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USAID
ASSIST PROJECT
*Applying Science to Strengthen
and Improve Systems*

USAID ASSIST Project

Nicaragua Country Report FY15

Cooperative Agreement Number:

AID-OAA-A-12-00101

Performance Period:

October 1, 2014 – September 30, 2015

DECEMBER 2015

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DISCLAIMER

This country report was authored by University Research Co., LLC (URC). The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

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For more information on the work of the USAID ASSIST Project, please visit www.usaidassist.org or write assist-info@urc-chs.com.

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Abbreviations

ADESENI	Association for Human Rights of Nicaraguan Sexual Diversity
ANIT	Nicaraguan Trans Association (Asociación Nicaragüense de Trans)
AIDS	Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
ANSAP	<i>Asociación Nicaragüense de Salud Pública</i> (Nicaraguan Association of Public Health)
ART	Antiretroviral therapy
ASSIST	USAID Applying Science to Strengthen and Improve Systems Project
BICU	Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University
CQI	Continuous quality improvement
FY	Fiscal year
GAO	Western Self-help Groups for People Living with HIV/AIDS
GBV	Gender-based violence
HCI	USAID Health Care Improvement Project
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
KAP	Knowledge, attitudes, and practices
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender
MOH	Ministry of Health
ODETRANS	Female Transgender Organization
PEPFAR	U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
PrevenSida	USAID's Prevention of HIV/AIDS Transmission among High Risk Population Project
POLISAL	<i>Instituto Politécnico de la Salud "Luis Felipe Moncada"</i> (Health Polytechnic Institute)
QI	Quality improvement
Red Trans Nicaragua	Trans Activists Network in Nicaragua
SONIGOB	Nicaraguan Society of Gynecology-Obstetrics
SONIMEP	Nicaraguan Society of Perinatal Medicine
SONIPED	Nicaraguan Society of Pediatrics
TA	Technical assistance
UAM	<i>Universidad Americana</i> (American University)
UCAN	<i>Universidad Cristiana Autónoma de Nicaragua</i> (Christian Autonomous University of Nicaragua)
UNAN	<i>Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua</i> (National Autonomous University of Nicaragua)
UNICA	<i>Universidad Católica Redemptoris Mater</i> (Catholic University Redemptoris Mater)
UPOLI	<i>Universidad Politécnica de Nicaragua</i> (Polytechnic University of Nicaragua)
URACCAN	<i>Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe de Nicaragua</i> (University of the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua)
USAID	United States Agency of International Development
WHO	World Health Organization

1 Introduction

The USAID Applying Science to Strengthen and Improve Systems (ASSIST) Project began activities in Nicaragua in 2014, continuing the work started by the USAID Health Care Improvement Project (HCI) in the country’s health training institutions. ASSIST, with the support of the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), is working to institutionalize improvement methods and pre-service training in HIV services in nine public and private universities in Nicaragua by supporting nursing and medical faculty to apply a teaching package for quality care. These universities are: *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua (UNAN) León*, *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua (UNAN) Managua*, Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University (BICU), *Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe de Nicaragua (URACCAN)*, *Instituto Politécnico de la Salud “Luis Felipe Moncada” (POLISAL)*, *Universidad Cristiana Autónoma de Nicaragua (UCAN)*, *Universidad Americana (UAM)*, *Universidad Politécnica de Nicaragua (UPOLI)*, and *Universidad Católica Redemptoris Mater (UNICA)*.

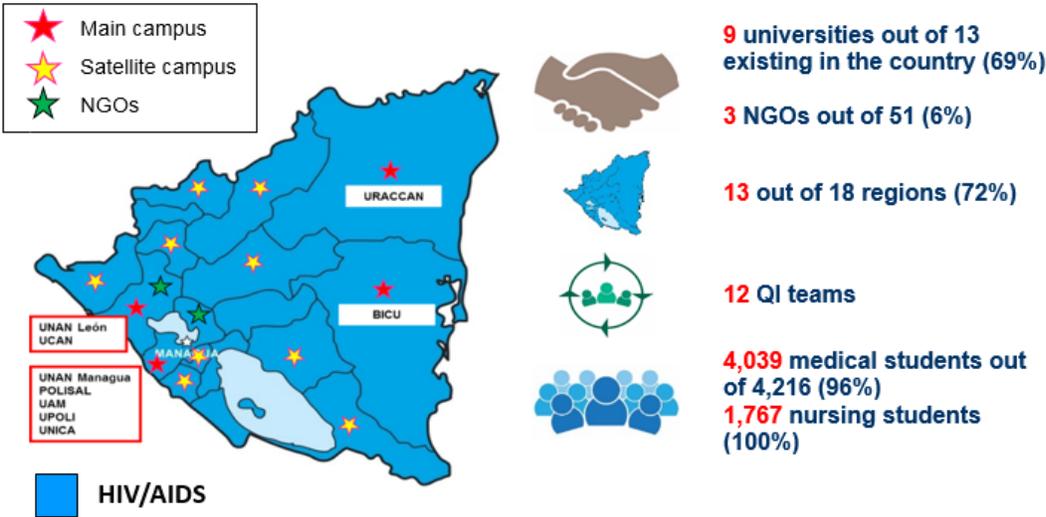
ASSIST’s technical assistance (TA), targets universities with the following objectives:

- Promote inclusion of the Ministry of Health (MOH) norms and protocols for prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV, rapid testing, and combination prevention counselling as well as gender, gender-based violence (GBV), and human trafficking topics in medical and nursing study programs
- Develop competencies among medical and nursing teachers and students for HIV prevention and health services provision for people with HIV
- Promote continuous improvement in teaching and evaluation methodologies for both medical and nursing teachers
- Provide support to universities in reducing stigma and discrimination towards people living with HIV (PLHIV) and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community

These objectives support the PEPFAR Central America strategy of accelerating progress towards universal access to prevention, care, treatment, and support related to HIV.

In addition, ASSIST is providing TA to three community organizations by targeting design and implementation of a quality management program. The organizations include are the Association for Human Rights of Nicaraguan Sexual Diversity (ADESENI), Western Self-help Group for People Living with HIV/AIDS (GAO), and Female Transgender Organization (ODETRANS). Two of these organizations focus on LGBT populations and one on PLHIV.

Scale of USAID ASSIST’s Work in Nicaragua

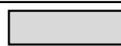


2 Program Overview

What are we trying to accomplish?	At what scale?
1. Strengthen teachers' capabilities to teach the HIV care protocols	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen teachers' abilities to develop competencies among medical and nursing students for prevention, care and follow-up of PLHIV 	13 of 18 regions (72%) 9 of 13 universities (69%)
2. Implement continuous quality improvement in teaching	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the quality of teaching and evaluation related to HIV-related subjects at universities 	13 of 18 regions (72%) 9 of 13 universities (69%) 4,039 medical students of 4216 (96%) 1,767 nursing students (100%)
3. Design and implement a quality management program in three non-governmental organizations serving PLHIV and LGBT populations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the quality of the HIV prevention services provided by the three NGOs 	3 of 51 organizations (6%) 400 of 47,306 LGBT persons (1%) 100 of 8,661 HIV-positive persons (1%)



= Improvement Activity



= Cross-cutting Activity

3 Key Activities, Accomplishments, and Results

Activity 1. Strengthen teachers' capabilities to teach the HIV care protocols

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND RESULTS

The Nicaraguan Ministry of Health (MOH) guidance and protocols to provide care for people with HIV were updated this year according to the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, making it necessary to update medical and nursing teachers on these new guidelines. In FY15, ASSIST:

- Provided TA to faculty from nine universities to develop their competencies on gender, GBV, human trafficking, and providing care for PLHIV.** In order to provide this technical assistance, ASSIST designed methodological tools to facilitate the process.
- Updated the interactive DVD teaching package, particularly the HIV module, as well as the 11 topics included in it.** Five new topics were added: HIV transmission, the new WHO approach for PLHIV, gender, GBV, and human trafficking. For each topic, ASSIST Nicaragua drafted the methodological design, technical note, supporting material, and any supplementary information. In addition, we added a checklist to evaluate knowledge related to the care protocol for adults with HIV. The modules on gender, GBV, and human trafficking were developed in partnership with the USAID PrevenSida Project to standardize contents for use in training provided by both projects.
 - 1,000 copies of the DVD were produced and distributed among the nine universities
- Drafted activity plans to reduce stigma and discrimination towards the LGBT community and PLHIV and helped five universities (UPOLI, POLISAL, BICU, UCAN and UNAN Leon) implement their plans.** These plans included activities such as sharing MOH resolutions and laws on protection of rights for these groups, as well as creating murals, holding student forums, and distributing educational materials on these topics.
- Provided TA to two universities – UNAN Managua and POLISAL – as a pilot project, to draft and declare a policy on HIV prevention and non-discrimination.** This policy would stipulate that all university employees be trained on HIV to eradicate stigma and discrimination towards sexual diversity and people with HIV. ASSIST will continue working on this process in 2016.

- **Designed and distributed educational materials:** ASSIST Nicaragua designed nine banners (see **Appendix 1** for banners in English and Spanish) on HIV prevention which were distributed at 17 university campuses. In addition, we designed and distributed 5,000 brochures on stigma and discrimination experienced by the LGBT community and people with HIV to be distributed at universities.

IMPROVEMENT IN KEY INDICATORS

Activity	Indicators	Baseline (FY14)	Last value (October 2014-March 2015)	Last value (October 2014-September 2015)
Strengthen teachers' capabilities to teach the HIV care protocols	Number of teachers trained in the HIV care protocols according to the WHO 2013 evidence, stigma and discrimination, GBV, and human trafficking	0	Reached: 114 A target: 150 (76%)	Reached:115 Cumulative 229 (153% of target)

SPREAD OF IMPROVEMENT

- ASSIST support reached nine universities, but with branches of the universities spread throughout the country, technical assistance coverage was nationwide.

Activity 2. Implement continuous quality improvement in teaching

OVERVIEW

ASSIST is providing technical assistance to nine universities to promote continuous quality improvement (CQI) activities in teaching processes and learning evaluation. Quality monitoring is not generally carried out at Nicaraguan universities; therefore, upon identifying teaching gaps, ASSIST designed a rapid cycle quality improvement methodology with the universities. This methodology includes defining improvement objectives, indicators, and the essential interventions to implement.

To identify gaps related to care for people with HIV, we conducted knowledge, attitude and practices (KAP) surveys among nursing and medical students at URACCAN in 2014 and in 2015 with the rest of the universities—UAM, UNICA, UCAN, UNAN Leon, UNAN Managua, UPOLI, POLISAL, and BICU. From these gaps, teachers at BICU, URACCAN, POLISAL, and UCAN designed an average of three improvement rapid cycles at each university, in order to implement changes in teaching and learning assessment methodologies for HIV topics. ASSIST also supported teachers at UNAN Leon and UPOLI to introduce changes to teaching and learning assessment methodologies which will enable students to develop required competencies to provide HIV prevention, care, and treatment services and teachers to evaluate student learning more objectively.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND RESULTS

During FY15, ASSIST:

- **Completed nine TA visits to six universities and supported the design of 19 improvement cycles currently under implementation to improve educational processes.**
- **New adjustments were made to study programs in two universities** (BICU in January and March 2015 and UNAN Leon in June 2015).
- **Conducted HIV KAP baseline surveys among medical students in five universities** (UCAN, UNICA, BICU, UNAN Leon and UPOLI), reaching a total of 450 medical students and 79 nursing students) (Feb – Aug 2015).
 - **At UCAN Leon**, the baseline results show that the students' main deficiencies were related to their attitudes toward counselling and caring for people with HIV (**Table 1**).

Table 1: Baseline KAP HIV study among UCAN Leon medical students (July 2015)

Topic	Percentage of correct responses 5th year 2014/2015 n= 61
Knowledge questions	78%
HIV risk factors	89%
Transmission ways	90%
Principles of counselling (attitude)	55%
Principles of counselling (knowledge)	72%
Human rights – stigma and discrimination	71%
HIV maternal child transmission	79%
Care for people with HIV (knowledge)	62%
Care for people with HIV (attitude)	58%
Antiretroviral therapy (ART)	73%

- Based on these results, UCAN teachers and administrators implemented the following changes: a) reorganized student rotation to include service in the HIV clinic; b) introduced HIV transmission and prevention clinical cases in tests for epidemiology class; and c) discussed HIV KAP survey results with students. The results allowed university professors to develop information, education, and communication activities to reduce stigma and discrimination in this university.
- o **At BICU University**, the baseline results showed that 5th year medical students have high levels of knowledge about the protocols of care for people with HIV but scored lower on attitudes (**Table 2**). As a result, teachers will include this topic in their classes and develop awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and discrimination in the university.

Table 2: Baseline KAP HIV study among BICU fifth year medical students (July 2015)

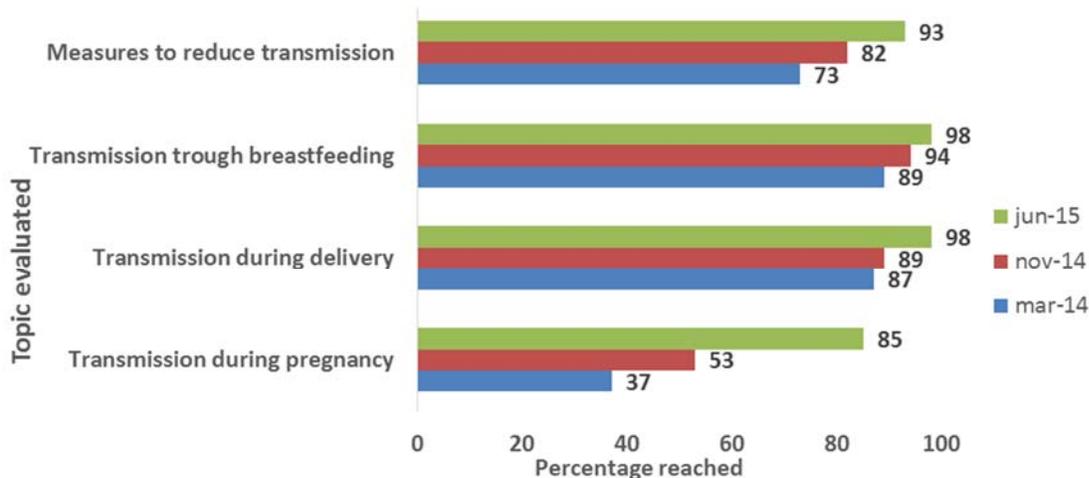
Topic	Percentage of correct responses 5th year 2014/2015 n= 27
Knowledge questions	85%
HIV risk factors	95%
Transmission ways	95%
Principles of counseling (attitude)	88%
Principles of counseling (knowledge)	88%
Human rights – stigma and discrimination	80%
HIV maternal child transmission	95%
Care for people with HIV (knowledge)	65%
Care for people with HIV (attitude)	59%
Antiretroviral therapy	82%

- o **At UPOLI nursing school**, KAP surveys showed poor knowledge among students on prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) and care for people with HIV, specifically on the benefits of ART for HIV-positive pregnant women. The faculty identified the following causal factors: teaching and evaluation methodologies are very traditional, there is no basic textbook to study PMTCT, and there is no plan to reinforce contents for students nor an individualized approach to problem cases.

After this causal analysis, they made the following changes:

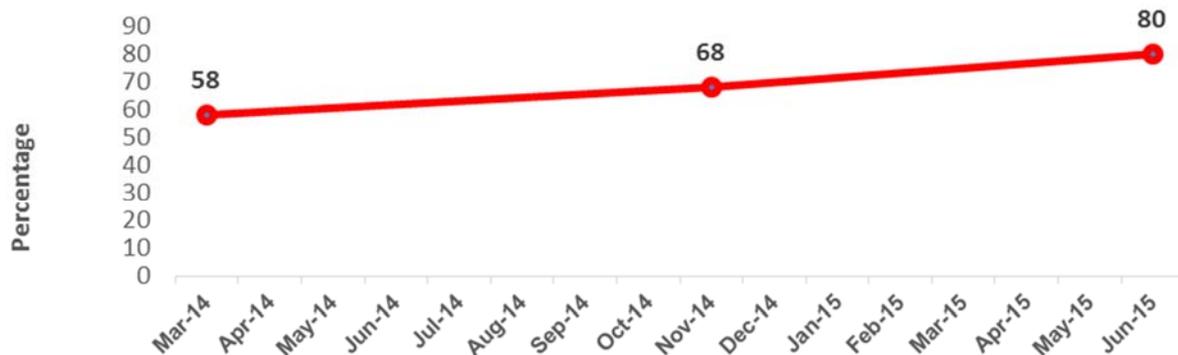
- Incorporated the technical content described in the teaching package in the UPOLI curriculum
 - Reviewed the contents of this subject in the curriculum and determined that the approach was very superficial; they then made adjustments in the teaching methodologies and number of hours dedicated to the topic
 - Incorporated new methodologies to teach these topics, such as the study of clinical cases available in the teaching package (i.e., they went from purely theoretical content to analyze clinical cases in class)
- Repeated KAP surveys showed significant changes in knowledge were achieved among nursing students over time. **Figure 1** shows that the proportion of nursing students with correct knowledge of measures to reduce HIV transmission increased from 73% to 93% between March 2014 and June 2015. Knowledge about HIV transmission during breastfeeding, delivery, and pregnancy increased during this time period as well. **Figure 2** shows that the proportion of nursing students with correct knowledge of antiretroviral therapy (ART) increased from 58% in March 2014 to 80% in May 2015.

Figure 1: Nicaragua | Changes in nursing students' knowledge related to PMTCT, UPOLI (March 2014-June 2015)



Source: Data provided by UPOLI. Mar n=32; Nov n=38; Jun n=36.

Figure 2: Nicaragua | Changes in proportion of UPOLI nursing students with correct knowledge of ART (March 2014 – June 2015)



Source: Data provided by UPOLI. Mar n=32; Nov n=38; Jun n=36.

- In June 2015, ASSIST carried out the baseline KAP survey at UNICA among 4th and 5th year medical students. Fifty (50) students participated in the survey. Results show that 75% of students across the two classes scored correctly on HIV knowledge questions, but only 58% on attitude-related questions. The lowest scores were in the areas of counselling and attitudes toward caring for people with HIV (Table 3). The results catalyzed UNICA faculty to revise their curriculum, with each faculty member reviewing their corresponding syllabi with the goal of incorporating or expanding, where applicable, topics on HIV.

Table 3: Percentage of UNICA medical students with correct responses, by topic, June 2015

Topic	Baseline Fourth year n= 10	Baseline Fifth year n= 40	Baseline Average (Both Classes)
All of the questions	63%	71%	70%
Knowledge questions	68%	77%	75%
Attitude questions	52%	59%	58%
HIV risk factors	80%	91%	89%
Transmission ways	90%	91%	91%
Principles of counseling (attitude)	43%	58%	55%
Principles of counseling (knowledge)	30%	35%	34%
Human rights – stigma and discrimination	63%	69%	68%
HIV maternal child transmission	63%	76%	74%
Care for people with HIV (knowledge)	62%	63%	62%
Care for people with HIV (attitude)	47%	56%	54%
Antiretroviral Therapy	62%	73%	71%

Source: KAP HIV study among UNICA Managua medicine students. June 2015

- At POLISAL, the rapid cycles' measurement did not demonstrate improvement because the school did not implement all the interventions that they had committed to doing. Continuing measurement studies with other student groups is pending.
- At UNAN Leon, ASSIST supported the revision of checklists to measure progress in knowledge acquired by medical and nursing students on counselling for HIV combination prevention and rapid testing, to be applied to students at the beginning and end of each rotation.

IMPROVEMENT IN KEY INDICATORS

Activity	Indicators	Baseline (FY14)	Last value (Oct 2014 – Mar 2015)	Last value (Oct 2014 – Sept 2015)
Implement continuous quality improvement in teaching	Percentage of universities implementing quality improvement cycles	0%	Reached: 6 of 8 (75%)	Reached: 6 of 9 (67%)

Activity 3. Design and implement a quality management program in three non-governmental organizations serving PLHIV and LGBT populations

OVERVIEW:

In 2013, HCI provided technical assistance to develop a Strategic Plan for integrated care of female transgender populations in Nicaragua. This plan was developed by four organizations—the ADESENI, ANIT (Nicaraguan Trans Association), ODETRANS, and Red Trans Nicaragua. Two years later, in FY15, ASSIST conducted an evaluation measuring the groups' compliance with the Strategic Plan.

Further, ASSIST designed quality management programs for three NGOs—ADESENI, GAO, and ODETRANS. The quality management programs included tools to measure client satisfaction, internal organizational climate, and service quality standards and indicators. In addition, the programs described the steps each organization needs to take to sustain service quality and evaluate it over time. In FY16, ASSIST will support with the revision and adjustments to the Strategic Plan.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND RESULTS

- **Completed the final report on the evaluation of the Strategic Plan for integrated care of female transgender populations in Nicaragua**, which shows that the four organizations (ADESENI, ANIT, ODETRANS and Red Trans Nicaragua) had achieved 21 out of 33 planned actions (64% compliance) to assure respect for human rights and social determinants of health.
- **Developed quality management programs for ADESENI, GAO, and ODETRANS.**

IMPROVEMENT IN KEY INDICATORS

Activity	Indicators	Baseline (FY14)	Last value (Oct 2014 – Mar 2015)	Last value (Oct 2014 – Sept 2015)
Design and implement a quality management program in three LGBT organizations	Number of organizations with a quality management program	0	Reached: 3 of 3 (100%)	Reached: 3 of 3 (100%)

4 Sustainability and Institutionalization

ASSIST has been working on institutionalizing the HIV training package that reflects the MOH prevention and care norms and protocols in the medical and nursing education programs of the major Nicaraguan universities. ASSIST’s institutionalization and sustainability strategy is to strengthen the Nicaraguan health system by increasing the knowledge and capacity among nursing and medical students from both public and private universities. These students are the future doctors, nurses, and leaders within the health system in Nicaragua.

5 Knowledge Management Products and Activities

- In FY15, we wrote an article on female transgender populations, to share the experience of drafting a Strategic Plan, based on analyzing the social determinants of health outcomes. This type of strategic planning experience contributed to the organizational strengthening of transgender women’s organizations and served as a model for other national organizations serving sexual diversity populations and sex workers. The article was submitted for consideration to the *Journal of the International AIDS Society*.
- **Shared the evidence-based interventions guide to reducing neonatal and perinatal mortality and morbidity** (see **Appendix 2**) which contains simple, cost effective, high-impact interventions that can be applied at all health care levels as part of the continuum of care: preconception, pregnancy, and postnatal periods. These interventions were selected after an intense search in the best libraries of the world, through: Tripdatabase, Hinari, Cochrane, Clinical Evidence, Clinical Queries, PubMed, Medlines Plus, Sumsearch, Bireme, the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, among others. The guide was shared with and distributed to:
 - 132 medical and nursing teachers from six universities and 280 medical students from UNAN Leon and UNAN Managua
 - Medical societies: Perinatal Medicine (SONIMEP), Pediatrics (SONIPED), Gynecology-Obstetrics (SONIGOB) and Nicaraguan Association of Public Health (ANSAP)
 - 837 copies disseminated nationwide

The guide was also posted on the ASSIST Spanish-language maternal-newborn health knowledge portal, www.maternoinfantil.org.

6 Gender Integration Activities

- Technical assistance from the USAID ASSIST Project is focused on transferring knowledge and the legal framework for gender, gender-based violence, and human trafficking issues to teachers of universities who through this knowledge, enhance equitable participation of men and women in the different training activities developed by the university.
- The ASSIST Nicaragua team continued our work to promote equity by ensuring that all students receive training on HIV-related stigma, discrimination, and the rights of LGBT people. The KAP surveys showed that there were biases among students surrounding HIV and sexual minorities. We have worked hard to ensure that the curriculum promotes equity and that this curriculum is institutionalized.
- Together with the USAID PrevenSida Project, we developed in FY14 a training module on gender, gender-based violence, and human trafficking, and we began testing the module in FY15, working with NGO staff and health human resource training institutions at Instituto Politécnico de la Salud “Luis Felipe Moncada” (POLISAL) and Universidad Politécnica de Nicaragua (UPOLI). Gender-based violence is a public health issue that is increasing in the country, and we have worked hard to ensure medical students who are future professionals and health services providers, receive this training. The training module is available on the ASSIST knowledge portal at: https://www.usaidassist.org/sites/assist/files/modulo_de_genero_final.pdf.
- In March 2015, we posted a blog on the ASSIST knowledge portal about the gender, GBV, and human trafficking training module, [“Addressing gender-based violence prevention and treatment in a training curriculum to improve the quality of health instruction in Nicaragua”](#).

7 Directions for FY16

In the next fiscal year, ASSIST Nicaragua will continue to provide technical assistance to the same nine universities to strengthen implementation of quality improvement methodologies with rapid cycles in their teaching and evaluation processes, as well as work on reducing stigma and discrimination. We also intend to expand the accumulated experience to a new university.

We will also work on the design and implementation of three virtual diploma courses on the following topics: Research Methodology, Continuous Quality Improvement, and the HIV Continuum of Care. Contents will be based on the interactive DVD and will be developed on virtual platforms under supervision of the ASSIST Project. We will contract with specific universities to develop and sponsor the virtual courses.

We will continue to support the three LGBT and PLHIV organizations to implement the quality management programs we helped them to develop in FY15. We will also expand our technical assistance to three new organizations.

ANIT, Red Trans, ADESENI, and ODETRANS female transgender organizations will receive technical assistance to adjust their strategic plans based on results obtained during the evaluation of their respective plans.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Banners Designed for Universities on HIV Prevention

English banner developed for the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua



At this university, teachers, workers and students promote health actions to prevent HIV, reducing risk behaviors and strengthening HIV knowledge, attitudes and practices among its staff.

REMEMBER, you can prevent HIV by following these recommendations:

- Ⓡ **Delaying early onset of sexual relations**
- Ⓡ **Reducing the number of sexual partners**
- Ⓡ **Using condoms and lubricants in every sexual encounter**
- Ⓡ **Getting tested for HIV**
- Ⓡ **Avoiding the use of alcohol and drugs**



Proyecto ASSIST de USAID
Aplicando la Ciencia para Fortalecer y Mejorar los Sistemas de Salud



En esta Universidad los docentes, trabajadores y estudiantes promovemos acciones en salud para la prevención del VIH, reduciendo los comportamientos de riesgo y fortaleciendo los conocimientos, actitudes y prácticas en VIH de su personal.

RECUERDA, tú puedes prevenir el VIH siguiendo estas recomendaciones:

- ⓧ Postergar el inicio a temprana edad de las relaciones sexuales**
- ⓧ Reducir el número de parejas sexuales**
- ⓧ Usar condones y lubricantes en cada relación sexual**
- ⓧ Realizarte la prueba de VIH**
- ⓧ Evitar el uso de alcohol y drogas**



Proyecto ASSIST de USAID
Aplicando la Ciencia para Fortalecer
y Mejorar los Sistemas de Salud

Appendix 2: Evidence-based Intervention Guide on Reducing Prenatal and Neonatal Mortality and Morbidity (Spanish)



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PROYECTO DE
MEJORAMIENTO DE
LA ATENCIÓN EN SALUD

**Guía de intervenciones basada
en evidencias que reducen
morbilidad y mortalidad
perinatal y neonatal**

Facilitado por el Proyecto de Mejoramiento de la Atención
en Salud de USAID

Managua, Nicaragua, noviembre 2014

**USAID APPLYING SCIENCE TO STRENGTHEN
AND IMPROVE SYSTEMS PROJECT**

University Research Co., LLC
7200 Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 600
Bethesda, MD 20814

Tel: (301) 654-8338

Fax: (301) 941-8427

www.usaidassist.org