system, to consumerism, but changing that mindset is very difficult because there's such a lot of pressure to conform. People want a quick job, easy money, to buy the products they see in the media. And as you say many people have left the country too, so it seems like a vicious circle of ideas and pressures.

DE But at the same time, wherever you go you will find local groups or organisations in the communities supporting a different approach, developing new ideas: 'look, don't go, here you have this'. I don't hear young people here [in Santa Julia] saying they are going to leave.

WN This provides a different concept of community development to the one that you find in books that is more related to economics; here it also refers to the preservation of the community.

DN We have to think ahead. In the 1980s young boys at say the age of 15 would get involved in community work. Today I can see Lea, Xiomara, Gemma, girls and young women who will stand up in an assembly and ask about the history of the community, how it was before and how we

The image shows a woman in a pink and white striped shirt and white shorts standing in a field of young plants in black plastic mulch. In the background, there are trees and a dirt path. Two circular logos are visible: one on the left with a globe and the word 'CLOC', and one on the right with the word 'CAMPESINA' and a group of people. Overlaid on the image is pink text that reads: '¡Sembrando Soberanía Alimentaria y solidaridad, cosechamos derechos y vida digna!'. Below the text is a green box with the website 'www.viacampesina.org'. At the bottom of the image is a pink banner with the text 'Movimiento de Mujeres del Campo' and 'ATC - MMC'. On the left and right of the banner are logos for 'MOVIMIENTO DE MUJERES DEL CAMPO' and 'ATC' respectively. Below the banner is a dark grey bar with the text 'Sowing food sovereignty and solidarity, we harvest our rights and a dignified life'.

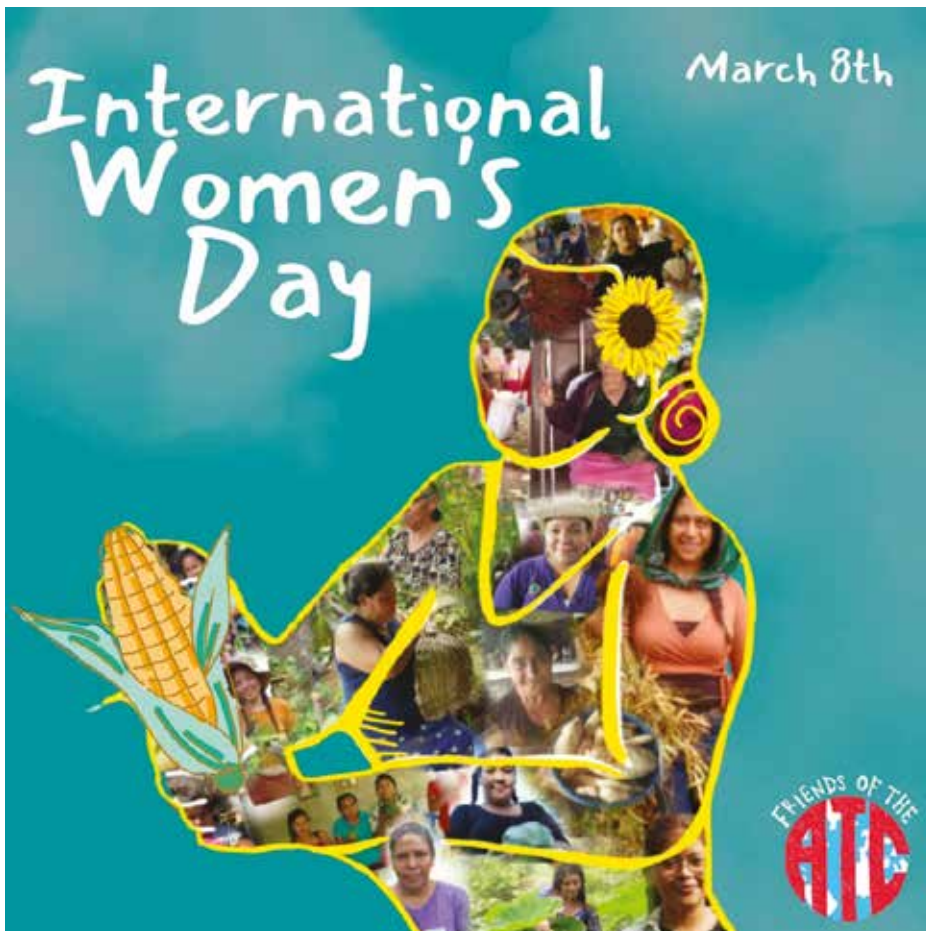
are doing now. When we are no longer here, these youngsters will tell the story and we won't lose that thread.

When you don't tell people all this, they want a smartphone, they want trendy shoes. If you tell them the story of the community and they see us working, they become more aware. They say yes, you serve as an example.

For example, I can tell Lea: 'Lea, there is going to be a workshop on agroecology, are you going to go? So five young people are going and I don't have to go, because I know that Lea and those four young people are going to represent the community.'

Further information: www.friendsatc.org

Peasant feminism: the rights of rural women



‘Peasant feminism’ is a term that first emerged from the Women’s Assemblies of La Via Campesina (LVC) in 2013 with the drafting of a document entitled ‘Peasant and Popular Feminism.’

Peasant feminism distinguishes itself from what LVC sees as ‘urban feminism’ in that it is rooted in the rural environment and encompasses the particular conditions of women who live in rural areas while recognising areas of overlap, particularly the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence.

Taking this idea further, over many years the Latin American and Caribbean members of La Via Campesina collectively developed the concept of ‘popular peasant feminism’, rooted in the historical context and forms of struggle of peasant women.

This concept comes from an understanding of feminism as an integral part of the struggle against the capitalist

system: “Men are not our enemy. Our enemies are capitalism, patriarchy and racism, and our peasant feminism is key to fighting these.”

A young peasant leader from the Landless People’s Movement in Brazil explained that: **“For us, feminism means changing relationships between people and nature and between men and women. Our work on farms must be valued, while the work of the home cannot be the exclusive burden of women. We must construct new values and new relations in daily life, in society and within our organisations”.**

At the core of rural life is a close, symbiotic relationship between people, food, the land, and the environment. It follows that peasant feminism puts land rights at the heart of its struggle.

Today, land rights also encompass food sovereignty, a key demand of peasant feminists, especially in Latin

La Via Campesina as an international organisation ‘promotes the participation of women from rural areas at all levels of action, power and representation in the building of an international movement politically and socially committed to the defence of peasant agriculture, food sovereignty, the struggle for land, justice, equality and to eradicate all forms of gender discrimination and violence.’

After more than ten years of advocacy by La Via Campesina and like minded organisations nationally and internationally, the UN declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas was approved on 17 December, 2018. Article N°4 declares that it is the responsibility of states to implement the measures it deems appropriate to: “eliminate all forms of discrimination against peasant women and other women working in rural areas and to promote their empowerment.” The UK and US voted against this declaration.

For further information:
see www.viacampesina.org
for a booklet entitled ‘The path of peasant and popular feminism’.

America. Food sovereignty is the right to access affordable, healthy, culturally appropriate food. Lola Esquivel of the Gloria Quintanilla Cooperative (see page 5), notes that **“peasant feminism is the fight for health, education, food, and for all women’s work to be recognised”.** In this, she interweaves the demands of more traditional feminism—the recognition of all women’s labour—with the demands of peasant farmers.

In Nicaragua, peasant feminism additionally characterises itself as being anti-imperialist. In fact, other forms of feminism that are more urban based are often seen as expressing the unwanted influence of the US particularly during and since the 2018 attempted coup.

The ATC Rural Women’s Movement recognises the achievements of government gender-based economic empowerment programmes particularly in rural areas.

Building homes, building community solidarity – the co-operative way

Winnie Narváez interviewed Yadira Aguirre and Margine Martínez, members of a housing co-operative in La Dalia, northern Nicaragua. Like every other country, Nicaragua needs more affordable housing. As part of poverty reduction programmes, the right to decent, low cost housing is a key government priority.

In many places community-based solutions are being implemented through shared responsibility between the government, the local council and the families that need better housing.

Some communities have used a co-operative model based on mutual support among members: many hours of voluntary work are put in by those benefiting from a scheme to build not only their own houses but those of their neighbours. It's a co-operative model that works because it's not just about building homes but also about building community solidarity.

Yadira, Margine and another 16 members of the co-operative are agricultural labourers whose main earnings come from coffee picking on large farms for three months each year. With the money earned, they are investing in new homes.

Through government programmes the co-op receives technical support and low interest credit to buy materials. The land on which the houses are being built was donated by the municipality because the families were relocated from places susceptible to landslides.

In preparation for the work INVUR (Nicaragua's Institute of Urban and Rural Housing), in agreement with the local mayor, a technical team and the co-operative, evaluated the community's needs and the suitability of the sites for building houses.

Yadira and Margine explained that "INVUR's job was to do a survey and check which areas are safe and which are dangerous and what can be done to solve the problems. "

Before starting the work, the cooperative set up three groups: the planning group keeps a timetable and a diary of what happens during

“We don't get paid, all our strength goes into the voluntary work building our houses because this is where we are going to live. The more we work we do, the more strongly each of us feels for the house we are building, everyone feels attached to what they are creating.”

YADIRA AGUIRRE AND MARGINE MARTÍNEZ

the day; a second group oversees the work teams; and a third group is responsible for administration.

So far they have worked on five plots of land, building steps where access is difficult, removing heavy stones and flattening the sites ready for building.

Building very steep steps to provide access to one plot convinced one sceptical member of the value of co-operative working. Yadira Aguirre commented on how this achievement illustrated how people who started off doubtful are now saying 'it's amazing what I have achieved with this group'.

People decide on the designs for the new houses collectively. One of them commented: "I think that our small old house is going to end up being the kitchen, that's why we have rebuilt it properly and further back so that the new house isn't affected by the smoke from the kitchen fire. I can already visualise what the new house will look like".

Mutual support produces genuine co-operation based on sharing, caring, remembering daily experiences of working together and recognising each person's contribution to the communal efforts.



Clearing land to build one of the new houses

A circular economy that binds communities together

Seventy per cent of Nicaragua's workforce is employed in the social economy, a sector that not only generates 65% of GDP but has sustained the country through crises: the 2018 attempted coup, two major hurricanes in 2020 and the pandemic.

In recognition of the importance of this sector, in 2012 the government set up the Nicaraguan Ministry for the Family, Community, Co-operative and Associative Economy (MEFCCA). The sector covers small and medium size businesses and farms, co-operatives, associations, self-employed workers and encompasses agriculture, services, tourism, transport, housing, savings and credit and housing.

When the Sandinista government returned to power in 2007, they launched a National Human Development Plan accompanied by well integrated policies, programmes and projects aimed at reducing the entrenched problem of high levels of poverty. At the time at least half of the country's population was living below the poverty line, particularly in rural areas.

The first building block put in place was restoring the basic rights of all Nicaraguans to free health care and education. Setting up MEFCCA was a key part of further restoring these rights by addressing food security through zero hunger and credit programmes for women while extending road

infrastructure and electrification.

The country has achieved 80% food sovereignty and largely eliminated hunger. MEFCCA has extended its focus to programmes in rural and urban areas that develop entrepreneurship.

MEFCCA minister Justa Perez explains how programmes to cut poverty complement and build on each other: 'If families have access to free health care and education for their children, if they have a good road to make it easier to get produce and goods to markets, if they have electricity, if they have markets to sell their products, they then have greater capacity to think about how to generate more income, to add value to their products and access more markets.'

Karen Laguna owns a small family business in the department of Leon that sells traditional Nicaraguan food. She is one of 29,000 families that have been involved in a MEFCCA Sustainable Development of Rural Families' Livelihoods Project (NICAVIDA). The aim of the Project is to transform rural economies and food systems to make them more inclusive, productive, resilient and sustainable.

NICAVIDA directly benefits vulnerable households, particularly women, in eight departments in the so called 'Dry Corridor', a region highly susceptible to climate change.

Karen Laguna explains the impact of the programme: "It has enabled us to support our families by backing our businesses, increasing sales, and managing and improving the infrastructure of our premises."

NICAVIDA provides well integrated support to help increase the income of the beneficiaries, improve their nutritional quality of their food and strengthen their capacity to adapt to climate change, particularly by facilitating access to water.

Co-financed by the Nicaraguan government, the Central American Bank for



Participants in a NICAVIDA entrepreneurship programme

Economic Integration (CABEI) in conjunction with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), NICAVIDA received the 2021 IFAD Latin America Gender Award.

CABEI Executive President Dante Mossi commented: "We are proud to support this type of transformation and social welfare initiative. As CABEI we are creating the necessary conditions to continue promoting

the active participation of women in society."

NICAVIDA also includes infrastructure projects such as wells, reservoirs, school gardens, reforestation, roads, bridges, seed banks, installing wood – saving ovens (to cut carbon emissions) and the rehabilitation of facilities. These projects have generated 20,000 jobs.

After the 2020 hurricanes, rebuilding lives and livelihoods

One year after the catastrophic hurricanes that struck Nicaragua in November 2020, British film maker Ahmed Kaballo visited Haulover, one of the communities worst affected.

The hardest hit parts of the country were the coastal areas of the Northern Caribbean Autonomous Region (RACN) home to Miskito, Afro-descendant and Mayagna people most of whom make their living from subsistence farming and fishing. The small community of Haulover with a population of 1,600 is one such community.

Almost every house and structure and much of the vegetation was completely destroyed by torrential rain and winds in excess of 150mph.

The community is situated 40km south of Bilwi (formerly Puerto Cabezas), the capital of the RACN. The journey to Haulover takes about 90 minutes by launch along inland waterways, avoiding the more dangerous route by sea.

As the hurricanes approached the Nicaraguan government rapidly activated well integrated emergency procedures co-ordinated through the National System for the Prevention, Mitigation, and Attention

to Disasters (SINAPRED).

For the authorities the immediate priority was to save lives and provide emergency shelter, food and basic necessities. Like all communities on the coast, the entire population of Haulover was evacuated to higher ground.

Despite the scale of the catastrophe and vulnerability of these communities, not one single life was lost in this region.

On his visit Ahmed found that families have rebuilt their houses using what they managed to salvage from the wreckage of their homes and new building materials provided through relief and reconstruction programmes co-ordinated by the local and national government.

Fishing has been reactivated with equipment and materials provided by the Nicaraguan Fisheries Institute (INPESCA) and support from Ministry of the Family, Communities, and Co-operatives (MEFCCA) and other government institutions.

Among local people that Ahmed interviewed was an Afro-descendant

Miskito speaking woman whose parents were originally from Mozambique. She has lived in Haulover most of her life.

She explained that in addition to government help to rebuild her house, her family have been beneficiaries of MEFCCA's support packages that included nets and a small boat from which she and her family make their living by fishing. She also noted the great importance of free health care and education for her family.

The local municipal authority is working with the community on plans for a building programme to relocate every family in Haulover to more secure housing on firmer ground away from the sandy coastline.

Local municipality representative Ulda Castro explained that the programme aims "to provide each family with a dignified house together with a community infrastructure including the new health clinic [currently under construction]."

The clinic will have a pharmacy, reception and records areas, as well as spaces for medical consultations. Electricity will be provided by solar panels. The construction is providing much needed employment for dozens of local people.

Shifting political allegiances

The government's support during the evacuation in 2020 as well as the substantial aid from the regional relief and reconstruction programmes were decisive in swaying electoral support for the Sandinista government in the national elections in November 2021. Over 90% of the electorate in Haulover cast their vote for the FSLN compared with 75% at national level.

This was a major shift of allegiance in a community that has traditionally supported an indigenous political party called YATAMA.

A local fisherman and former contra fighter Domingo Peralta told Ahmed Caballo, "I used to be with YATAMA, but the YATAMA leadership did nothing for us, so I switched to the Frente Sandinista."



Empowerment of young trade unionists

‘Our union creates the conditions for and prioritises succession planning and the training of our young people in order to guarantee the future of our union.’

**DOMINGO PEREZ, GENERAL SECRETARY,
NICARAGUAN PUBLIC SERVICE UNION UNE**

Nicaragua has a relatively young population. Of its 6.3 million people, approximately 58% are young people, with only about 3% over 60. It is therefore no surprise that Nicaragua’s trade unions pay particular attention to recruiting and developing young people. This ensures that today’s young members will be tomorrow’s trade union leaders.

All of Nicaragua’s trade unions have youth structures at national, regional and branch level. The age range for young members is 16-40 and Nicaragua’s unions have been particularly successful in recruiting young people. One of the likely reasons for this is that young members participate actively in all areas of union work and play a role which goes beyond that of strictly trade union issues such as collective bargaining and health and safety.

Nicaragua’s unions see themselves as

having a socio-political role which means that they are able to influence economic, environmental and political matters that affect workers. Young trade unionists are therefore given space to take part in a wide range of activities.

The workplan of UNE’s youth

committee includes political activism and advocacy. Young members are involved in providing services to the community and promoting sporting and cultural activities. They participate regularly in environmental and health brigades and visit rural communities to arrange sporting and cultural activities for children. At Christmas time, they help with distributing toys to children in different municipalities. UNE has also recently set up a baseball league for its branches and young people are fully involved in playing for their respective teams.

In common with other Nicaraguan unions, UNE allocates a significant amount of its budget to youth activities.

This includes a wide range of training and capacity building for young members. Recent examples include courses on social media, computer security and trade union history.

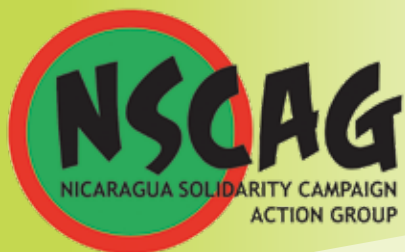
UNE’s Youth Committee meets monthly to follow up on activities and also proposes agenda items to the National Secretariat, to which it also reports on a monthly basis. Members of the Committee also participate in meetings of the Coordinadora Social, an umbrella body which brings together social, labour and popular movements. The Committee’s strapline is ‘Young Trade Unionists always at the forefront’ and their work will ensure that Nicaragua’s trade unions continue to grow and develop for the benefit of future generations.



UNE’s young members map plans and priorities



Caring for the environment: making signs for a trail in a nature reserve



NSCAG activities and plans

We have continued to stand in solidarity with the Nicaraguan people and with Nicaragua's trade unions in their fight to defend the country's national sovereignty and right to self-determination in the face of continued US hostility.

Over the past year, NSCAG has been unable to organise its normal programme of activities due to the pandemic. However, we have run a very successful series of webinars, some of which we have organised jointly with the US based Alliance for Global Justice and with the UK Cuba and Venezuela Solidarity Campaigns. These have been on a wide range of topics including US sanctions, the Nicaraguan elections and labour relations. We have produced regular updates and briefings containing articles and information about developments in Nicaragua.

Throughout 2022 we are hoping to resume our normal programme of activities which will include a teacher exchange with Nicaragua (supported by the National Education Union) and visits by Nicaraguan trade unionists to the UK.



On 26 March the Nicaraguan public sector union UNE celebrated its 44th anniversary. We congratulate them on achieving

this important milestone and on their commitments to defending the labour and social rights of their members. UNE continues to support the government's poverty reduction and human development programmes.



credit

UK – Nicaragua teacher exchange

2017 National Education Union (NEU) delegation to Nicaragua with Jose Antonio Zepeda and Bernarda Lopez of the Nicaraguan teachers union ANDEN. The delegation spent three weeks working

alongside Nicaraguan English teachers focusing on the methodology of teaching English as a second language. This teacher exchange will take place again this year in July and August.

Further information is available from Louise Richards at nscag@nicaraguasc.org.uk

The NEU, the UK's largest education union, welcomes the important advances in education in Nicaragua since 2007 and congratulates the Nicaraguan people on the 42nd anniversary of the world-renowned National Literacy Crusade.

**In solidarity,
Mary Busted and Kevin Courtney
Joint general secretaries**



**NEU
International**



Perspectives of a US-born Nicaraguan

Rohan Rice interviewed Aminta Zea, a US-born Nicaraguan researcher and organiser. In 2021, she participated in a delegation and internship in Nicaragua with Friends of the Rural Workers' Association (ATC).



Aminta Zea (centre) interpreting for a group of North Americans doing an agroecology course in Nicaragua.

On moving to Nicaragua and the colonial baggage of being a mestiza

I have been going to Nicaragua since I was five, visiting family in the department of Matagalpa. But as I got older and deepened my political knowledge, I developed as an anti-imperialist and as a socialist. This led me to visit in 2019 to study the aftermath of the attempted coup. Not long after I began to feel politically isolated in the US and Nicaragua felt more and more like home.

The delegation really intrigued me as it incorporated so many different aspects. Very quickly, the ATC became like a family to me, so I decided to stay on and use my skills as a student of sociology.

I really wanted to get a sense of campesino life and understand its political dimensions. However, my research during the internship really centred around aspects of my own identity.

Moving to Nicaragua was a process of 'de-diasporisation'. This word is important to me: during four years of political organising in the US from 2018 until 2021, I struggled to find a political home, principally because I was both Nicaraguan diaspora and an anti-imperialist. The term also speaks to the unique experience of immersing myself

in Nicaraguan society as someone from the diaspora.

I was asking questions about mestizaje [mixed identity]. How does Nicaragua deal with that generational trauma? As mestizo/as, we hold a lot of colonial

baggage, but Nicaragua is unique because of its revolutionary processes — an ideology of national liberation, a liberation that also takes into account preserving and loving our land, our people, and also rescuing ancestral knowledge—we've been able to acknowledge that colonial baggage but not let it hold us back.

On LGBTQ rights, gay marriage, and abortion rights

It's going to sound really silly, but I'm actually very interested in the sociology of nightlife! Anecdotally, one thing I've noticed is that there are a lot of queer youth. They're able to enter spaces without much fuss, I have not seen somebody yell out or harass somebody because of their sexuality and a lot of my comrades are queer.

I think this has a lot to do with how gender is perceived. While Nicaragua can be very machista, I have found it less so than other Latin American societies and this is down to the emancipation of women, central to Sandinista society.

It was under the US puppet government of Violeta Chamorro that gender rights regressed [even to the extent of passing] an anti-sodomy law, a big step back for LGBTQ rights.

Large sections of Nicaraguan society are pushing for gay marriage and abortion rights but there are still strong conservative sectors that hold it all back. As with queer liberation, we are still reeling from the seventeen years of neo-liberalism but [now] from what I understand, it's a question of 'when' not 'if'.

On ATC organising in the countryside

... more than anything I have taken an approach that is more linked to agricultural workers, to peasant farmers. In many of my previous organising spaces in the US—I lived in DC and later in New Orleans—I really felt that this [agricultural] sector was greatly dismissed. And now I think a lot about what our national hero, Sandino, told us: that only the peasants and the workers will be able to accomplish revolution. To exclude farmers is such a dangerous mistake.

On moving towards a multi-polar world

It's a really exciting time for Nicaragua. China's mission to eradicate poverty in its own country has been hugely successful and I know it's something that the Sandinista government has long been pursuing. I'm hoping with China's knowledge and investment we'll finally be able to achieve that goal.

The new sanctions imposed [on Nicaragua] by the US last year, and the current sanctions on Russia (traditionally a large trading partner with Nicaragua), are really going to hurt the Nicaraguan people. Yet hopefully new trade and investment with China might mitigate the worst of the sanctions.

A new multi-polar world is on the horizon. Regionally, there is a leftward shift away from US hegemony. The recent election of Xiomara Castro in Honduras is an exciting development, as that means we have a neighbouring government opposed to US imperialism that Nicaragua can begin to build a new, independent relationship alongside.