



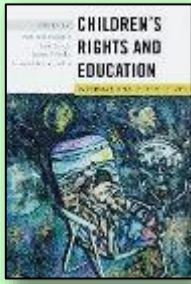
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Claiming the Right to Quality Education in Nicaragua

Harry Shier, Martha Lidia Padilla, Nohemí Molina Torres, Leonilda Barrera López, Moisés Molina Torres, Zorayda Castillo, and Karen Alicia Ortiz Alvarado

Introduction

Education rights can be thought of as comprising rights to, in, and through education. The idea of quality in education is bound up with all three. On returning to power in 2007, the Nicaraguan Sandinista government outlawed all charges for public schools. This made education free of charge (though not free of costs) and represented significant progress toward fulfilling the right to education. However, with no corresponding budget increase, this move failed to address the issue of quality, so that rights in and through education were still major issues.

This chapter describes the project "Safe, Quality Schools" run by local NGO CESESMA (Centre for Education in Health and Environment) in rural communities in the remote coffee-growing region of northern Nicaragua. This project tackled rights *in* education by recognizing children not only as consumers of education, but as researchers, advocates, and change agents organizing to influence the educational system in which they are the central actors.

In the pages that follow, this chapter will examine three key project documents in order to reconsider the project's outcomes and achievements as they relate to this education rights framework. The analysis supports the conclusion that a human rights-based approach to education, policy, and programming that also promotes the empowerment of children and young people as key stakeholders, can stimulate significant change in adverse circumstances, provided it goes beyond simple notions of the child's right to attend school and incorporates the ideas of respect for human rights in education and quality of education.

Analyzing this experience helps us understand the interdependence of rights to, in, and through education. Families make decisions about their children's schooling based on many factors. Poverty and the pressure for children to work play a part, but also important are perceptions about the safety of the school, how children are treated, the quality of teaching, and the relevance of what is taught. If rights in education are not attended to, the result is that many children will not enjoy their right to education, nor will they go on to enjoy other rights through education.

Human-Rights-Based Approaches in Education

In poorer countries it is an everyday reality that not all children go to school, and in these circumstances governments and civil society organizations have often interpreted the right to education simply as the right to go to school. Development goals have been orientated toward getting more children — especially girls and children who work — into schools, thus leaving fewer children outside

the school system. Millennium Development Goal (MDG) No. 2, "Achieve universal primary education by 2015," is a well-known example of this development thrust.

More recently, however, it has been recognized that school outcomes depend on a complex interrelationship between attendance rates and a variety of other factors, including school safety and the quality of the educational experience from both the children's and their parents' points of view (see, for example, UNESCO, 2005). If the ultimate goal is to improve educational outcomes, this will require attention to the issues of school safety and the quality of education, alongside the problems that limit access and availability.

At a global level, the coming to the fore of human rights-based approaches in development in the past decade has led to a refocusing of education policy and strategies (see Theis, 2004; Save the Children, 2005; United Nations, 2003; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2006) that has enabled both governments and NGOs to start moving beyond the MDG-inspired "get more kids into school" approach. While there exists today "a vast and bewildering assortment of international human rights conventions, covenants, and treaties" (Tomaševski, 2004, p. ii) in the children and youth field, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) provides the basic framework in relation to education.

Implementing the UNCRC in the context of schools and schooling involves at least three essential components (drawing on Tomaševski, 2001; and Verhellen, 2000):

1. The right *to* education: making education available and accessible to all children everywhere.
2. Rights *in* education: ensuring that children's rights in general are respected and complied with in education systems.
3. Rights *through* education. This has two linked meanings. First, it refers to human rights education (Verhellen, 2000, p. 110). This implies more than just informing children that they have rights. It also needs to develop children's self-concept as rights-holders and the skills and confidence they require to claim and defend rights and to call failing duty-bearers to account. Second, as Coomans (2007) points out, it draws our attention to the fact that education is a foundation for the enjoyment of many other rights throughout one's lifetime. With education, a person has more opportunities to secure employment and thereby avoid poverty and the rights violations that poverty brings. Educated people have more opportunities to express their views publicly and have them listened to, or to put forward rights claims and demand a response. Tomaševski (2001) insists, however, that the fulfillment of rights *to* and *in* education is a necessary prerequisite for fulfilling this third element.

In 2007, a global framework for the application of these new ideas was offered by UNESCO and UNICEF with their joint framework document, *A Human Rights-Based Approach to Education for All* (UNESCO/UNICEF, 2007), based largely on the UNCRC. This framework supports the model of rights to, in, and through education and adds a new emphasis on the right to quality education. While UNICEF (2000), among others, has provided a definition of quality education,¹ the project described in this chapter (as will be explained later) eschewed such prefabricated concepts and enabled local stakeholders, principally children and young people, to develop their own ideas of what quality education meant for them.

The Right to Education in Nicaragua

International NGO Save the Children has been an important promoter of rights-based approaches in work with children throughout the world. Since 2004, Save the Children² in Nicaragua has been concerned about the ineffectiveness of the country's education policies and programs and has sought to demonstrate how a rights-based approach could serve to improve this situation.

In Nicaragua, from 1990 until 2006, a succession of inefficient neoliberal, pro-free-market governments not only failed to invest in education, but encouraged a culture of illegal charging to develop in public schools, flouting Nicaragua's constitutional guarantee of free public education for all and making school attendance a financial burden for parents. As a result, many poorer families simply abandoned their local schools and put their children to work. In larger families, hard choices were made about which children could go to school and which would have to work. In these choices, boys were often favored by being sent to school while girls were kept at home for domestic work.

When the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN in Spanish) won the 2006 presidential elections and returned to power after 16 years in opposition, the new education minister's first act upon entering office was to issue a decree outlawing all charging of fees and other "contributions" in public schools, thus once again making Nicaraguan children's constitutional right to free education a reality, as it had been in the revolutionary 1980s (Jacobs, 2009). This led to an immediate increase in school enrolment and attendance, but, without a corresponding increase in national education spending (exacerbated by the loss of the illegal income schools had been generating locally by charging parents), there were no new teachers, classrooms, desks, books, or other resources. While the basic right to education had been guaranteed for the majority of Nicaraguan children, the *quality* of education and respect for rights in education now became the most important concerns.

The "Safe, Quality Schools" Project

Against this background, Save the Children identified the northern coffee-growing zone as one of the worst-affected areas (Shier, 2009), and with local partners CESESMA (based in San Ramón) and La Cuculmecca (based in Jinotega), they started to develop a plan focusing on five of the poorest and educationally least well-served of the coffee-growing districts. Gradually, the proposal for the project known as "Safe, Quality Schools" took shape with the overall aim to "contribute to the realization of children and young people's rights with emphasis on the rights to quality education, to live without violence, and to participate" (Save the Children, Nicaragua, 2008). The specific objectives were:

1. to improve the quality of education by promoting the active role of children and young people in school, improving access and retention of students;
2. to promote relationships based on positive effect, equality, and respect toward children and young people in school;
3. to promote the participation of children and young people and other stakeholders in the community, in order to generate capacity and encourage collective action in defense of children's rights; and
4. to develop capacity in local organizations for promotion of social change.

The project identified just over 4,000 children as directly involved, with an additional 35,000 as indirect beneficiaries, and—as a long-term goal—the potential to influence national education policies. A notable aspect of this project is that it recognizes children not only as consumers of education (or, in NGO language, "beneficiaries"), but as researchers, advocates, and change agents, organizing to influence the educational system in which they are the central actors. This marked a significant challenge to prevailing approaches to educational development in this region.

Methodology of This Study

The discussion of the project's work is based on an analysis of three key documents, each one the result of a participatory process involving different stakeholders, created at a distinct stage of the project's development. The first is an unpublished report of a participatory appraisal of the quality of education in the districts to be covered by the project carried out by CESESMA and La Cuculmecca in 2006–2007 with the involvement of multiple stakeholders, including children and young people. The

second is a booklet called *Safe, Quality Schools—A View from the Children and Young People*, published by CESESMA in 2010, three years into the project, in which children and young people express in their own words what the ideas of a safe school and quality education mean for them. Finally, in 2012, a team of education workers, most of whom had worked on the project since the beginning, met to reconstruct the process and review the principal achievements. They were facilitated in this over two sessions using an adapted focus group methodology, and the written report of these sessions (also unpublished) forms the third key document to be considered here.

The documents will be reviewed one by one, followed by an analysis drawing on all three to develop a number of conclusions about the effective application of rights-based approaches in education in this particular context.

Initial Multi-Stakeholder Participatory Appraisal of the Quality of Education

CESESMA and La Cuculmeca began by carrying out a participatory appraisal of the quality of education in the five districts in which the Safe, Quality Schools project was to be implemented, involving children and young people (both school students and children outside the formal education system), parents, teachers, community leaders, local officials, and NGO workers. The following brief summary of the key points from their unpublished 2007 report shows the complex reality of education in children's lives in these communities and makes it clear that the elimination of school fees and charges discussed above, while clearly a step in the right direction, was in no way an adequate policy response for guaranteeing children's education rights.

The appraisal report found that the typical primary classroom offered little or nothing to interest or motivate the learner. Most teachers were using old-fashioned teaching methods relying on rote learning and repetition without active involvement of the learner. Children were sent to school when parents could afford it and sent to work when they couldn't, leading to irregular attendance. A further consequence was that it was common to find teenagers in primary classrooms side by side with 6- and 7-year-olds. Children were tested at the end of each school year, and those who failed had to repeat the year instead of advancing a class. This contributed to the wide age range and diversity of learning needs in each class, and also led to boredom and frustration for many students. There was a serious lack of books and other educational materials, with the few that existed often inappropriate or irrelevant to the lives and interests of rural children. There were no resources to encourage active or participatory learning. School buildings were generally in poor condition with insufficient space for the children attending. The more remote coffee plantations did not have purpose-built schools, so communities had to improvise classrooms in whatever space was available, often failing to meet even the most basic quality or hygiene standards.

Teacher training was considered to be of poor quality, with teachers ill prepared and rarely able to develop their skills through reflective practice. In particular, teachers had no knowledge of or experience with participatory learning, or how to manage a crowded classroom without the threat of physical punishment. To add to teachers' problems, in more remote communities a single teacher generally had to teach two or three grades at the same time. The Ministry of Education found it almost impossible to recruit and retain qualified teachers for isolated rural schools, and many primary teachers were therefore untrained and unqualified. Moreover, many children lacked a stable home where their schooling was supported and encouraged. When putting food on the table was the family's main concern, and children's work contributed to their family's survival, the potential of schooling to produce long-term benefits was often disregarded. These children had to combine school attendance with farm work or coffee plantation work. This caused particular problems, as the coffee harvest overlapped with the first and last months of the school year, so the children were more likely to be made to repeat grades or to drop out altogether after repeated failures. Few of these children made it beyond grade 3, let alone grade 6. Many coffee-picking families adopted a nomadic lifestyle during the harvest, creating additional barriers to education for their children.

Finally, in this region, children became accustomed to violence as a way of life. Verbal and physical violence were seen as normal childrearing practice, and this approach continued in school, where physical and humiliating punishments were considered essential to maintaining discipline. Sexual abuse was widespread, and in Nicaragua's *machista* (sexist) culture, the abuse often went unreported and unpunished. Sexual abuse of students by teachers has been reported to be endemic (see Amnesty International, 2010, for a thoroughly researched report on the nature and extent of this problem).

Safe, Quality Schools Booklet of Children and Young People's Perceptions, 2010

The second document to be considered is the booklet *Safe, Quality Schools — A View from the Children and Young People*, published by CESESMA in 2010 and available online. In a gathering facilitated by CESESMA, 134 children (girls and boys) from different schools in the three districts covered by the project met and talked about what a safe school meant to them and shared their ideas about what quality education would be like. Instead of a summary of the document, which would entail paraphrasing the content in adults' words, the following is a representative sample of how the children themselves defined what makes a safe, quality school (translated from Spanish by Harry Shier). While there is certainly a lot more that could be said about these comments, the authors prefer to invite the reader to engage with the children's words as they were spoken:

- "A safe school is a nice big school, painted, with plenty of desks, a good floor, windows, toilets for everyone."
- "Choose a good place to build it. It shouldn't be close to steep slopes, rivers or cantinas where they sell liquor, and the pupils shouldn't have to walk long distances because something might happen to them."
- "The school should have a big library with all kinds of books: story books, history books, dictionaries, Spanish books, English books."
- "A safe school is where there's a teacher who respects the pupils. We don't want shameless teachers who think they're smart and are too busy flirting with their female pupils to teach the lesson properly."
- "Teachers and school heads should be well prepared so the pupils can learn well. They should have been to university, should be professional teachers."
- "It should be according to the rules, without corruption. When a pupil has money, this shouldn't guarantee them good marks, or that they automatically go up to the next grade."
- "We should have space to play. The school yard should be bigger."
- "It's when your parents attend the parents' meetings and support school activities. Even if they can't read, they help us do our homework."

Project Team Focus Group on Challenges and Achievements³

In 2012, about 5 years into the project (now in a second phase of funding from Save the Children), the team that worked on the project met to discuss it over two sessions. The first of these was used mainly to construct a visual time line of the project from 2007 to the present, identifying milestones, changes, setbacks, and developments. The second session was used to ask and answer a number of questions about what had been achieved, how, and why. The following are the main achievements that the project team identified.⁴

Children's reading network. Children became volunteer reading promoters organizing storytelling sessions and sharing storybooks to encourage reading for pleasure, in contrast to the way reading was treated as no more than a taxing chore in the typical classroom.

Parents' groups undertaking school mapping. School mapping is an established method of identifying those features that affect access to education in a community or neighborhood, and in this case it was

found to be useful in identifying why some children were not attending school and involving the community in looking for ways to overcome the barriers.

Alternative crafts, media, and vocational workshops. These included carpentry, dressmaking, organic food-growing courses, arts and crafts workshops, children's theatre groups, and a children's radio project.

Work with student councils. Nicaragua's 2004 Law of Educational Participation provides for every school—primary and secondary—to have an elected student council with the right to be consulted on decisions affecting the students. However, many of these were said to be ineffective, as they were dominated and manipulated by school heads and thus were relegated to token status. Workshops were conducted for student council members to help them assert themselves in decision making, particularly in relation to claiming rights on behalf of the students they represented. A complex issue the project had to deal with in this context was that the existing legally-mandated autonomous student councils had been sidelined by a new student-union model imposed by the ruling FSLN party. While this new model offered children and young people greater access to power and influence in important decisions, there were concerns that this, too, was open to manipulation, since it was under the control of a centralized, adult-run party political machine. However, a rights-based approach, if coherently applied, can render this a non-issue. Children and young people have the right to authentic, non-manipulated participation, and helping them to empower and assert themselves to achieve this is a legitimate objective that does not change, whether the would-be manipulators are teachers and school authorities or political parties.

Girls groups and "reconstructing masculinity" groups with boys and young men. Working with girls was a well-established area in CESESMA, seen as vital in working toward gender equality in a male-dominated society and realizing girls' and young women's right to live without violence or discrimination. The parallel work with boys and young men was a more recent initiative, helping them to recognize that being a real man does not need to involve subjugation of or violence toward women and girls.

Children and young people's participation in local and national policy initiatives. This included lobbying for increased investment in children and youth in local council budgets, a national campaign for investment in education, a national youth campaign against sexism, and participation in the National Movement Against Sexual Abuse.

Children as researchers and consultants. Children researched the state of environmental education in their schools and communities and made recommendations to improve this. Another group was involved in writing and designing a child-friendly version of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's recommendations to the government of Nicaragua (CODENI, 2012). In 2012, three children's advisory groups were elected to advise CESESMA on program and policy development, with a special emphasis on monitoring and evaluation. Also in 2012, teams of young researchers were formed to investigate perceptions of, and attitudes toward, child workers in their communities, as part of an international Save the Children program aimed at reducing economic exploitation of child workers.

Child protection policies. One area in which children have had significant policy influence has been the development of child protection policies in local schools. Though it seems astonishing from a northern perspective, child protection had not previously been recognized as an issue in Nicaraguan schools, and some of the consequences of this failing can be seen in the children's comments quoted above. In this project, instead of the usual top-down process, child protection policies were developed in a participatory way from the bottom up. Children worked in teams to identify the risks to which they felt they were exposed—both at school and travelling to and from school—and to propose changes in conditions, practices, attitudes, and abilities that would help safeguard them from these risks. Groups of parents and teachers carried out similar analyses. Next, smaller working groups involving students, parents, and teachers met to synthesize their findings and develop draft policy documents. Finally, there were meetings among teachers, parents, and students to review and adopt the policies. At the

time of this writing (December 2012), the implementation stage is underway, with children and young people also taking a leading role in monitoring and evaluation.

Based on this reconstruction and review, the project team identified what it saw as the main lessons learned from the experience so far. One of these was the importance of an intervention strategy that involves all the key stakeholders: first and foremost the children and young people (both in and out of school), but also their parents, teachers, community leaders, school heads, education ministry officials, local politicians, and coffee farmers. The strategy requires that all these actors be seen as capable of taking on a positive and active role in helping to achieve safe, quality schools, and seeking to get them sharing and collaborating rather than quarreling. This does require, however, that adult actors be willing to accept and respect children and young people as protagonists in the collective struggle for the right to education.

The project team also believed it was important that the policy objective — in this case the creation of safe, quality schools for all children — was a shared vision, that is, something the different stakeholders had come together to define and therefore could believe in. The concept of a safe, quality school they were striving to realize was not one that had been presented to them by Save the Children or the Ministry of Education, but one that they themselves had generated through a shared process of appraisal, reflection, and analysis.

It was recognized that the main duty-bearer in relation to the right to education was the state. Children could not — and should not — seek to take on the responsibilities that the government shirked. This meant that the relationship between the community, the NGOs, and the Ministry of Education was a complex one that needed to be handled carefully. In order to play their own role in bringing about changes in education, the children, the parents, and the NGOs that support them needed a positive collaborative relationship with the Ministry of Education. Their challenge to the ministry, though forceful, could not be hostile or aggressive. However, the maintenance of this positive relationship, and the commitment of local actors to playing their part in improving education, helped ensure greater openness on the part of ministers and officials to the serious demands being put forward. Having said this, however, the strategy of positive collaboration with the Ministry of Education was a cause of constant frustration for local actors, since it was obvious to everyone that unless central government increased the national education budget, many of the necessary changes simply could not be achieved.

Rights To, In, and Through Education: Complementary and Interdependent

To return to the analysis of education rights begun at the top of this chapter, the Safe, Quality Schools project has helped all those involved develop a more realistic conception of the significance of the right to education. Nicaraguan government policy now provides that almost all the country's children can attend school without the obstacles previously posed by the charging of illegal fees. In other words, they have made great strides in guaranteeing the right to education. However, this does not mean they have fulfilled their obligations in relation to this right. There remains a small but significant child population that never attends school (there are no reliable statistics, but it could be as high as 5% in rural areas), and in addition to these children, half of those who start primary school drop out before completing it. As a result, there are over 48,000 primary school-age children—about 8% of the total—who are not attending school (UNESCO, 2012). Therefore, making schooling free of charge, though important, is not enough to guarantee the right to education.

The reasons why children do not go to school are complex, and there are nearly always multiple factors at play. The following analysis draws on published work by teams of Nicaraguan child researchers (CESESMA, 2012) who identified and listed what they perceived as the main factors preventing access to education in their communities.

Some of the factors that prevent children from going to school are related to infrastructure problems. For example, there may be no school close to the child's home and no viable or affordable means of transportation to get to the nearest school. Many factors are clearly related to poverty, because even when the school does not charge, there are costs involved in attending, such as transport, uniforms, shoes, and school materials. While Nicaraguan law clearly states that school uniforms are not obligatory, there is shame and stigma attached to having to go to school without one. There is also the opportunity cost of lost earnings or unpaid domestic or farm labor if children who would otherwise be working are sent to school. In northern Nicaragua, the opportunity for children to make a substantial contribution to the family income occurs during the months of the coffee harvest (November to January), which coincide with the beginning and end of the school year. However, missing these months of schooling increases the likelihood of failing a grade and having to repeat it, and thus puts at risk the benefit of attending school the rest of the year, with early dropout the most likely outcome. One of the teams of child researchers made a specific study of the effects of alcohol in its community and found that fathers' alcoholism was an additional factor contributing to problems at school and non-attendance in many families.

In short, whether poor, rural children get to enjoy their right to education depends on difficult decisions to be made by themselves and their parents. It is too easy to say that poor families have no choice in the matter. Along with the stories of children who had to sacrifice their education in order to work and help support their family, the Safe, Quality Schools project has documented testimonies from desperately poor parents who chose to make extraordinary sacrifices to ensure that their children attended school. Despite their poverty, these parents did feel that they had a choice to make, however difficult. It is important to note, however, that these are not simple choices of whether to send children to school or to work. Most primary school-age children in the areas covered by the project do both, so the decisions that families have to make are about how best to combine school and work. For example, the money earned on the coffee plantation may be necessary to buy school uniforms and shoes, or to pay bus fare to the nearest secondary school.

It is when families have to make these difficult decisions that the interdependence of the right *to* education, rights *in* education (particularly in relation to the quality of education), and rights *through* education becomes sharply focused. When sending their children to school, and keeping them in school, presents so many challenges to poor families, it does not take much to tip the balance, so the family decides that schooling is not worth the sacrifice. If we look at the quality factors identified by the children themselves in the extracts from the *Safe, Quality Schools* booklet cited above, these negative factors are all too clear. If the school has no proper toilets or clean water, and if it has no playground, a dirt floor, and not enough desks for its students, it is hard to maintain enthusiasm for learning. If the lessons are dull and repetitive and seem to have no relevance to pressing, real-life needs, and if there is no protection from sexual harassment or the risk of abuse by teachers—along with additional risks on the long and difficult journey to and from school—the temptation to abandon school and find an alternative in paid work is in many cases overwhelming.

With regard to many of these problems, responsibility lies with the main duty-bearer, the state, and its failure to recognize education as a spending priority. The Safe, Quality Schools project did include a token contribution from Save the Children of materials for mending leaky school roofs. However, while this was seen as a useful tactic for maintaining good relations with the Ministry of Education, it was also perceived as a dangerous precedent, as fixing school roofs must be clearly demarcated as the duty of the state. The other approach used was strenuous participation in an ongoing national campaign to encourage increased government investment in children and youth (which the government has ignored equally strenuously for the past 6 years).

Other problems, however, are susceptible to being addressed by the combined efforts of local stakeholders. While this does not absolve the state of its responsibility as duty-bearer, it can be an empowering experience for local communities and provide a model for the state to replicate. The Safe, Quality Schools project's effort to get all local stakeholders involved in developing, implementing, and

monitoring child protection policies is one example. This makes schools safer places for children and thus contributes directly to the fulfillment of their rights *in* education. If there is a difficult decision to be made about whether to stay in school or to leave, or, for parents, a decision on whether to send children to school or send them out to work, then feeling that the school is safe, that the children are protected, that real efforts are being made to reduce the risks of physical violence and sexual abuse are all positive factors that will help tip the balance in favor of staying in school. Attention to children's rights *in* education can thus be seen as an integral component of their right *to* education.

The connection with rights *through* education can also be demonstrated through the work of the Safe, Quality Schools project. Examples include these:

- vocational training workshops (carpentry, dressmaking, etc.) gave young people new options for earning a decent living in their own community, thereby reducing the need for emigration and family breakup;
- the children's radio project provided a platform for raising awareness of rights issues (though aimed at children and young people, surveys showed that teachers and council officials often listened to the weekly program to keep abreast of children and young people's concerns);
- the youth theatre groups, as well as young women's and young men's groups, empowered young people to tackle discrimination and violence, thus defending their fundamental human rights;
- the children's reading network opened up access to a whole range of rights by tackling illiteracy.

In conclusion, the right *to* education requires education to be available and accessible to all. However, in the case of poor working children like those in northern Nicaragua, if school is not safe, if the curriculum is not relevant, if the students are not treated with respect, if the teaching is unprofessional and the resources are inadequate—in other words, if children's rights *in* education are not fulfilled—then the decision will be made either by parents or by young people themselves to stay away, and so the right *to* education is also violated. As Tomaševski (2001) explained, rights *to* and *in* education are both essential prerequisites for the eventual enjoyment of rights *through* education, thus completing the linkage or interdependence of all three elements.

While the principal duty-bearer in respect of education rights is, and will remain, the state, one thing the Safe, Quality Schools project has demonstrated is how active, empowered citizens—particularly children and young people themselves—can play a positive role in identifying rights violations and voluntarily taking on the responsibilities that correspond to them as stakeholders in promoting rights awareness, defending their rights (and other people's), and holding the state to account for its failings.

Notes

¹ UNICEF's definition of "quality education" (UNICEF, 2000, p. 4):

- Learners who are healthy, well-nourished, and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities.
- Environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities.
- Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention, and peace.
- Processes through which trained teachers use child-centered teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skillful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities.

- Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society.
- ² Before Save the Children adopted a unified presence in 2009, several national Save the Children agencies operated side by side in Nicaragua. The project described here was initiated by Save the Children, Norway, before being passed to the merged Save the Children, Nicaragua.
- ³ Unpublished report, 2012.
- ⁴ Methodologically speaking, it should be stressed that these are what the project team (the people closest to the work on the ground) *perceived* as the achievements of the project on the day of the focus group, and not necessarily the results of independent evaluation.

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