

# Creating Economic Opportunities in Nicaragua

Spring Report 2022

*“Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow.” Ecclesiastes 4:9-10*

Nicaragua has faced a number of challenges throughout the year due to continuing COVID-19 case spikes and political unrest, creating a fluctuating environment for our clients. The school again shifted to remote learning, and community development programs continued to pivot how they conducted services. The plant was also affected and suffered setbacks from two fires and supply chain pricing fluxes on foreign materials. The lodge where many students from the school learn tourism skills saw a significant decline in numbers of travelers due to uncertainties.

*Despite these difficulties, individuals and families continued to recover economically and chart a pathway out of poverty because of your generous support. We are thankful for the ways you continue to heed God’s calling to love and serve the poor in Nicaragua. Thank you.*

## Supporting Other Community Development Activities

Supporting community economic development activities remains a core of Opportunity Nicaragua’s programs, creating a pathway for economic growth and strengthening of communities.

- In the last quarter of 2021, training was conducted for 50 community leaders to provide them with tools related to entrepreneurship, business, and family finance.
- Eleven women received seed capital to start a small business and help boost the economic income of their families.
- Meetings were held with two prospective partners for collaboration on executing water projects.



Urania has actively participated in Opportunity’s community workshops on leadership, violence prevention, and financial education. There, she learned about Opportunity’s loan program for families of farmers. Obtaining a loan, she was able to resume her business of making nacamales, a traditional Nicaraguan tamale made from corn dough and stuffed with pork then wrapped in plantain leaves and steamed, to generate additional income.

She began in August with the production of 50 nacamales every other week; three months later she was making 80 with a potential to increase to 120 soon. The family’s income has increased by 40% per month. With the profits, she is able to pay school fees for her two daughters to continue their education.

Her plan for 2022 is to continue increasing the sale of nacamales to support her daughters to continue their studies and begin buying construction materials to gradually build her own house.



Across 17 communities surveyed, 14 documented positive increases from 2018 to 2021 on the community vibrancy index, with scores increasing up to 18.9 points. Positive changes noted include:

- More farmers organized - 50% sell to the plant and all with incomes 35% above baseline
- Experienced more economic activity due to the increase in temporary jobs throughout the year
- Formed a board to promote and lobby community projects

Goals over the next year include:

- Implementing four water projects, positively impacting 16,000 community residents, as well as three other community improvement projects, including constructing a church and improving roads
- Conduct financial literacy training, hygiene, and violence prevention programs in eight neighborhoods
- Provide leadership training for 90 leaders from 21 communities to support them in fostering ownership of community development plans
- Increase seed capital for local businesses by 50% to impact 40 families
- Establish two community savings groups to support small community business growth

### **Educators and Students Learn New Skills at Emprendedora Technical High School**

Students faced a fluctuating environment of hybrid and online learning due to surges of COVID cases. Despite these challenges, because of your support the program is continuing to grow and provide a pathway to employment for students.

- Core classes were conducted live online, with students using their smartphones or donated laptops to connect. The school remained opened for students to use the computer lab and library or meet with a teacher as needed.
- The educational team participated in a four-week training by a professional coach to learn about high performance teams.
- One teacher participated in a certification program for resilient mentors, giving her the tools and technical and emotional preparation to manage teams and assist students.
- The sixth graduating class in December 2021 consisted of 50 students (25 agriculture and 25 tourism).
- Scholarships were renewed for five alumni students from different graduating classes to help them cover expenses at university, and 9 senior students are participating in the gap year program.
- There are 74 students receiving some financial aid.



After her father died, Jennifer’s two older siblings migrated to look for work to help support the family. She was unsure about her future.

“I learned about Emprendedora in sixth grade during a presentation at my school. I liked everything the school offered. As a senior, I enrolled in the program that gives students the opportunity to practice English with native speakers through video calls. I made a lot of progress and became one of the top in my class.”

Jennifer graduated in December 2021 and was awarded a gap year scholarship to continue her studies and help her prepare for college.

“My dream now is to study international business to bring more opportunities and investors to the country. I also want to start a business that creates jobs for those with fewer opportunities. I am grateful to the people who support this school. Thank you.”

- The lodge where students gain tourism skills is beginning to hold weddings and larger events to create additional revenue and learning opportunities.
- Volunteers play an important role in supporting conversational and proficiency English learning by graciously giving time to conduct online conversation practices. Throughout the pandemic, these video conversation calls have continued.

The school has set goals for the next year, including:

- Maintain student scores of 60% or higher in English proficiency
- Develop and implement a graduate readiness program impacting 100 senior students through mentorship, internship, and career counseling
- Broaden technology curriculum to include programming and robotics as well as build an additional science lab
- Implement an emotional intelligence and psychosocial support program for 300 students
- Build a business plan for the opening of a primary school under Opportunity's mission and vision
- Purchase a tractor and farm truck to expand learning opportunities in the agriculture program

### Moving to a Profitable, Sustainable Model in Agricultural Production

This was a monumental year for the plant. Despite a number of setbacks and challenges, it achieved profitability for the first time. We no longer utilize grant funding for this operation! Opportunity is continuing to evaluate the purchase price of yuca from farmers, with plans to raise rates year over year to increase incomes and profits for farmers. As 80% of employees walk to work, it also has a significant impact on the local community.

- International sales have taken off, and the plant became a for-profit entity—a long-awaited milestone.
- The school farm was recertificated in December 2021 by the USDA for lettuce, beans, turmeric, and yuca.
- This year, 335 farmers sold yuca to the plant, with their production surpassing projections by 26%.
- 100% of the farmers who received advances by Opportunity or financing from the bank made repayment in full in 2021.
- A backup generator was installed, adding four hours to the plant's daily operating time; and a new mill has been added to increase productivity by 46%.
- The senior management team has achieved the goal of 50% male/female leadership, and a chief financial officer was hired to help the plant continue to maximize profits.



The goals over the next year include:

- Maximize plant capacity to generate profits to sustain operations
- Provide increased income opportunities for 400+ Opportunity farmers and all plant operators
- Evaluate one additional animal feed product

Opportunity Nicaragua also plans to expand the Young Life program for rural communities from 3 to 14 youth clubs over the next year, reaching 150 young people directly and serving 700 youth in camps.

**Waymaker, thank you for continuing to chart a pathway forward for youth, women, farmers, and families in rural communities in Nicaragua.**