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**DISPLACED CHILDREN AND ORPHANS**  
**IN**  
**NICARAGUA**

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Nicaragua: Report on Use of Orphans and Displaced Children Funds

Executive Summary

A. Background The Orphans and Displaced Children's Fund was used to finance a fourteen month, \$1,400,000, project to provide assistance to orphans in Nicaragua implemented by the Wisconsin/Nicaragua branch of the National Association of Partners of the Americas (Partners). The funding was provided as an adjunct to the Survival Assistance for Victims of Civil Strife in Central America (CASA) program, under which congressionally-mandated funds in the amount of \$4 million financed programs providing emergency medical assistance to civilians affected by the armed insurgency in Nicaragua. Partners originally proposed a broader program for funding consideration under the CASA project, but was requested by A.I.D. to concentrate on orphans.

B. Legislation The legislation governing both the CASA program and the Orphans and Displaced Children's Fund present problems of definition and targeting. While the Partners project was not actually governed by the CASA legislation, the existence of such legislation appears to have influenced the way assistance to children was envisaged. The CASA legislation precluded assistance being provided to or through Government of Nicaragua channels, and also specified that assistance be provided to meet the immediate needs of civilian victims of civil strife. At the time the legislation was drafted, there was no USAID mission in Nicaragua, and relations between the USG and the then Government of Nicaragua made accessing information and conducting needs assessments difficult.

Though not as restrictive or specific, the wording of the Orphans and Displaced Children Fund legislation is also problematic in that many of the war-affected children in Nicaragua are not orphans, nor are they easily accessible as a group.

C. Project Objectives From the outset, the funding source and the close identification of the Partners project with other projects funded under the CASA program contributed to problems in both selection of project objectives and mode of operation. The project purpose, "to provide immediate attention to the medical, psychological and nutritional needs of approximately 15,000 Nicaraguan orphans and to strengthen the institutions responsible for providing for their ongoing care", is at once both extremely broad and general in defining the type of assistance to be provided, and quite specific in the number and nature of children to be targeted. Providing assistance to the targeted number of war orphans proved problematic, both in that children orphaned as a direct result of the war were almost impossible to separate from other children in institutions, and that the assumed numbers of orphaned children simply did not exist.

D. Achievement of Project Objectives Assessment of the achievement of project objectives is complicated by the differing perceptions of A.I.D. -- the funding agency -- and Partners -- the

## Nicaragua: Report on the Use of Orphans and Displaced Children Fund

This report is divided into two sections. Section I contains a general discussion of the background to the project, the project itself, Partners as an organization, and ways in which the needs of war affected children can be met. Following from this, Section II discusses specific issues indicated in the scope of work.

### Section I

#### A. Background

The Orphans and Displaced Children's Fund was used to finance a fourteen month, \$1,400,000, project to provide assistance to orphans in Nicaragua implemented by the Wisconsin/Nicaragua branch of the National Association of Partners of the Americas (Partners).<sup>1</sup> The funding was provided as an adjunct to the Survival Assistance to Victims of Civil Strife in Central America (CASA) program, under which congressionally-mandated funds in the amount of \$4 million financed programs providing primarily emergency medical assistance to civilians affected by the armed insurgency in Nicaragua.

i. Legislation The legislation governing both the CASA program and the Orphans and Displaced Children's Fund present problems of definition and targeting. While the Partners project was not actually governed by the CASA legislation, the existence of such legislation appears to have influenced the way assistance to children was envisaged. The CASA legislation precluded assistance being provided to or through Government of Nicaragua channels, and also specified that assistance be provided to meet the immediate needs of civilian victims of civil strife. At the time the legislation was drafted, there was no USAID mission in Nicaragua, and relations between the USG and the then Government of Nicaragua made accessing information and conducting needs assessments difficult.

While projects funded under the CASA program undoubtedly served a purpose and benefited a wide range of people, they suffered from the restrictions imposed by the legislation, as well as from being designed and approved in a short timeframe. An assessment of CASA-funded activities conducted in 1991 concluded that the unmet needs for immediate, emergency medical assistance had been overestimated, and that such assistance could have best been provided through national programs rather than through private organizations operating outside of the national health service structure. The assessment also concluded that there were considerable unmet needs for longer term skills training to assist those injured as a

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of simplicity, "Partners" is used throughout to refer to both the National Association of Partners of the Americas and the Partners Wisconsin/Nicaragua branch. The grant was made to the National Association, but the program was implemented by the Wisconsin/Nicaragua branch with administrative support from the national headquarters in Washington.

result of the war lead economically productive lives, and that A.I.D. funds could therefore perhaps have been better used to fund such activities.

The wording of the Orphans and Displaced Children's Fund is problematic, in that many war-affected children are not orphans, nor are they easily accessible as a group.<sup>2</sup> The legislation however generally lends itself to flexibility in both targeting children for assistance and in the type of programs which can be implemented in that it does not specify how assistance should be delivered. Unfortunately, it appears that some of the restrictions of the CASA legislation were unwittingly applied to the orphans funds, resulting in a project which was at once both too general in its purpose and too specific in its targeted beneficiaries and mode of implementation.

ii. Request for Applications In March 1990, A.I.D. issued a request for applications under the CASA program which specifically indicated that projects should be designed "to provide medical care and other relief for noncombatant victims of civil strife in Central America .... to make available prosthetic devices and rehabilitation, provide medicines and immunizations, assist burn victims, help orphans, and otherwise provide assistance for non-combatants who have been physically injured or displaced by civil strife in Central America." The request for applications further indicated that funding priority would be given to proposals which focussed on "a) physically injured...; b) immediate needs of internally displaced non-combatants and orphaned children; c) provision of medicines, immunizations, feeding assistance or other commodities in support of the basic human needs of noncombatants", and stressed the immediate and short-term nature of the program.

In response to this request for applications, Partners submitted a proposal for a broader program providing a wide range of services, but was requested by A.I.D. to concentrate on orphans. In part this request was conditioned by Partners' success in providing emergency medical assistance to children under the Children's Survival Assistance Program, a precursor to the CASA project.<sup>3</sup> The revised proposal, although focussing on orphans, still responded to the request for applications in that it proposed immediate assistance, largely in the form of provision of commodities to institutions, though with some limited, specialized training.

iii. Situation of Children

Though undoubtedly adversely affected by the war, the socio-economic situation of

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<sup>2</sup> The term "orphans" is generally used to mean children who have lost both parents. "War orphans" is generally taken to mean children who have lost parents as a direct result of war or civil strife.

<sup>3</sup> "Under the previous CSAP activities in Nicaragua, NAPA (National Association of Partners of the Americas) demonstrated their ability to organize rapidly and effectively: they reached over 46,000 children through their clinic/dispensary network." Taken from CASA Program Technical Review Committee Summary Report.

Nicaragua was also a result of years of underdevelopment, ill-advised governmental economic policies, and the cumulative effect of sanctions and depressed world commodity prices. Together, these resulted in escalating unemployment and poverty, which was exacerbated by a high population growth rate. The overall result was increasing numbers of children at risk.

It can be argued that while some children were obviously directly affected by the war, most were indirect victims, suffering from the effects of increasing poverty and breakdown in social structures. Although considerable numbers of children lived in combat zones, or were displaced as result of insecurity, the war by and large did not produce the massive displacements of people as, for example, in Mozambique. Similarly, though some children were themselves actively involved in combat, the numbers were small in comparison to the numbers of children indirectly affected by the war, and although devastating, the war did not produce the widespread destruction, mass starvation and death, or the numbers of children left parentless, of recent civil strife or war in other countries.

The civil strife did, however, result in extraordinarily large numbers of children being left with only one parent, usually a mother, who lacked the means to support them. It also strained the fabric of society, reducing the ability of the extended family or communities to cope. Statistics portray an extremely bleak situation: UNICEF estimated that 70 percent of the total population of Nicaragua was living in conditions of extreme poverty in 1990, and that 50 percent of the population were aged under 16. It further estimated that 25 percent of households were headed by women, with 21 percent of all live births being to women aged under 20. Additionally, the rapid urbanization of Nicaragua placed children in vulnerable conditions: the urban population increased by 60 percent between 1980 and 1990, and in 1990 66 percent of women aged under 25 lived in urban areas, while 24 percent of children between the ages of 10 and 14 participated in some form of informal sector work, predominantly in cities.<sup>4</sup>

## B. The Partners Project

### i. The Partners Organization

The National Association of Partners of the Americas is registered as a PVO, and has a professional managerial staff in Washington. However, in large part its programs are implemented by member state organizations, and are thus dependent on the skills and

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<sup>4</sup> Source: UNICEF, Analysis of the Social and Economic Situation, September 1991. The same report classed 500,000 children as living in especially difficult circumstances -- 240,000 direct or indirect victims of war, 120,000 affected by natural catastrophes, 114,000 living in conditions of extreme poverty, close to 20,000 working in the formal or informal sector, and 6,000 children abandoned, on the streets, or living in special institutions.

voluntary contributions of individual members. The Partners Wisconsin/Nicaragua (Partners) branch is not, and nor does it claim to be, either a development organization or private voluntary organization with professional, salaried staff, such as CARE or World Vision. It is essentially a charitable, people-to-people organization, dependent on the volunteerism of its members. As such it can and does provide an invaluable service, which is complementary to the assistance provided by other development organizations, or to the funding provided by aid agencies.

The fact that Partners is a voluntary people-to-people organization is both its strength and its weakness. Its strength lies in its ability to provide assistance in a range of areas in a flexible manner, unencumbered by bureaucratic and administrative structures, and to continue such assistance over a period of time. Its weakness is that assistance can at times be provided on a somewhat ad hoc basis, without systematic follow through or analytic assessment of impact.

Partners has long provided assistance to Nicaragua through the voluntary efforts of both its Wisconsin and Nicaraguan members. Activities have been determined primarily by matching identified needs with the ability of members to leverage financial resources or commodities, or to provide specialized technical assistance. Over the years, several Nicaraguan professionals have received specialized training, physical conditions of schools, hospitals and health centers have been upgraded, medical attention has been provided, and a range of skills and technology transferred.

For most of its existence the Nicaragua branch operated on a purely voluntary basis, without either an established office and administrative structure or salaried staff. In order to administer the orphans project, it needed to establish an office, warehouse facility, and more formal administrative and communications systems, as well as retain salaried staff. While this may have been useful in terms of institution building for the organization, it has caused problems of raised expectations of additional funding for projects which the organization has neither the skills nor experience to administer.

## ii. Project Objectives

The design of the project, its objectives, and manner of implementation appear to have been conditioned by the existence of the CASA legislation, the use of the word "orphans", and the nature of the implementing organization, Partners. Approval of the proposed project without extensive modification was probably due to the extraordinary circumstances which surrounded it and the lack of available accurate data. These issues should be considered when assessing both the validity of the stated objectives and Partners' success in meeting them.

Partners stated that the project purpose was "to provide immediate attention to the medical, psychological and nutritional needs of approximately 15,000 Nicaraguan orphans and to strengthen the institutions responsible for providing for their ongoing care". It proposed to

achieve this by a) providing limited training for physicians, nurses, mental health professionals, and orphanage staff members; and b) supplying orphanages with a range of commodities, including medicines, vaccines, vitamins and milk, as well as tools, seeds, recreational and educational materials. In the proposal, this was termed "institution building". The function of the project coordinating office in Nicaragua was to organize seminars, visits, and distribution of commodities to implementing organizations. Given Partners' experience and organizational structure, this was probably the only way that such an ambitious program could be implemented outside of the governmental health and social welfare system.

From the perspective of a charitable, voluntary organization, the project purpose and proposed means of meeting such purpose are both reasonable and laudable. From the perspective of a development funding agency, the stated project purpose is extraordinarily broad, no objective means of assessing impact were defined and the provision of commodities does not equate to institution building in the normally accepted use of the term.<sup>5</sup>

### iii. Project Implementation

Partners implemented the project more or less as initially described in the project description, focussing on medical attention, limited training in a variety of fields related to child care, and provision of commodities to a number of institutions.<sup>6</sup> Early in project implementation, problems with both the definition of "orphans" and the original estimated target population of children became apparent. Though Partners managed to establish a network of 28 private, usually church-related institutions providing care for children, the total numbers of children in such institutions fell short of the originally estimated number, in part because many children orphaned or otherwise adversely affected by the war probably remained either in the care of relatives or otherwise outside of institutions. Furthermore, it was almost impossible to determine which children were orphans in the sense of being parentless, and which were directly "war orphans". Many children in institutions had been abandoned, or had only one parent, usually a mother, who lacked the means to provide for them. They were in institutions as these provided at least minimal shelter, and often better opportunities than the children would otherwise have been afforded. In many instances, children had other family members, such as grandparents or older siblings, who could have provided care had economic circumstances permitted.

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<sup>5</sup> Institution building is generally taken to mean enhancing the capacity of an institution to implement activities. Thus, while upgrading of infrastructure or provision of commodities can be a part of such institution building, professional training and development of administrative and managerial capacity are also essential elements.

<sup>6</sup> The term "institution" is used to cover all private residential centers for children, regardless of size or structure.

In order to reach the target number, Partners provided commodities to other centers providing assistance to children, the government-run child development centers. It was the intent that commodities provided to such centers would be used only to assist orphans, although once again definitional issues come into play.<sup>7</sup> It is also problematic to provide assistance to one group in a situation in which the entire cohort is in need, as is likely to have been the case in the centers.

Throughout the project, Partners reported activities undertaken, problems encountered, and commodities delivered. In terms of commodity distribution, Partners' reports indicated type and quantity delivered to each institution. For the most part, commodities consisted of foodstuffs, beds and bedding, clothing, school supplies, and medicines. Recreational equipment was also supplied. The training provided was generally of a short-term nature, consisting mainly of seminars on a variety of topics related to children's health, nutritional, psychological, and emotional needs, and provision of information and teaching materials. A number of Nicaraguan professionals also received more intensive training in the United States. There does not appear to have been a systematic training plan, and thus there was little in the way of follow-up, or on-going training which could have provided the basis for greater institutional development. In the absence of such a plan, the training program touched on a wide range of issues which affected children, rather than focussing on specific issues related to civil strife and its affect on children. The same broad approach was applied to the provision of health care, which was taken to mean almost anything which related to the health and nutritional status of children. Recognizing the limitations of this type of assistance, Partners tried to lay the basis for longer-term impact by providing seeds and tools for the institutions, developing skills and vocational training programs, and stimulating the local economy through income generating schemes. In this it was defeated by the terms of the grant, which did not permit either vocational development or development of local industries.

The range of problems encountered by childcare institutions in Nicaragua parallels the range of institutions which exist.<sup>8</sup> In general problems of recurrent costs, maintenance, and continued provision of supplies, are central to them all. Several have attempted to engage in

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<sup>7</sup> Given the large number of female headed households and numbers of households living in conditions of extreme poverty, it is unlikely that only orphans could be assisted in these centers which cater for a wide range of children.

<sup>8</sup> Private church or religious social welfare institutions are a feature of Nicaraguan society. They provide a range of social services, ranging from health and education to childcare or care of the elderly. Several hospitals and clinics are also run by church organizations. Many work in conjunction with the government, so that, for example, salaries of nurses, doctors and teachers are paid by the government, but the actual facility and most of the equipment and supplies are provided by the organization. Use of nuns frequently augments the staff of such institutions, so that relatively few salaried staff are required.

income generating or income saving projects, and most work with government departments to provide joint services. Many are dependent on church contributions, or contributions from religious or other charitable organizations abroad. The most financially secure are well equipped and possibly fall into the trap of providing too closeted an environment for the children in their care, thus cutting them off from the surrounding communities. The poorest are extremely basic and unable to offer much in addition to minimal shelter and sustenance.<sup>9</sup> All of the organizations assist a variety of children, not just war orphans. Many children are victims of abuse, have been abandoned, or are unable to remain with their families because of poverty, others had been street children prior to coming to the centers. Few, if any, of the organizations are able to offer specialized care, and children with a variety of needs are grouped together.

The program was undoubtedly beneficial in the short-term, but was perhaps too diffuse to realize a wider impact, and would have benefited from being more specifically targeted, both in terms of numbers and range of activities undertaken. Although some assistance was provided to institutions, it was essentially short-term and not sustainable. Partners had assumed that it would be sufficient to provide assistance to institutions in the immediate term, following which they would either be able to find additional sources of funding, or become self-financing. It is unclear on what basis this assumption was made, as few of the institutions had the capacity to generate income, and the economic situation was such that they were unlikely to find much support from either governmental or non-governmental sources. Indeed, this has been the case, and not only are institutions unable to find alternative sources of assistance to continue provision of commodities now that the project is over, but in many cases are increasingly unable to meet their operating costs. In this sense the project may have been actually harmful, in that it provided commodities in the short term which were then abruptly cut off when funding ran out. It may also have raised expectations of continuing assistance on the behalf of institutions, while doing nothing to help them build an income-generating base to assist meet recurrent costs.

Although the project was approved in AID/Washington and was centrally-funded, day-to-day management was assumed by USAID/Nicaragua once the Mission was established. In many ways this added to the problems, as the Mission felt that it had inherited responsibility for a project without having been involved in the decision to fund it.<sup>10</sup> By the time the USAID

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<sup>9</sup> In Nicaragua, the most glaring difference can be seen between the SOS Children's Villages, and the centers run by the Padre Fabretto organization. While the SOS Children's Villages, though far from luxurious, conform to the worldwide standards set by the organization, the Padre Fabretto centers are extremely poor, very basic, and understaffed.

<sup>10</sup> This was also the case with the projects funded under the CASA program. The Mission felt that it had inherited these projects, and was concerned to administer them to the best of its ability and ensure compliance with the terms of the grants. It was, however, concerned about both the nature and utility of several of the projects, and the lack of impact assessment or

Mission was established and staffed, project implementation had already begun, and, given the short project duration, it would probably have been counterproductive to try to change the fundamental nature of the project or the way it was implemented, even though the project managers had doubts about the utility of the activities.

### C. Analytic Assumptions

Three main analytic assumptions informed the process of review. Firstly, there is a fundamental difference in the way in which people-to-people and charitable organizations function and the way professional development organizations and aid agencies operate. This is not to suggest that either approach is better, but merely to indicate that they serve different, often complementary, purposes. Secondly, it is generally accepted that the best way to meet the needs of children is in a family or community setting. This does not mean that institutions cannot serve a useful purpose, but rather that their inherent problems should be recognized from the outset. Thirdly, children are affected by war and civil strife differently according to their actual situation and experience, and no single paradigm of "war-affected" children can be constructed. There is therefore a need for understanding of the prevailing socio-cultural conditions and problems before assistance can be provided to such children.

#### i. Organizational Differences

An understanding of the differences in both the objectives and operational style of charitable organizations and professional development or aid agencies is essential if one is not to be judged, often unfairly, against the standards of the other. It is also important that the circumstances surrounding funding decisions, and the objectives of the funds used, are clearly understood.

As indicated earlier, Partners is a volunteer, people-to-people organization. By their nature, people-to-people organizations generally do not undertake extensive needs assessments, or analyze projects in terms of their sustainability, or try to measure their impact. In fact, they rarely implement projects as generally defined in development terms, but rather conduct a series of relatively discrete activities, which are not expected to have an impact beyond the immediate. This was the philosophy and approach which Partners brought to the project. Such an approach is both right and proper for a voluntary organization, and the activities conducted and service provided by such organizations contribute tremendously to the well-being of communities.

Partners implemented the project to the best of its ability given the nature of the organization, the project management skills available to it, and the constraints imposed by both the situation within Nicaragua and the terms of the grant. Commodities were delivered,

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sustainability.

training seminars conducted, medical attention provided, and records kept. Partners did not attempt to assess impact beyond the delivery of goods and services, nor were the validity, viability or sustainability of the institutions themselves addressed. However, neither the Partners proposal nor the grant suggested that such issues would be assessed, and they were not raised by A.I.D. during either the proposal review or project implementation.

There are fundamental differences in the way Partners and USAID/Nicaragua perceive the project. The basis for such disparate views lies in the difference between Partners and A.I.D.. A.I.D. is an aid and development funding agency which should be concerned with impact, sustainability, cost-effectiveness and inculcating dependency. The organizations which A.I.D. generally funds, with the exception of indigenous NGOs, tend to be professionally staffed and with expertise in a particular area. Project proposals are usually assessed against pre-defined criteria by a selection committee, which considers issues of cost-effectiveness and sustainability, as well as the technical expertise of the potential implementing organization, and weighs such considerations against need and the potential benefit accruing from each project.

According to these terms, neither the project design nor the method of implementation were appropriate for an A.I.D.-funded development project, hence some of the Mission's concerns. However, the circumstances surrounding the funding of the project, along with those projects funded under CASA, must be borne in mind. The normal development criteria were never applied to these projects, which were funded in response to considerable pressure to provide immediate assistance to civilian victims of civil strife, and both the need and the numbers were probably overestimated. The project is therefore more akin to emergency projects which are not evaluated according to accepted development criteria, and generally do little other than provide commodities and immediate assistance.

#### ii. Assistance to Children

It is now generally accepted that the needs of children, except in extreme cases, are best met within either a family or community, rather than institutional, setting, with specialized assistance being provided by professionals as needed. The family unit need not necessarily be the family of origin, and indeed children often need to be removed from situations of abuse or neglect, but nonetheless the interactive family and community structure is regarded as the most useful for providing children with care and attention. This is especially true in instances in which children have been traumatized and severely affected by their experiences and the where the emphasis is on reaffirming an environment in which they can function as members of a societal group.

The danger of providing assistance to children in such a social setting is that, of course, special needs may be undiscovered, or remain unmet, and that children can be neglected, abused, or deprived of their rights. Working with children in a community setting also requires special programs, training for a wide variety of professionals and community members, and on-going commitment. On the positive side, the provision of assistance can in

itself serve as a tool for community development or conflict resolution, and can strengthen the ability of communities and individuals to develop and act on priorities and participate in the process of development. Obviously, understanding of socio-cultural mores and patterns of behavior, and involvement of communities in the design and implementation of programs, are crucially important.

Institutions can and do provide care and attention to children, and in certain circumstances the care and attention provided is superior to that which could be provided in a non-institutional setting. They also provide specialized care for children with particular needs. However, particularly in poor countries, institutional care is fraught with a number of problems, not the least of which are cost and the level of care provided.

At one extreme, institutions can create a living environment which is removed from the world in which the children must function upon leaving. In some cases this leads to the institutionalization of members, and renders them unable to fully participate in society outside of an institutionalized environment. This can, however, be mitigated if there is regular and ongoing interaction with a larger community, as is usually the case with childcare institutions.

Another disadvantage of institutions, particularly in poor countries, is that they can become magnets, and attract far greater numbers than they have either the physical facilities or resources to care for.<sup>11</sup> It is also hard in such circumstances for children to receive specialized care, or to be protected from abuse by others. In such instances, the centers offer little more than basic shelter and minimal sustenance. It is, however, true that such minimal levels may still be superior to other alternatives available to the children.

Finally, institutions are extremely costly to maintain if adequate staff are to be provided and acceptable standards maintained, especially since they are generally required to provide amenities and a standard of sanitation which frequently is not matched in surrounding communities. Unless institutions have some sort of funding base or on-going financial assistance from government institutions, meeting recurrent costs and maintaining infrastructure is extremely difficult. By definition, child care centers are not income generating, and in poor countries cannot depend on community contributions.

### iii. Children Affected by War and Civil Strife

As children are variously affected by war and civil strife according to the actual situation experienced, it is almost impossible to develop a paradigm of war-affected children. Rather, both the nature of the war and prevailing socio-cultural and political conditions have to be

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<sup>11</sup> This appears to have been the case in many instances in Nicaragua, whereby children were sent to institutions because they afforded better opportunities than could be provided at home. When economic problems forced some centers to reduce numbers, it was found that a good number of children had family members of some sort with whom they could live.

taken into account when assessing needs and developing programs to meet such needs. In some cases, the nature and extent of war and civil strife have caused extreme suffering and resulted in large numbers of civilian deaths and massive displacements of people. In others, the duration of conflict has resulted in entire generations of children growing up in a climate of insecurity and threat of violence. In yet others, the infrastructure has been almost completely destroyed and normal life rendered impossible. In all cases, insecurity, disruption of production, and extraordinarily high levels of military expenditure have affected economies, resulting in high unemployment and escalating poverty.

Children suffer directly from war and civil strife by being displaced, living in combat zones, being injured, losing family members, or being themselves involved in combat. They also suffer indirectly, from the consequences of war. While some children in Nicaragua were obviously directly affected, many more were indirect victims, suffering from the economic consequences or growing up in a one-parent family. Indeed, the numbers of such children are alarmingly high, and present grave problems for the future.<sup>12</sup>

Given the range of potential experiences and their effect on children, it is essential that programs identify a specific target group and address clearly identified problems in order to maximize effectiveness. Some problems are common to all, and all war-affected children have acute needs for a secure, predictable, and stable environment, free from fear. However, other needs are conditioned by particular experience, so that children who have been exposed to extreme brutality require specialized assistance. Generally, once the emergency needs for food, shelter, and immediate medical attention have been met, the most pressing need for children affected by war is for activities which address their socio-psychological needs and prepare them for life in a peaceful society. Attempting to reach too broad a group, too large a number, or to meet a wide variety of needs leads to dissipation of effort. Where possible, for the purposes of sustainability and continuity, community involvement is key.

## Section II

This section discusses specific issues raised in the scope of work, and follows the format of the scope of work. It draws upon the general points discussed in the preceding section.

1. Review the project and its goals to determine project effectiveness
  - A. Were the project objectives appropriate to assist orphans in Nicaragua at that time.

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<sup>12</sup> The potential social problems of a population of which 50 percent is under age 16 and largely un- or minimally educated are enormous, and it is likely that increasing numbers of children will be placed at risk as the economic consequences of such a situation become more manifest.

Would other objectives have been more appropriate?

It would be hard to say that the general objective of providing assistance to orphans was not appropriate. Obviously, meeting the immediate medical, psychological and nutritional needs of orphans, and improving the capacity of institutions to provide care for such children, were both appropriate and necessary. However, as indicated in Section I, the project objectives were so broad that they could only really be met in minimal terms, and no means of measuring their achievement were developed. Additionally, targeting only orphans proved to be problematic, both in that the anticipated numbers did not exist, and also in that the majority of the children in institutions, though undoubtedly in need, were not war orphans.

Whether the objectives were the most suitable to meet the needs of war-affected children at the time in Nicaragua remains a matter of opinion. It can be argued that though undoubtedly necessary, they were not. As indicated earlier, it would have perhaps have been better to have focussed attention on helping to meet the socio-psychological needs of war-affected children, or to have targeted assistance on a specific group, such as displaced children, returning refugees, or children in combat zones. Focussing attention in this way would also appear to be more in conformity with the spirit of the Orphans and Displaced Children's Fund legislation. However, given the complexities and sensitivities involved, it would probably have been unwise for A.I.D. to request that such a program be implemented unless one already existed.

B. Were the objectives met? This must be answered from the perspective of both Partners and A.I.D. If meeting the objectives is measured in terms of accomplishing a set of defined tasks, then the objectives were indeed met, in that commodities were delivered, medical attention provided, and training seminars held. However, a number of substantive issues relating to the nature of the program remain. The purpose, as described, was so broad that it could not really have been achieved in any meaningful manner given the time and resources involved. It is also debatable whether the project outputs, as listed, add up to achieving the purpose. Similarly, it is by no means automatic that provision of the project inputs would result in the anticipated outputs. For example, the grant program description states that "...the project will combat the major causes of child mortality -- diarrhea, malnutrition, and lack of childhood immunizations -- by providing orphanages with adequate amounts of immunizations, and providing basic food staples, such as milk." It requires a considerable leap of faith to accept that limited provision of vaccines and milk to orphanages over a short timeframe would in fact combat the major causes of child mortality in Nicaragua.

Similar problems with definition and assumptions occur throughout the project description, which specifically cites provision of commodities as institution building. Furthermore, there was no baseline against which to measure progress, no criteria for measuring impact were developed, and there appears to have been little concern to evaluate the project beyond assuring that commodities were delivered.

However, A.I.D. both approved the project proposal and executed a grant which embraced the extremely broad project purpose and contained a project description which referenced proposed inputs and outputs and defined institution building as provision of commodities. Partners therefore implemented the program in good faith, and cannot be faulted in terms of ensuring that all commodities purchased were accounted for and distributed without loss.

In summary, therefore, Partners considers that the objectives were more than met, whereas from an A.I.D. perspective they were probably impossible to meet in any real sense.

C. Can a short-term project such as this provide long term improvements in institutions and consequently long-term improvements in the situation of orphans? This specific project was not intended to provide long term improvements. In general, short-term projects can build the basis for long-term improvements, but only if they are designed carefully, and include capacity building and institutional development. Had the project been designed to do different things, it could have substantially improved the basis for long-term care. Given the design of the project, it could not, except in so far as that the training, if applied, will increase the capacity of Nicaraguan professionals to provide assistance to children. As previously stated, long-term improvements in the situation of orphans could perhaps better have been achieved by a different type of program, which focussed either on special needs, or on enhancing the ability of communities to make the transition to peace and provide an environment of stability and security for children.

D. Is a 24% administrative cost reasonable? The Partners' negotiated provisional overhead cost rate of 19% was in the same range as other PVOs funded under the CASA program. The 24% administrative cost is obtained by adding the overhead rate and management costs. While this makes the total administrative cost somewhat higher than that of the others, it is still not unreasonable for a small organization, particularly one which lacks the institutional base of larger PVOs such as CARE or World Vision. Additionally, the strain which implementing a grant such as this placed on Partners should be borne in mind. Office space and warehousing facilities had to be rented, and additional staff hired and trained to ensure adequate record keeping and compliance with A.I.D. regulations. It should also be noted that the final contribution of Partners, through volunteer effort and leverage of resources, was estimated at a ratio of 3:1 to grant funds.

2. Review the Unique approach of partners, involving linkages with a state considering special long-term benefits for the children and the institutions. Is the approach an appropriate one for use under this fund?

Although the linkages and potential for long-term involvement offered by the Partners approach are useful, the approach also has its shortcomings. As indicated earlier, people-to-people organizations are essentially dependent on the skills and resources of their members. Thus, for an organization to effectively implement projects, it must be able to draw upon appropriate skills and resources. While it may well be the case that certain twinning programs can do this, it is by no means automatic. The most effective twinning programs

are either those which match needs and resources, or those which involve specific institutional development and which can draw upon specialized organizational resources in the partner city or state. Partners generally operates by matching needs and resources, but also establishes institutional linkages, such as, for example, with the University of Wisconsin. Examples of specific institutional development are municipal development programs which offer the opportunity for local government entities in one country to benefit from training and technical assistance of counterpart structures in another, or university twinning programs which focus on particular areas.

However, for twinning programs to be effective, they must build on specific strengths and identified expertise. For this reason, university-to-university programs are usually particularly successful. Twinning programs are least effective when they are used merely as vehicles to implement projects which do not exploit their particular advantage. This type of approach, therefore, is only a useful mechanism for the Orphans and Displaced Children's Fund if organizations which have access to appropriate individuals or institutions, or which can draw upon specific skills and resources, are used. Without such access, use of people-to-people organizations or twinning programs is unlikely to yield positive results.

Partners-type organizations with specific expertise of working with children with special needs would obviously be ideally suited to implement projects financed by the fund. However, it is not recommended that either such organizations be created, or that people-to-people organizations without specific expertise be used. It is also probably generally more advisable to fund existing projects rather than activities which have been specially designed to access Orphans and Displaced Children's Fund resources.

3. Given the guidelines which have been established for the Orphans and Displaced Children's Fund, non-emergency assistance for orphans, can this fund effectively provide long-term sustainable assistance to these children immediately following civil strife or war.

While the Orphans and Displaced Children's fund, because of its nature, cannot be used to provide on-going long-term assistance to children affected by civil strife or war, it would appear that it can effectively be used to for activities which provide the basis for longer-term, potentially sustainable, assistance. However, in this case, it must be used for clearly defined purposes which meet specific needs of children, and funded activities must be based on a clear understanding of both the socio-political context and the constraints which exist. If the fund is used to provide assistance on an ad hoc basis, or is used to simply fund a wide range of activities involving children in war situations, its potential will be considerably reduced.

The fund is useful in that, provided it can be used to meet the needs of war-affected, as opposed to war-orphaned, children, it affords the opportunity to finance a variety of activities to meet needs which would otherwise be unmet. It should not, however, be used to provide assistance which could better be provided through other mechanisms, such as specialized medical attention for physically disabled children, or for activities which undermine or

conflict with more general efforts to improve provision of health care and educational opportunities for children. Specifically, care should be taken to ensure that the fund is not used to finance activities which have the potential to be counterproductive by favoring a subset of the population<sup>13</sup>, or for activities which are really provision of emergency assistance. Similarly, it should not be used for activities which encourage the adoption of behavior which can in the long-term be counter-productive.<sup>14</sup>

It is particularly important that funded activities be based on clear analysis of the socio-political situation and an understanding of what is most appropriate in such circumstances. In many societies, children are not placed in institutions when they are orphaned, but are taken care of within extended family or community groups. In others, children are more likely to be abandoned and placed at risk in urban settings. Thus, in some instances it could be that provision of assistance to existing institutions has the most immediate impact, whereas in others programs involving communities would be more appropriate. The danger of funding programs without an adequate understanding of the circumstances is that while they may be based on good intentions, they may be ultimately inappropriate, or even ill-advised. Ideally, a needs assessment should be undertaken prior to funding programs, and funded programs should complement other activities meeting similar needs. Proposed activities should also be assessed in terms of their capacity to meet clearly defined goals, and should have a measurable impact.<sup>15</sup>

Given the complexities of each situation and the myriad needs of war-affected children, it is suggested that the fund could best be used to assist in the socio-psychological rehabilitation of such children, and by assisting communities to better provide a stable environment for them. The focus of such programs would necessarily be different depending on the situation, and programs should be sufficiently flexible and dynamic to respond to changing situations. In some cases, more direct interventions will be necessary, such as when children have themselves been involved in combat, or when they have grown up in an atmosphere of fear and threat of violence. In others, family reunification will be the primary intervention. In yet others, assistance can be provided through programs which deal with the secondary

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<sup>13</sup> The same problems of providing assistance to refugees or demobilized ex-combatants apply to war-affected children, in that once immediate special needs have been met, programs should also benefit surrounding communities. It is also more useful if special groups are integrated with the surrounding population, and their health, education, and skills training needs met as part of existing, on-going programs which are available to all.

<sup>14</sup> For example, on-going direct assistance to institutions or families which elect to care for orphaned children can exacerbate the magnet effect of institutions, or encourage families to take in children in order to benefit from the assistance.

<sup>15</sup> While objectively verifiable, quantifiable indicators are difficult to establish for such programs, it is possible to develop criteria for assessment beyond mere delivery of commodities or numbers of children reached.

consequences of prolonged war and civil strife, or with street children, or abandoned or abused children. In general, children's needs are best met in the community, and programs which enhance the capacity of communities and service providers to address the needs of children and to rebuild social structures following war will have a cumulative impact. Working with social workers and community groups will also enhance the long term viability of success. Additionally, there is a need in many instances, to "de-professionalize" the work. This is not to say that untrained people should become psychologists or deal with complex behavioral problems, but rather that community worker and teachers, as well as volunteers, be trained to work with children, and refer them to professionals when specific problems are identified. In many instances, the types of community development required in reconstructing societies is the best way to help children recover from the experience of war by creating an environment in which community members work together to meet self-defined needs.

The fund should not be used for extensive supply of commodities, except in cases in which the provision of commodities is an integral component of other assistance, such as a starter kit when families are reunified, or when limited materials and equipment are needed to facilitate the running of a program.