

HEALTH RESEARCH PROFILE

NICARAGUA

BACKGROUND

Nicaragua is ranked 127 in the Human Development Index and 106 in the index of development related to gender. Unemployment was 17% in 1996 and poverty is close to 40%. The highest ranked 20% of the population concentrate 17 times more income than the lowest 20%.

Health research funding in Nicaragua arises mainly from international co-operation agencies. National funding is scarce and hidden inside of the budget of hospitals and Universities. This profile contains data available from an expert review of research projects in the area of health developed in the period 1996-1998.

I. RESEARCH ON HEALTH INEQUITIES

A review of the last three years of available information on 59 health research studies started between 1996 and 1998 shows that 10 out of the 59 address equity issues explicitly or implicitly. These studies correspond to the areas of public health, health economics and health services research. Gender issues are addressed by 11 projects out of the same 59.

II. RESEARCH FINDINGS AS A BASIS FOR CHANGES IN HEALTH POLICIES

During the period 1996-98, the following examples of research projects linked to health policies can be mentioned:

- Financial sustainability, economic efficiency, efficacy and equity of the Nicaraguan Health system. This project, funded by the Central Bank of Nicaragua, provides valuable information for decision making in health reform issues at the national level. The study was developed by an independent investigator in 1996.
- Study of the labour market in the health sector. Funded by the MOH under the agreement with the World Bank, the study, implemented by an independent research centre (FUNSALUD), provides with valuable information for the Human Resource Policies at the MOH.
- Applying the sisterhood method for estimating maternal mortality to a health facility-based sample: a comparison with results from a household-based sample. Funded and developed by the Centers for Disease Control of the U.S.A. The study provides a method for estimations of Maternal Mortality that can be useful for policies on the area.

Expert judgement found 22 out of the 59 projects reviewed in the period that can be linked to a decision in different areas and levels of policy-making.

III. HEALTH RESEARCH MANAGEMENT

There is no formal or central management of health research in the country. During the period of analysis, the Ministry of Health (MOH), funded 8 projects for the evaluation of important areas of health damage (i.e. Health damages due to Hurricane Mitch); evaluation of health interventions (i.e. Immunization Coverage in the Municipalities of the country); and better knowledge of health resources (i.e. Study of the Labor Market in the Health Sector). Only one of these projects was funded without the assistance of PAHO or the World Bank.

The rest of the projects reviewed were funded by international institutions. The MOH authorize each of these projects when they are implemented at the facilities of the Public Health System.

IV. THE RESEARCH AGENDA

There is no national research agenda in Nicaragua but the review of the 59 projects developed during the period of analysis shows an important link between these efforts and national health priorities as judged externally. This last finding can be explained by the concordance between interests of funding agencies and the reality of a country in the lower level of human development. An evaluation of this relationship in accordance to explicit research priorities of the country is not available.

V. NATIONAL RESEARCH POLICY

There is no information about explicit research policies in the country

VI. RESOURCES FOR HEALTH RESEARCH

There is no data available in regard t the amount of resources for research in Nicaragua during the period of analysis. Table 1 shows de distribution of projects in accordance to the area of health research and funding source.

TABLE 1
HEALTH RESEARCH PROJECTS
Nicaragua 1996-98

Research area	Funding source						N° of projects
	Public Hospital	University	Internat'l coop.	Central* Gov.	W.B.	NGO	
Biomedical	2	4	6	1			13
Health economics				1	1		2
Public Health	1	9	12	5	1	2	30
Health services		2	5	7			14
Total	3	15	23	14	2	2	59

* Mainly MOH

VII. QUALITY ASSURANCE OF RESEARCH

Quality of research in Nicaragua can only be judged in terms of the number of publications originated from the research projects. Table 2 show the results of the review in terms of published papers corresponding to the 59 projects included in the review.

Table 2
Publications originated from health research projects
Nicaragua, 1996-1998

Area of research	N° of projects	Publications		Total N° of Publications
		Internat'l	National*	
Biomedical	13	13		13
Health economics	2		2	2
Public health	30	19	8	27
Health services	14	5	8	13

* Reports of the institutions

It is worth mentioning the important number of international publications arising from biomedical research. Health services research is the area with the lowest proportion of scientific papers.

VIII. STATUS OF RESEARCHERS

No data on evidence available to judge.

IX. POLICY EFFORTS IN REGARD TO HEALTH PRIORITIES

As it was previously mentioned, even tough there is not an implicit agenda, it is important to mention the coherence between health priorities as judged by expert opinion and the kind of health research developed in the country.

X. POLICY EFFORTS IN REGARD TO FUNDING OF ESSENTIAL HEALTH RESEARCH

There is no fund for research addressing health priorities. The MOH funds research that seems in accordance with policy needs.