



NICARAGUA

Poverty & Development Challenges in Nicaragua

With a population of 6.17 million people, Nicaragua is the poorest country in Central America and the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. It ranks 125th on the Human Development Index (of 188 countries surveyed).

In a country where poverty is so rampant, many people struggle to attain financial security and a good standard of living. According to 2009 statistics, while 42.5% of Nicaraguans live at or below the poverty line, a staggering 63.3% of the rural population lives in poverty. And of those in the working force, 46.5% are considered under-employed (meaning they have employment only part-time or do not have enough work to satisfy their economic needs).

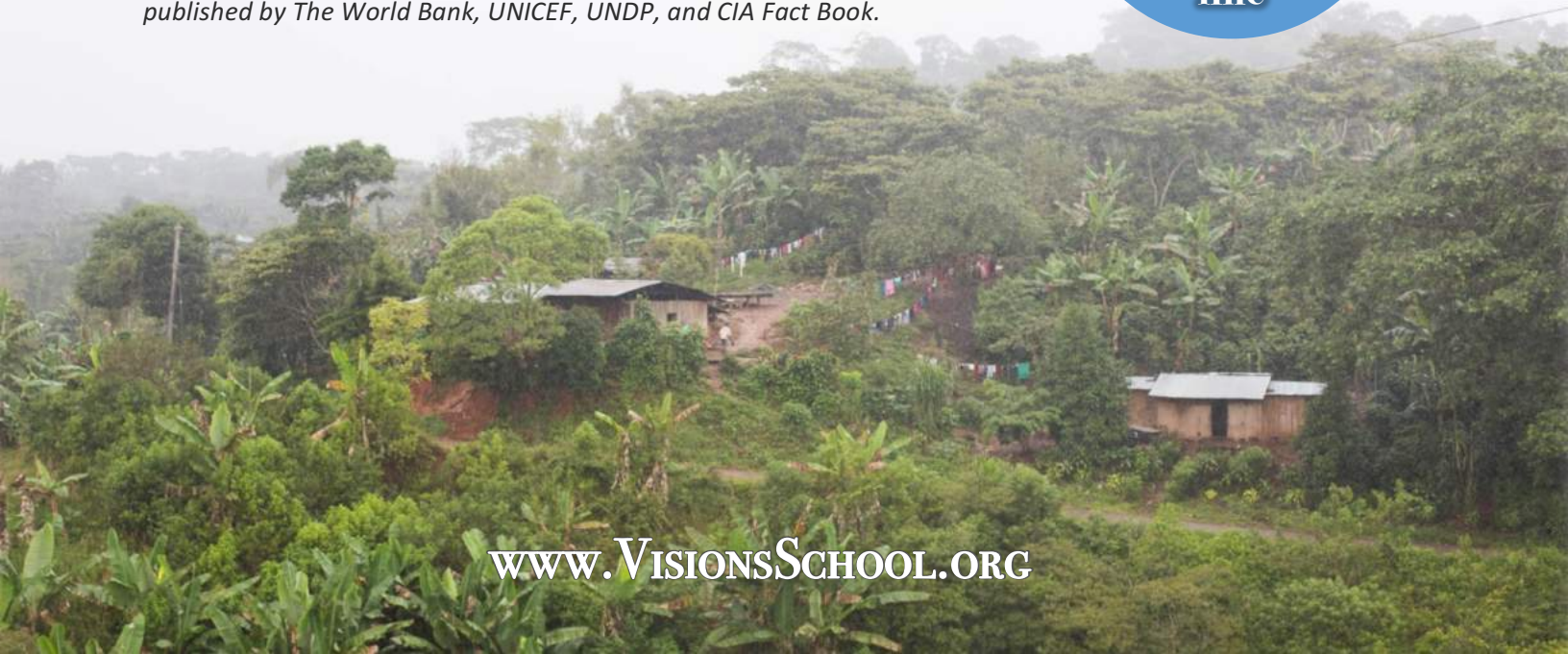
Dramatic income inequality and vulnerability to natural disasters (such as earthquakes, hurricanes, flooding, volcanic eruptions, landslides, drought, and wildfires) often further exacerbate this situation, hitting an already underdeveloped infrastructure and economy with additional stresses.

Naturally, education indicators are lagging as well. An estimated 7% (or 170,000+) of primary school-age children do not attend school at all. And only 56% of youth who do attend school make it past Grade 5. Only an estimated 17% graduate from secondary school. In rural areas, the statistics are much worse though. As in most parts of the world, teachers are highly under-paid, and schools are poorly equipped and supported to meet the massive education challenges of their communities. A lack of transportation and family/economic pressure to start working & earning an income serve as major barriers to students continuing their studies.

**Most data used in this report was taken from the most recent statistics published by The World Bank, UNICEF, UNDP, and CIA Fact Book.*

**2nd poorest
country in the
Western
Hemisphere**

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Hidden Costs of Education

While free primary education is constitutionally mandated in Nicaragua, this often only holds true in the narrow sense that public schools do not charge for tuition. In actuality, for parents who wish for their children to receive a quality education, the real cost of schooling turns out to be quite high. These “hidden” costs include school fees, uniforms, textbooks, daily meals/snacks, sports equipment, and so on, in addition to the opportunity costs associated with choosing school over work.

The pressure of assuming these financial burdens while losing a potential helping hand at home or another household income (as some form of child labor is quite common in India) often proves to be more than poor families can bear. In addition, the often-poor quality of public schooling eliminates any incentive the family may have to send their children to school. If parents are discouraged from sending their children to school, it is often a result of parents’ perception that school is a waste of time and money. Girls in particular face greater exclusion and hardship in securing a quality education due to cultural and social factors that prioritize the wellbeing of boys and encourage girls to play more traditional roles of homemaker, mother, and day laborer.

Older children in particular frequently miss school during the harvest season because they are needed to help their



families and take part in important communal celebrations. Students who do not attend school during these times find it difficult to make up the lost class work, and many eventually drop out.

Equal Opportunity

Over the next few years, Visions Global Empowerment (“Visions”), a nonprofit organization based in Los Angeles, California, will be working hard to establish the Vera Corazón School – a residential school in Matagalpa, Nicaragua for girls from disadvantaged backgrounds. By making a high quality education accessible for girls who



13% of the
adult
population is
illiterate

21% of
children leave
school after
Grade 1

would otherwise not have access to it, and by providing opportunities for them to engage in extracurricular activities and develop specific skill sets, these students who are typically left behind in the education process, (including orphans, dropouts and “underachievers”) will be given the chance to succeed. And indirectly, they will help to contribute to the development of their own families and communities as well.

The school aims to mold a cadre of the brightest minds through a personal development experience that seeks to **educate the whole individual**. Looking beyond the parameters of formal education alone, the school seeks to provide a unique, engaging, and interactive learning environment in which students have the opportunity to participate in myriad extra-curricular activities, liberal arts education, language development, computer and IT education, professional development, and meaningful cross-cultural exchanges. This institution will eventually span Grades 1 – 12 and shall provide a safe and comfortable residential environment for those young women chosen to attend to pursue a free education.

Ultimately, the idea is to prepare these young women in leading an independent, healthy, goal-driven, and meaningful life and to develop their academic, personal, and professional leadership abilities for active participation in the modern world. Given the many challenges Nicaragua faces in its development, the country needs bright, motivated, and well-rounded leaders to take it forward and make a difference.

To learn more or to get involved, please visit www.VisionsSchool.org.

The average
education level
in rural areas
is less than
4 years

15% of
children are
engaged in
child labor

