

# Nicaragua: Strengthening Communities and Building for the Future

Your Program Impact Report—Spring 2024

## OUR GRATITUDE

Opportunity International believes all our brothers and sisters should have the chance to live with dignity and purpose, to live in safe and cohesive communities, and to send their children to school. Thank you for sharing this belief. Thank you for lifting up the people of Nicaragua as they build a brighter future.



## THE NEED

The World Bank reports that Nicaragua's long-term growth and per capita incomes are significantly constrained by low human capital, significant infrastructure gaps, and a weak institutional and business environment.

GDP expanded by 3.8% in 2022 despite high inflation. However, the average annual inflation in 2022 surged to 10.5%, the highest among Central American countries. The poverty rate in 2022 was 13.1%.

Nicaragua's economic growth is projected to moderate to 3.1% in 2023 due to the global economic slowdown. Nicaragua is one of the poorest countries in the region, despite opportunities.

## ONE SOLUTION: QUALITY EDUCATION

Founded in 2012, Emprededora Technical School continues to provide high-quality, relevant education to rural students in grades 7-11. The school provides:

<p>➊ <b>Comprehensive general education and English lessons</b>, to help the students gain English fluency, which is often an important skill in their chosen field or in higher education</p>	<p>➋ <b>Hands-on experience operating and managing the school's organic agribusinesses</b>, including an egg hatchery and vegetable farm, and learning about food processing via the local yucca processing plant</p>	<p>➌ <b>In-depth hospitality experience</b> by interning at a local sustainable tourism resort, Pacaya Lodge, and learning about day-to-day operations and financial planning for hospitality businesses</p>	<p>➍ <b>Job or college preparation assistance</b>, including mock-interviews, resume assistance, college application workshops, and business plan evaluations</p>
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With your support, Emprededora Technical High School is working toward being a **self-sustaining school that builds upon current community development work in Nicaragua while also serving as a model school for other communities.**

Teaching and comprehension of English is a critical component for students, especially with the focus on tourism. English textbooks and workbooks were provided for all 300 students—an incredible resources for both students and teachers. They also have a digital platform with access to complementary material to

use in the classroom and for testing. Volunteers support continue to strengthen the English program; volunteers work closely with the English teachers to design dynamic lesson plans and provide input for assessment activities and tests. Activities include coordinating conversational sessions in-class and video calls with a network of about ten volunteers from the USA.



As of December 2023, Emprededora celebrated the graduation of 52 students—23 with a focus in agriculture and 29 in tourism; 98% of graduates are interning with 19 local businesses for two months post-graduation. Six graduates are interning for the Government’s Department of Agriculture. Twelve additional alumni from the school are receiving financial support to cover study-related expenses at university.

The school’s administration building was expanded and a stone driveway with sidewalks was completed.

We surveyed 212 out of the 350 graduates from the previous seven generations:

- 81% are furthering their academic pursuits
- 30% are working (half of whom are both working and studying)

**SCHOOL PROGRAM - BALANCE SCORECARD**

Program Area	Indicator	Year Goal	Goal YTD	Actual	% Fulfilled
Student Leadership Formation	Retention rate	96%	97%	97%	100%
	Percentage of students that attain 90 points in their personal behavior assessment	80%	75%	85%	113%
	Percentage of students with a GPA of B or better	80%	75%	82%	109%
	% of graduates enrolled in university	70%	70%	81%	116%
	% of graduates in a job or own business	30%	30%	30%	100%
Sustainability	Revenue generated by the agribusiness in US\$	89,264	72,518	68,607	95%
	Revenue generated by academics	58,334	49,396	49,219	100%
	Percentage of school sustainability	30%	29%	27%	92%

**ONE SOLUTION: COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Community Economic Development (CED) is a proven, holistic, participatory approach that elicits community involvement to build strong industries and markets. It starts with recognizing a community’s local resources and tapping those resources for maximum community benefit. Social and economic development fosters community well-being.

In 2023 we added a spiritual coordinator, program support staff, and an impact evaluator—all strengthening community services offered. As of December 2023, 18 communities in the Pacific south were served holistically through the following activities:

- 55 leaders from 18 communities were trained in emotional intelligence to lead oneself and others.
- 25 leaders from 4 communities were trained in leadership and community organization.

- 4 communities completed a three-year development plan for projects prioritization.
- 4 small infrastructure projects were executed, impacting over a thousand beneficiaries.
- 187 women received training on prevention of cervical cancer as well as emotional/psychological care.
- 60 women from 11 communities received \$15,000 in seed capital to invest in their small businesses.
- 18 young entrepreneurs received \$6,340 in seed capital to start their small businesses.
- 2 community groups trained and established savings and credit groups in their communities.
- 11 Young Life clubs are operating with an average participation of 170 youth; plans are in place to stand up an additional three clubs.

Nicaragua Community Economic Development Goals	
<b>Economic</b>	Equip people living in poverty to prosper through increased income, asset development, and saving strategies
<b>Social</b>	Develop effective local leadership as measured by diverse social networks, community problem-solving, and successful community actions.
<b>Spiritual</b>	Encourage love of God and love of neighbor, as measured by increased hopefulness and trust in God and redemptive family and community relationships.

In 2024 we have bold plans to expand community economic development services to six additional communities, impacting over 1,000 families.

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM - BALANCE SCORECARD**

Program Area	Indicator	Year Goal	Goal YTD	Actual	% Fulfilled
Community Leadership					
	Local leaders trained to identify, manage and execute development projects (average)	75	75	80	107%
Social Improvement					
	Communities water projects executed successfully	2	2	0	0%
	Community infrastructure (non-water) projects executed	3	3	4	133%
	Women access to physical and emotional health information and services	200	166	187	113%
	Beneficiaries impacted as a result of community intervention	8,500	8,220	3,685	45%
Economic Development					
	Seed capital and financial education training for 60 small businesses led by women	60	60	60	100%
	Seed capital and financial education training for 14 small businesses led by youth	14	14	18	129%
	Creation of 3 savings and credit groups	3	3	3	100%
Spiritual Growth					
	Rural youth impacted by the Young Life club activities (average)	210	210	170	81%
	Devotionals carried out by 21 community boards throughout the year	208	166	149	90%

## ONE SOLUTION: AGRICULTURE BEST PRACTICES

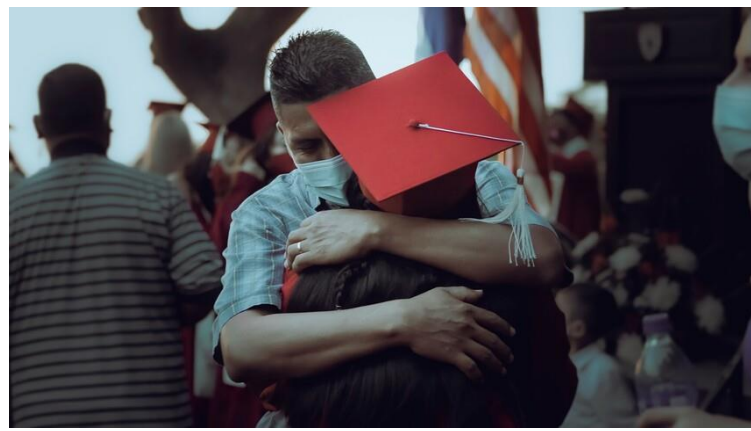
Through a farmer-first, field-to-market approach, we provide a comprehensive development program that aims to provide smallholder farmers in remote areas with opportunities to successfully finance, plant, harvest, process, and sell their crops. We achieve this through a hub-and-spoke model that allows small farmers to access a state-of-the-art processing plant and a diverse portfolio of products (such as yuca, cassava, moringa, and plantains) for year-round harvesting opportunities.



Through their engagement with Opportunity Nicaragua, rural farmers are trained on agricultural best practices such as the globally recognized National Organic Program certification. Certified organic cassava is purchased for 35% higher than conventional prices, and farmers are empowered to pursue holistic and regenerative growing practices.

In addition, Opportunity Nicaragua is committed to providing farmers access to market through its distribution partner, Prospera Foods Inc., a B corporation designed to provide smallholder farmers with access to global markets.

In 2023, smallholder farmers' output increased an estimated 70%. There were challenges in processing at a rate that kept up with the harvest, resulting in more product than can be harvested in the first half of 2024. At the end of 2023, Opportunity International had purchased 20 million pounds of yuca from 450 smallholder farmers a 4.16% increase year-over-year and -9.65% decrease of total raw material collected year-over-year, due to shortages of raw materials and processing plant downtime challenges.





*“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” – James 1:17*



**The people of Nicaragua are working hard, every day, to transform their lives. We are inspired by the accounts of students succeeding in school and farmers harvesting valuable, healthy crops. Thank you for celebrating this success; thank you for helping to build sustainable communities. We are filled with gratitude.**



## APPENDIX

### Emprededora School capital improvements needed

- *Expansion of the dining area and outfitting for events* (\$147,000): add to existing space, raise roof, build stage
- *Science lab/multi-use classroom* (\$58,000): in support of teaching biology, chemistry, and physics as well as music classes, English language group work
- *Improvements in the farm business* (\$49,000): includes agricultural office, classroom, changing rooms, showers, bathroom, equipment storage
- *Teaching equipment and school furniture replacement* (\$20,000): includes equipping 10 classrooms with projectors and teachers with computers
- *Establishing new learning areas for practice* (\$8,200): demonstration areas for agricultural technical curriculum

### Emprededora School scholarships

Another way to enable access to quality education for Nicaraguan youth is to support the scholarship fund. One hundred percent of the students attending Emprededora Technical School receive financial assistance.

The cost to send a child to school for one year is \$1,400, which covers tuition only. Opportunity International subsidizes the cost of tuition; students only pay 10 percent of the total cost of tuition and about 20-25 percent of the students cannot afford even that small amount. Additional fees such as uniforms, books, and tools must be paid by the students' families.

We raise scholarship funds year-round; currently the school has about 300 students. The annual tuition cost for those students totals \$420,000. We also have a fund for supplemental items such as uniforms, books, and tools.

### Community Economic Development needs

- *Water projects fund and other infrastructure projects* (\$50,000): implement two water projects impacting 5,000+ beneficiaries, including improvements to the pumping equipment, storage tank or electrical system of existing aqueducts; also implement three non-water infrastructure projects impacting 2,000 beneficiaries, constructing latrines and doing church improvements
- *Spiritual development* (\$40,000): maintain and mature the expanded Young Life model for 14 rural communities reaching 300 youth
- *Economic development initiatives* (\$35,000): provide training on finance and entrepreneurship for community leaders, particularly women and youth; provide seed capital for small businesses to impact 70+ families; establish two community savings groups
- *Training and leadership development* (\$10,000): provide leadership training to 80 leaders from 21 communities to build and foster ownership of community development plans
- *Access to health services* (\$6,000): provide women in 21 rural communities with access to health information and services related to self-care, cervical cancer prevention, sexual and reproductive health, PAP smear tests, psychological/emotional wellness.