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**Social Assessment for the Nicaragua
Rural Municipalities Project:**
Poverty, Gender, and Indigenous Issues in the Integration
of Environment and Rural Reconstruction Assistance

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Valeria Junho Pena
Marvin Ortega
Marcia Arieira
Maria Correia

The World Bank
Latin America Technical Department
Environment Unit

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Foreword

The Dissemination Note Series of the Latin America and the Caribbean Region's Environment Unit (LATEN) seeks to share the results of our analytical and operational work, both completed or in progress. Through this series, we present the preliminary findings of larger studies in an abbreviated form, as well as describe "best practices" with regard to major environmental issues currently confronting countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In most cases, these notes represent "work in progress" and as such have not been subject to either substantial internal review or editing. Therefore the findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in these notes are entirely those of the authors and should not be attributed to the World Bank, members of its Board of Executive Directors, or the countries they represent.

Since one of the key objectives of these notes is to stimulate debate, we would encourage readers to contact the authors directly should they have any comments or suggestions as to how the analyses could be improved.

William L. Partridge
Unit Chief
Environment Unit
Latin America and the Caribbean Region
The World Bank

Acknowledgments

This summary of the social assessment for the Nicaragua Rural Municipalities Project is based on background documents produced by Marcia Leite Arieira (consultant, poverty), Mary Lisbeth González (consultant, indigenous people), Marvin Ortega (consultant, rapid rural appraisal) and Maria Correia (gender specialist, LASLG). Social Assessment Coordinator for the project is Valeria Junho Pena, Social Scientist in LATEN. Luis Constantino, Senior Natural Resources Economist in LASLG, is Task Manager for the project. Michael Baxter is Manager of LASLG, and William Partridge is Division Chief of LATEN. At the time the social assessment was conducted the project was being managed by LA2NR, and Mr. Constantino, Mr. Baxter, and Ms. Correia were working in that division. LA2NR was eliminated as part of a reorganization, and the project is now managed by LASLG.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABC	Atlantic Biodiversity Corridor
CBO	Community-based organization
EA	Environmental assessment
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FIAHS	Fund for Innovative Approaches in Human and Social Development
GEF	Global Environment Facility
IDA	International Development Association
INIFOM	Nicaraguan Institute for Municipal Development
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office of the World Bank
LA2NR	Natural Resources Management & Rural Poverty Division of the World Bank's Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office, Country Department II
LASLG	Latin America and the Caribbean Region Sector Leadership Group
LATEN	Environment Unit of the World Bank's Latin America and the Caribbean Region Technical Department
LSMS	Living Standard Measurement Survey
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
RRA	Rapid rural appraisal
SA	Social assessment
UCAIS	Union de las Cooperativas Indígenas de Sutiaba
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund



Sutiabas celebrating inauguration of the Fondo Rotatoria de Crédito Xuchiatl, a local rotating loan fund for productive activities.

Social Assessment for the Nicaragua Rural Municipalities Project

Poverty, Gender, and Indigenous Issues in the Integration of
Environment and Rural Reconstruction Assistance

Valeria Junho Pena, Marvin Ortega,
Marcia Arieira, and Maria Correia

BACKGROUND

According to the 1994 International Development Association (IDA) Poverty Profile more than half of the Nicaraguan population falls below the poverty line, and about one-fifth lives below the extreme poverty line, without even the recognized minimum caloric intake. Poverty is far more prevalent in Nicaragua's rural areas: with only 41 percent of the population rural areas account for 63 percent of all poor. The objective of the Rural Municipalities Project is to improve the management of natural resources to alleviate rural poverty by (a) improving the capacity of national and local institutions to make and enforce sectoral policies, (b) increasing the quality of public investment in a more sustainable use of natural resources that is oriented toward poverty reduction, and (c) enhancing prevailing conservation efforts. During its first year of implementation the project will focus on the western departments of Leon and Chinandega.

To prepare the project, the Nicaraguan government used several consultation and participatory mechanisms, including a series of workshops with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), community representatives, and local organizations and leaders. These stakeholders, with

their on-the-ground presence and firsthand knowledge, made important contributions to the project's preparation from the very beginning. Because the project cuts across different natural resources and sectors, stakeholder participation was integrated into several project preparation instruments, including the environmental assessment (EA), the biodiversity strategy, and the social assessment (SA). The SA (see Box 1) was carried out between May and September 1995 by the World Bank's Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office with support from the Fund for Innovative Approaches in Human and Social Development (FIAHS).¹ In accordance with the project's implementation schedule, the SA initially focused on the western region. The next step is to take the SA to the Atlantic region, and to include an Indigenous Development Plan for groups in that area. This paper concentrates on the contribution of the SA to project design.

1. The LAC units that conducted the SA were the Environment Unit of the Technical Department (LATEN), and the Natural Resources Management & Rural Poverty Division of Country Department II (LA2NR). LA2NR was eliminated in a recent reorganization, and the project is now being managed by the LAC Region Sector Leadership Group (LASLG).

Box 1. Data Sources and Results of the Social Assessment

The SA drew from the Nicaragua Poverty Assessment, the data set of the 1993 Living Standard Measurement Survey (LSMS), and two rapid rural appraisals (RRAs) in León and Chinandega. The first RRA looked at the rural poor and involved interviews with 299 individuals, while the second RRA focused on the Sutiaba indigenous people and interviewed 99 individuals. The LSMS provided information on main socioeconomic characteristics of the region's population and households, as well as on basic infrastructure.

The RRAs provided information on:

- Local traditions, culture, and socioeconomic organization
- Structure of the local community, existing leadership, and the extent of their influence
- Local systems governing access to and control of natural resources, including land tenure systems and rights to water, forest, and pasture resources
- Gender roles
- Environmental and development problems
- Organization of labor and the production process
- Community perceptions about local governments
- The views of the poor on the causes of poverty and on the possibility of overcoming it.

The main objectives of the RRA for the Sutiaba indigenous people were to (a) provide a historic overview and an analysis of the socioeconomic conditions of the Sutiabas, including an analysis of the existing types of community organization and of land ownership from social, economic, cultural, and legal perspectives, and (b) assess the potential of the Sutiaba community to engage and effectively participate in the project.

The main objectives of the SA were to:

- Identify key stakeholders
- Identify the rural poor and assess their living conditions
- Understand the views of the poor on the causes of poverty and how it can be overcome
- Understand existing farming systems and their constraints
- Evaluate the main needs of the poor, and obstacles to income generation
- Evaluate linkages between poverty and environmental degradation
- Assess the degree to which the rural poor are organized into NGOs and/or community-based organizations (CBOs)
- Assess the strength of local organizations and the kind of services the rural poor obtain from them
- Evaluate the stakeholders' perceptions of local governments

- Evaluate key gender issues and how the project should address them
- Make recommendations on how to eliminate/mitigate risks, stabilize migration, and strengthen the capacity of community organizations to better deliver project services.

As part of the SA, the Sutiaba indigenous group was also analyzed. The Sutiabas today constitute an ethnically diverse population coming from different areas of León and other parts of the country. The majority of local residents are of ethnic Sutiaba ancestry, but it is common for people living in the Sutiaba area, regardless of their ancestry, to be identified and to identify themselves as indigenous Sutiabas and to share Sutiaba cultural traditions and claims to communal property. The Sutiaba population of about 36,000 constitutes 17 percent of the total population in the Department of León.² The majority—approximately 23,000—live in urban areas, either in the historical site of the Sutiaba pueblo on the western side of the city of León or in twenty-four small urban settlements located to the north, south, and west of the Sutiaba pueblo. These settlements were created in the mid-1980s when the government moved small farmers from different parts of the country as part of a strategy to counter the military aggression coming from Honduran territory. About 15 percent of the urban population (approximately 3,500 residents) live in the settlements, with the remainder living in the historical Sutiaba pueblo. The rural area is composed of nine *comarcas*, with subdivisions in which thousands of nonindigenous residents live.

SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN THE PROJECT AREA

Project Stakeholders

2. *Census Population Projections, Ministry of Health, 1995.*

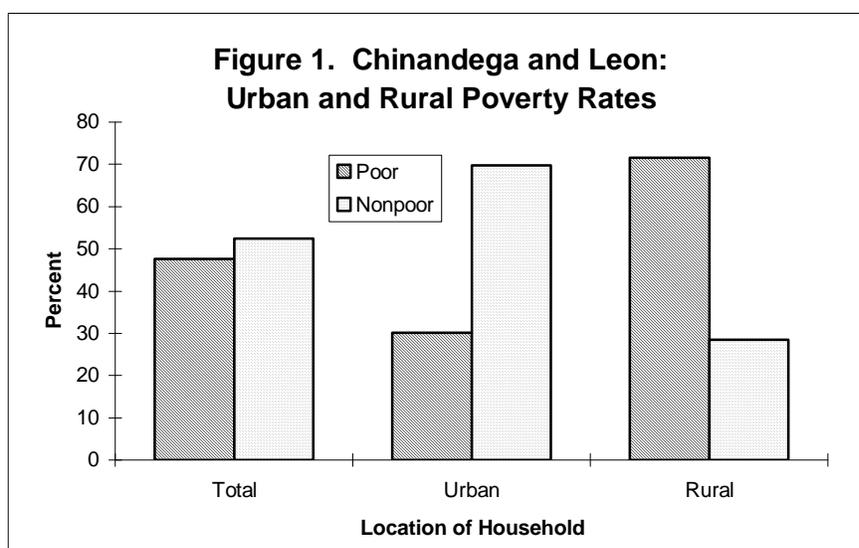
The primary stakeholders of the project are:

- Small farmers and other rural poor—both men and women
- Other farmers
- Children and youth
- Community-based organizations, particularly *comites comarcales*
- The Sutiaba indigenous group
- NGOs
- Municipal governments
- Central government agencies

General Economic and Demographic Features

The agricultural land in the project area used to be the most fertile of the country—Leon and Chinandega were Nicaragua’s major producers of corn, beans, and fruit. However, in the 1950s there was a shift toward export production of cotton, sugar cane, and bananas. Though promoting a passing economic boom, in the long run this destroyed the

land's fertility. Since then, political strife, inflation, environmental degradation, and decreasing export crop prices and production have caused a decline in living standards. The western region has a large share of the national population (17.3 percent, surpassed only by Managua with 27 percent), and a corresponding share of Nicaragua's poor and extreme poor, 16.4 percent and 17 percent respectively. Within the region, about half of all households, and about seven-tenths of all rural households, fall below the poverty line (see Figure 1).



Source: 1993 Living Standard Measurement Survey

The Department of León has ten municipalities and a population of about 423,000 whose livelihood is mainly derived from agriculture and livestock. The Department of Chinandega consists of thirteen municipalities and has a population of about 373,000, which relies primarily on agriculture. In both departments, about half of the population lives in rural areas.

In all age groups after age 14 there is a greater proportion of women than men. Although more than 90 percent of conjugal households are headed by men, in the 30 percent

of households that are headed by a single person more than four-fifths are headed by women. This, combined with women's differing economic opportunities in rural and urban areas, has a telling effect on poverty rates in single-headed versus conjugal households (see Table 1). Most notably, in urban areas where women have many productive opportunities in the informal market, the rate of extreme poverty for single-headed households is much lower than for conjugal households, and the total rate of poverty is about the same. However in rural areas, where women heads of household generally own very small properties compared to men, and there are fewer informal economic opportunities, single-headed households have a significantly higher rate of extreme poverty than conjugal households. This suggests that female heads of household are at least as economically productive and enterprising as males, except where they lack comparable resources or opportunities.

Table 1. Poverty rates for conjugal and single-headed households in Chinandega and Leon (percent)

<i>Poverty Category</i>	<i>Urban households</i>		<i>Rural households</i>	
	<i>Conjugal</i>	<i>Single-headed</i>	<i>Conjugal</i>	<i>Single-headed</i>
Extremely poor	9.9	1.3	32.2	41.6
Poor	19.2	29.8	37.6	33.7
Nonpoor	70.9	68.9	30.1	24.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Consultant report based on 1993 Living Standard Measurement Survey

As is common in poor regions, the population in western Nicaragua is young, slightly younger than in Nicaragua as a whole. In this area, 45 percent of the population is age fourteen or younger. About one-fifth of the people are less than seven years old. Because labor is the most important asset for the poor, households become poorer as the number of adults of working age decreases in relation to the number of old and young people. The dependency ratio

in western Nicaragua—the number of people less than 12 years old or more than 60 years old divided by all other household members—is 0.84, and in the rural areas the ratio is 0.98. Households not only are crowded, but they are more crowded in rural areas where poverty is greater. The average household size in the entire region is 5.4 persons, but in urban areas it is only 5.2, while in rural areas it is 5.7 persons. In sum, households are crowded with dependents, frequently children, who are being supported by impoverished adults. The result is a vicious cycle of poverty in which, as expressed by a doctor interviewed in Malpasillo during the RRA, *“the children don’t come to schools because their parents don’t have the means to feed or dress them.”*

Land Tenure

Four types of farmers were identified in the RRA. The first group, accounting for 58 percent of farmers, have holdings of less than five manzanas. Approximately one-third of these are households headed by a single female. These small properties are more frequently found in the municipalities of El Jacaral, Santa Rosa, Achuapa, Larreynaga, and Quezalaguaque in the Department of León, and in the municipalities of Morazon, Cinco Pinos, San Francisco, Santo Tomas, San Pedro, and Posoltega in the Department of Chinandega. Farmers tend to produce for their own consumption and survival, and sell any surpluses they may have at local markets. However, productivity is constrained by property size, absence of credit, and lack of modern technology. These farmers have few or no trees close to the house and typically do not cultivate vegetable gardens. Many farmers received land through the Sandinista agrarian reform and lack formal title, though the

current government is making efforts to provide secure property titles.³

The second group, comprising some 29 percent of farmers, have 5-20 manzanas and mostly cultivate corn, beans, and sesame (*ajonjoli*). They usually own a cow to produce milk for household consumption. Women play a central role in the survival strategies of this group, selling domestic produce and serving as the primary family contact with public services.

A third group, about 8 percent, have larger properties and produce for the external market, usually in association with livestock production. They are found in the municipalities of El Viejo, Larreynaga, El Sauce, La Paz Central, Nagorote, León, Chinandega, Somotilla, and Villanueva. Although opportunities are limited, smaller farmers are a source of labor for these large farms.

Finally, a fourth group is composed of the 7 percent of farmers who are organized into cooperatives created during the last decade, and who cultivate common land. Usually they combine work in the common fields with work on their own land. Although women participate in cooperatives as family laborers or as family members, they often are not formally recognized as cooperative members.

RURAL POVERTY

Living Conditions of the Poor

The SA participants and the LSMS respondents in rural areas of the western region were distributed among thirty-

3. *The government is receiving support for land titling through the International Development Association's Agricultural Technology and Land Management Project.*

one rural communities. The conditions of the thirty-one communities are as follows:

- Two have post offices
- Eight have paved roads leading to their communities
- Thirteen do not have access to motorized transportation
- Eight have a doctor and six have a nurse; thirteen have no doctor, nurse, or midwife
- Four have a pharmacy
- Five do not have primary schools
- None of the communities have a daily market

All community respondents to the LSMS agreed that living conditions had not improved during the five years previous to 1993. Members of twenty-six of the communities believed that conditions had worsened, while in the other five communities people believed they had stayed the same. Inflation, lack of employment opportunities, and high costs of living are the reasons given for this situation. In Puerto Morazan it was reported during the RRA that *“we are poorer now than before because there are no sources of employment.”* Very often the pessimism is expressed as a kind of religious fatalism. A respondent in Chinandega, for example, said that *“there are many people saying that this is the will of God.”*

Access to water and sanitation in the project area is inadequate, particularly among the rural poor. Less than half of all households in the western region have piped, in-house water, of which 72 percent are nonpoor and 7 percent are extremely poor. Urban residents have greater access to piped water but differences between poor and nonpoor are greater in these urban zones. Seventy percent of urban households have piped water, of which almost four-fifths are nonpoor and 3 percent are poor. The inequality between groups is less dramatic in rural areas because so few have access to water: 70 percent of the extreme poor,

63 percent of the poor, and 68 percent of the nonpoor do not have in-house piped water in rural zones.

Access to sanitation services is even scarcer. Only about 20 percent of all households in the western region are connected to public sewer systems, most of them nonpoor households. The extreme poor simply do not have access to sanitation services. Even septic tanks benefit only 7 percent of households. In rural areas of the western region, 99 percent of households have no access to public sewer systems, septic tanks, or cesspools. All households with access to any of these types of sanitation services are nonpoor.

Rural People's Perceptions of the Causes of Poverty

According to the local rural population, three major factors cause poverty: lack of employment, diminishing productivity, and limited markets. Participants cited stagnant agricultural and livestock activities as the main reasons for limited employment and income. For those who own the land, productivity has diminished and there is no credit available. Among landowners interviewed during the RRA, 83 percent had not received credit or financial assistance during the year prior to the interview. Lack of external and internal markets emerged as another primary reasons for poverty. As explained by a small farmer in El Viejo, *"The peasants do not have seeds, do not have minimal agricultural inputs, there is no credit, there is no one to whom to sell, someone who buys instead of robbing us."*

Data from the LSMS confirm the people's evaluation of their own poverty. Altogether, 56 percent of respondents reported not working in the seven days prior to the date of the interview, and 51 percent reported not having looked for

a job, which can be interpreted as an indicator of hopelessness. Once again, differences between urban and rural areas are striking. Of those who had worked, 60 percent were urban-based and 40 percent were from rural areas. During the year prior to the LSMS, 50 percent reported not having worked and of those who had worked, 81 percent were urban residents. Among rural inhabitants who consider themselves employed, 41 percent are self-employed.

Irrational natural resources management is not cited in the RRA as a cause of poverty and low agricultural productivity. Although there is a broad recognition that this is a constraint, environmental degradation was overwhelmingly identified as a consequence of poverty as opposed to a cause (Box 2).

Box 2. Poverty and Environmental Degradation: Views of the People

“When the only alternative is hunger, there is no other way except to eat the chicken with the golden eggs.” —*Rural worker in León.*

“We know we are destroying the environment, but since we are so poor, there is no other way, except to go on destroying it.” —*Small farmer in El Viejo, Chinandega.*

“Because we are dying of hunger, we set fires on the mountains to help us to find small animals.” —*President of the Livestock Producers Association of Villanueva, Chinandega.*

“They are very poor: they are always looking either for firewood or for small animals.” —*Member of the Municipal Council, Telica, León.*

“They cut trees to sell the logs. Because they need money. To sow the land, one has to cut trees.” —*Small farmer, Telica.*

Source: RRA

Male temporary migration is now a common feature of the region. Migration is directed towards Costa Rica more often than to other rural areas of Nicaragua. According to a priest in El Jicaral, “*Because they do not have anything to work with, no seeds, many go to Costa Rica, lately 2,500 have gone. Many also look for work in León, Chinandega, and Matagalpa because in El Jacaral there are no jobs, the*

banana production does not provide them employment anymore, and the quality of the land is now very bad. Male out-migration puts strong pressure on women, who are left to care for households on their own under extremely difficult conditions. Migration, which began as a coping strategy for the poor, often results in the breakdown of the family and neighborhood patterns of solidarity.

Rural Organizations

In the western region people believe that solidarity is an important mechanism to overcome poverty. According to a participant in the RRA, ***“only people who belong to some organization are able to be conscious, the rest of the population, where there are no organizations, is indifferent.”*** About 40 percent of RRA participants belong to at least one organization. Of those who are organized, 47 percent belong to a producer organization such as a cooperative; 32 percent to a religious organization; 13 percent to a community organization; 11 percent to a development project; 5 percent to a political party; and 9 percent to a union. The organizational system which prevails is very intricate, having as key actors foreign governments and donors, local and international NGOs, and local communities. This system probably provides the most important safety net for the rural poor as indicated by the following examples:

- “There is a commission for environmental protection in Villanueva and Somotillo, which includes the participation of Casa de la Mujer, the Asociación de Ganaderos, the Polos de Desarrollo, and the police” (RRA).
- The Fondo para Chinandega Norte, which is funded by the Swiss, was established with support from the Secretaria de la Mujer de Chinandega and comprises more than 1,000 women who, together with some NGOs, implement several development projects.
- In the Chinandega municipalities of Somotillo, Santo Tomas, Cinco Pinos, San Pedro, San Francisco, and Villanueva, the Comisión de Desarrollo Comarcal was formed. It funds about ten projects with financial help from the Swiss government.

According to the RRA, the most frequent organizational structures found in the area are the following:

- *Comites comunales* or *comites comarcales* operate at the municipal level and are usually initiated by the communities themselves. Members, who are elected by the community, usually consist of the midwife, the person in charge of health services (brigadista de la salud), the teacher, a representative of the municipality, and the priest. During the last decade, the comites served as a vehicle for demanding land. In León, the comites are the strongest and most organized voice of local communities.
- *Cooperatives* were organized during the last decade with the objective of pooling resources such as land and labor. Today about 61 cooperatives are active in the area, with 1,116 members working 33,507 manzanas of land.
- *Women's groups*, the most important of which are the *Casas de Mujer*, are spread across some municipalities and linked to Nicaragua's Organización Nacional de Mujeres. The focus of the Casas de Mujer is on professional training. They seldom work on rural activities.
- *NGOs*, are present in the entire region, particularly in León, Chinandega, Somotillo, El Sauce, and El Viejo.
- *Project Organizations* such as (a) Apoyo a la Actividad Forestal Campesina de León, funded by Finland; (b) Proyecto de Conservación y Manejo de Recursos Naturales, funded by Holland and FAO; (c) Proyecto de Cultivos de Camarones en Estanques, Puerto Morazon, funded by Christian Initiative of Munster (Germany); and (d) Programa de Apoyo a la Conformación de una Estrategia de Desarrollo Alternativo para el Campesino Pobre, funded by Austria.

Rural People's Poverty Alleviation Priorities

Men and women identified similar priorities for alleviating poverty, although men were relatively more likely than women to choose agricultural support or credit, job creation, training, and infrastructure, while women expressed slightly more concern than men for water, health, and education. Overall, support to agricultural subsistence activities was overwhelmingly considered the highest priority among those interviewed by the RRA, followed by access to clean water and health services (see Table 2).

Table 2. Rural People’s Priorities for Poverty Alleviation

<i>First priority</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Support to agricultural production	38.1
Water	15.3
Health	11.7
Job creation	6.3
Electricity	6.0
Education	4.7
Support to livestock production	4.0
Environment	1.7
Roads	1.3
Sewerage	1.3
Training	1.0
Other	8.0
<i>Total</i>	100.0

Source: RRA

Rural People’s Perceptions of Local Governments

The RRA participants’ perceptions of local governments are mixed. Seventy-five percent knew who was the mayor, 44 percent knew the council members, but only 27 percent felt that local governments consulted the population, and many complained about authorities. A common complaint was that although communities had been invited to municipal meetings and workshops, these events lacked continuity and only a few people participated. Others noted that not all communities participate in workshops. Those who said that the municipal administration does not consult the population cited lack of community organization, politics, and the mayor’s incapacity as the reasons.

Participants also acknowledge the limitations of local governments to respond to local problems. Some participants recognized that the local administration tries to answer their needs: “they gave land for twenty years, for reforestation on a lifelong basis, as a response to community requests, therefore they listen to peasants and to the community” (male community member, Chinandega).

Others thought that the mayor did not make an effort to meet community demands: “he listens to them either through their representatives or he sees them in his office, but he does not solve the problems” (female community member, León). Activities carried out by the municipality create a certain awareness of local government—15 percent of respondents said that the mayor had helped them with land problems and about 20 percent had received help for seeds; 39 percent recognized municipal support for education, 37 percent for health, and 36 percent for road maintenance.

Participants provided ideas on project implementation mechanisms at the local level. When asked about the best form of organization for articulating community demands,
43

percent preferred a Comité Comarcal, 17 percent wanted a small committee, 11 percent preferred small groups of interested people, 11 percent preferred individual interaction with municipal government, and 5 percent recommended cooperatives. Concerning who should be involved in key decisions regarding subproject approval, 53 percent indicated the mayor, 60 percent recommended council members, 87 percent proposed a local notable (priest, teacher, nurse, etc.) and 72 percent suggested an NGO. An overwhelmingly number of participants, (92 percent) said that a community representative should participate in such decisions.

GENDER ISSUES

Gender Roles and Priorities

While men's roles in the economy are well acknowledged, women also play an important role in the survival strategies of the poor both as partners in congruently headed households and as the heads of single-headed households. Studies in Nicaragua indicate that while rural men control productive resources and land, women in poor households contribute significantly to household income. Households headed by single females depend exclusively on the woman's income. In conjugal households women often are responsible for supporting the family during the agricultural off-season and periods of scarcity. Particularly when farm and nonfarm opportunities for men are restricted, women will resort to selling garden produce and small livestock, other petty trading, and domestic labor to sustain the family. Women's gardens are also a major source of family nutrients year-round and therefore represent a key element of the rural poor's survival strategies.

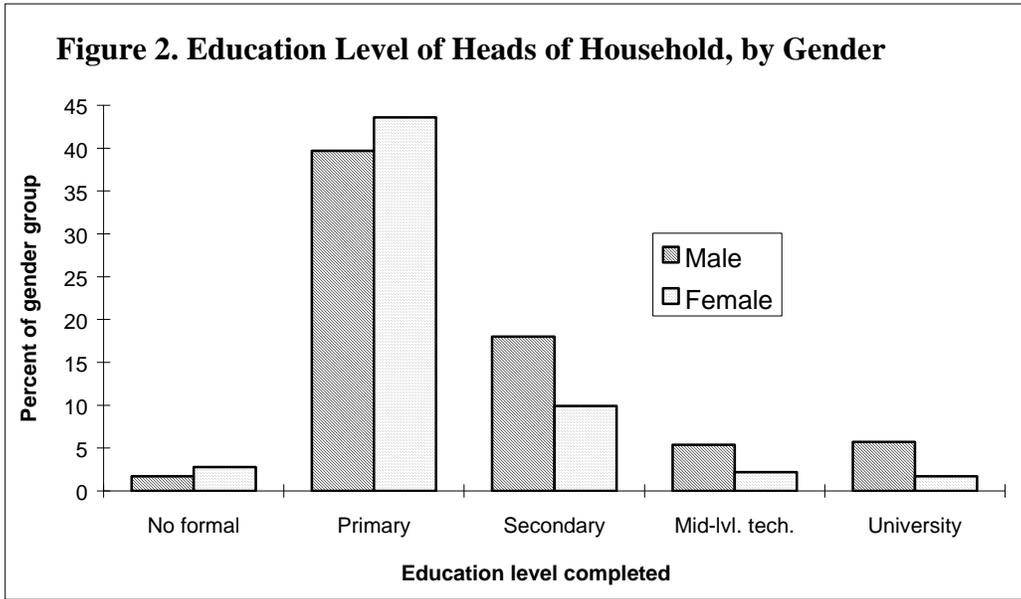
While support to agricultural production was chosen by both men and women as the highest priority for addressing poverty, their agricultural technology, extension, and training needs differ. Labor in agriculture and livestock production is divided along gender lines in Nicaragua, with basic grains and livestock primarily being men's work, while women are the principal producers of horticulture products, fruits, and small livestock, with a secondary role in producing basic grains. Women also dominate marketing of farm products.

Men and women use natural resources for different purposes and this, in turn, affects their priorities and participation levels in environmental projects. The principal causes of deforestation in the project area are felling for commercial purposes, the expansion of agricultural lands, and hunting. These typically are male activities and

concerns. Women, on the other hand, tend to be more concerned with domestic fuelwood. Similarly, while both men and women identified water as a primary concern, women were more interested in domestic consumption while men showed greater interest in water for irrigation and production. These differing gender-based interests in natural resources are reflected in higher participation rates by women in environmental projects with intrinsic social goals. However, men still dominate the decisionmaking process for these projects.

Gender Differences in Education

Education plays a central role in an individual's ability to escape poverty, therefore the fact that women receive far less formal education than men puts households headed by single females in a more vulnerable position. The gender inequality pattern in education is pervasive in the western region. Women are relatively more likely than men to only have a primary education or less, and the higher the education level the greater the advantage for males (Figure 2). This inequality is greater in rural than in urban areas.



Note: Inappropriate or no response was given by 29 percent of male, and 40 percent of female respondents

Source: 1993 Living Standard Measurement Survey

Gender and Participation in Rural Organizations

The SA indicates that men and women are involved in different forms of organization, with women participating to the greatest extent in service-oriented groups (religious and community) and men predominating in producer organizations (Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos, and other cooperatives and unions). For example, men constitute 88 percent of members of agriculture and livestock cooperatives in the region. Men also predominate in municipal government in the region, accounting for 83 percent of mayors and 89 percent of the consejales. A breakdown of the gender composition of local government committees (comarcales) is not available, but it is expected that women's and men's involvement is more balanced in these committees since they typically consist of the local midwife, teacher, health worker, and representatives of producer groups and the church.

A corollary of gender differences in organizations is that women will have less access to information and resources than men because producer groups tend to be better organized and have greater political clout. The SA supports this assertion. It showed that overall men's participation in organizations was greater than women's and that membership in organizations was associated with land tenure security and other resources. Women surveyed also had less knowledge of their municipal leaders than men.

THE SUTIABAS

Who Are the Sutiabas?

The Sutiabas are one of thirteen Nicaraguan indigenous groups that claim a "native background." In the words of a Sutiaba leader, "native background is the right that all of us, native people, have, to respect our own culture and

historical traditions, forms of social organization and the ownership of our communal land.” The basis for Sutiaba ethnic identity is rooted in kinship relationships, which provide social and ethnic cohesion. The Sutiaba kinship system, however, has been eroded as a result of the changes that the country has experienced through its history. Kinship is no longer restricted to the children of Sutiaba fathers and mothers, but rather is based on individuals’ identification with Sutiaba values and customs. The migration of ladinos to the Sutiaba region, attracted since colonial times by the possibility of farming communal lands, allowed for a reinterpretation of kinship networks to include the children of the ethnic mix which resulted from migration. Migration also brought about acculturation, loss of control over communal land, and periods of violence resulting from discrimination and the predominance of ladinos.

Sutiaba History

Since Spanish colonization, Sutiaba history has been characterized by permanent tensions over land rights and efforts by León landowners to take increasingly larger tracts of traditional indigenous territory. Strategies to squeeze the Sutiabas' traditional land rights included invading their lands, dissolving Sutiaba autonomous forms of economic and social organization through national government legislation, and promoting "ladinización" of indigenous communities. Since the mid-eighteenth century the Sutiabas have constituted an independent political-administrative division of the city of León. In 1850, with the introduction of coffee plantations, the need for labor led the government to issue legislation on vagrancy and mandatory labor which justified the forceful and massive recruitment of indigenous people for farm labor.

The introduction of cotton crops in the 1950s exacerbated tensions and violence. Some conflicts became reference points in the Sutiabas' political conscience which in turn strengthened their ethnic identity. On the other hand, internal discord on the most effective way to handle such disputes has weakened the community to some extent. In the 1960s and 1970s some leaders sought to strengthen ties with the Somoza governments as a way of advancing their land property cause. In the 1970s, the Sandinistas developed relationships with the Sutiabas, and particularly youth groups trying to advance the cause of communal land. When the Sandinistas came to power, Sandinista indigenous leaders assumed political control of the Sutiaba community. During this period the Sutiaba recovered some lands from private landowners and also benefited from government efforts to eliminate illiteracy and improve education and health conditions. Like previous governments, however, the Sandinistas were unable to understand the Sutiabas ethnic claims and their historic legacy. Similar to previous



Like most indigenous cultures, the Sutiaba have been strongly influenced by the colonizers' religion and culture. Above, Sutiaba youths dance in the Traditional Festival of the Bulls in honor of San Jeronimo.

governments, new political organizations also diluted the ethnic specificity of the Sutiabas.

Sutiaba Demographics

The Sutiaba population of about 36,000 constitutes 17 percent of the total population in the Department of León.⁴ The majority—approximately 23,000—live in urban areas, and the remaining 12,000 are spread over nine rural comarcas which are also populated by non-Sutiaba residents. While the exact size of Sutiaba territory recognized by the Spanish monarchy in colonial times is unclear, and even less is known of the extent of their territory in pre-Columbian times, the Sutiabas today probably occupy only a fraction of their ancestral lands.

Urban Sutiaba live in the traditional historical site of the Sutiaba *pueblo*, on the western side of the city of León, and in twenty-four small urban settlements to the north, south, and west of the Sutiaba pueblo. The government created

4. *Census Population Projections, Ministry of Health, 1995.*

these settlements in the mid-1980s as part of its overall strategy to counter military aggression originating in neighboring Honduras. The municipal administration of León has been using the areas around the Sutiaba community to establish settlements and absorb the city's natural urban growth. Such settlements—although created without consulting the Sutiabas—are not a source of conflict because the Sutiaba community has accepted the new settlers. It is estimated that around 15 percent of the urban Sutiaba population lives in the settlements, and about 85 percent lives in the historical Sutiaba site.

Although the majority of residents have local Sutiaba ancestry, it is common for all dwellers in Sutiaba territory to identify themselves as indigenous Sutiabas, to share Sutiaba cultural traditions, and to make claims to communal land. Ninety-eight percent of the RRA participants identified themselves as indigenous Sutiaba, although only 72 percent have a Sutiaba parent. Men identified themselves as indigenous Sutiabas at the same rate as women, although more women (80 percent) than men (65 percent) had at least one Sutiaba parent.

Sutiaba Land Claims

Currently, indigenous lands extend from the northwest to the southeast of the city of León, in the plains between the Marribios Mountains and the Pacific coast. The land is mostly flat except south of the city where slopes are steeper and elevations reach almost 150 meters above sea level. Two rivers, the Telica and the Chiquito, cut the region. The Chiquito River has been contaminated by domestic and industrial waste. The two rivers contain about 40 percent of all river water in the department. Statistical data on Sutiaba land and land ownership is conflicting and disorganized, but it is clear that they have lost much of their original property or sold it to non-Sutiabas after title was transferred from the community to individuals (Box 3). Different versions of what constitutes Sutiaba property make it difficult to determine precisely which portion of the land belongs to the community, which portion belongs to peasants, and which portions were taken by landowners. The royal title in the hands of the indigenous community states that the land belonging to the Sutiabas is equal to sixty-three “caballerías” and twelve “atillos,” ancient Spanish measures the size of which is not known for sure (and undoubtedly less than the Sutiabas’ ancestral

Box 3. Legislation Affecting Indigenous Property Rights

Historical legislation developed between 1877 and 1952 gave landowners access to the traditional lands of the Sutiabas. These laws, though not in use today, were never abolished.

The most common tool used by the government and legislators has been the distribution of individual land title to community members, disregarding the community’s claims to communal land property and resulting in non-Sutiaba landowners immediately purchasing the land from the individual indigenous “owners.”

A 1902 law that incorporated the Sutiaba pueblo in the city of León determines that land that has been worked by indigenous people belongs to them, even if they are mere tenants of these lands, with the rent title being accepted as evidence of tenure.

Long-term pressures from landowners to eliminate autonomous forms of Sutiaba organization and government resulted in a 1895 government decree stating that half of the indigenous lands could remain in indigenous hands and the other half could be sold to outsiders. This legislation, however, did not protect indigenous land claims in spite of additional legislation in the first half of the twentieth century.

territory).

According to members of the Directive Council of the Sutiabas (Junta Directiva) and some indigenous leaders, between 10,000 hectares and 15,000 hectares of the Sutiabas' colonial-era land grant are now in the hands of large landowners who are not members of the community and with whom there is a permanent conflict, 7,000 hectares are still under direct control of the community, and 8,000 hectares belong to small individual farmers or cooperatives. Other interpretations of "caballeria" and "atillos" give rise to smaller estimates of the Sutiabas' land rights from colonial times.

A key to understanding the Sutiaba land situation is the way land titles have been distributed and are recognized. Within the 7,000 hectares under the direct control of the community, many small farmers were given supplementary titles to land as a way of breaking down communal land property by the Sutiabas. From the government's point of view this land was state property, while from the point of view of indigenous leaders it was and remains community property. Only 11 percent of small farmers recognize that the land they work is under the direct control of the indigenous community, that is, part of traditional communal lands. Less than 15 percent of rural Sutiabas are members of cooperatives, but these cooperatives own about 30 percent (8,000 hectares) of the traditional lands claimed by the Sutiabas.

About 44 percent of the RRA participants neither own land nor work land for agricultural purposes, 45 percent work their own lands (89 percent have legal title), 6 percent work community-owned lands, and 4 percent work lands that belong to another person. In rural areas only 6 percent are landless or lack access to land for agricultural production,

while in urban areas this is true for 80 percent of the population. However, more than half of rural farmers in the sample have only small plots of 5 hectares or less, whereas four of the six largest farms (larger than 20 hectares) are controlled by urban agriculturalists.

The majority of Sutiabas live in extreme poverty, have few resources for market production, and are exposed to climatic hazards. The small plot size of most farms limits their commercial potential, and accentuates farmers' vulnerability to poor harvests and market conditions—only 6 percent of farmers have properties larger than 20 manzanas.

Employment and Income Among the Sutiaba

Employment dynamics among the Sutiabas do not differ from the general trends of the other poor in the western region. Unemployment is high, and employment, when available, is restricted to low-paid jobs requiring little training or qualifications. In urban areas, about 44 percent of participants are unemployed and another 20 percent did not have a permanent job.

Sutiaba women are restricted to professions such as commerce, maid services, teaching, and nursing. The majority of Sutiaba women who do not work define themselves as housewives rather than unemployed. According to one participant: *“I haven't had a job since 1990; I don't even look for a job anymore because I can't find any”* (Sutiaba housewife). In urban areas the economically active population for women is the same as that of men, but women have lower incomes relative to men (a little over 50 percent of the price of

a basic food basket for women as opposed to 70 percent for men). The mid-level technical/professional category for women in commerce is the only employment category that has above average income levels, although these incomes are only close to the price of the basic food basket. A significant proportion of women work as maids, which is one of the lowest paid jobs in the economy. In rural areas, the situation for women is even more difficult because they are not even recognized as farmers although most perform agricultural tasks alongside men.

The majority of the rural-based economically active population works as small farmers or rural workers. The latter are mostly seasonally employed for about five to six months a year. All rural families grow small plots (usually less than one manzana) of basic crops such as beans and corn. This does not produce enough food to sustain the family, forcing members of the family to seek alternate survival strategies such as selling firewood and working as day laborers or in construction jobs in exchange for food.

The Sutiabas are organized into eighteen cooperatives which sow about 3,600 manzanas of corn, beans, and sorgo annually. The cooperatives, however, do not generate permanent work year-round for their members. Crops are grown using nontraditional technology, and generally occupy members six months every year, leaving them unemployed for the remaining six months.

The Sutiabas and the Environment

The Sutiabas have no experience managing forest areas nor has this concern been part of their tradition in light of the more pressing need for survival. Sutiaba territory lacks important forest areas except for a few patches of tropical dry woodlands. Forest destruction is caused mostly by

cutting for domestic and commercial firewood. Almost 82 percent of RRA participants use firewood for cooking.

Social Organization Among the Sutiabas

Social capital among the Sutiabas is high—about 48 percent of RRA participants are members of community organizations. Although gender differences are small, more men are organized than women. The largest organization is the Indigenous Community; it was the first organization mentioned by 55 percent of the RRA participants who said they belonged to an organization. The second most frequently cited type of organization are those related to development projects—17 percent of those belonging to organizations said that they were members of these types of groups. While urban respondents are only slightly more likely than rural Sutiabas to belong to an organization, there are notable differences in the type of organization to which they belong—urban participation was substantially higher in the Indigenous Community and cooperatives, while participation in development projects and political parties was almost entirely from rural people.

The principal political and administrative Sutiaba organizations are the *Junta Directiva de la Comunidad Indígena*, the *Consejo de Ancianos*, the *Consejos Comunales*, and the *Juntas de Cementerio*. Characteristics of these organizations are as follows:

The Junta Directiva is elected by popular vote for a two-year term, although government regulations state that elections should be annual. As a result of the economic, social, and political changes that affected the ethnic composition of the Sutiaba communities, the Sutiabas require only kinship as a basis for membership in the community. Thus, voting rights are given to any individual

who has been residing in the community for more than seven years whenever they accept and identify with the Sutiabas' indigenous values, even in the absence of Sutiaba ancestry. From a political and administrative point of view, this is the indigenous organization with the largest mandate, although it does not constitute a pure form of autonomous local government. Both urban and rural Sutiabas are under the jurisdiction of the municipality of León.

The Junta Directiva is not a traditional Sutiaba organization although it was created by the Sutiabas to deal with issues related to the indigenous community. Its origins relate to the Sutiabas process of incorporation in León. Most likely the organizational structure started as a mechanism promoted by government and local landowners to counter indigenous land disputes which had been led by traditional indigenous organizations like the Consejo de Ancianos. Basic activities of the Junta Directiva are: mediating community relationships with the city administration and the central government; administering community land; coordinating activities with different indigenous organizations; and representing the Sutiabas in the Coordination of Nicaraguan Indigenous Communities. It also promotes activities in the area of social, economic, and cultural development. But the Junta Directiva's main asset is the moral authority won during land disputes. The Junta is recognized by the Sutiabas as their moral and political authority even though this role has been weakened in recent years by political polarization.

The Consejo de Ancianos was the highest authority in the community before Spanish colonization, and it remained so into the twentieth century, though weakened by colonial authorities and subsequent national governments. The

council virtually disappeared in the first half of the twentieth century, but in the 1980s it was more or less restored. The Consejo is an autonomous moral authority with approximately thirty-five members who are elders in the community. Members must be born in Sutiaba territory, belong to old families of communal tradition, be recognized as an advocate of communal land property, have been a member of the Junta Directiva, and have an untarnished reputation.

The Consejos Comunales are neighborhood organizations whose members are elected primarily to respond to social demands of residents. The Juntas de Cementerio are in charge of maintaining and managing five community cemeteries as well as observing religious traditions and Holy Week rituals.

Traditional productive organizations no longer exist among the Sutiaba. The cooperatives, which are presently the most common model of productive organization in the community, emerged in 1979. With the participation of long-standing members of the community, the cooperatives recovered about 8,000 hectares of communal lands in the 1980s which had previously been controlled by large landowners. There are eighteen Sutiaba cooperatives with 310 members, many of whom are urban based. Eleven of the cooperatives are part of the Union de las Cooperativas Indígenas de Sutiaba (UCAIS), which provides associate members with technical assistance, storage, marketing, and legal and bookkeeping advice. UCAIS has the best capacity for economic management in the community.

In addition to the advice it provides to associate members, UCAIS operates a number of other programs including a program for female farmers; the Asociación de Ganaderos de Sutiaba, which is a small association of members who

own lands outside the Sutiaba territorial limits; and the Fondo Rotatorio de Crédito Xuchiatl, which is a revolving loan fund for productive activities. This fund was created by the Junta Directiva de la Comunidad and the Nicaraguan Institute for Investigations and Popular Education. As of 1995, it had provided financing to 122 families, 79 percent of which were headed by single females. A team of indigenous Sutiaba professionals manages the fund.

The two most important organizations that work with women and youth among the Sutiabas are:

- The Fundación para el Desarrollo Integral de la Mujer Indígena “Xochitl Acatl” which receives support from European funds and UNICEF to work with women. Funds support informal credit for poultry production, vegetable gardens, cattle, and reforestation. To date forty-seven single, female heads of household have benefited from resources for productive activities. Funds also offer educational programs in health, family planning, prenatal and infant care, and sanitation. In cooperation with the Universidad Nacional Autónoma and cooperating physicians, the foundation supports clinical activities which have benefited an average of 290 patients a month in traditional medicine and 240 in nontraditional medicine. Other programs for women and youth at risk include education in sexuality, fertility, sexually transmitted diseases, solidarity, and equality.
- The Movimiento de Jóvenes Indígenas “Hringue Nidi Ruis” (Children of the Sun) offers programs in health, water, electricity, education, environment, culture, and sports. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) have provided the group with funding for the Recreation and Attention Centers for Sutiaba Adolescents.

The presence of nongovernmental organizations in Sutiaba territory is weak except for the ones mentioned above. The Centro de Investigación y Promoción Económico y Social, the Evangelical Committee for Development Aid, and CARE also support small sustainable projects in water, agriculture, and irrigation in a few districts.

CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusions of the social assessment are as follows:

- I. Rural areas of the western region show the poorest social indicators. In contrast with urban areas, poverty in rural zones is greater, opportunities are fewer, educational levels are worse, and there is less access to infrastructure services. Health and education facilities, sanitation, roads, and access to local markets are unsatisfactory in many areas.
- II. Rural households are more crowded and have a higher dependency ratio than in urban homes. The proportion of children in poverty is high in the entire region, and higher in rural than in urban areas. Children are an at-risk population group.
- III. In the project area, the main gender issues are:
 - Single-headed households, which are usually female-headed, tend to be poorer than conjugal households.
 - Both men and women play a role in the survival strategies of the poor but women have a particularly critical position because they are responsible for most single-headed households and often provide crucial support in conjugal families during periods of scarcity.



- The gender division of labor on the farm and in the household implies that technology, extension, and training needs differ for men and women.
 - Men and women use natural resources differently and therefore also have different priorities in environmental activities.
 - Educational levels among women tend to be lower than among men, which in turn affects women's ability to participate in project activities.
 - Men and women have different forms of organization, which affects their access to information and resources.
- IV. The rural poor, including the Sutiaba rural poor, are predominantly small farmers, often landless. Frequently, households live off properties of less than 5 manzanas. Productivity is low and access to markets is difficult.
- V. Two interrelated factors cause poverty: first, the small size of property coupled with extremely low productivity due to inappropriate technologies and lack of financing; and second, the absence of off-farm employment opportunities for the poor.
- VI. According to the rural population, poverty results from lack of employment, low agricultural productivity, and limited access to markets. Based on their diagnosis of poverty, their highest priorities are: support to agricultural production, water supply for both agricultural needs and family consumption, and health services. The environment is not seen as a priority because it is perceived as a result rather than a cause of poverty.
- VII. The sense of hopelessness that prevails among the poor is often offset by a cultural disposition toward social solidarity. The poor in the project area are well organized. They participate in community groups such as the comites comarcales, cooperatives, women's associations, Sutiaba cooperatives, NGOs, and project groups. Foreign donors, however, largely mobilize and sustain these community organizations.
- VIII. The main problems of the Sutiabas are the absence of legal mechanisms to recognize land claims, and land disputes with large landowners. Although it may be seen as risky to fund projects in areas under contention, a vast portion of the Sutiaba land is under community control and this control cannot be legally challenged. This includes cooperative land legalized by the government. Indigenous leaders requested that the project prioritize women because their experience shows that investments to women produce greater benefits to the family. Agricultural projects are of lesser interest to urban-based Sutiaba because fewer of them own land.

ACTION PLAN FOR PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Project implementation would take into account the recommendations of the social assessment and indigenous and gender studies in the following ways.

Rural Poverty

Municipal technical units, the Nicaraguan Institute for Municipal Development (INIFOM), and the project central unit would actively promote the project in eligible communities to make information available to the rural poor. Community project promoters would make use of local meetings, churches, and radio in this dissemination process. Considering the low formal education level, particularly among women, the project would emphasize visual materials such as videos.

The project would promote and support several community organizations—an Intercommunity Assembly, Municipal Project Selection Committee, and Community Supervisory Committee—to help the poor voice their demands and force local governments to respond. These committees would include members elected by the communities.

The project would support several training programs for the communities themselves as well as for professionals (private, NGO, and government) that would provide services to the communities. The training would focus on the priority themes identified by the poor, including subsistence rural production, natural resource management, and community organization and management. The subproject categories include most priority investments identified by the rural population during the rapid rural appraisals.

Annual Rural Appraisals would assess the results of project implementation, and particularly whether benefits are

effectively reaching the poor. A midterm review would permit changes in the project to accommodate findings from rapid rural appraisals.

Gender

***Gender Goals.* The project would promote participation and benefits for both men and women by making gender inclusion an explicit goal of municipal development. Gender goals would also be reflected in the philosophy of the municipal development component of the project and included in staff orientation so that awareness of gender issues becomes a part of staff values. Members of the participatory structures involved in the project (municipal governments, municipal project selection committees, municipal technical units, intercommunity councils, intercommunity supervisory committees, community promoters, intermediary organizations, and community assemblies) would also receive orientation on gender issues.**

All personnel working on the project (including INIFOM personnel, other project staff, and municipal technicians) would be given explicit responsibility for involving both men and women in municipal development activities, and this would be included in the terms of reference defining staff's responsibilities and objectives. The project would avoid establishing special segregated programs for women which tend to marginalize them and imply that women's programs are secondary to mainstream project activities.

To ensure that gender issues are adequately internalized in project implementation, the project would recruit a participation and gender advisor to work on INIFOM staff as part of the project team. The advisor will act as a catalyst and resource person and ensure that gender is adequately

covered in promotion and information dissemination activities, participatory microplanning, and monitoring. The advisor will also monitor the effectiveness of the project in reaching both men and women.

Training Programs. To enhance participation by both men and women, the project would train staff on how to detect gender-based social and economic differences and constraints to participation, and how to develop strategies for overcoming gender barriers in the project.

Project Promotion. The project would ensure that promotional material and communications channels reflect gender differences and constraints. Specifically, materials would avoid gender stereotypes in visual displays and text and portray men and women as equal participants in the project. The project would design a promotional and communications strategy for men and women based on the following information in project areas: (a) specific local gathering spots for men and women; (b) frequently used or accessible forms of mass media for men and women; (c) time that men and women use media channels; and (d) traditional means of communication. It is expected that the project will establish a door-to-door promotional campaign to ensure that both men and women are invited to introductory meetings and microplanning sessions. If societal norms inhibit women's participation with men, the project will gather men and women separately and train them on gender issues to avoid possible conflicts.

Participatory Planning and Subproject Implementation. The project would use a participatory planning methodology with a gender perspective to ensure that both men and women have access to municipal funds and are involved in determining community priorities and in planning and executing subprojects. The methodology will consider:

gender-based social divisions in the community; time schedules of men and women; gender differences in geographical mobility; literacy, education, and training differences between men and women; and organizational capacity and legal status of men's and women's groups.

The project will encourage women's participation through their own organizations in situations where men dominate and have greater influence in community organizations, but will work towards mainstreaming women in community groups by training women in organization, leadership, and self-esteem, and training men on gender issues. The project will also schedule activities to coincide with time and geographical limitations faced by men and women (for example, before or after religious services on Sundays).

Training and Capacity Building at the Community Level.

The project will support training programs to compensate for illiteracy among community members which in turn impedes participation in the project (particularly on the part of women). Training and information dissemination will involve means other than written materials (such as oral communication) to avoid illiteracy obstacles. The project will recruit trainers and intermediary organizations based on their capacity and experience to work with illiterate people. Training materials supported by the project will include manuals, workbooks, and learning tools such as games, that use simple concepts, illustrations, colors, and cartoon figures.

***Project Monitoring and Evaluation.* The project establishes gender disaggregated indicators into the monitoring and evaluation process of the project to measure the different impact of the project on men and women and the effect of men's and women's participation on project outputs. Indicators that will be differentiated by gender include (a)**

members of participatory structures; (b) attendance at community assemblies; (c) participation in community and municipal planning; (d) number of people participating in environmental, natural resources, and productive subprojects; (e) number of direct and indirect beneficiaries of subprojects; (f) number of people adopting improved technologies; (g) number of people with increased income from project activities; and (h) participation levels in training and capacity building activities.

Special Studies and Auditing Procedures. The project would incorporate gender into monitoring and evaluation indicators. It would also finance special studies to measure, by gender, the intra-household impact of project activities and specifically their effect on poverty reduction. Specifically, the audits would examine (a) gender opportunities and constraints to participation at the family, group, and community level, as well as project strategies—e.g., impact of information campaigns and communications channels, timing of introductory and participatory sessions, special training for men on gender issues, leadership training for women, etc.—to overcome these constraints and/or create opportunities (b) impact of INIFOM staff, municipal technicians, and technical consultants in promoting both male and female participation in project activities, and the effectiveness of staff training and incentives to achieve gender goals; and (c) the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to integrating men and women into project activities.

Sutiabas

The project would contribute to resolution of land claims through two mechanisms: support for legal procedures awarding indigenous communal land titles, and strengthening of indigenous organizations to enhance their

bargaining power in land disputes.⁵ The issue of procedures for titling communal lands is being addressed as part of preparation for the Atlantic Biodiversity Corridor (ABC) component funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF). Indigenous organizations would be strengthening through the training programs and specific capacity building subprojects that they may propose.

Regarding participation and municipal investments, the Sutiabas and other indigenous communities would be treated differently. While for nonindigenous people a community is defined as a “comarca” which is a geographical unit, for indigenous people in the Pacific and Atlantic the community would be considered as the indigenous group independent of physical location. Traditional indigenous decisionmaking structures would be the mechanisms for defining priorities and supervising subproject implementation.

5. The problem of lack of legal procedures affects all indigenous groups in Nicaragua, including those in the Atlantic who will be the key stakeholders in the ABC component. Nicaragua has an advanced legal framework for indigenous peoples, the main constraint is the absence of procedures for implementing this legal framework.

