

A.I.D. EVALUATION SUMMARY

PD-ABP-717

IDENTIFICATION DATA

A. Reporting A.I.D. Unit: <b>USAID/NICARAGUA</b>  Evaluation Number: 97/2	B. Was Evaluation Scheduled in Current FY Annual Evaluation Plan? Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Slipped <input type="checkbox"/> Ad Hoc <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluation Plan Submission Date:	C. Evaluation Timing  Interim <input type="checkbox"/> Final <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ex Post <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>
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D. Activity or Activities Evaluated (List the following information for project(s) or program(s); if not applicable list title and date of the evaluation report.)

Project No.	Project/Program Title	First PROAG or Equivalent (FY)	Most Recent PACD (mo/yr)	Planned LOP Cost (000)	Amount Obligated to date (000)
524-0316	<b>USAID's Support for the 1996 Nicaraguan Elections                      through a Cooperative Agreement with the Inter-                      American Institute of Human Rights/Center for                      Election Assistance and Promotion (IIDH/CAPEL)</b>	12/95	02/97	3,500	3,500

ACTIONS \*

E. The Mission has agreed on the following:  - Copies of the final report of the "Evaluation of USAID's Support for the 1996 Nicaraguan Elections through a Cooperative Agreement with the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights/Center for Election Assistance and Promotion (IIDH/CAPEL)," will be sent to the Nicaraguan Supreme Electoral Council, the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights/Center for Election Assistance and Promotion (IIDH/CAPEL), and the Center for Development Information and Evaluation (USAID/CDIE).		
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APPROVALS

F. Date of Mission Review of Evaluation: June, 1997				
G. Approvals of Evaluation Summary and Action Decisions:				
	Project Officer or Program Officer	Evaluation Officer	Representative of Borrower/Grantee	Mission Director
Name (Typed)	Alexandria Panehal	Paul Greenough		George Carner
Signature	<i>A. Panehal</i>	<i>HP Paul Greenough</i>		<i>A. Panehal for</i>
Date	10/27/97	10/23/97		10/27/97

## H. EVALUATION ABSTRACT

### Background

The Elections Assistance Component of USAID's Strengthening Democratic Institutions Project, which included the CAPEL Cooperative Agreement, was undertaken in an atmosphere of heightened political tension, which emanated both from the international community and the national scene. The focus of the CAPEL project was primarily to support CSE preparations for the October 1996 elections and a short period thereafter to allow for preparation of lessons learned and recommendations as to how the institution might continue efforts to improve its operations and the electoral process in general. The overall goals of the USAID-IIDH/CAPEL Cooperative Agreement were to: 1) provide technical assistance and commodities to the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE), together with the training necessary to produce a voter registration database and maintenance of the system; 2) train party poll watchers and purchase material for training CSE election day workers; 3) provide logistical, organizational, financial, and administrative support to the CSE and the Departmental Electoral Councils (CEDs); 4) provide technical and financial assistance to the CSE to produce and print both a preliminary and final list of voter registry; and 5) assist the CSE in developing and implementing civic and voter education campaigns.

The objective of the evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of technical assistance and commodities provided by the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights/Center for Election Assistance and Promotion (IIDH/CAPEL) in support of the Nicaragua 1996 election. The evaluation, carried out by Management Systems International, was based on: a review of project documentation; site visits; and interviews with persons involved in the design, monitoring, implementation, and evaluation of the project.

### Findings and Conclusions

- An important overall finding is that, given the unexpected change of CSE leadership early in this project, and the absence of a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding between the two parties, all project activities were negatively affected by shifting expectations and confusing demands - all this within a context of constant political pressure. Nevertheless, these deficiencies were largely overcome and the elections - while flawed and initially contested by the Sandinista Front - were judged by national and international observers to have been free and fair. Most importantly, the Nicaraguan population has accepted the results.
- Broadly speaking, IIDH/CAPEL advisors did provide the technical assistance, commodities and training which enabled the CSE to produce a partial voter list, the *ad-hoc* registry card, and the supplementary voting document.
- The technical assistance and commodities provided to the CSE were effective in improving the process for developing the voter registry. However, because of constant interruptions due to emergencies, the ultimate goal of a complete country-wide voter list was not completed in a timely manner.
- At the request of the CSE, IIDH/CAPEL assistance in training was limited. IIDH/CAPEL did not participate directly in the National Workshops held for the Training of Political Party Poll Watchers, however, the assistance provided in the design and production of training materials was instrumental in the workshops.
- The technical assistance and commodities were instrumental in the successful conduct of the elections. While only a part of technical advice provided by IIDH/CAPEL was accepted by the CSE, the principal objectives of the project were achieved.
- Through IIDH/CAPEL, the project was to assist the CSE in the design and implementation of a civic and voter education campaign. The main purpose of the campaign was "to increase the public's general understanding of the electoral process and the rights and responsibilities of governmental entities, political parties and citizens in a democratic system." The basic objective was "to achieve a) a high degree of voter registration; b) a high voter turnout on election day; and, c) a low rate of annulled votes." This objective was fully realized, and the results of the election were accepted by the Nicaraguan people and by the international community.
- The weaknesses and deficiencies of the electoral process encountered throughout the life of the project in no way reflect negatively on the professionals of IIDH/CAPEL, who continued to be responsible for the implementation of this project when the evaluation team departed Nicaragua. As confirmed by interviews with counterparts within the CSE, the CAPEL staff involved in the administration and provision of technical assistance contributed greatly to the success of the electoral process.

## COSTS

### I. Evaluation Costs

Name	1. Evaluation Team Affiliation	Contract Number OR TDY Person Days	Contract Cost OR TDY Cost (U.S. \$)	Source of Funds
Robert Murphy Gabriel Bonilla José Miguel Goddard		D.O. No. 800  AEP-5468-I-00- 6006-00	\$80,763.21	Project
2. Mission/Office Professional Staff Person-Days (estimate): N/A		3. Borrower/Grantee Professional Staff Person-Days (Estimate): N/A		

## SUMMARY

J. Summary of Evaluation Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations (Try not to exceed three (3) pages)

Address the following items:

- Purpose of Evaluation and methodology used
- Purpose of activity(ies) evaluated
- Findings and conclusions (relate to questions)
- Principal Recommendations
- Lessons Learned

Mission or Office:

USAID/Nicaragua

Date This Summary Prepared:

July 17, 1997

Title and Date of Full Evaluation Report:

Evaluation of USAID's Support for the 1996 Nicaraguan Elections through a Cooperative Agreement with the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights/Center for Election Assistance and Promotion (IIDH/CAPEL) - 05/97

Prior to the elections of February 1990, Nicaragua had suffered more than a half century of political and social turmoil. That period, known as the Somoza years, ended with a revolution which was followed by 10 years of rule by the Sandinista Front, the leftist opposition movement. That decade was marked by a bloody civil war, during which time the economy was devastated and hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans fled the country. The 1990 electoral process brought together a broad coalition of anti-Sandinista parties and resulted in the first freely-elected democratic government led by President Violeta Chamorro.

In anticipation of the October 1996 elections, on December 27, 1995, USAID/Nicaragua entered into a \$3.5 million Cooperative Agreement with the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights/Center for Election Assistance and Promotion (IIDH/CAPEL). This represented the Elections Assistance project under the Mission's Strengthening Democratic Institutions activity. By then, Nicaragua had experienced more than five years of civilian government, marked by the rebirth of democratic principles and improved citizen participation at all levels. That period also resulted in a rise of popular expectations with regards to the government's ability to provide for the citizenry.

The 1996 vote covered elections at six different levels --from the President to the country majors, members of Congress, Departmental legislatures, and members of the Central American Parliament. In all, some 34,000 candidates competed for nearly 2,000 offices. The challenge confronting the official entity responsible for the process, the *Consejo Supremo Electoral* (CSE) was to demonstrate its ability to organize fair elections while maintaining and demonstrating political neutrality and independence.

To help accomplish this, the overall goals of the USAID-IIDH/CAPEL Cooperative Agreement were to: 1) provide technical assistance and commodities to the CSE, together with the training necessary to produce a voter registration database and maintain the system; 2) train party poll watchers and purchase material for training CSE election day workers; 3) provide logistical, organizational, financial, and administrative support to the CSE and the Departmental Electoral Councils (CEDs); 4) provide technical and financial assistance to the CSE to produce and print both a preliminary and final list of voter registry; and 5) assist the CSE in developing and implementing civic and voter education campaigns. Key overall indicators of success included high voter turnout, declaration of the elections as free and fair by international and domestic observers, and the acceptance of election results by the Nicaraguan public.

### **FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Given the country's political history, the entire process was surrounded by conflict and pressure emanating from both national and international sources. Responding to the unforeseen developments that arose continually as a result of those pressures required constant attention and additional effort by all - USAID/N, the CSE and IIDH/CAPEL. This, in turn, distracted from the important task of preparing for the elections and frequently delayed CSE administrative decisions, necessitating changes in scheduled project activities. In addition, administrative and technical deficiencies within the CSE, coupled with the change of leadership, significantly weakened the organization's capacity for efficient and effective management of the process. The change at the top of the CSE also resulted in altered demands and expectations as to exactly what was to be provided by IIDH/CAPEL.

Against this backdrop, and despite the delayed initiation of project activities, the general opinion of those interviewed for this evaluation was that, without the support provided to the CSE by USAID/N through IIDH/CAPEL, the electoral process would have been severely deficient. Indeed, with the hindsight that comes in the aftermath of a very complicated process, weaknesses and deficiencies were encountered. However, the project successfully dealt with the many emergencies that arose, and IIDH/CAPEL was able to carry out the majority of the tasks specified in the agreement.

**A. Computer System:** The CSE received timely technical assistance, hardware and training to produce voter identity documents and a partial voter list. The CSE is now equipped with sufficient hardware, software and trained personnel to continue the process of establishing a national voter registration system. The procurement of computer equipment was delayed due to the lack of timely authorization by the CSE and IIDH/CAPEL's lack of familiarity with USAID procurement regulations. In addition, a prior assessment was not carried out to determine and prioritize CSE's procurement needs, and many of the initial procurements responded to perceived needs. The many deficiencies confronting IIDH/CAPEL during the initial phases of the project included a lack of timely administrative decisions by the CSE and technical weaknesses with its personnel. Once the computers were installed, several problems were encountered, which were not corrected. At present, three databases exist with many overlapping and duplicative entries, there is no single access key to enable cross-checking of data, nor has the system been decentralized. Although it proved impossible to develop a permanent voter registry for all citizens, 1,094,000 citizens are now registered - nearly reaching the 1.1 million goal that had been set.

**B. Padrón Electoral:** The technical assistance and commodities provided to the CSE were effective in improving the process for developing the voter registry, however, the goal of achieving a permanent voter list was not met due to insufficient time to complete the task. This was related to problems linked to the interpretation of the Article 23 of the Electoral Law (amended in 1996), and the consequent division of voting districts along with the re-distribution of polling places (JRVs - one for every 400 voters), leading to a huge mapping effort, delays in the printing of the new voter lists and general confusion on the part of the voters. Also, 419,000 changes in the existing lists were required in keeping with new JRV locations. An ad-hoc process was created for 26 politically-sensitive municipalities, and "supplementary" cards were issued to half the voters who did not get cédulas.

**C. Training and Support Materials:** IIDH/CAPEL did not participate directly in the CSE's National Workshops. However, the assistance provided in the design and production of training materials used in those workshops - especially the "Guide for JRV Members" - was instrumental in ensuring maximum voter participation on election day. Again, the lack of a clear formal agreement led to different expectations by the two parties. While the CSE manifested little interest in IIDH/CAPEL assistance with poll watcher training, the Cooperative Agreement included a line item of nearly \$1 million for this purpose which was later re-allocated. IIDH/CAPEL participation in the planning of training for party workers would have aided in the resolution of many of the problems that arose during the registration process and on election day. The CSE's decision not to take advantage of CAPEL's technical assistance, according to a number of interviewees, was one of the reasons party workers were ill-informed on election day monitoring responsibilities. Another principal reason was last minute substitutions of *fiscales*, which resulted in many *fiscales* working in the JRVs on election day who had received no pre-election day training.

**D. National and Local Electoral Organization:** IIDH/CAPEL technical assistance and commodities were instrumental in the successful conduct of the elections. The project's objectives, including a. 75% registration rate; b. 60% voter turn-out; and c. less than 5% ratio of annulled votes, were exceeded. CSE managers and staff reported that IIDH/CAPEL assistance was instrumental in achieving these results. Although the implementation of election day simulation exercises and the technical improvements proposed by CAPEL would have been useful in avoiding or overcoming many of the difficulties encountered in organizing the electoral process, the CSE was unable or unwilling to conduct simulations as they were dealing with other crises.

**E. Civic Education Campaign:** The basic goal of this component (same as the objectives above) was fully realized, and election results were accepted by the majority of Nicaraguan people and by the international community. However, the confused/complex TV and radio messages produced by the

CSE (which were revised and combined versions of the individual messages proposed by IIDH/CAPEL) contributed to the climate of uncertainty and problems surrounding these elections. If CAPEL had not assumed a prominent role in this component, these activities would most likely not have been carried out. Considerable cost savings could have been made if a publicity agency had been given responsibility for the design, production and implementation of all components of the campaign. This was proposed initially by IIDH/CAPEL, but not agreed to by the USAID/N Contracts Office.

**F. Grant Management:** While the program purpose and objectives were generally achieved, the lack of clarity in the Cooperative Agreement and the other factors discussed in this report limited the ability of CAPEL advisors to implement all tasks successfully.

#### **LESSONS LEARNED/RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Given the above, the evaluator offered five general recommendations and three specific suggestions addressed to IIDH/CAPEL. The former, which are in reality "lessons learned" from this activity, call for:

- 1) clarification of Cooperative Agreements;
- 2) coordination with other donors;
- 3) increased involvement of civil society and the private sector;
- 4) institutionalized project implementation and follow-up; and,
- 5) evaluation procedures.

Specific recommendations suggest that IIDH/CAPEL:

- 1) not accept responsibility for tasks for which it does not have proven expertise (i.e. procurement);
- 2) establish reciprocal/collaborative relations with other cooperators, and;
- 3) assure that training and technical assistance be designed to ensure transfer of information, management, and election administration areas, particularly the logistics branch of the CSE, thus decreasing dependency on external resources.

## ATTACHMENTS

K. Attachments (List attachments submitted with this Evaluation Summary; always attach a copy of the full report.)

The full evaluation report is attached: *Evaluation of USAID's Support for the 1996 Nicaraguan Elections through a Cooperative Agreement with the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights/Center for Election Assistance and Promotion (IIDH/CAPEL)*

## COMMENTS

L. Comments by Mission and Borrower/Grantee on Full Report

The Mission appreciates the effort of the evaluation team. It confirmed many of the concerns that the Mission previously held. As a result of the evaluation, IIDH/CAPEL will improve management and procurement practices. Recommendations made by the evaluation team will also be the basis for restructuring USAID's election support assistance to the Consejo Supremo Electoral.

Nevertheless, USAID noted that the evaluation team did not appear to work well together as a team. The team leader did not appear to have a full understanding of the findings when he delivered the final briefing to the Mission.

The first report lacked coherence because the team did not properly organize their findings. Nor did the team deliver either the original report or the translation in a timely fashion. The extra effort provided by the home office to refine the evaluation resulted in a useful report that IIDH/CAPEL and USAID have used to restructure their election support programs.