



CEPAD



## Let God's Light Shine

Stopping Gender Violence in Nicaragua

Methodist and Presbyterian Women's Special Project 2016 –17



Now married and with a child of her own Oneyda has worked hard to overcome the depression and isolation of her childhood. When she was growing up, she spent a lot of time on her own. Her home was a violent place and she was often fearful.

At 15 she was chosen to be a health promoter in the village near Matagalpa where she lived. With training and support from CEPAD, she led a group of 15 young people who met regularly as part of a psychosocial programme. Many of the group members came from homes that were often violent. Leading the sessions, helped Oneyda heal. To talk about the issues that affected others, she had to think about her own life. The training CEPAD offered gave her the courage to share her experiences and she found ready help from her peers. *(continued)*

### In a Nutshell:

For poor rural communities in Nicaragua CEPAD (*Consejo de Iglesias Evangelicas Pro-Alianza Denominacional* or Council of Protestant Churches of Nicaragua) is a source of hope. They fill the gaps created by poverty and conflict by:

- Forming local committees to foster stronger and healthy communities
- Training peace mentors to run psychosocial care programmes in their communities
- Equipping rural small farmers to improve family incomes
- Supporting women setting up small businesses.







management and other support to stop violence and strengthen communities with few resources. CEPAD supervises the trained mentors.

Part of the training programme introduces participants to the legal protections available. Every municipal police station has a specialised women's department to deal with complaints. Bigger complaints are heard at a Family Court and a Family Judge gives the ruling.

High levels of poverty, a culture of *machismo* and a history of conflict have made violence common. *Machismo* is an exaggerated sense of being masculine, making gang attacks, outbursts of aggression and domestic violence more common,

...continued

Many of the young people had psychological and physical scars from the violence at home. Finding new ways to respond has helped break the cycle of violence.

Oneyda is not the only member of her family to be helped by CEPAD's wide ranging work in their village. As a participant in the agricultural programme, her father found ways to improve the family's livelihood and learnt to have better control of his temper. Her mother too, has found the opportunity to heal because of the deep concern and attention of CEPAD's staff for those who are involved in its work,

She says CEPAD's work has reduced violence in her village and many more in rural Nicaragua. "I am thankful for CEPAD for these programmes that help young people and families prevent violence in our communities."

CEPAD has set up local community groups to provide psychosocial care in rural villages where there is none. They train mentors over ten sessions to provide counselling, stress

CEPAD's economic programme is addressing some of the violence in the communities. Their programmes to set women up in small businesses and to diversify their home gardens is improving the lives and livelihoods of women. Earning additional income from selling produce for example eases some of the financial strain that can contribute to escalating violence as well as improve self-esteem.

Village by village, CEPAD is working to foster safe and healthy communities.

## Gender-based Violence in Nicaragua

According to the Pan-America Health Organisation about a third of women have experienced violence from their partners and more than 15% sexual violence. Women are concerned that femicide (the deliberate killing of women because they are female) is rising. In 2012, femicide claimed the lives of 85 women and the rate is rising after the weakening of the legislation to force women to mediation.

On the [Global Gender Gap Report](#) produced by

the World Economic Forum , Nicaragua ranks 12th out of 145 countries. Abortions are not allowed even if the mother's life is in danger. 30% of women are married between the ages of 15-19.

## About Nicaragua

Life is not easy for people living in a country regularly hit by weather disasters, earthquakes and increasingly climate change. However, after decades of conflict and political upheaval, Nicaragua is making progress despite its position as the second poorest nation in the Western hemisphere.

Nicaragua ranks 132 out of 187 countries on the UNDP's Human Development Index with 19.8% of people living in multidimensional poverty and a further 14.8% very near to it. Multidimensional poverty takes into account education, health and living standards. The total population is 6,014 million with 80% of poor people living in rural areas. In recent years, droughts have destroyed crops making life that much harder for small farmers. Last year the economy grew by 4.7% with inflation at 6.0%. According to the World Bank remittances make up 9.7% of the country's Gross Domestic Product.

Compared with its neighbours, Nicaragua has a low homicide rate – 8.7 per 100,000 people while in Honduras it was 92 per 100,000 (the highest murder rate in the world). The story is not so positive for girls and women. Violence against women is high. According to UNICEF...



*Fifteen year old Giselle is training to be a Peace Community Mentor with CEPAD. Along with trainees Marcos and Lea (both 26), she has plans for the small village where they live. The three want to help young people, especially those struggling with substance abuse, domestic violence, low self-esteem and depression.*

*Their dream is to build a recreational space and start a sports programme. After that, Marcos says it will be a case of listening to their ideas and figuring out a way to implement them. "I want the kids to feel like a community and respect each other," says Giselle.*

*For the isolated village of La Ceiba, the programme will build peace and self-esteem for young people locked in a cycle of grinding poverty. Giving young people time to talk and play will help release some of the frustration they carry.*

***"People see alcohol as a refuge because they don't feel they have anything else to turn to," she adds.***

*Giselle joined the training because she wanted change in her family, but after the first sessions says, "I'm seeing how these skills will enable me to help the whole community."*



... 81.8% of 6,069 victims of sexual violence were under 18, of which 87.5% were girls. Nicaragua also has the highest early pregnancy rate in the region – 23.3% adolescents under 18 are already mothers or pregnant.

## Message from CEPAD

*Being a Latino country, the macho culture affects women both in urban and rural areas. CEPAD emphasises Galatians 3:28: "... there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" and because of that, women are empowered through workshops that teach them what the Bible says but also what the laws of the country say about equality in gender.*

*The Law 779 (offering legal protection from gender-specific crimes) is well known among the women in the 84 rural villages that CEPAD has walked with during the 10 years since the Law was approved by the Parliament. Women now know where to go in case of domestic abuse, what rights they are entitled to and what the sanctions are for the aggressors.*

***We are grateful to you, brothers and sisters in New Zealand, because of your contributions to Christian World Service***



***that help make these workshops and psychosocial groups possible. Women can seek justice and lead lives with dignity.***

*With gratitude,  
Dámaris Albuquerque E.  
Executive Director*

*CEPAD is a member of the ACT Alliance. Dámaris represents Latin America on the Board.*

## Scripture for Devotions

*Galatian 3:19-29  
Psalm 13*

***CWS has produced a PowerPoint about the work of CEPAD and gender violence. It comes with a talk that you can adapt. Contact us for a copy.***

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