

Appeal for material support, teaching personnel and a Nicaragua - Britain Statistics link.

Leon, Nicaragua Libre, February 20th, 1986

"Nicaragua must survive", could be the summary of every Nicaraguan programme in 1986, whether social, economic or political.

I have spent four weeks on a national agricultural survey aimed at monitoring production of the staple diet products, corn and beans. Unable to develop new agricultural projects because of the drain on investment involved in defence against Pentagon-financed military attacks, Nicaragua is aiming at a subsistence economy, relying on traditional small-scale production by anyone willing to farm the land. The survey is intended to help plan imports and exports of basic foods, but is equally affected by the military aggression: in 1985 three of its field vehicles were destroyed by contras (there are no funds to replace them); technical knowledge is sparse, to say the least; facilities for analysis suffer from decades of under-development and the difficulty of repairing computers during a trade embargo from the US.

The same problems occur, on other surveys, in the statistical department of every ministry and in the few research institutions in Nicaragua. The 1982 national demographic census had to be cancelled due to lack of resources. During discussions with Nicaraguans involved in data collection, data analysis and in the training of statisticians, they have welcomed the idea of support from statisticians abroad in areas such as:

- collection of books and journals (new or secondhand) for use by teachers in the newly-started University Statistics degree (see below). English is acceptable although any Spanish-language texts would be most welcome.
- collection of solar calculators (batteries have to be imported and are scarce) for use in statistics teaching and in research institutions.
- placement and funding of Nicaraguan statistics graduates for higher degree training in Britain.
- volunteer statisticians to fill needs in Nicaragua. This would be above all training statistics teachers or research workers.

This last need, volunteer statisticians, could initially take various forms, for examples:

- (a) Formal discussions of problems encountered in a particular field of statistical work, e.g. financial statistics, health service evaluation, industrial statistics, perhaps as a preliminary to an informal discussion

and consultancy on problems encountered by Nicaraguan research workers in the field chosen.

- (b) Formal courses for university statistics lecturers.
- (c) Very basic interpretation of statistics training for research institutions. Similarly, use of simple statistical computer packages.
- (d) Support on a particular project identified by a Nicaraguan institution.

Time in Nicaragua would be from two weeks upwards. Some Spanish would be essential, fluency an advantage but not a pre-requisite. Payment unlikely or minimal. Organisation of volunteers could be via 'Tecnica', an existing US-based programme of mainly computer scientists, which has an office in Managua.

#### Statistics in Nicaragua

(1) Government Ministries, plus INEC: Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos. Has the role of over-seeing all statistical production in Nicaragua, but suffers from lack of resources, lack of trained personnel and consequent lack of confidence. Agricultural, industrial and demographic information is produced by INEC.

(2) Main Research Institutions with data analysis needs: INIES: Instituto Nacional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales.

CRIES: Centro Regional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales (looks at Central America and Caribbean).

CIERA: Centro de Investigación y Estudio sobre la Reforma Agraria (part of the agrarian reform ministry).

Scientific Research Stations, including cotton and seismology.

#### (3) Teaching:

UNAN: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua. This university established the first degree in statistics in 1983 on its two campuses in the cities of Managua and Leon. The degree course is 5 years, the first two being common with mathematics degree students. Because of Leon's larger mathematics department, it is producing its first graduates in statistics in 1986, ahead of Managua. In 1986 there will be 23 new entrants to the statistics degree in Leon (where I have had most contact).

The seven "professional courses" within the degree are:

- Sampling
- Experimental design
- Statistics of the Economy
- Multi-variate Analysis
- Non-parametric Statistics
- Stochastic Processes
- Econometrics

It is within these areas and demography where the need for books, journals and teacher training was most expressed.

I am sending these details in the hope that at RadStats AGM and via the Newsletter, Radical Statistics Group can

- establish a fund to buy materials to help the development of statistics in Nicaragua at a time when it is forced to direct its national resources towards defence of its right to survive. I received £60 before leaving, spent on solar calculators and demographic textbooks, left with Leon University and INEC respectively.
- organise the collection of bibliographic material.
- encourage and channel offers of technical voluntary work in statistics.
- develop permanent links and exchanges between statisticians in Britain and Nicaragua.

I will be back in mid-March, with more details and willing to help on these activities.

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On returning, I have discovered that I just missed the AGM with the above account. I suggest that anyone who a) wishes more detailed information or b) wishes to contribute to a fund for statistics links with Nicaragua or c) has suggestions on this project, should write to me at the above address.

I will also send the information to the Troika including a letter to them from Leon University and will see what can develop from that.

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