

PROSERBI

Integrated basic services program in Nicaragua

**Elisabeth Lewin
Kristina Boman
Marta Medina**

Department for Latin America

PROSERBI

Integrated basic services program in Nicaragua

Elisabeth Lewin

Kristina Boman

Marta Medina

Sida Evaluation 99/34

**Department for Latin
America**

Evaluation Reports may be ordered from:

Infocenter, Sida
S-105 25 Stockholm
Telephone: (+46) (0)8 795 23 44
Telefax: (+46) (0)8 760 58 95
E-mail: info@sida.se, Homepage <http://www.sida.se>

Authors: Elisabeth Lewin, Kristina Boman, Marta Medina.

The views and interpretations expressed in this report are the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida.

Sida Evaluation 99/34
Commissioned by Sida, Department for Latin America

Copyright: Sida and the authors

Registration No.:
Date of Final Report: September 1999
Printed in Stockholm, Sweden 1999
ISBN 91 586 8954-0
ISSN 1401-0402

SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY
Address: S-105 25 Stockholm, Sweden. Office: Sveavägen 20, Stockholm
Telephone: +46 (0)8-698 50 00. Telefax: +46 (0)8-20 88 64
Telegram: sida stockholm. Postgiro: 1 56 34-9
E-mail: info@sida.se. Homepage: <http://www.sida.se>

Table of contents

Executive summary.....	1
1 Introduction	3
2 Work plan and methodology	4
3 The national context.....	5
3.1 Economic and Social Development.....	5
3.2 Social Policies.....	5
3.3 Resources for Social Development	6
3.4 The Decentralization Process	7
4 The PROSERBI project.....	8
4.1 The First Phase 1992–96	8
4.2 The Second Phase 1998–2001	8
4.3 Financial Resources	11
5 Organization and functioning of PROSERBI/SAS.....	12
5.1 Organization at Central, Departmental and Local Levels	12
5.2 Human Resources: Technical Capacity and Personnel Management.....	15
5.3 Systems of Planning and Monitoring.....	15
6 Achievements and performance per project	17
6.1 Policy Formulation and Elaboration of Social Plans at the Municipal Level (Project 1).....	17
6.1.1 Objectives and strategies.....	17
6.1.3 Evaluation.....	18
6.2 Integrated Basic Services (Project 2)	20
6.2.1 Health and nutrition	20
6.2.2 Basic education.....	24
6.2.3 Gender and Economic Activities for Women.....	26
6.2.4 Promotion of Child Rights	31
6.2.5 Special protection	33
6.3 Water and Sanitation (Project 3).....	35
6.3.1. The water and sanitation sector.....	35
6.3.2. Water and sanitation in PROSERBI.....	35
6.3.3. Results, expected impact and evaluation.....	37
7 Progress in terms of strategic objectives	39
7.1 Reinforcing the government decentralization strategy	39
7.2 Strengthening the municipalities as local governments	39
7.3 Strengthening and empowering community organization	39
7.4 Strengthening inter-sectoral coordination	40
7.5 Gender equality – for children and adults	40
7.6 Sustainability	40

8	General conclusions.....	42
8.1	Progress towards the program objective	42
8.2	Strategic vision	42
8.3	Institutional arrangements	43
8.4	Politization	43
8.5	Transparency	45
	<i>8.5.1 Lack of transparency of decision making and the use of funds</i>	45
	<i>8.5.2 Lack of control mechanisms for municipalities</i>	45
	<i>8.5.3 Financial management</i>	45
8.6	Role and performance of UNICEF	46

Annexes

1.	Some data on the 30 municipalities included in the PROSERBI/SAS program	48
2.	Monitoring Mission: Time and work pla. Municipalities visited.....	49
3.	Number of people interviewed per category.	50
4.	Water and Sanitation Project. Suggestions for the future	51

Executive summary

Since 1992, the Swedish Government has supported an Integrated Basic Services Program in Nicaragua called PROSERBI. The objective of the program is to improve the living conditions of the people in the poorest rural areas by increasing access and improving the quality of basic services, mainly health, education, water and sanitation. The target group is the most vulnerable people: children, adolescents and women. As an decentralized, integrated, multisectoral and inter-institutional program spread over a large geographical area, it is quite complex. PROSERBI is composed of three projects, each one with several sub-projects:

Project 1: Project Formulation and Elaboration of Social Plans at the Municipal Level.

Project 2: Integrated Basic Services.

Project 3: Water and Sanitation.

The program which is administered by UNICEF is implemented by two national executing agencies: the Secretaría de Acción Social (SAS) and the National Water and Sanitation Enterprise, ENACAL. The cost of the present phase, 1998–2001, is US\$ 14.1 million. Sweden contributes 60%, Nicaragua 36% and UNICEF 4%.

In order to support the follow-up, Sida and the Embassy of Sweden in Managua decided to contract an independent monitoring team to provide an input for the annual consultations with UNICEF and the implementing parties. The team was to analyze performance and progress, identify problems and suggest modifications. The work was carried out in Nicaragua August 30 – September 17, 1999. It included the review of documentation, meetings with major stakeholders, visits to three departmental offices of PROSERBI/SAS and to 13 of the 30 municipalities where the program is being executed. Interviews were conducted individually or in groups with over 550 people.

Observations and Conclusions

According to the Program Proposal the overall framework of PROSERBI is based on reinforcing the government decentralization strategy, strengthening the role of municipalities as local governments, fostering and empowering community organization, and inter-sectoral coordination. Today PROSERBI/SAS does not encompass this vision. As the government is not pursuing a decentralization strategy, PROSERBI cannot reinforce decentralization. At present, the program appears to lack a coherent strategic vision of how to achieve its objective and how to make the three projects work together in a coordinated, supportive manner creating synergy effects. The results of the three projects of PROSERBI can be summarized as follows.

Project 1, Social Policy and Plans. Municipal plans have been elaborated and produced for all 30 municipalities. However, due to the methodology applied neither the institutional strengthening of municipalities, nor the organization and empowerment of communities have been realized to the extent foreseen.

Project 2, Integrated Basic Services, has had very limited effects on access and quality improvement. One reason is the absence of a coherent strategy with clear priorities, another one the dispersion of activities financed by the program.

Project 3, Water and Sanitation, shows excellent results. Access to services has increased and the quality improved. The community and institutional participation is satisfactory. Local communities assume technical and financial responsibility and a sense of ownership has developed.

The organizational location of PROSERBI within one of the secretariats of the Presidency (Project 1 and 2) is an indication of an exposure to political influence. Given the level of politization in the country at this time when major elections are approaching, it will be very difficult for PROSERBI to be managed as an independent and apolitical program.

There is evidence that PROSERBI/SAS is being used for political purposes, i.e. to further the interests of the political party in power. The politization is regarded by the Mission as a very serious problem in itself, because it is unacceptable that Swedish development cooperation funds – as well as UNICEF funds – be used to support the interests of a political party. But moreover, the politization also has a negative impact on the technical quality of the program.

The Water and Sanitation project located in ENACAL, is viewed as a more technical program and is less exposed to political pressure. At the time of the visit of the Mission, no obvious signs of politization were found, but the risk has to be closely monitored.

Another serious problem is the lack of transparency in the decision making process. There are no objective criteria established for the distribution of funds and activities among municipalities and communities. This opens up to the use of political criteria and personal favors. The municipalities do not receive information from SAS about how much funds will be available for each of them in the coming year. Therefore they can not make a plan for the optimal use of resources in accordance with local priorities. Because decisions are not transparent and publically known, neither the municipalities, nor the communities have a way of controlling the use of funds.

As other programs where several different offices manage funds for a wide array of projects, PROSERBI is exposed to risks of an inappropriate use of funds. In order to protect the program and ensure that funds are used as planned, adequate and secure routines and control systems – that go beyond what is in place today – need to be established.

The justification for Sida's decision to have UNICEF administer Swedish funds in Nicaragua is that UNICEF is considered as having a unique capacity, skills and experience in managing a rural social development program, such as PROSERBI. However, in relation to PROSERBI some parts of the work of UNICEF have been rather weak. UNICEF needs to be more active in providing *technical assistance*; in cases where in house capacity is not sufficient, external specialists should be hired. The *monitoring* of the program should be more systematic and the *reporting* to Sida more analytic and problem oriented. The aim should be to transmit a realistic picture that reflects not only positive aspects but also difficulties and obstacles faced by the program. For example, the changes in the Nicaraguan policy in relation to the decentralization process – which have altered the basic foundation on which PROSERBI was built – have not been adequately analyzed and discussed with Sida and the Embassy.

The Mission is aware that PROSERBI is a complex program functioning in a difficult environment. There are lessons to be learnt by all: the Nicaraguan Government, UNICEF and Sida.

1 Introduction

Since 1992, the Swedish Government has supported an Integrated Basic Services Program in Nicaragua called PROSERBI. The aim of the program is to improve the living conditions of the people in the poorest rural areas by increasing the access and improving the quality of basic services. Two government entities, the Secretaría de Acción Social (SAS) and ENACAL/DAR are responsible for the national execution, while UNICEF supports the program by providing technical assistance and administering the program funds. The follow-up on the Swedish side has been delegated by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) to the Embassy of Sweden in Managua. The program is now well into its second phase, 1998–2001.

In order to support the follow-up of the Embassy an independent monitoring team has been contracted to review the program on an annual basis. The monitoring team is to analyze the progress and performance of the program, identify problems and obstacles and suggest modifications and improvements. The purpose of this exercise is to provide an input to the Embassy and Sida for their annual consultations with UNICEF and the implementing parties in Nicaragua¹.

In addition to the general scope of work outlined above, this year the monitoring Mission was asked to look into the following specific aspects:

- The relevance of the program in Nicaragua of today. Duplication or complementarity with other programs? The implications of PROSERBI for the line ministries working in the social areas? Does it strengthen or weaken them? Coordination at the central and local levels?
- Institutionality aspects. What are the political and other implications of the present organizational arrangement whereby a major part of PROSERBI has been transferred from a line ministry (MAS) to the Ministry of the Presidency (SAS)? Would SAS have the capacity to implement a possible enlargement of the program as proposed in the Stockholm conference? Is there need for continued technical and administrative support by UNICEF?
- Politization of the program.
- Does the PROSERBI working model contribute to the achievement of the strategic objectives, such as decentralization, democratization, popular participation and sustainability?
- Systems of planning, monitoring and evaluation at the central and local level, respectively.
- Roles and responsibilities of the main actors of the program. Coordination between the Nicaraguan counterparts and UNICEF.
- Program impact and functioning of the program and its components. How and to what extent is the program contributing to the improvement of living conditions of the target group? Does it strengthen local governments, community organization, and women's participation?

Because of time constraints, it was decided that this year priority would be given to the part of the program implemented by SAS/PROSERBI and that less time and effort would be spent on the water and sanitation project executed by ENACAL/DAR.

Three independent consultants were contracted by the Embassy to undertake the monitoring mission: Elisabeth Lewin (team leader), Kristina Boman and Marta Medina. Gudrun Hubendick, program officer responsible for PROSERBI, Embassy of Sweden in Managua, participated in field visits and internal discussions of the team.

¹ In September 1998 another monitoring mission with a different team took place.

2 Work plan and methodology

The work was performed in Nicaragua 30 August – 17 September, 1999 (three weeks). It included review of documentation, meetings with main stakeholders in Managua, visits to three of the four departmental offices of PROSERBI, and 13 of the municipalities² where the program is being executed. In Managua the team had extensive interviews with SAS, ENACAL/DAR and UNICEF at the very beginning of the study, as well as after concluding the field visits. Interviews were also held with the Technical Secretary of the Presidency, Dr Luis Durán, with regard to the social policies and initiatives of the Government, and the Director of Coordination of Special Programs of SAS Lic. José Dolores de Ríos, with regard to the various programs administered by SAS.

After an exploratory visit to the municipality of San Nicolas, 12 municipalities were selected for the field visits with the aim of achieving representativeness in terms of size, geographical location, political affiliation of the mayor and performance rating made by UNICEF in terms of the PROSERBI program. The final selection included seven municipalities with mayors from the Liberal Party and five with Sandinista mayors. Seven of the municipalities had an A rating, four a B rating and one a C rating (see annexes 1). The time and work plan is included as annex 2 to this report.

In the departments of Estelí, Ocotal and Matagalpa, interviews were conducted with the staff of the Proserbi offices, mayors, municipal staff, elected municipal advisors (concejales), Municipal Development Commissions (CDM), delegates of line ministries and NGOs. During the field visits, the team interviewed focus groups and individuals: community leaders, participants in PROSERBI projects, training courses, work shops etcetera, other beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the target group. On many occasions the team split up in groups in order for more localities, projects and interviews to be included. The interviews were semi-structured based on interview guidelines that the team had prepared for the different categories of respondents. All in all, interviews were conducted with more than 550 people, either individually or in groups (see annex 3).

As a matter of principle, all interviews in the field were conducted by the team without the presence of SAS, ENACAL, UNICEF, the municipality or other authorities.

² A visit to the municipality of San Nicolas, was made initially to learn about the program. The purpose was to facilitate the design and instruments of the study proper of 12 other municipalities.

3 The national context

3.1 Economic and Social Development

Poverty continues to be Nicaragua's most serious problem. 50% of the Nicaraguans live in poverty out of whom 20% in extreme poverty (their income is not enough to buy an adequate amount of food). The great majority of people suffering from extreme poverty live in rural areas.

Social and economic indicators 1998³

GDP per capita	US\$ 468
Debt per capita	US\$ 1,315
Poverty (head count measure)	50%
Extreme poverty	20%
Rural poverty	75%
Maternal mortality	161/100,000
Infant mortality	40/1000
Child malnutrition	24%
Population growth rate	3.2%
Illiteracy rate	23%

There is a significant gap between urban and rural areas in terms of economic and social development. For example, while the national average of extreme poverty is 20%, in rural areas the percentage is as high as 36%. 44% of young children in these households suffer from malnutrition, 67% of the rural population lack access to safe water and proper sanitation. 45% of the rural poor are illiterate and the average time spent in school is only two years mainly due to early dropout. Child labor from a young age has become a natural way of life in farming communities and many children leave school because they are forced to work.

The quality and access of services are also more deficient in rural than in urban areas. For example, only 20% of the rural population have access to health services. Another problem is the weak demand due to the low level of education, poverty and the low quality of services.

The municipalities where the PROSERBI program is concentrated have been selected for being among the very poorest in Nicaragua. Therefore the economic and social indicators in these areas can be expected to be even worse than the average for rural areas (see annex 4).

3.2 Social Policies

The Technical Secretariat of the Presidency is responsible for coordinating national social policies and external resources put to the disposal of the Government for social sector development. The

³ Source: Republic of Nicaragua: Investing in our Best Resources, Social Sector Policies, Strategies and Programs for Social Reconstruction and transformation, prepared for the Consultative Group meeting in Stockholm, May 1999.

Technical Secretary has ministerial rank and is a member of the Economic Cabinet, the Social Cabinet and the Cabinet as a whole.

The Government's view is that economic and social development go hand in hand and have to be seen in conjunction due to the fact that macroeconomic stability and coherence is the foundation for social policy. The social strategy is based on two fundamental lines of action: 1) Investment in human capital, and 2) Strengthening of the protection mechanisms for the most vulnerable groups. Reforms programs are presently being undertaken in education, health, social security and social protection.

Because of the insufficient resources available for health and education in the national budget, the Government set up a Social Supplementary Fund (*Fondo Social Suplementario*) in June 1998. It is intended as a temporary mechanism aimed at increasing the per capita spending in health and education above the levels of fiscal spending permitted under the structural adjustment agreement (ESAF) with the IMF. At present the Fund amounts to 20MUSD. Next year it is intended that these resources will also be made available to the Family Ministry. Another mechanism to mobilize external resources for social development is the Social Investment Fund (FISE).

In October 1999, a new program for Social Protection will be launched by the Government with the support of IDB and the World Bank. The purpose is to create a social safety net for the most vulnerable people. Cash incentives will be provided for families to send their children to school and to take them to the health post/center regularly. The financial support is intended to make it possible for these extremely poor families to get sufficient food and nutrition thereby improving their health. The program is to be administered by FISE in coordination with MINSA and MECD.

The Secretaría de Acción Social (SAS) administers three different programs: *PROSERBI* which is by far the largest, the employment program, *Programa de Empleo Comunitario* (PEC), and the housing program, *Programa Vivienda*. The two latter ones are temporary interventions to assist the victims of hurricane Mitch: PEC by offering temporary jobs to clean up in the communities, the Vivienda program to provide basic housing to people who lost their homes.

While this and other programs may help poor people to live better temporarily, their asistencialist approach tends to make people dependent on government assistance and reduces their ability of coping on their own. Experience shows that handout programs are extremely risky and difficult to manage – there are in fact few examples of successful ones. Also their top down approach and lack of participant involvement tend to make people develop passive attitudes. Instead of making efforts to provide for themselves, they may decide to wait for others to do this for them.

3.3 Resources for Social Development

The budget share for the social sectors has increased from 38% of total spending in 1996 to 45% in 1999. However, due to the low level of the budget, even so the amount in dollars is very far from sufficient. At present, the annual social spending in Nicaragua is about US\$ 60 per capita or 10% of GDP. The amount in dollars is somewhat higher than that of Guatemala, about equivalent to that of Honduras and El Salvador, but only a small fraction of the expenditure per capita in Costa Rica and Panama (US\$ 225 and 250 respectively).

In the period 1994–97 the expenditure per capita for health was reduced by 21% and that of education by 9%. Although the ESAF agreement puts a ceiling on government expenditure, it has been agreed that social sector spending may be increased to the extent that concessional funds are made

available by the international donor community. The Government of Nicaragua calculates that Social Supplementary Fund will require about US\$ 128 million for the critical period 1998–2000. After the year 2000 Nicaragua expects to be in a position to increase government spending provided that the conditions of ESAF have been met and that Nicaragua benefits from the HIPC initiative.

It has not been possible for the Mission to verify the total volume of development cooperation benefiting the social sectors, but it must be quite substantial. It is assumed that a large proportion of this assistance is channelled through special, often temporary, programs such as FISE or the FSS, rather than through the line ministries. Sometimes, there may be good reasons for this, but one should be aware that such procedures debilitate the line ministries reducing their role in terms of leadership, policy formulation, planning and coordination, not to mention financial resources.

3.4 The Decentralization Process

At the time when the present phase of PROSERBI was planned, the Government declared officially that it would promote decentralization aimed at strengthening the role of the municipalities as local governments and fostering and empowering community organization. It is difficult to determine to what extent the Government at this time really intended to pursue a genuine decentralization by giving the municipalities a more proactive role, greater responsibility and more resources.

What is known is that several programs supported by the international community have as their objective the strengthening of the municipalities (i.e. PRODEL/INIFOM and the FISE pilot project in nine municipalities). It is also a fact that “the primary political/management strategy of PROSERBI has been to support the decentralization of planning and implementation as part of the State’s development policy”⁴. This statement confirms that the declared decentralization policy of the Government served as a basis for the design of the second phase of PROSERBI.

However by 1999, the decentralization appears to have come to a halt, or even gone into reverse. As a rule, social programs are formulated, directed and administered by the central government bypassing local governments. The role of local governments is severely restricted and their financial capacity reduced to a bare minimum. The scarcity of funds has been accentuated this year by a reduction in the level of taxes received by the municipality. For example, the recently approved Ley de Justicia Tributaria gradually reduces the 2% sales tax collected by the municipalities to 1% (this tax represents 50% of all taxes collected by the municipalities). Another example is the 10 year tax exemption on property related to tourism investments. There is no direct transfer of funds from the national budget to the municipalities.

The Government has established the *National Commission on Decentralization* which is to study and analyze the experiences gained from the various ongoing decentralization processes, i.e. MINSA, MECD, FISE, MARENA, FISE, and INIFOM. This work is progressing very slowly. The decision some six months ago to designate Secretaries as representative of the President in the departments (Secretarios Departamentales) is interpreted as a sign of centralization, as well as an effort to deconcentrate and enhance the presence of the executive in the territory. The main function of the Departmental Secretaries is to coordinate government efforts at the departmental level..

The detained decentralization process and the centralization of decision-making, planning and implementation are creating obstacles for the PROSERBI and other programs whose objective it is to strengthen local governments and promote citizen participation.

⁴ PROSERBI project proposal, p. 11.

4 The PROSERBI project

4.1 The First Phase 1992–96

In 1992, the Government of Nicaragua launched the Integrated Basic Services Program called PROSERBI with the support of UNICEF, as a continuation of the previous integrated rural development program called PQDRI. Geographically, PROSERBI was focused on rural areas seriously affected by poverty, the armed conflict and the economic crisis of the 1980s. In the period 1992–1997 (first phase of PROSERBI 1992–96 + bridging support in 1997), the Government of Sweden supported this program in the amount of 34 MSEK (appr MUSD 5.5). This amount does not include the water and sanitation project which at this time was managed separately. Norway also gave financial support to the PROSERBI program.

The overall objective of this phase was to improve the living conditions of the population of the most impoverished communities of Regions I, V and VI through the provision of basic services and the implementation of integrated rural development activities. The program was characterized by integrated actions, inter-sectoriality and inter-institutional coordination. Actions were focused on health and nutrition, water and sanitation, education, women's development and economic activities, community organization and children in especially difficult circumstances. In 1993, the Ministry of Social Action (MAS) became the national executor of the program. In 1993/94 five municipalities were included in the program, to be increased to 16 in 1995.

An independent evaluation⁵ commissioned by Sida in 1997 concluded that PROSERBI had been an innovative program catalyzing local and municipal efforts and mobilizing institutional resources resulting in increased coverage of basic services in designated areas. Continued financial support from Sweden was recommended. The evaluation proposed that in designing the next phase special consideration should be given to the following aspects:

- A broad participatory approach in planning the program.
- Mechanisms fostering self-reliance, empowerment and sustainable community development.
- Inter-sectoral coordination at the central level.
- Creating synergy among related programs, such as PROSILAIS.
- Making the Municipal Plan the key tool for social sector coordination at the local level.
- The quality and content of the program, especially in designing the training components.
- Developing a monitoring system incorporating community criteria.

4.2 The Second Phase 1998–2001

Following a Logical Framework Workshop in May, 1997, a program proposal was developed outlining the program for the period 1997–2001. It is emphasized in the document that particular attention would be given to empowerment, social mobilization, participatory methodologies and full assimilation of the communities in the development process.

⁵ Ron Sawyer and Nadine Gasman, Evaluation of Proserbi 1992–96, Managua, April 1997.

The hierarchy of objectives as shown in the LFA structure of PROSERBI.

<i>Superior Objective</i>	Improvement of the quality of life of the Nicaraguan people through access to basic services.
<i>Program Objective</i>	To increase the access and quality of basic services of the most vulnerable sectors of the population, with community and institutional participation.
<i>Expected Results</i>	Some 30 expected results are formulated to be achieved by the end of the project.
<i>Activities</i>	A range of activities are detailed for each one of the projects..
<i>Financial Resources</i>	Swedish contribution: US\$ 8.8 million for the period 1997–2001. Total program costs amount to US\$ 14.1 million.

The 1997–2001 PROSERBI program is composed of three projects, each one with various components, as follows:

Project 1 Social Policy and Planning

- a) Institutional Development
- b) Community Development
- c) Municipal Plans
- d) Evaluation, Review and Information

Project 2 Integrated Basic Services

- a) Health and Nutrition
- b) Education
- c) Gender and Economic Activities
- d) Promotion of Child and Adolescent Code
- e) Special Protection

Project 3 Water and Environmental Sanitation

- a) Health, Education and Personal Hygiene
- b) Installation of Sanitation Systems
- c) Installation of Water Systems.

Water and Sanitation was a new component in the PROSERBI program in 1998, although Sweden had been supporting the sector since the late 1980's through a UNICEF sub-regional programme for Central America.

According to the planning figures of UNICEF, the Swedish funds are to be distributed among the three projects, as follows:

Project 1, Social Policy and Planning	25%
Project 2, Basic Services	37%
Project 3, Water and Sanitation	38%
TOTAL	100%

Until September 1998, the Ministry of Social Action (MAS) was the national counterpart for the two first projects. When this Ministry was abolished as part of a government reform, the execution was transferred to Secretary for Social Action (SAS) of the Ministry of the Presidency. The national counterpart for the third project is the Nicaraguan Waterworks and Sewage Enterprise, ENACAL/DAR, a state enterprise.

30 municipalities of the poorest municipalities in Nicaragua were identified for the second phase of PROSERBI. 11 of these had been included in the first phase. The 30 municipalities account for 15% of the nation's population or about 400,000 people (66,000 families) living in poverty or extreme poverty, mainly in rural areas. For a list of the PROSERBI municipalities, see annex 4.

The overall framework of PROSERBI is based on reinforcing the government decentralization strategy, strengthening the role of municipalities as local governments, fostering and empowering community organization, and inter-sectoral coordination including both governmental institutions and NGOs. Community participation is emphasized. Plans are to be made and decisions taken at the lowest possible level. Communication and social mobilization strategies are to promote the rights of the child and the women at the local level. Based on this vision of the program a number of *strategic objectives* are defined that cut across the entire program structure and are key to the success of the program.

Strategic objectives:

1. The strengthening of local governments.
2. The strengthening of community organization
3. Involvement of municipalities, government entities, NGOs and the population in general in the municipal development process.
4. Enhanced intra- and interinstitutional coordination.
5. Promotion of gender equity – for children and adults.

The objectives, strategies, design and annual plans of the PROSERBI program – in combination with changes in the national environment in which the program functions – provide important points of departure for the assessment of program progress. In the following chapters we shall attempt to answer the following questions:

- To what extent have changes in the project environment affected the program?
- Is the program pursuing the defined strategies?
- Is the program being implemented according to its original design?
- To what extent is the program achieving its final objective and the projects the expected results?
- To what extent are the strategic objectives being achieved?

4.3 Financial Resources

The total budgeted cost of the PROSERBI program in the five-year period 1997–2001 was calculated at US\$ 14.1 million to be contributed as follows:

External costs	9.0	64%
Sweden ⁶	8.5	60%
Supplementary Resources		
UNICEF	0.5	4%
General Funds		
Internal Costs	5.1	36%
Government of Nicaragua	4.1	29%
Municipalities/Communities	1.0	7%
TOTAL COSTS	14.1	100%

The contribution of the Government of Nicaragua is to be used mainly for salaries of central government employees working with the program. The support by the communities is primarily in the form of labor and salaries.

The agreement between the Government of Sweden and UNICEF signed in March 1998 covers the period 1 April, 1998–31 December, 2001. This is only 3 years and 9 months, although it is usually thought of as a 5 year period because the bridging period covering 1997 and the first quarter of 1998 are often included in planning schemes, budgets and overviews.

Sweden's commitment is made in Swedish Kronor amounting to 65 MSEK, out of which 62 million is for program costs in Nicaragua to be administered by UNICEF, while 3 MSEK is set aside for Sida's monitoring and evaluation of the program. At the exchange rate of 1997 the Swedish contribution corresponds to about MUSD 8.5. According to UNICEF's projections the Swedish funds would be spent at the rate of about 2 MUSD per year in 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001. As of August 1999, US\$ 3.3 million or 41% had been spent. This is an acceptable spending rate considering that 46% of the agreement period has been completed.

All in all, Sweden has supported the PROSERBI program with almost 100 MSEK, as follows:

Period of time	Phase	Amount of Swedish support (MSEK)
1992–96	Phase 1	25.5
1997	Bridging	8.5
1998–2001	Phase 2	65.0
TOTAL SWEDISH SUPPORT		99.0

⁶ In addition Sweden contributes 3% or US\$ 255,000 to UNICEF for incremental field costs.

5 Organization and functioning of PROSERBI/SAS

5.1 Organization at Central, Departmental and Local Levels

Central level: Within the Secretaria de Accion Social (SAS), PROSERBI has operational autonomy and its own structure, although it is a Department within the Unit for follow-up of programs and projects. Of the three programs under SAS, PROSERBI is the only one having offices and personnel at the departmental level. There is a staff of all together 45 people at the central office in Managua and in the four departmental offices.

The National Coordination Office of PROSERBI is located at SAS' headquarters in Managua. It is headed by the National Coordinator. Among the functions of this office are the planning, monitoring, and supervision of activities, as well as the overall administration and management of accounting and finance. It is responsible for the budget allocation to projects and the sub-projects to be executed. Finally, it is in charge of the management and implementation of activities related to Project 1 7. The central office is also responsible for coordination with the line ministries at the central level (i.e. MINSA, MECD, MIFAMILIA). This area was identified as one of the weak points by the 1997 evaluation. Apart from some meetings with MECD, not much effort appears to have been dedicated to improve the coordination and therefore not much progress can be observed.

A tendency towards centralization and vertical management of the Program is observed in 1999. This is reflected in the adoption of strategies of work and lines of action without proper consultation with the counterparts at the local level. An example of this is the decision taken this year to have SAS implement the training program for community leaders, rather than implementing it through the mayor's offices. This office is now used mainly to notify or invite people for training sessions but not to lead or coordinate the process. Another example is the centralization of the management and implementation of activities related to the gender network.

SAS does not seem to be aware of the need for institutional development of the municipalities and the other counterparts. In general the counterparts are told that PROSERBI can provide support only to a defined set of activities and their request have to be made within a set menu. There appears to be little flexibility to adjust activities to be supported by PROSERBI to local needs and demands. For example, the decision to eliminate the support to training/supervision activities within MECD, MINSA and MIFAMILIA was taken by PROSERBI and UNICEF without consultation with the local level. The decision was only "communicated" to their respective municipal offices. The same can be said with regard to the decision this year to concentrate efforts on infrastructure. These examples show that the Program has a top-down approach failing to take into account the priorities and opinions of local counterparts and the target group.

It would seem more reasonable and in line with the original strategy if PROSERBI would allocate a budget to each municipality and let the interested parties at the municipal level decide on priorities, preferred activities and geographic areas where to concentrate efforts⁸. This should be done by means of a democratic and participatory process coordinated by the Mayor's office. A process like

⁷ In the first semester of 1999 this funds amounted to 46% of the total funds disbursed by UNICEF in the period. This proportion was 36.4% in 1998.

⁸ This requires a better definition of criteria for the selection of target groups, specific goals/objectives for each municipality, definition of activities to be supported, micro-localisation of activities, selection of counterparts.

this requires greater involvement of the community but has the advantage of creating commitment and ownership at the local level.

The National Coordinator holds planning and coordination meetings with the departmental coordinators. Meetings are said to take place each trimester to monitor and adjust the yearly plan of implementation. The team was not able to assess the regularity, effectiveness or contribution of these meetings to a more effective program management.

Departmental level: The Program has established four departmental offices (Estelí, Nueva Segovia, Matagalpa and León). When the Program was transferred to SAS, the departmental offices began reporting directly to the SAS/PROSERBI National Coordinator in Managua. Before they reported to the departmental delegation of MAS.

The staff of each office is composed of 6–8 persons (1 departmental coordinator, 2–3 technicians each responsible for the planning, coordination, follow-up, implementation (sometimes) and supervision of the activities in 2–4 municipalities, 1–2 persons responsible for financing and accounting matters, a driver, a guardian and a cleaner). SAS pays the salaries of this staff, as well as other expenses such as office space, electricity, water and telephone. Facilitators have been sub-contracted in each department for the training of community leaders and activities related to the gender network. These facilitators are trained at the central level in terms of content and methods to be used in the respective training activities.

Some of the personnel expressed concerns regarding their job stability and having to work under external political pressures (see section 8.4). These concerns have increased recently due to the removal of two departmental coordinators (Nueva Segovia and León) for unspecified reasons and a technician in León, as well as the transfer of some personnel between offices. The team's attention was called to the fact that the people recruited to replace them are members of the Liberal Party. It appears that staff members who are not associated with this party will be more at risk to lose their job. If this is the case, it is a sign of far reaching politization.

In principle, the functions of the departmental offices focus on the provision of technical assistance, follow-up and supervision. Data gathered during the field visits reflect however that recently and particularly since the Program became under SAS administration, the departmental offices have become more of (direct) executors of Program activities. The justifications given for this situation relate to insufficient capacity of the counterparts to implement activities, non-bureaucratic and faster delivery of services/equipment/materials, etc.

By executing activities PROSERBI is taking over the role and functions of the counterparts. It may be justified in some cases that PROSERBI assumes responsibility for carrying out construction or rehabilitation of infrastructure projects, but what can not be justified is that the recipient counterparts (the mayor's office, government institutions, communities) has no real participation in the contracting, follow-up and supervision of the work. The Mission concludes that team work mechanisms and joint planning, monitoring and evaluation of departmental activities are not functioning adequately. Moreover, vertical mechanisms seem to predominate.

The technicians of the PROSERBI/SAS departmental offices are the key links between the Program and the mayor's office, as well as with the other counterparts and communities. They are responsible for the planning, coordination, follow-up, implementation and supervision of activities at the municipal level. It was not possible for the team to assess thoroughly how these technicians plan their job or how effective their work is as supervisors or as facilitators of community participation and organization.

Local level: At this level the main actors are the following:

- a) *the municipalities* (i.e. the mayor's office, the mayor himself/herself, the Municipal Development Committee – CDM, and the Municipal Childhood Commission – CMN).

PROSERBI is not under the leadership, coordination and control of the Mayors' offices, as it was intended to be according to the project document. Through the field visits the team could confirm that the mayors know about PROSERBI, but in most cases they do not feel responsible for its coordination or execution. In a few municipalities PROSERBI activities were planned and coordinated at the local level by the CDM or the CMN. More often than not, these bodies are very weak, they do not meet regularly and they are not clear about their functions and responsibilities. In most cases, the members of both bodies are the same. The same people often also participate in other municipal committees. There seems to be a need to better define their role and relationships vis a vis the Mayor's office, the communities and other institutions and to strengthen the capacity of the CDM and CNM to perform their functions. The participation of these bodies in the monitoring and evaluation of the Program has not yet been developed. Initial efforts are made to introduce monitoring committees in some municipalities, but at this point none of them is fully operational.

The way PROSERBI has been managed, as described above, has resulted into a very weak ownership of the program by the local counterparts, poor contribution to institutional strengthening of the Mayor's offices and PROSERBI itself becoming a program executor. Furthermore it limits the role, functions and effectiveness of the technician (instead of being a facilitator, a capacity builder, providing assistance to the Mayor's office to take on a coordinating role for social action in the municipality, he/she becomes the program executor).

- b) *Local representation of government institutions* responsible for the delivery of social services, such as the Ministry of Health (MINSa), the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports (MECD), The Ministry of the Family (MIFAMILIA).

These ministries are counterparts for the implementation of activities related to the sub-projects health and nutrition, education, promotion of child rights. MINSa and MECD have municipal offices, which facilitates the coordination and participation. It is more difficult with MIFAMILIA having only departmental offices and more limited staff and resources. In most cases the local ministry representatives are members of the CMN and the CDM and have participated in the elaboration of the 5-year social development plans and the POA (where it exists). The ministries are responsible for direct execution of training and supervision activities and in the case of MINSa to carry out the "integral health visits" (Matagalpa). With the elimination of the training and supervision they become mere recipients of materials/equipment and newly built or rehabilitated units. Through the "multi-sector visits" also other government institutions participate in PROSERBI activities (the police, the CSE, and others). They do not however execute activities or sub-projects.

- c) *NGOs* implementing activities, such as credits, or participating in the sub-project special protection (i.e. Los Pipitos). In other cases, local organizations help identify participants for the leadership/gender training. Yet in others they have received sports equipment.
- d) *Population of the communities.* This is the target group for PROSERBI and the final recipients of the support. At present, they are mainly passive recipients of goods and services, as their participation and involvement in PROSERBI activities are very limited. It is the opinion of the Mission that strong organized participation and involvement of communities in the planning, decision making, implementation and evaluation of PROSERBI activities would benefit the program and particularly the communities themselves.

5.2 Human Resources: Technical Capacity and Personnel Management

In general, PROSERBI directors and staff appear to have a relevant technical background and appropriate previous experience. They also appear to be motivated. However, the wide scope of activities of PROSERBI makes it difficult for any person to master all the work areas. The areas of institutional and municipal development and credits seem to be the weakest, and therefore need to be strengthened both on the national and departmental level.

The departmental coordinators are selected and proposed by the national coordinator and then formally appointed by the Minister of SAS. In other words, there is no open and transparent process of selection and appointment based on application and competition. The departmental coordinators propose candidates for technical posts to the national coordinator who takes the final decision. The coordinators and other personnel may also be dismissed from their posts following instructions by the Minister. This way two of the four regional coordinators have been removed in the past two months without any formal reasons given.

5.3 Systems of Planning and Monitoring

It has not been easy for the Mission to get a clear and coherent explanation of PROSERBI's system of annual planning and distribution of funds and activities among municipalities and communities. As we understand it, the steps of the annual planning are the following:

1. The elaboration of the yearly plan takes place in the last trimester of each year. SAS in Managua together with UNICEF define the main guidelines for the activities of the coming year. These guidelines, which are based on the UNICEF Master Plan of Operations and the PROSERBI Program Proposal, serve as input in the planning.
2. The annual plans (Plan Operativo Anual, POA) promoted by PROSERBI at the municipal level are developed with the participation of different counterparts. The POAs are normally elaborated at special events organized by PROSERBI, in which the participating organizations define the support they would like to get from the Program within the framework of Project 2, Integrated Basic Services.
3. The POAs from the 30 municipalities are sent to SAS/PROSERBI in Managua which systematizes them and selects those activities that can be supported by PROSERBI. The demand normally exceeds funds available and SAS/PROSERBI has to make a selection. The result is a preliminary PROSERBI POA defining the amount of funds and the activities per project and subproject. To this plan is added the plan (POA) for Project 1 "Policy Formulation and Social Plans" which is elaborated at the central level by PROSERBI in Managua.
4. UNICEF studies and analyzes the POAs for Projects 1 and 2 prepared by PROSERBI comparing them with the Master Plan of Operations and the Program Documents and considering previous annual execution of PROSERBI. UNICEF may propose modifications.
5. SAS and UNICEF give the final approval of the annual plan of action. Finally, the modified PROSERBI POA is discussed with the SAS/PROSERBI at the department level.

The distribution of funds per municipality and per community is defined by PROSERBI in Managua. The departmental offices receive a POA for each municipality showing amounts and activities to be implemented.

PROSERBI does not normally share the POA with the counterparts or municipalities. As a rule, counterparts are not informed in advance of what funds have been approved. Only at the beginning

of every quarter (trimester) the counterparts receive checks or material together with an instruction of what activity to undertake. None of the counterparts or municipalities visited had information about the total funds available for them during 1999.

The implementation of activities is monitored by the departmental offices of PROSERBI. They report to SAS in Managua, which compiles information about activities and costs per municipality. In some municipalities visited, PROSERBI was monitoring the implementation together with the municipality and other counterparts. This is an incipient activity and was only undertaken in a few of the visited municipalities.

In the opinion of the Mission, PROSERBI's system for annual planning and monitoring has some weaknesses that need to be attended to:

- The real participation of counterparts and municipalities in the process of planning and monitoring is quite limited. They do not get copies of the PROSERBI POA, nor do they get information about the total amount of funds approved. The late notification of funds approved causes problems in terms of the counterpart's execution, and the lack of information about the total funds available makes it difficult to monitor the activities.
- Although municipalities and other counterparts are asked for inputs to the annual plans, the actual planning system is too centralized. Ultimately decisions about "who gets what support" are taken by PROSERBI Managua, and the criteria for distribution among municipalities and communities are not transparent. The centralized planning is especially detrimental to some activities like institutional development, which need to be based on the local needs.
- Lack of coordination is apparent in some cases. In one municipality PROSERBI had provided MECD with 1200 notebooks for only 100 children. In another PROSERBI had decided to construct buildings which were already included in FISE's municipal investment plan.

6 Achievements and performance per project

6.1 Policy Formulation and Elaboration of Social Plans at the Municipal Level (Project 1)

The Project 1 “Development of Municipal Policies and Plans” consists of *four Subprojects*:

1. Institutional Development
2. Community Development
3. Development of Municipal Plans
4. Evaluation and Monitoring

6.1.1 Objectives and strategies

The final objective Project 1, i.e. what the four subprojects should achieve together, is stated as follows: “*to contribute to the formulation of municipal social plans to coordinate and mobilize resources for the development of children, adolescents and women*”⁹.

However, the expected results of the Project as defined in the LFA matrix in the Program Proposal, supersedes this objective stating that the aim is also to strengthen the capacities of municipalities, ministries and organizations at the municipal level, as well as communities. As Project 1 includes the development of municipal plans, it also serves to define the activities of Projects 2 and 3.

Although, the Program Proposal¹⁰ does not contain a complete strategic vision¹¹ for Project 1, it presents general strategies and ideas on how to implement the project at the central and local levels.

⁹ Objective as stated in PROSERBIS's plan of action 1999.

¹⁰ UNICEF-Nicaragua, Integrated Basic Service Programme (PROSERBI), Programme Proposal 1997-2001, June 1997.

¹¹ Strategic vision refers to the definition of what should be achieved (objectives) and how these can be achieved. The type of activities implemented during 1998 and 1999 per subproject is shown in the table:

SUBPROJECT	ACTIVITIES 1998	ACTIVITIES 1999 (January – June)
Institutional Development (Subproject 1)	• Counterparts trained in PROSERBI's system for financial reporting • Financing of MECD and MINSA training of staff • Purchase of vehicles and material • Production of PROSERBI magazine	• Counterparts trained in PROSERBI's system for financial reporting • Management course for PROSERBI staff • Production of PROSERBI's magazine • Purchase of vehicles and computers
Community Development (Subproject 2)	• 2,906 community leaders participated in 186 training events,	• Training of 764 community leaders • Printing of 12,000 t-shirts and caps • Purchase of 10 motorbikes, 4 electrical plants, 10 overhead projectors • Production of PROSERBI magazine
Development of Municipal Plans (Subproject 3)	• Development of 16 municipal plans including the process of participation of communities, institutions and municipalities. (9,500 persons) • Development of 30 annual municipal plans • Development of manual for monitoring of municipal plans	• Development of 9 municipal plans including the process of participation of communities, institutions and municipalities. (9,500 persons)
Evaluation and Monitoring (Subproject 4)	• Development and implementation of computerized monitoring system in PROSERBI	• Follow up of 1997 baseline study • Implementation of monitoring of plans in some municipalities

6.1.2 Evaluation

The four subprojects are evaluated in the following section in terms of technical aspects, prospect of achieving the program objective and other issues.

Subproject 1, “Institutional Strengthening” consists mainly of the training of counterparts in the financial reporting system of PROSERBI and the provision of vehicles and office equipment. Some strengthening has been done of PROSERBI staff and counterpart institutions. However, the activities are not based on a systematic approach to institutional strengthening starting with an analysis of training needs. Considering that few activities are undertaken and that these are done unsystematically, the Mission concludes that subproject 1 will not have much impact on the institutional strengthening of counterparts.

Subproject 2, “Community Development” has taken a new turn in 1999. PROSERBI has developed a model for training of adult and young potential leaders. The training material appears relevant and appropriate. Some municipalities report that the training of leaders has been beneficial and that few other organizations undertake this. It is positive that also future leaders are being trained. The process to select leaders is unclear and not always coordinated with other actors in the municipality¹. In some cases PROSERBI seems to promote new leaders rather than strengthening the ones recognized by the community. This practice is counterproductive to community strengthening, since it is not based on the social organization of the community.

The result of this subproject will depend on how it is implemented and the situation in the community. In some cases it may strengthen the capacity of community leaders to plan and implement projects, while in other cases it may have little or negative effect. The Mission considers that PROSERBI needs to train more leaders per community in order to achieve a greater impact. It is preferable that leaders to be trained be selected by the community members.

Subproject 3, “Development of Municipal Plans” has achieved *very* varied results. A general achievement observed in most visited municipalities, is an increased awareness of the need to support children and youth. However, the use of the plans and the learning process vary among municipalities. In some cases, the plan is indeed used to implement and follow up activities and has led to the strengthening of strategic planning and increased coordination. But in about half of the municipalities visited, the plan has not had such positive results. In some cases this is because the municipal government already had strategic plans that were not taken into account by PROSERBI, in others, because PROSERBI did not coordinate well with the municipality with the result that the strategic plan is not being used.

It is clear to the Mission that the planning process is based on a participatory method involving communities as well as institutions in the municipal territory and that the opinions of a wide variety of people are taken into consideration. This is viewed as very positive. Moreover, the training of facilitators in planning methodology is important as it strengthens the capacities of those trained. The main problems with the methodology are that:

- The plans are not sufficiently coordinated with other strategic plans which may exist in the municipality.
- PROSERBI basically undertakes all the activities necessary for the production of the plans. The municipality and the line ministries participate but do not have an active role. The transfer of capacities through “learning by doing” is thereby significantly reduced.

- The final document bears the logo of the “Presidencia de la Republica”, SAS, PROSERBI, and then the name of the municipality, rather than highlighting the name of the municipality. This tends to reduce the sense of ownership of the municipality. Moreover, the document does not permit changes like adding other strategic plans. The cost of editing and printing a plan is as high as USD 1800. In the opinion of the Mission, the document is too flashy in comparison with other documents of the municipal government and is too expensive to produce.
- The time needed to systematize and print the plan, which is done in Managua, is too long. The plans are sometimes delivered as much as 8 or 12 months after that the planning process in the municipality has been concluded.
- The result of the planning process, the final plan, is not communicated to the communities that participated. This means that the potential effects of the planning process, such as increased participation and possible monitoring, are reduced.

The results with respect to the annual municipal plans developed by PROSERBI are similar to those of the strategic plans. In some municipalities the plans are utilized, while in others, copies of the plan are not even available to the municipalities.

Subproject 4, “Monitoring and Evaluation” comprehends activities at three levels: 1) the municipal level, b) PROSERBI, and 3) externally through the baseline study (see section below). The monitoring at the municipal level was initiated in 1999 and the idea is to work through the CDMs (Municipal Development Committees) which exist in many, but not all municipalities.

PROSERBI’s effort to strengthen monitoring is positive and the strategy to reinforce the CDMs is appropriate in order to increase inter-institutional coordination and mobilize resources. But just as is the case of subproject 3 (municipal plans), PROSERBI is the driving force, while the municipal governments tend to have a more passive role. The result is that the municipalities do not develop their capacity and experience in monitoring, as much as could have been the case.

The 1997 base line study and the 1999 follow-up

In 1997 PROSERBI initiated a systematic process for the monitoring of selected social indicators in the municipalities where PROSERBI works. A base line study, using the sentinel community surveillance methodology, was conducted in december 1997 by CIET International. A follow-up study was made in June 1999. The base line study included institutional data in the 30 PROSERBI municipalities and in 20 control municipalities where PROSERBI is not present. Furthermore it included household surveys in 120 communities selected on the basis of their representativeness of the totality of PROSERBI communities.¹ The follow-up study was carried out in the same communities and municipalities as the base line study.

The base line study defined 28 indicators based on household surveys and 25 indicators based on the institutional data. The 1999 follow-up study analysed 36 indicators, 20 of them included in the 1997 base line study and 16 new ones. All the indicators relate to the situation of women, children and adolescents, as well as to the type of program activities promoted by PROSERBI. The purpose of the follow-up was to monitor the changes observed in the base line indicators and thus to measure the impact of social program interventions.

This process represents a great effort and a well sounded method for the monitoring of social indicators at the local level. One should be aware, however, that it is not an appropriate method for measuring the effects of the PROSERBI program. The indicators included in the base line and follow up studies reflect the overall social development in the geographic areas studied. This is the result of a multitude of different factors, such as the general economic and social development of the

country and efforts and interventions by a variety of actors (government, non-government, families, communities, etc.). It is however not possible to distinguish the specific contribution of PROSERBI to the overall development, as reflected by the indicators.

More discussion of the findings at the local level is required, as well as better utilisation of the results for decisions about the distribution of resources and activities. The findings are perhaps particularly useful at the micro level, since trends and changes of each indicator can be analysed for specific municipalities. For example; the 1999 follow-up study alerts the reader to an observed tendency of an increasing infant mortality rate in the 30 municipalities where PROSERBI works since 1995 (most evident in the municipalities of the Department of León). Another alert is the increase in the percentage of illiterate adolescents (13–18 years of age) – from 14% in 1997 to 18% in 1998, with greater percentage increase in the municipalities of Dipilto, Murra, San Nicolás, San Juan de Limay, Condega, and La Trinidad.

The base line study and the follow up study is an excellent initiative of PROSERBI which is or could be of great value not only to this program but also to a wide spectrum of governmental institutions and non-governmental organizations working in social development. The systematic data collection could be a very useful management tool for all of them to better target their resources. It is viewed as very positive by the Mission that PROSERBI has made the results of these studies available to government institutions and organisations, as well as to some mayors.

* * *

The Mission considers that the final effect of Project 1 on institutional development and institutional coordination will be limited due to the following weaknesses:

- The lack of a coherent strategy in which the different subprojects reinforce each other.
- There is an emphasis on the product rather than the process of strengthening capacities.
- The role of PROSERBI is too active while that of other actors is too passive,
- PROSERBI lacks professional capacity to work effectively with institutional development.
- The fact that most activities are executed directly by PROSERBI means that there is little incentive for participation and coordination among different institutions.

6.2 Integrated Basic Services (Project 2)

The final objective for Project 2, i.e. what the five subprojects should achieve together, is expressed as follows:

“Contribute to improving basic services in an efficient manner through a cost effective package of community services and with the use of appropriate technology, leading to the development of models for replication”.

6.2.1 Health and nutrition

Type of activities

Activities include the training of health personnel/health brigadistas and midwives, the support to vaccination and disease outbreak control, the rehabilitation of health centers/health posts, construction of Casas Bases, the provision of equipment for health units and Casas Bases, support to integral visits (Dept. of Matagalpa) and to multi-sector visits (in the other departments since the end of 1998). Additionally, in 1999 the Program a study was conducted on the Situation and Development of Traditional Medicine and Alternative Therapies in the 30 municipalities of PROSERBI.

The scope of activities was reduced ¹ in 1999 and this year the focus has been on rehabilitation of health centers/health posts, construction/equipment of Casas Base, equipment for health centers/health posts and support for integral visits and multi-sector visits. The following explanations were given for this change of focus: To avoid duplication of activities supported by PROSILAI, to concentrate on activities that have more impact (equipment/rehabilitation) and that this is part of the internal “corporate” process within UNICEF. The counterparts at the municipal level were not consulted before this decision was taken. During the field visits some of them complained about this procedure to the monitoring team .

Expected results

The project document states “*reduced maternal and infant mortality*” as the *expected result* for this sub-project.

Strategic vision

There is no strategic vision for this component. The expected result calls for targeting of activities to children under one year of age and pregnant women, but the activities supported in 1999 are not specifically geared toward these groups, but are more targeted to the general population.

Assessment

Financial share

According to PROSERBI’s reports the expenditures under this sub-project represented 17.9% of the total budget in 1998 and in the first semester of 1999. Available information does not allow a break-down of cost by activity.

Access

The integral visits and the multi-sector visits have made a contribution to increasing the access to health services such as medical consultations, prenatal control, child control and development, dental services and others. How significant is this increase in access? Is the Program reaching those most at risk or those that are living close to the community where the Visits are carried out? These are questions that need to be answered to better assess the contribution of the visits to better access/coverage and to the corresponding contribution to the improvement of the health status.

The 1999 follow-up study on the base line throws some light on these question: 5% of the households responded that some member of the family has received some service from the multi-sector visits (9% in León, Estelí, 2% in Matagalpa and Nueva Segovia). The main reasons given for not receiving the services were: “there has been no visit here”(61% of the households), “I was not aware” (36%) and “time and distance problems” (8%). Of those receiving services half of the respondents reported having received a medical consultation, 14% the services of the civil registry, 9% services related to the ID card (cédula) and 8% had benefited from maternal and child services.

The following tables and calculations prepared by the Mission are based on the reports provided by PROSERBI:

No. of Health Units in the 30 PROSERBI municipalities

	1997	1999
Puestos de Salud	149	164
Casas Bases	950	1361

Source: PROSERBI 1999, Seguimiento a Línea Base 1997

Units rehabilitated	1998	1 st . semester 1999
Health Centers	10	20
Health Posts	21	13
Casas Base	21	4
Casa Materna	4	1
Labor and delivery room	2	Nd.
Surgery room	1	Nd.
Sets of kitchen utensiles for casas base and children kitchen		100
Training assistance for food preparation and administration of children community	421	Nd.

Source: SAS/PROSERBI Nd.: no data available

	Integral Visits 1998	Multisector Visits 1 st . semester 1999
No.	363	137
No. of medical and dental consultations	11,430	17,352
No of medical consultations/inhabitant	0.01	0.02
No. of Visits/Municipality/yr.	12	4 (in half year)
No. Medical and dental consultations/visit	31	126
No. parasites treatments /visit		5
No. Immunizations/visit		28
No. birth certificates /visit		6
No. civil registry inscriptions/visit		37
Cédulas handed in / visit		8
No. Marriages /visit		1
No. of request for cédulas received /visit		4
No. of voluntary police organized /visit		1.2

Source: SAS/PROSERBI. The same total population number was used as a denominator for both years (672,154) and the number of municipalities used as denominator is 30.

The tables above show that the productivity of the multi-sector visits is low. They also show that the universe of health units to be covered with rehabilitation and equipment is large as compared to the resources PROSERBI could provide. These facts reinforce the need for a more clear strategy with regard to the type of activities the Program will provide support to.

Quality

Dimensions of quality of services include *inter alia* the analysis of user satisfaction, continuity, accessibility, adequate equipment and personnel, physical environment, and access to drugs.

In the 1999 follow-up to the base line study, 86% of the respondents received services by means of the multi-sector visits stating they had been well attended. Nevertheless, the Mission wants to express concern with regard to the quality of the medical consultations. (There is no privacy for the patient, not enough time for a good physical examination or for establishing a good rapport patient-

provider, continuity of the care is not secured and the frequency of the visits, at least from the epidemiological point of view, might not be appropriate).

Discussion

The criteria for deciding on the frequency of the *multisector visits* or the places to visit are not based on elements such as risks factors, type of problems the visit should contribute to solving, and the magnitude of these problems. The frequency of the visits is determined by the funds available and the community where the visit will take place is in most cases selected because it is the central community in a micro-region. Taken into consideration that more than half of the population coming to the multi-sector visits demand health services, it would seem reasonable to consider epidemiological/medical criteria when making decisions with regard to the visits.

There are no clear criteria for the selection of *units to be rehabilitated or equipped*. Nor has the final purpose of the rehabilitation of infrastructure been defined. There is no coordination between this rehabilitation and the strategy to improve the level and quality of services of the various unit should be able to provide. It has been demonstrated that the rehabilitation work by itself will not guarantee an increase use of services. Other factors influence service utilization, i.e. type and number of personnel, adequacy of equipment, availability of drugs, and geographical access).

The 1999 plan of action makes a provision for the rehabilitation of 10 health centers/health posts. This number has been more than doubled in the first semester. What is the justification for this? The plan also states that at 40 Casas Bases and UROs will be rehabilitated/equipped, but only 4 such projects have been carried out in half a year. No construction of Casas Bases is included in the plan of action, Nevertheless the team saw at least one in the process of being constructed. In our interview with PROSILAIS we were informed that the policy with regard to Casas Bases is to equip them, not to built new ones. The Casa Base is the house of a voluntary member of the community (often the health brigadista) that has offer his place to serve this purpose.¹¹

The study on *traditional medicine* provides an overview of the situation of this practice in the municipalities and points out weaknesses detected. It recommends that projects be developed with the purpose of securing access and the use of safe and effective medicinal plants. The study stresses the need to work both at the policy level and at the local level in training, research and production on medicinal plants. It also recommends the strengthening of the CPC in San Ramón as a training center for human resources in Traditional Medicine and as a production center for quality and safe medicinal plants. The access to safe and effective traditional medicine is of great significance in Nicaragua today. The 1999 follow-up base line study reports that 59% of households are using medicinal plants. The great majority of the population has knowledge of traditional medicine and uses it. Besides, commercial drugs are often hard to find in rural areas and many people can not afford to buy them anyway. Together with other actors, PROSERBI could make an important contribution by increasing access and promoting the use of safe and effective medicinal plants.

Conclusion

From the data provided it seems that PROSERBI's contribution to increased access to quality health services is very limited. The strategy and selection of do not seem to be the most effective. Among the reasons for this is the dispersion of the services and insufficient resources to secure a improved access and enhanced quality. This is aggravated by the lack of focusing the services on population at high risk, and on specific problems of great magnitude.

6.2.2 Basic education

Type of activities

In 1998, the activities included teacher training (3,225 formal and voluntary teachers in 143 training events), the provision of basic didactic material to 341 communal pre-schools, support to the training of 471 school councils, and the rehabilitation or equipment of 54 centers (25 primary schools and multi-grade schools, 12 pre-schools and 12 libraries).

In 1999, the training/supervision activities directed to teachers have been eliminated. According to the report for the first semester, training for schools councils and parents associations has been kept (26 events with the participation of 8,245 persons), as well as the rehabilitation/equipment of centers (31 centers – 8 primary schools and multi-grade school rooms and 23 preschools facilities), and the supply of didactic material and bibliographies (30 preschools and expanding primary schools).

Expected results

According to the Project Document the expected result of this subproject is “*Expanded basic education*”. The proposed activities to achieve this result are training of formal and non-formal teachers, promotion of community-based preschool education, the provision of materials and equipment and the production of educational material as an important support to educating parents and involving them in their children’s education. With the elimination of activities related to training and supervision of teachers, the expanding of activities to primary schools and multi-grade schools and the existing gap in coverage and access to preschool services, it is unlikely that a significant contribution to the expansion of basic education will be made.

Strategic vision

A strategic vision for this component is lacking. The expected result of the subproject calls for targeting of activities to preschool services and preschool aged children, but the present activities are directed also to other population groups. The existing gap for preschool services is great. There are several actors working in this area: MECD, MIFAMILIA, the PAINIM program, NGOs, and communities. All of these factors point to the need for better coordination at the municipal level.

Assessment

Financial share

According to PROSERBI reports the expenditures for this sub-project represented 19.2% of the total budget in 1998 and 11.8% in the first semester of 1999. The information provided does not allow a break-down by activity.

Access

The following table presents a summary of the main activities carried out under this subproject in 1998 and the first semester of 1999. It also presents some basic data for the sector, as reported in the 1997 base line study.

	Base line 1997	Activities	
		1998	1 st semester 1999
No. preschools formal/communal	992		
No. Pre-school teachers Formal/communal	990		
No. Rural infant kitchen	636		
No. children 3–5 years old attending pre-school	22,255		
No. of primary schools teachers	3,769		
No. of pre.schools/ municipality	33		
No. of preschools teachers/municipality	33		
No. of pre-schools receiving didactic material.		341(11/municipality)	30 (1/municipality)
Rehabilitation/equip			
No. of Primary/multigrade		25	8
No. Pre-school		12	23
No. Libraries		12 (appr. 1.6/municip.)	(appr. 1/munc.)
Teachers participating in training activities		3,225 (22 part./event)	None
Training to schools councils/parents associations		471	8,245 (317 part/event)

According to the 1999 follow-up study, the preschool coverage is 39% (increase from 32% in 1997). There are 16 pre-schools for/1000 children 3–5 years old. As can be seen there is a great gap in coverage and access to pre-school services. The observed increase in coverage can not be fully attributed to PROSERBI interventions, because there are other institutions/organizations working with pre-schools. PROSERBI is basically rehabilitating or providing new facilities for existing units, therefore not necessarily making a significant contribution to increasing coverage and access (most rehabilitated or constructed unit are built to cater for the present number of children). Given the present gap in coverage what is needed is a coordinated local effort to secure a significant change in coverage and access.

Quality

The team could not properly assess the quality of the services provided by PROSERBI in this sub-project, but there were indications of some rather poor results. There were complaints that the newly built facilities were already too small for the number of children attending the school, that the didactic material was not sufficient in quantity. Nevertheless it is recognized that this material makes a difference, especially in view of the lack of provision of materials by MECD and MIFAMILIA. The kitchen facilities were said to be inadequate and the kitchen utensils provided insufficient (only 58% of pre-schools having kitchen facilities).

No significant contribution/improvement resulting from the training of “schools councils” or “parent associations” could be observed. The training has not been systematic and follow-up and on site assistance has not been made.

The teachers who had participated in the training expressed their satisfaction, but complained that it was not continued. In addition they stressed that the need for training, particularly for teachers of non-formal pre-schools is great. (These teachers are mostly young community members with no formal training).

Discussion

Two government institutions are working with pre-school centers: MIFAMILIA promoting the communal pre-schools and rural child feeding centers (comedores infantiles rurales) and MECD in charge of formal pre-school centers. In coordination with MECD MIFAMILIA is implementing the project PMA 4515 which provides a nutritional supplement to some pre-schools and primary schools. The project PAINIM is promoting community child feeding centers (comedores infantiles comunitarios – CICO), providing training and payment to voluntary teachers and educational materials. It seems that PROSERBI has not discussed enough with these institutions how it could contribute to improve quality and access to pre-school services in a more effective and cost-efficient way. From the interviews and field visits, it was apparent to the team that the support for training activities was a priority both for MECD and MIFAMILIA at the municipal level. There is no support yet from the central level for such activities at the local level.

Conclusions

PROSERBI's potential contribution to increased *access* is limited unless a strategy is elaborated and coordinated with other actors. What is needed is a joint effort.

PROSERBI could probably make a contribution to the *quality* of services, if an appropriate strategy could be worked out and a more systematic approach be defined in terms of the joint provision of equipment and didactic material, as well as the up-grading of pre-school teachers particularly in remote, rural areas. This will also require a better definition of groups and communities to be targeted, i.e. communities where efforts should be concentrated.

6.2.3 Gender and Economic Activities for Women

This Subproject comprehends promotion of equality between men and women and credits for women. The specific objective for this subproject as presented in UNICEF donor report 1998 is to: *“Promote the participation of women in social and community development, in order to enhance leadership capacities, family income and create equal opportunities”*.

The expected results of the Credit to Women are to improve the income of 3000 households and to organize 1000 women.

Gender Training and the Gender Network

The largest share of the budget for the Subproject 3 is for gender training and the creation of a gender network. Most of this section is dedicated to the gender network.

The Program Proposal does not contain a detailed strategic vision for the gender network, but explains that the aim is to *“change the behavior of couples through creating greater gender awareness among different target groups such as professionals, peasants, adolescents, women, men, teachers and technicians”*. Gender awareness is expected to result from PROSERBI's training of facilitators who in turn train other people at different levels.

PROSERBI's efforts to promote gender equality goes back to 1994 when workshops were organized at department level. A total of 240 persons (PROSERBI staff, local governments and counterparts) participated in the training. 73 persons were selected as facilitators for the gender network. In 1995, 50 of the 73 facilitators were trained in 3 workshops of four days each addressing the areas of popular education, gender perspective and strategic planning. 25 persons from the 16 PROSERBI municipalities completed the courses. 1995–1997 PROSERBI financed activities implemented by the facilitators, and in most departments, the facilitators created a network of “multiplicators” who in turn trained others. The target group for the training was wide ranging from institutional staff to community members. A total of 3900 persons were trained during this period.

The process was analyzed and systematized¹¹ by UNICEF and PROSERBI in 1997. The conclusions were that training “in cascades” had been created by the gender network and that positive results could be observed, such as: change in attitudes among women and men at the community levels, more gender equality awareness among the staff of institutions and increased coordination among different organizations. The study detected weaknesses in the planning, implementation and follow up of the activities of the facilitators. It was recommended that

- clear objectives and strategies for the network be defined,
- the network be strengthened and more funds be given to activities undertaken by the facilitators,
- the network increase its coordination and alliances with NGOs and Women Commissions at the municipal level,
- the network plan its activities through the CDMs in the municipalities.

Although there was a problem of desertion of facilitators, in 1997 the network seems to have been quite active at least in the departments of Esteli and Matagalpa. In Esteli the network achieved interinstitutional coordination between different NGOs, the line ministries and the mayor’s office.

In 1998 PROSERBI decided to amplify the gender network and invited old and potential new facilitators to workshops. The participants were asked to fill in a form applying to become facilitators. At the central level, PROSERBI selected 73 new facilitators, averaging 2,4 persons per municipality. The selected facilitators belonged to organizations like MINSA, MECD, PROSERBI, some NGOs, JCOPS and “movimiento comunal”. In Esteli, Nueva Segovia and Matagalpa almost none of the “old” facilitators were selected. There is evidence that PROSERBI promoted the participation of JCOPS and liberal party members along with line ministry staff in the new network of Esteli, and that existing women NGOs were excluded. This exclusion is not as apparent in Nueva Segovia where some members of such NGOs were selected.

In 1998, 44 of the 73 new facilitators were trained in three workshops. Subsequently PROSERBI started to finance training activities undertaken by the new facilitators. The facilitators of the “old” network did not get any funds from PROSERBI and in most cases they discontinued activities. The new network trained a total of 1,641 in 41 training events in 1998, i.e. an average of 1,3 training events were organized per municipality, each facilitator undertaking one event.

In three of four departments, the facilitators receive “economic support” for each training event they conduct. The highest remuneration per day is 300 córdobas in Leon, followed by 250 in Esteli and 75 in Matagalpa. This level of remuneration is very high. As a comparison, the monthly salary of a teacher in Nicaragua is about 600 córdobas and the per diem of MINSA is around 35 cordobas.

In 1999, SAS/PROSERBI in consultation with UNICEF decided that the network should be converted into an NGO. PROSERBI Managua designed a process in which “boards” of the networks were selected at municipal, departmental and nation levels. The board of the national network consists of 9 persons who were elected by the members of the department boards in an event organized by PROSERBI. Currently, PROSERBI is providing funds and technical assistance to the national board to form the NGO. A lawyer is paid to design the organizational structure and elaborate internal regulations. The 9 members of the national board will be the founders of the NGO. Of these nine, two persons, the president and the treasurer, are currently full time employed by PROSERBI and one person is working on a contract basis.

PROSERBI and UNICEF have expressed their intention to finance activities of the NGO. Initially the NGO will take on gender training and the credit program. The key persons in the Board of Di-

rectors are quite young and none of them has previous experience in the starting up and running of an organization. The NGO is considered to be dominated by members of the liberal party.

Analysis of the strategic vision

After reviewing documents and interviewing PROSERBI staff, the Mission concludes that the strategic visions for the network and the NGO are not sufficiently clear. There is no in-depth analysis of the target group, what should be achieved and how. Discussions with SAS/PROSERBI and the Board of Directors of the NGO, have made it clear that PROSERBI considers the NGO to be a solution for the sustainability of PROSERBI and that it will work mainly with “training and credits to poor women”¹¹. In SAS/PROSERBI’s opinion the NGO will be able to execute other PROSERBI activities as well and will be able to seek other donor funding as the NGO becomes more consolidated. The idea to train persons from other institutions and thereby indirectly have an impact on the work of these institutions, does not form part of the perception of the new NGO.

Results, effects and impact

What can be said about the results of PROSERBI gender network? It is clear that both the old and the new network have been successful in training a vast number of people. The training has most likely resulted in an enhanced awareness of gender inequality which in itself is an important result. However, there are several factors that limit the effects and the potential positive impact:

- The model suffers from problems detected in study conducted in 1997. There are still no clear objectives and strategies regarding the target group, the effect to be achieved and the activities required to do so. PROSERBI does not follow up the events sufficiently to know the impact of the training and to be able to adapt the future work.
- The training manuals for facilitators developed in 1996 have not been updated, nor has any new material been developed. The material does not match the instructions from PROSERBI Managua for the training to be conducted. The exception is Nueva Segovia where PROSERBI’s technical staff has prepared new material.
- The quality of the training seems to vary between different departments. In Nueva Segovia and Matagalpa, activities are coordinated and facilitators are provided with training material. In Matagalpa the facilitators support each other in elaborating training material.
- Several other organizations are promoting gender equality in areas where PROSERBI works. The Mission believes that the gender network could have achieved more impact if PROSERBI had worked with these organizations. The prospect of sustainability would likewise have been better. Closer cooperation with existing institutions would also have been more in line with the recommendation of the 1997 study, as well as with the Program Proposal where it is recommended that existing institutions be strengthened rather than new ones created.
- The process of finding and retraining facilitators has meant extra costs to the program. The network has been politicized in some departments. The economic remuneration paid to facilitators is too high, which means that sustainability is negatively affected. The Mission does not understand why PROSERBI decided to create a new network and why the old facilitators were not included. We also consider that the funds spent to create the NGO would have been better utilized in further training of facilitators and the production of new training material.
- The Mission has not been able to verify whether the network has organized 1000 women. What seems clear is that if these women are organized within the network, it has been achieved through a top down approach rather than through a grass root inspired civil society movement. This means that the empowering impact of the network is less than what it could have been.

- The Mission is worried about lack of experience of the founding members and Board of Directors of the NGO, as substantial skills and experience are required to start up and run an organization. This is further aggravated by the fact that PROSERBI has not undertaken any study regarding the viability of a new gender NGO in Nicaragua, nor are there financial calculations showing the start up and running costs and the project volume needed to make the NGO financially feasible. In other words, PROSERBI does not know what the NGO will cost and where the funds will come from. No other donor has been contacted regarding their interest to finance the NGO's activities. Once the NGO is formed, there is a risk that PROSERBI will feel obliged to finance its activities. This situation could be detrimental to an efficient execution of PROSERBI activities, since the NGO would be the preferred counterpart because of its dependence on PROSERBI rather than because of the quality of its work.
- Last but not least, the Mission questions whether it is ethically correct for PROSERBI to assist in the start up and operation of an NGO which is founded by some of its staff.

In conclusion, we consider that PROSERBI has been successful in developing an innovative approach to promote gender equality. The number of people reached through the network is impressive and the project has probably contributed to changing attitudes about men's and women's roles and rights. In this respect PROSERBI's work is excellent. Simultaneously, as presented above, the project suffers from weaknesses that severely limit the results and the potential impact of the network. The Mission considers that a lot more could have been achieved with a better strategy.

Credits

Activities and strategic vision

PROSERBI started to promote credits in the previous phase through the establishing of three savings and credits cooperatives. In 1997 the Program expanded the activities and included credits through already existing institutions. In 1997 and 1998 funds were provided through the following institutions¹:

Type of institutions	Municipal government	Existing savings and credits cooperatives	NGOs	Total
Number of institutions participating	3 (Leon, El Jicaro and Jalapa)	6 existing Cooperatives 3 Cooperatives created by PROSERBI	2 in 1998, 4 in 1999 (visited by the Mission)	14 institutions in total
Total amount of credits financed	USD 4,868	USD 11,454	USD 8,809 in 1998	USD 25,131
Number of clients receiving credits	94 persons	208 persons	105 persons	411 or 407 persons

The strategic vision in relation to credits is not developed. The objectives seem to be to improve household income and to create a revolving fund. However, the strategies used by PROSERBI are not clear, and furthermore they are inappropriate for promoting credits and creating sustainable systems for credit delivery. A slight but inconsistent improvement can be observed in 1999. In 1998, PROSERBI undertook a study of the credit schemes which concluded that the objectives and the strategies needed to be completely redefined. Among other things, the study recommended that PROSERBI should *only* work with specialized micro-finance organizations¹¹.

PROSERBI has told the Mission that the recommendations of the study are being implemented. In spite of these assurances, it is clear that PROSERBI plans to utilize the newly created NGO to select beneficiaries and execute credit programs¹¹. This would be contradictory to the recommendations

of the study, as well as to common knowledge of successful micro-finance. It takes several years and much experience to build up a micro finance institution. Moreover, there are other micro finance organizations in Nicaragua that could be utilized and strengthened by PROSERBI.

Evaluation: Results and Possible Impact

The following weaknesses can be found in the credit component:

- Before the end of 1998, PROSERBI did not have a strategy of what organizations to work with.
- The decision to cooperate with a particular organization is not based on information about micro-finance organizations available in the region, nor are technical criteria utilized to assess the potential performance of organizations.
- The majority of organizations “used” by PROSERBI are inappropriate for credit activities and/or do not have sufficient expertise in credit and lack methodology as well as systems for internal and external control.
- The default rates are very high and losses will most likely be incurred.
- PROSERBI does not have a systematic approach to monitor credit. Standard criteria like default rates and degree of self-sufficiency are not applied for the follow up of credit portfolios and institutional development.
- PROSERBI does not support the institutional development of the credit organizations with which it works. This is especially serious due to that PROSERBI has “created” 3 cooperatives and has chosen to work with institutions with little or no previous experience of credits,
- PROSERBI utilizes too many organizations resulting in difficulties to follow up activities, little impact per organization and problems to provide technical assistance to achieve sustainability.
- The credits are often too small and inefficiently administered to achieve a real impact on household income, (average credit size is USD 60 per client).
- PROSERBI did not assess the performance of the credit component until 1998. The problems and weaknesses of the cooperatives created in 1994 and 1995 could have been detected earlier.

To conclude: Until 1998 PROSERBI had not produced a comprehensive and efficient model for the credit activities. The study conducted in 1998 offers recommendations for a total reorganization of credit activities, but as mentioned above PROSERBI plans to use the new NGO for credits. Moreover, not much improvement in monitoring, follow up and technical assistance was observed during the Mission’s visit in September 1999, one year after the credit study. Naturally it takes time to reconstruct the subproject, but it is disappointing that not more has been achieved in 13 months.

The Mission considers that with its current performance PROSERBI will not be able to extend credits to 3000 household by 2001. Due to the general inefficiency and lack of methodology in credit delivery it can be assumed that the impact on household income will be low. Moreover, the model utilized by PROSERBI will not produce sustainable credit institutions and it is likely that that the revolving fund will incur losses and thereby decapitalize over time.¹¹

In view of the weaknesses mentioned, the credit activities will not contribute to reaching the overall objective of subproject 3, credit: *to produce cost efficient models to be replicated*. Due to that the micro-finance sector and the thinking on micro-finance in general in Nicaragua, is ahead of PROSERBI’s, the Mission believes that most of the weaknesses could have been avoided if the Program had built on existing experience or drawn on Nicaraguan expertise at an earlier stage.

6.2.4 Promotion of Child Rights

Type of activities

The activities carried out in 1998 as part of this sub-project include:

- sensitization towards institutions, community leaders, parents, children, adolescents and community in general on child's rights,
- celebration of the Children's day with 21,754 boys and girls participating in recreation, cultural and sports activities (calculated average 14 children per community),
- training of formal and voluntary teachers on child rights; incorporation of this topic in the municipal agendas;
- rehabilitation of sports camps in rural communities,
- supply of sports equipment,
- 159 training events with participation of 4,067 children, adolescents and parents (on average 25 participants per event, and 5 events/municipality).

In 1999, the performed activities included:

- training events on the following topics: Child Rights, Child and Adolescent Legislation, cause and effects of the family crisis, psycho-social development, and leadership -52 events with 1,766 participants- (31 participants/event, 1.7 events/municipality).
- Sensitization campaigns to social agents working with children: municipal authorities, citizens, and government officers.
- Celebration of the Children's day with the participation of 9,511 (calculated average of 6 children per community).
- Rehabilitation of sports camps, mini-courts, sports training, and organization of sport leagues.

Expected results

In the Program Document activities for this sub-project are proposed that will promote child rights at the municipal level, facilitate the organization of children and youth movements that can address their needs and make them proponents of their own rights. The expected result is "*Children's rights promoted*" aiming at having 10,000 children and adolescents organized. The proposed activities to achieve the results are: 1) Promotion and publication of child rights, 2) Organization of children's movements, 3) Supply of materials and equipment and 4) Development of educational material.

Strategic vision

The team was not informed of the overall strategy for the implementation of this sub-project.

Assessment

Financial share

According to PROSERBI reports the expenditures for this sub-project represented 8.4% of the total budget in 1998 and 8.8% in the first semester of 1999. The information provided does not allow the breakdown by activity.

Access and Quality

This sub-project promotes child rights in general and the right to a name and a nationality and the right to recreation, in particular. During the field visits the team did not see any training material and was not able to observe any visible impact of the activities that had been carried out. Only in one of the municipalities could the team observe a children's movement which was working actively

promoting children rights to other children¹. It was integrated into the municipal child commission with a voice and a vote. The children and adolescents participating in sports activities that were interviewed by the team were not able to converse about child rights and said they had never participated in educational activities or discussions on the subject.

The mayors and the Municipal Child Commissions (CMN) mentioned the support for the celebration of the Children's day as an important activity for the promotion of child's rights. The team recognizes that such events can be used for social mobilization but the impact is reduced if it is not backed-up by a strong children's movement. So far the participation of children in these events has been limited (on average 6–14 children/community). Another activity mentioned was the “Cabildos Infantiles” (in 1998, 750 children participated in 15 local councils presided by a “Child Mayor”, i.e. 50 children participating in each gathering).

Right to a name. The 1999 follow-up of the base line did not report a change in the percentage of children 0–36 months old registered in the municipalities, i.e. the sensitization, training activities had not had a visible impact on registration.

It is a fact that in rural areas the opportunities for adolescents of education, technical training and recreation opportunities are almost non-existing. There has been an increase between 1997–1999 in the proportion of adolescents 13–18 years old that are illiterate – from 14% to 18% – in the 30 PROSERBI municipalities. Furthermore, in 1999, 21% of the boys and 14% of the girls in this age group do not know how to read and write. Therefore, sports activities seem to be relevant and could provide the entry point to address needs and problems of adolescents. The team observed that sport activities were directed mainly to boys, although, it was said that they would eventually be organized for girls too. The available resources are insufficient, but nevertheless the team could observe that in the communities that have benefited from having equipment, rehabilitation or construction of sport facilities children and adolescents were making use of them. The organization of the base-ball leagues awoke enthusiasm. The training provided to the sport promoters has contributed to improve the technical abilities of the players in the sports.

Discussion

The promotion of children rights is more than celebrating Children's days. The children and adolescents themselves should organize themselves and start playing an active role in the promotion and defense of their rights.. The CMN should be a vehicle fostering the coordination of efforts and guaranteeing that children can exercise their rights. During the field visits the team was not able to observe any organized, systematic efforts toward the promotion of child rights, the consolidation of a child/adolescent movements or the strengthening of the CMN.

The 1999 follow-up study that only 25% of boys and 7% of girls 13–18 years old practice some sport. Therefore the existing gap is huge. The lack of a strategy for the promotion of sports/recreational activities causes dispersion of efforts and therefore reduces the potential impact. Other recreational activities have rarely been considered (music, theater, dance, etc.)

Conclusion

The activities carried out as part of this sub-project seem to be sporadic and lack continuity and coherence Furthermore the subproject is lacking an overall strategy that could guide the implementation of the project: what to do and how in order to achieve the expected results. The key issues are how to promote a child/adolescent movement and how to support the CMN to enhance their capacity to coordinate efforts and advocate child rights in the municipality. The Program needs to better define better its approach to this sub-project.

In Nicaragua, several NGOs are working with child and adolescents issues, some with special emphasis on child rights, including the promotion of the recently approved child code. PROSERBI might benefit from the exchange of experiences or from working together with these organizations.

6.2.5 Special protection

Type of activities executed

Most activities executed under this sub-project are related to disabled children. The Program has worked with the NGO “Los Pipitos” and the Commissions for Community Based Rehabilitation.

In 1998 the following activities were supported: 86 training events with the participation of 1,793 people on topics related to children and adolescents with physical or mental handicap; workshops on “autovalidismo” aimed at giving the children self-respect and self-value – at the community level; and the rehabilitation of 2 rooms and 2 houses for disabled children. In 1999 the activities included 30 training events with the participation of 522 people (17 persons/event, 1 event per municipality), social mobilization (23 events with 592 persons participating, 19 persons/event, 0.7 events/municipality) and rehabilitation and equipment of 15 centers for autovalidismo (on average 0.5 centers per municipality).

Additionally, a study on the “Diagnosis of the child population 0–18 years old with alterations in development” in the 30 PROSERBI municipalities was completed in September 1999. It is expected that it will be used to define areas for immediate action and to have the government develop and define a coherent national policy for this group of children and adolescents.

Objectives/Expected results

According to the Program Proposal the objective of this sub-project is *the reduction of conditions posing risks to children*. The *expected result* is to have 3,000 children reinserted into their families and into society and to achieve a 10% reduction of child labour by the end of the present phase of the program. The following main activities are proposed for the subproject: 1) the conduction of studies on children’s conditions, 2) undertaking innovative institutional and community actions, and 3) development of educational material.

In 1998, PROSERBI carried out activities towards working children (promoting educational alternatives to learn new skills for 366 adolescents at risk) in collaboration with MIFAMILIA.

These activities were discontinued in 1999, because the program was considered as having a negative impact on the target group. At this time, there are no particular actions or activities undertaken to achieve the 10% reduction of child labor and the insertion of 3,000 children into their families and society. The Program has instead concentrated its efforts on disabled children. It would therefore be appropriate to define the expected results and indicators in relation to this area of work.

Strategic vision

It follows from the previous paragraph that the Program has not developed a strategic vision of how to achieve the objective of this sub-project.

Assessment

Financial share

According to PROSERBI reports this sub-project represented 7.9% of the total budget in 1998 and 6.5% in the first semester, 1999. The information provided does not allow a breakdown by activity.

Access

The activities aimed at disabled children have contributed to the detection of cases thereby facilitating access to the limited services available to these children. The construction of the “centers for autovalidismo” has contributed to gaining social recognition of this group of children and of groups working with the disabled population. It has opened more possibilities for them to have a place where to meet and carry out activities with the children. The construction of centers should always be complemented with the supply of equipment. The support to training activities should be provided within a framework where the purpose, objectives and target groups are clearly defined. Inter-sectoral and inter-institutional coordination need to be strengthened in order to secure a more integrated set of services for this vulnerable group of children and youngsters.

Quality

The activities supported so far through the Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) and Los Pipitos have made a significant difference to the groups benefited. Recognition from the local society has increased and more appropriate place to meet and carry out activities has been created. There are excellent examples, e.g. the work of the Pipitos and the CBR in Matagalpa.

Discussion

The Program has made an important contribution to the knowledge on the magnitude of the problems affecting children with disabilities. On one hand the 1999 PROSERBI follow-up study estimates that there are as many as 4,960 children aged 0–18 with some disability in the 30 municipalities where PROSERBI operates. Approximately 77% of the cases are concentrated in the municipalities in the Departments of Matagalpa, Estelí and Madriz.

The study “Diagnosis of the child population 0–18 years of age with alterations in development” analyzes important issues in relation to this group: 1) There is no national policy on how to achieve the integration of these children; 2) The services available to this group is very limited. 3) The parents who care for these children have very limited resources and possibilities. 4) Different levels of rejection or acceptance towards these children exist among the general public. This information is valuable and could be used in the future to pursue advocacy and to better define the support by PROSERBI.

The issue of disabled children should be seen from a *child rights perspective*. Just as other children these children have the right to education, health services, recreation, etc. It may be a long way to go but the vision must be brought to the forefront and it must guide the work..

Conclusion

The April 1997 evaluation and the 1998 monitoring mission recommended an expansion of the work for disabled children and the activities described above have been conducted in order to follow-up those recommendations. The team saw some examples of positive actions, but just as in other sub-projects there is a lack of a strategic vision. Hopefully the results of the study mentioned above could be used for the formulation of a strategy.

An important task for UNICEF – possibly within the framework of PROSERBI – could be to advocate publicly for the elaboration and definition of a government policy on children and disability.

6.3 Water and Sanitation (Project 3)

6.3.1 The water and sanitation sector

Empresa Nicaragüense de Acueductos y Alcantarillados Sanitarios (ENACAL) is responsible for both the rural and urban water and sanitation sector in Nicaragua. ENACAL is a state owned company which was formed out of the Instituto de Acueductos y Alcantarillados (INAA). With the formation of ENACAL, INAA was converted into the sector's regulating institution.

ENACAL has nine co-operation agreements for the rural water and sanitation sector which together will invest approximately USD 26.6 million between 1998 and 2001. The largest cooperation programs and their relative contributions are the following: the European Community 38%, COSUDE 17%, KFW 13%, UNICEF (PROSERBI) 12% and CAR-COSUDE 8%.

The rural water sector in Nicaragua is relatively well organized. The *National Consultative Group for Water and Sanitation* has been created to coordinate different efforts. The Group, which is headed by ENACAL, includes representatives of the main donors, including UNICEF. The existence of this Group and the consistent use of INAA, and later ENACAL, for investments in the sector have resulted in a relatively well developed sector which is on the way to establish national technical norms and standards for investments. As more actors are involved in rural sanitation than in rural water, sanitation is less well coordinated. Both ENACAL and FISE are investing in sanitation, and NGOs as well as private sector organizations are implementing sanitation projects.

According to PROSERBI's baseline study of 1997, 56% of the rural population in the municipalities PROSERBI had potable water and 53% had latrines. This could be compared to the national rural average of 30% for water in 1997. Rural water and sanitation was severely affected by hurricane Mitch. The PROSERBI annual report of 1998 shows that 30% of all the water systems in the "PROSERBI municipalities" were damaged.

6.3.2 Water and sanitation in PROSERBI

UNICEF has supported water and sanitation through INAA/ENACAL since 1983. In 1997, it was decided to integrate the support to water and sanitation, the so called Water Supply and Environmental Sanitation Program financed by Sida, into PROSERBI. The water, sanitation and hygiene project (WASAHIP) is called Project 3 of PROSERBI and consists of four subprojects¹¹:

1. Institutional Development,
2. Water and Sanitation Systems,
3. Community Organization and Hygiene Education,
4. Monitoring and Evaluation.

The WASAHIP is implemented directly by ENACAL without the participation of SAS. It shares the objective PROSERBI's Project 2, i.e.: *"to contribute to improving basic services in an efficient manner through a cost effective package of community services and with the use of appropriate technology, leading to the development of models for replication"*.

The strategic vision of the WASAHIP is quite clear. The aim is to improve the health of the population through the promotion of good hygiene and environmental sanitation habits and to provide water systems and latrines that can be sustained by the communities with the assistance of local governments and ENACAL. ENACAL is aware that can not be achieved by this institution alone. The change of habits requires continuous training and information and will take considerable time. In order to complement the limited training provided when water systems are constructed, ENACAL has started the Initiative on Hygiene and Environmental Sanitation.

The PROSERBI program document presents the following expected result for the WASAHIP by the present phase, in 2001:

- 2000 potable water committees organized and administrating and operating systems.
- 220,000 people covered by potable water.
- 100% of systems concluded are operating and sustainable.
- 80% of all families have improved their hygiene sanitation conditions.
- Reduction of the prevalence of diseases.
- 14,000 families or 84,000 persons have been provided with latrines.

WASAHIP consists of four different activities:

Activity 1: Construction of water systems. The water systems are either gravity fed, hand dug wells or drilled wells. Besides the construction of the water system, the projects include organization and training of community members. In each community, ENACAL organizes and trains community water committees (CAPS) in administration, operation & maintenance of the systems, as well as in basic hygiene and environmental sanitation. In order to enhance gender equality, all CAPS should have some female members. The projects also include hygiene education to community members through talks made by ENACAL's extension workers.

A new initiative to improve the sustainability of water systems is being tested in Matagalpa. This consists in convincing municipal governments to employ a municipal technician for supervision and assistance to CAPS. The technician is paid by the municipality and trained by ENACAL.

Activity 2: Construction of latrines. This includes construction of latrines and talks to community members on hygiene and maintenance of latrines.

Activity 3: Institutional development of ENACAL. This consists of training of ENACAL's managers and technicians. It also includes consultancy studies, e.g. on cost calculation and monitoring systems.

Activity 4: The Initiative for Hygiene and Environmental Education. This was launched by ENACAL in 1998. The ultimate objective is to improve the environmental sanitation and hygiene habits of the Nicaraguan population and thereby reduce infant morbidity and mortality rates. The initiative works at the national and municipal level and is being coordinated by ENACAL.

ENACAL coordinates with the local governments forming *Municipal Work Teams* to promote the Hygiene and Environmental Education Initiative. The Teams consist of municipal representatives from MINSA, MECD and other ministries, the local government and NGOs working in the municipal territory. Coordinated by MINSA, the Teams develop work plans for the promotion of hygiene and environmental sanitation. Communities that have especially high incidence of diarrhea or bad sanitary conditions are targeted. A specific strategy is to include sanitation and hygiene education in primary schools making children a particular target group. Community participation is promoted. The activities are executed through the pooling of resources. ENACAL finances some activities while the participating institutions contribute with staff and equipment.

On the national level, ENACAL seeks to coordinate the actions with MINSA and MECD. The basic idea is to institutionalize activities that have proven successful at the municipal level. During 1999, the coordination aims at integrating hygiene education in the primary school curriculum.

6.3.3 Results, expected impact and evaluation

The expected results for 1998 to 2001 and the results achieved during 1998 and the first semester of 1999 are shown in the table:

Expected results 1998 to 2001	Achieved results 1998	Achieved results first semester 1999
2000 CAPS organized and trained	256 CAPS organized and trained	143 CAPS organized and trained 858 persons trained, (240 women)
220,000 people covered by water systems	20,587 persons covered	16,651 persons covered
84,000 people have got access to latrines	10,277 persons got access	9,697 persons got access
80% of all families improved hygiene sanitation conditions	7,935 people oriented on hygiene and environmental sanitation issues The Initiative on Hygiene and Environmental Sanitation covered 10 municipalities.	2,235 people oriented on hygiene and environmental sanitation issues. The Initiative on Hygiene and Environmental Sanitation will cover 60 municipalities at the end of 1999. Has reached 39 municipalities upto September.
100% of systems constructed are operating	85% of systems are self-sustainable	No information available
Institutional development: consolidate the financial and physical monitoring system and a pilot project on cost recovery	Pilot systems designed but not implemented Training of 93 directors and technicians in ENACAL	No information available

The table shows that the implementation of the WASAHIP is well under way but that it may be difficult to reach the expected results by 2001. This regards especially the water and sanitation systems which are lagging behind plans. The destruction, and the delays in the execution of projects caused by the hurricane Mitch probably explains the level of implementation as compared to plans. The Initiative on Hygiene and Environmental Sanitation is proceeding according to the plans.

The potential impact will be reduced due to the fact that fewer projects are constructed and therefore fewer persons will be reached. However, the impact on the persons reached is most likely positive. The reasons for this assumption is that:

- Water is a demanded and appreciated by the population.
- ENACAL has a long experience of water and sanitation systems and has developed appropriate technology, such as the Mecate hand pump,
- Communities are organized and trained and seem to know how to operate and maintain the systems. In some villages visited, the CAPS are collecting fees for future repairs.

The pilot project on municipal government support to the administration, operation & maintenance of systems will have a positive effect on sustainability. The strategy is considered appropriate. However, the project is being tested and has therefore not yet had any significant impact.

The Mission did not have the chance to look at the utilization of constructed latrines, but the people interviewed informed us that the latrines are used. This, however, needs to be verified since latrine use is normally difficult to achieve.

The *Initiative on Hygiene and Environmental Education* is still in its start up phase, but judging from the activities organized in communities visited in Matagalpa, the initiative seems to reach down to community level. Teachers, parents' associations and primary school children have undertaken promising activities, and the Initiative has boosted sanitation and hygiene activities organized by line ministries and NGOs in the municipalities. The Mission considers that the Initiative, if continued in this positive direction, could achieve changes in hygiene habits in the long run. The Initiative's possible impact on national policies is especially interesting.

The conclusion of the Mission is that the WASAHIP is achieving the final objective of PROSERBI Project 3: *providing efficient basic services with replicable models*. Through the training of CAPS and the participatory method for construction, the capacities of the communities are strengthened. *The Initiative for Hygiene and Environmental Sanitation Education* seems to promote inter-institutional coordination and lead to institutional strengthening on the municipal and -in the future perhaps also- on the national level. The Initiative could serve as a model for the other projects of PROSERBI of how to coordinate on the municipal level, how to spur local initiatives and pool resources to achieve greater impact. Both the Initiative and the pilot project of the local government assuming responsibility for A,O&M are innovative for the water and sanitation sector and could be valuable to share with other rural water and sanitation programs regionally and internationally.

The Mission has elaborated some suggestions for the future development of the Water and sanitation Project. They are presented in Annex 4 of this report.

7 Progress in terms of strategic objectives

Although there is no explicit mentioning of strategic objectives in the project document, they clearly emerge from the strategic vision of the program, as defined at the outset of phase 2. The strategic objectives define *how* PROSERBI will work to achieve its final objective. Seen this way, the strategic objectives are means to an end. They are however also an end in themselves having their proper intrinsic value. They cut across the entire program and are key to success. In this chapter an assessment of the progress in terms of the strategic objectives will be made.

7.1 Reinforcing the government decentralization strategy

As discussed in section 3.4, the decentralization process in Nicaragua appears to have come to a halt or even gone into reverse. This has changed the political framework of PROSERBI to such a degree that the basic conditions for its strategic orientation are no longer present.

7.2 Strengthening the municipalities as local governments

Some of the participating municipalities have no doubt been strengthened through the process leading up to the five year plan for social development. As explained in section 6.1, however, on the whole the impact on institutional development is limited due to the methodology used. It is unfortunate that PROSERBI has not drawn on the experiences of programs, such as PRODEL, that have been particularly successful in building institutional capacity. In some places, PROSERBI and other programs have existed side by side without any cross-fertilization or coordination, resulting in a duplication of efforts.

7.3 Strengthening and empowering community organization

PROSERBI has been successful in developing a training program for community leaders, including the training of facilitators, and the elaboration of modules and training material. The workshops are considered useful and are much appreciated by the participants.

The approach has been rather vertical in that individual leaders rather than entire communities have been strengthened. A key question is on what grounds the leaders have been selected and whether they are recognized as leaders by their communities. It can not be taken for granted that a community leader will be able to transfer knowledge, skills and enthusiasm to his community. A probably more effective approach would have been to have facilitators work with the whole community identifying its strengths, weaknesses and determining together priorities. This may have lead to better results in terms of strengthening and empowering community organization.

With regard to the water and sanitation program, the methodology of ENACAL/DAR to involve and train the local population giving them the responsibility for the functioning of the water and sanitation has contributed to the strengthening and empowering of the communities.

7.4 Strengthening inter-sectoral coordination

The inter-sectoral coordination at the *local level* was working quite well during the planning process in the municipalities and the meetings organized by PROSERBI were well attended. However, at the present time there are few signs of continued inter-institutional coordination. There are several reasons for this. The real participation of counterparts and municipalities in the annual planning process is limited; PROSERBI is not giving priority to institutional development of the municipalities and its counterparts; and a good part of the execution of activities has been taken over by PROSERBI whereby the immediate need for inter-institutional coordination is reduced. The fact that PROSERBI is not working through the CDMs or any other permanent, inter-institutional body is another limiting factor. Had these Committees been given the role and responsibility for elaborating annual plans and monitoring them, they might have become effective and lasting instruments for inter-institutional and inter-sectoral coordination.

A good example of effective inter-institutional coordination at the local level is the *Municipal Work Teams* set up by the ENACAL Initiative for Hygiene and Environmental sanitation. The fact that the work on the ground is carried out by several institutions in coordination and that each one contributes some resources is having a positive effect. ENACAL is also planning to initiate coordination with MINSA and MECD at the national level.

At the *central level* a closer coordination between ENACAL/DAR and SAS is seen as a positive result of PROSERBI

7.5 Gender equality – for children and adults

One of the central strategies of the program is a balanced gender approach which cuts across all programme components and is fully integrated into the activities at the local level.

A great amount of good work has been done to create awareness of gender aspects and of the lack of equal opportunities for women and girls. An impressive number of people have been trained at all levels of the community and gender networks established. These results are very positive, but as shown in section 6.2.3 on the gender network, the impact could have been even greater, had different strategy been used.

With regard to the other components of SAS/PROSERBI, gender aspects do not appear to have been addressed explicitly in defining the methodologies of work or in planning program activities.

The work of ENACAL has had a positive development but needs to be further improved in terms of integrating more women into the work at different levels and for different tasks. After many years of experience, it can be noted that the water and sanitation program has become increasingly successful in involving women in the local committees giving them a voice and a vote.

7.6 Sustainability

The PROSERBI/SAS is leaving some skills behind as a result of the planning process undertaken with broad institutional and community participation. But the *technical sustainability* is limited because the institutional development of the municipalities and the sense of ownership of the five year plans are weak. In the communities some skills acquired through the PROSERBI training may remain, but because the program has not worked with established organizations, sustainability will be at

stake. The gender networks may last for some time, but there is a great risk that once the funding stops, the network will cease to function.

Discontinuing with the training of staff from MINSA and MECD has put the ministries in a difficult situation, as they do not have the means to continue the training. Another sustainability problem is the maintenance of infrastructure built by PROSERBI/SAS. Finally, the dispersity of the program, the top down approach and the failing to strengthen existing institutions tend to reduce the sustainability.

The *financial sustainability* of PROSERBI/SAS is definitely extremely weak. Considering the limited resources of the central government and the even more scarce resources of the municipalities, it is hard to see the PROSERBI/SAS program could be continued once the external funding terminates.

With regard to the water and sanitation program the picture is brighter. At the central level the *technical sustainability* is guaranteed by the level of institutional development of ENACAL/DAR. The *financial sustainability* is only partially guaranteed since as much as 60% of the program is financed by external cooperation. At the local level, thanks to the functioning of the local committees, the technical, as well as the financial sustainability are partially – but not entirely – guaranteed. The pilot project in Matagalpa providing municipal support to the administration, operation and maintenance is viewed positively from the point of sustainability of constructed systems.

8 General conclusions

8.1 Progress towards the program objective

The final objective of the program is stated as “*to increase the access and quality of basic services of the most vulnerable sectors of the population with community and institutional participation*”. Now at roughly mid-term, what progress has been made towards this objective?

The results of the three projects of PROSERBI are presented in Chapter 6. With regard to **Project 1, Social Policy and Plans**, municipal plans have been elaborated and produced for all 30 municipalities. However, due to the methodology applied by the project neither the institutional strengthening of municipalities, nor the organization and empowerment of communities have been realized to the extent foreseen. Nor has a sense of ownership of the projects been created.

Project 2, Integrated Basic Services, has had very limited effects, if any, on access and quality improvement. One reason is the absence of a coherent strategy with clear priorities, another one the dispersion of interventions financed by the program.

Project 3, Water and Sanitation, shows excellent results and also includes innovative activities for the sector. Access to water and sanitation has increased at the rate foreseen and the quality of basic services has improved. The community and institutional participation is also quite satisfactory. The local communities are assuming technical and financial responsibility for the installations and a sense of ownership has developed.

8.2 Strategic vision

The strategic vision of PROSERBI is well explained in the *Program Proposal 1997–2001* (June 1997) presented by UNICEF to Sida as the formal proposal for Swedish funding. In the section on *Strategies* (p. 11–12) there is the following introduction: “The overall framework of PROSERBI is based on reinforcing the government decentralization strategy, strengthening the role of municipalities as local governments, fostering and empowering community organization, and inter-sectoral coordination including both governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).”

The following paragraph reads: “The primary political/management strategy of PROSERBI has been to support the decentralization of planning and implementation, as part of the State’s development policy. This is based on the premise that management and financial decisions and initiatives should take place at the lowest possible level, or as close as possible to the affected population. This involves the development of local capacity to plan, manage and control the use of resources, including the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development activities.”

Today PROSERBI/SAS does not encompass this vision. It has become a program managed on principles far removed from concepts such as decentralization, strengthening of local governments and empowering of community organizations. As the government is not pursuing a decentralization strategy, PROSERBI cannot possibly reinforce decentralization. The modification of Nicaraguan policies in terms of decentralization has in fact altered the basic foundation on which PROSERBI was built.

It is not clear what is the new strategic vision of the program, if there is one. In the opinion of the Mission, the program lacks a coherent strategy as how to achieve its final objective and how to make

the three projects work together in a coordinated, supportive manner creating synergy effects. Projects 1 and 2 need rethinking in terms of a strategic framework, if they are to succeed in the strengthening of capacities and coordination at the local level and improving access and quality of basic services. At the present time, only Project 3, the Water and Sanitation project, is guided by a clear strategy.

8.3 Institutional arrangements

The project document makes it clear that PROSERBI is seen as a decentralized program working at the municipal level with the aim of strengthening the municipalities as local governments and promoting the organization, participation and empowerment of the communities. At the outset of the present phase, when the Government officially declared that a decentralization strategy would be promoted and while the program was managed by the Ministry for Social Action, the PROSERBI strategy seemed reasonable and feasible.

However, with the present organizational location of the program within one of the Secretariats of the Presidency (SAS) and the current policy of concentration of power and resources to the central government, the situation is very different. There is rather a contradiction between the objective and the strategy of the program and its organizational location. Therefore it comes as no surprise that the program has not been implemented as foreseen in the project document and has not achieved the expected results.

Due to the increasing centralization of decisionmaking, planning (partially), implementation and monitoring to the Secretaría de Acción Social, the municipalities have not been given the opportunity of playing an active and dynamic role of local governments in charge of social development. Nor have the communities been encouraged to participate actively, as foreseen in the project document. As a consequence, the program has not had any major effect on the capacity of municipalities, nor on the empowerment of the communities. Instead, it is clear that the program has strengthened the capacity of SAS/PROSERBI which is seen as a positive effect. An evidence of this is the capacity shown by SAS to manage the emergency funds received after Mitch.

The Water and Sanitation project located in ENACAL is viewed as a more technical program and is less exposed to political pressure. As a state enterprise it is farther removed from the sphere of political influence. The mission considers such an organizational location much more appropriate for an externally funded local development project.

8.4 Politization

The following section, except for the last paragraph, applies to PROSERBI/SAS, not to ENACAL/DAR.

The mere transfer of PROSERBI, project 1 and 2, from the Ministerio de Acción Social (MAS), to one of the Secretariats of the Presidency is a clear indication of the exposure of the program to political influence. In Nicaragua, just as in any other country in the region, the Presidency by nature is at the center of political power. Given the level of politization in the country at this time when major elections are approaching, it will be very difficult for PROSERBI be managed as an independent and apolitical program.

There is clear evidence that PROSERBI is being used for political purposes, i.e. that the political party in power is using the program to further its political interests. The following may serve as examples:

- Instead of having decisions taken at the local level close to the people, as was the original strategy of the project, decisions with regard to the selection of projects and activities to be funded by the program are taken by the central government (SAS). This allows for decisions to be guided by political criteria. Meetings have been held with high level staff of PROSERBI to discuss how the program can best be used for the benefit of the party.
- Political favors are accepted and even encouraged by the SAS management. Requests for financial or material contributions to the Liberal Party or associated organizations received by the departmental offices of PROSERBI have been approved.
- PROSERBI staff – not only members, but also non-members – have received letters from the Liberal Party asking for “voluntary” contributions of 5% of their salary. In the opinion of the staff, they must agree to the deduction in order to keep their job.
- The local population perceives PROSERBI as associated with the Liberal Party. Party meetings have been held in the PROSERBI office in Estelí. JCOPs, a community organization closely associated with the Liberal Party, is promoted by the program in spite of the fact that it has very little presence, if any, in some of the departments.
- Hiring and firing of principal staff members is done on political grounds. The Estelí office is already controlled by the Liberal Party. Recently (August – September, 1999), the coordinators of the offices of León and Ocotal were forced to leave. They are being replaced by persons close to the Liberal Party. It is expected that also most of the other staff in León and Ocotal will be changed. What in fact happens in this process is that experienced staff selected on technical grounds is exchanged for people, often selected on political rather than technical criteria.
- Inaugurations are big public events where the Government presents PROSERBI projects as its own projects. Municipalities are often not given an appropriate role, nor are the efforts of local communities recognized. The support of UNICEF and the Government of Sweden to the program is sometimes not even mentioned.
- Some PROSERBI material, such as T-shirts, caps, notebooks and booklets, pick up Liberal Party color and symbols. Sometimes such material is distributed directly by visiting high ranking political persons or by PROSERBI staff instead of being distributed through the appropriate channels.
- Supporting the creation of a new NGO out of the gender network. At least in some of the departments the participation of people closely associated with the Liberal Party or the JCOPs has been promoted by PROSERBI leaving other civil society organizations aside.

The politization is regarded as a very serious problem in itself, because it is totally unacceptable that Swedish development cooperation funds be used to support the interests of a political party. But beyond that, the politization also has a negative impact on the technical quality of the program.

In the case of PROSERBI/SAS, the politization is leading to tense and frustrated relations between PROSERBI and some of the municipalities. The lack of coordination between this and other similar programs, such as INIFOM/PRODEL and FISE, working with the strengthening of local governments, implies a duplication of efforts and loss of efficiency. For example, there is no coordination between the different plans that exist side by side in some municipalities, nor are the planning processes coordinated.

The Water and Sanitation project located in ENACAL, is viewed as a more technical program and is therefore less exposed to political pressure. At the time of the visit of the Mission, no obvious signs of politization were found, but the risk has to be closely monitored. In the opinion of the Mission, it would be wise for UNICEF to initiate a discussion with other donors to the sector with respect to norms, rules and procedures for the management of programs through ENACAL with the purpose of preventing politization of the program. Preferably, all donors should agree on such norms and include them in their agreements with ENACAL. It is suggested that such protection criteria are not temporary measures but are maintained over time.

8.5 Transparency

8.5.1 Lack of transparency of decision making and the use of funds

Despite energetic and continuous efforts of the Mission, it was not possible to get information neither from SAS, nor from UNICEF on what criteria decisions are taken in terms of the distribution of resources among the 30 municipalities and among the various subprojects of Project 1 and 2. Nor could it be determined on what basis decisions are taken with regard to the selection of communities within the departments where projects are to be executed; the selection of executors of the various projects (except for execution by government entities); or the selection of participants in some of the training events.

Therefore the Mission must conclude, that no clear and objective criteria¹ have been established and that there is a serious lack of transparency in the decision making process. Naturally, this is unfortunate in that it opens up to the use of political criteria and personal favors.

Another area that is lacking in transparency is the level of fees for facilitators and per diems. Apparently it is up to the respective regional coordinators to decide on the levels with the result that they vary substantially from department to department and from event to event. For the sake of uniformity and transparency, PROSERBI should establish uniform norms and levels of per diems and fees applicable to all program components and contracted personal, such as course facilitators. The levels should be kept at a reasonable level roughly corresponding to those applied by other government entities, such as MINSA. In some departments, the levels of fees and per diems are now exceedingly high.

8.5.2 Lack of control mechanisms for municipalities

Neither the municipalities, or the communities have a way of controlling the PROSERBI project or the use of funds, because decisions are not transparent and publically known. Only SAS and UNICEF have the whole picture of what funds are available and how they are distributed and spent.

The individual municipality does not receive information from SAS about how much funds will be available in the next year. Therefore they can not make a plan for the optimal use of resources according to their local priorities and at the end of the year they cannot control that the funds have been used accordingly. PROSERBI/SAS makes decisions for them and the outcome is shared with the municipalities only in a piecemeal fashion, at the beginning of each trimester. Even less information is given to the communities. Therefore there can be no “social audit” in the sense that the target group or their representatives can control the use of funds in their community.

8.5.3 Financial management

As other programs where several different offices manage funds for a wide array of projects, PROSERBI is exposed to risks of inappropriate use of funds. Among the variety of methods that might

be used for taking money out of the project for personal, or political gains, the following may be mentioned:

- Receipts are signed “in blanco” and higher amount than paid is filled out later.
- Contracts are in higher amounts than the recipient gets.
- Commissions are charged for awarding contracts.
- More building or other material bought than needed.
- At training courses more participants are added to list and charged for than those actually present (a fixed amount per participants is paid to the organizer, but this way a higher amount is charged to the PROSERBI account).
- Paying for unauthorized activities by calling them “training events”.

In order to protect the program and ensure that funds are used in accordance with the project purpose and plan and solely for the benefit of the target group, it is necessary to establish adequate and secure routines and control systems that go beyond what is in place today. Regular audits are not always sufficient.

It has not been a task of Mission to look into the UNICEF *administration of Swedish funds*, nor to analyze the financial reports. This aspect of the program will be looked into separately by specialists specialized in accounting and auditing. The team has a generally favorable impression of the financial management of UNICEF. However, due to the risks of inappropriate use of funds, some complementary control methods should to be developed.

8.6 Role and performance of UNICEF

PROSERBI is a UNICEF program which is funded partially by the Government of Sweden. Another way of seeing it, is that Sida entrusts part of the Swedish funds allocated to Nicaragua to UNICEF for the implementation of a program that is in agreement with Swedish principles and priorities. The justification for Sida’s decision to have UNICEF administer Swedish funds in this case is that UNICEF is considered as having unique capacity, skills and experience to manage a rural social development program, such as PROSERBI.

When entrusting UNICEF (or any other multilateral agency) to administer Swedish funds for the implementation of a program, Sida expects the agency to perform the following tasks:

1. Provide *technical assistance* to the program securing that the strategic vision, design and implementation of the program will lead to the highest possible achievement of objectives.
2. Perform effective *monitoring, supervision and control* of the program.
3. *Administer the Swedish funds.*
4. Provide Sida with *financial and substantive reporting*, as well as *annual plans*, as specified in the agreement between Government of Sweden and UNICEF.

In the opinion of the Mission, UNICEF’s performance in relation to PROSERBI has in some parts been rather weak. UNICEF needs to be more active in providing *technical assistance*; in cases where in house capacity is not sufficient, external specialists should be contracted (example: institutional development and micro-credits). The *monitoring* of the program should be more systematic and should relate explicitly to adopted strategies and established objectives and results. The reporting to Sida and the Embassy in Managua should be more analytic and problem oriented. The aim should be to

transmit a realistic picture that reflects not only positive aspects but also internal and external difficulties and obstacles faced by the program. For example, the deviation from the program strategy as defined in the project proposal could have been observed, analyzed and discussed with Sida quite some time ago and the increasing politicization detected brought to Sida's attention as it appeared.

* * *

The Mission is aware that PROSERBI is a complex program functioning in a difficult environment. There are lessons to be learnt by the Nicaraguan Government, UNICEF and Sida.

The Program Proposal emphasizes the importance of supporting the decentralization process and strengthening the capacities, as well as the institutional and inter-sectoral coordination.

However, when SAS/PROSERBI presents the strategic vision for the four subprojects of Project 1, it is clear that:

- The general strategy contained in the Program Proposal has not been adapted to the current situation in Nicaragua and the different levels of institutional development of the municipalities. The strategic vision of SAS/PROSERBI is in fact less developed than that of the Proposal,
- The strategic vision for subproject 2 (Community Development) has been developed during 1999 in terms of training of community leaders and the model of training. However, there is still a need to define how training of leaders will result in community development, and whether the training of one to two leaders per community is the best strategy,
- The strategic vision for subproject 4, (Monitoring and Evaluation) is also somewhat developed. However the monitoring related to the baseline could preferably be extended to include other actors and serve as an instrument for monitoring in the Committees of Municipal Development – CDMs. These committees include representatives from line ministries, NGOs and the local government. Earlier the CDMs were promoted by MAS.
- No clear strategic visions for subprojects 1, Institutional Development, and 3, Municipal Plans, have yet been defined.
- There is no vision of how the different subprojects should be coordinated to mutually reinforce each other at the municipal level, for example, how the strengthening of communities should be tied to the monitoring and evaluation in the CDMs.
- The role of the SAS as compared to that of the municipalities is confused with regard to the development, implementation and monitoring of municipal plans. In general, SAS/PROSERBI considers that it is responsible for planning and monitoring, while the municipalities have a “facilitating” role and should learn from participating. This division of roles is unfortunate, because it will not promote institutional development, nor does it take the capacity of the Nicaraguan municipalities into account. Most municipalities already have a planning and monitoring process and some municipalities have experience of strategic planning.

Annex 1

Data on the 30 municipalities included in the PROSERBI program¹²

Departments	Municipalities	No of Communities	Population	Rural poor %	Poverty index	Rating ¹³
Estelí	La Trinidad	52	18,518	39%	Alta	A
	San Nicolas	28	6,200	92%	Extrema	A
	Estelí	140	92,988	39%	Alta	A
	San Juan de Limay	52	12,501	73%	Extrema	A
	Condega	64	25,155	69%	Extrema	B
	Pueblo Nuevo	42	19,532	85%	Extrema	B
Madriz	Yalaguina	22	7,501	97%	Extrema	A
	Palacaguina	22	11,843	68%	Extrema	B
León	El Sauce	17	25,973	77%	Alta	A
	El Jicaral	32	10,036	97%	Alta	B
	Sta Rosa de Peñon	37	9,129	77%	Alta	B
	San José Achuapa	45	13,186	83%	Alta	A
	Jalapa	82	41,756	48%	Extrema	B
N. Segovia	Jicaro	65	22,000	75%	Extrema	A
	Murra	42	11,017	96%	Extrema	C
	Mozonte	14	5,186	73%	Extrema	A
	Ciudad Antigua	13	3,421	67%	Extrema	C
	San Fernando	12	5,950	63%	Extrema	A
	Ocotol	22	26,076	3%	Alta	A
	Dipilto	16	3,879	92%	Extrema	A
	Matagalpa	114	23,061	93%	Extrema	A
Matagalpa	San Dionisio	22	16,003	86%	Extrema	A
	Esquipulas	30	14,746	69%	Extrema	A
	Terrabona	52	10,605	90%	Extrema	B
	Muy Muy	42	13,069	78%	Extrema	A
	Sébaco	63	24,936	49%	Media	A
	Ciudad Darío	140	35,871	76%	Extrema	A
	Matiguás	136	38,548	81%	Alta	B
	San Isidro	42	15,353	87%	Alta	A
	Matagalpa	102	104,381	22%	Alta	B
Total		1,562	672,154			

¹² Informe Semestral 1999 (January–July), Presidencia de la República, Secretaría de Acción Social, Managua, page 5–6.

¹³ Rating of performance in terms of the PROSERBI program (by UNICEF)

Annex 2

Proserbi Monitoring Mission. Time and work plan 30 August – 17 September, 1999.

30–31 August	Meetings with UNICEF, SAS/Proserbi Team, ENACAL/DAR, PROSILAI, FISE, PRODEL.		
1 September	Visit to the Department of Estelí. Visits to the municipalities of San Nicolás and the communities of Las Puertas and Santa Lucía (exploratory visit to help the team plan the subsequent visits).		
2 September	Internal work of the team elaborating time and work plan as well as methodology to be applied during the field visits.		
3–9 September	Visits to the following departments and municipalities:		
Department:	Estelí	Ocotal	Matagalpa
Municipalities:	Estelí	Ocotal	Matagalpa
	Pueblo Nuevo	Mozonte	San Ramón
	Condega	Ciudad Antigua	San Isidro
	Palacaguina	Ciudad Darío	Yalaguina
10–16 September	Additional interviews with SAS, ENACAL/DAR, CIET (base line study), the Secretaría Técnica de la Presidencia, and UNICEF.		
11–17 September	Compilation of data, analysis and report writing.		
17 September	Presentation of preliminary results and conclusions of the monitoring mission.		

Annex 3

PROSERBI Monitoring Mission, Nicaragua, 30 August – 17 September, 1999.

Number of people interviewed per category

Mayors and vice mayors	10
Staff of mayor's offices	26
Members of municipal committees (CDM and CMN)	60
Participants in training events	77
Children and adolescents	132
Disabled children and organizations working with disabled children	34
Members of Juntas Directivas Comunitarias	29
Other community members	65
PROSERBI staff	18
Women (in relation to women's programs)	53
NGOs not working with PROSERBI	3
Credit program	7
ENACAL/DAR	13
Water projects	15
Other programs. Government officials.	16
TOTAL number of people interviewed either individually or in groups	558

Annex 4

Project 3: Water and Sanitation Program. Suggestions for the future

As shown in Section 6.3, the Mission considers that the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Project (WASAHIP) to be quite successful. In order to further improve the project the following suggestions are given:

Although the hygiene and environmental sanitation education at village level has been improved through the recently developed training materials, it needs to be further strengthened. Performance evaluations by the regional offices of the individual extension workers should include education activities. Community members should receive at least five educational talks per system regardless of the type of the water system technology. The extension workers' capacity to deliver participatory training needs to be improved.

All CAPS should be trained in the three workshops according to the model developed by ENACAL. Currently not all communities receive all the workshops. To further improve training, an investigation of existing systems is suggested. The investigation should be multi-sectoral i.e. include organizational, social, hygiene education, gender equality and technical aspects of the systems. The results should be used to further improve the basic training package for CAPS. The activities undertaken to promote gender equality are positive but incipient. It is suggested that a component of gender equality awareness is included in the training of CAPS and the communities.

The pilot project for local government's involvement in A,O&M should be evaluated and promoted in all municipalities, if possible.

The *Initiative for Hygiene and Environmental Sanitation Education* is promising and should be strengthened. On the whole, the strategies utilized on local and national levels are appropriate and should be kept. The idea to keep costs low and let all institutions contribute should be continued to foster participation and strengthen the likelihood of sustainability. The following improvements could be made:

- The model utilized in Matagalpa, where one person is specially hired for the Initiative seems the most appropriate to launch the activity. This model is recommended for other departments,
- In some municipalities, the Municipal Work Teams have not received sufficient information about the Initiative and what activities ENACAL can finance. The Teams could further improve their work if ENACAL would provide initial orientation on hygiene and sanitation problems and assist the Team in brainstorming about innovative activities and how the Initiative could complement and support already existing activities,
- Sometimes the activities, as well as the training approach at municipal level are too traditional and lacks creativity. ENACAL should promote innovative activities and a more participatory approach to training. Sanitation campaigns where school children draw pictures, sing or make sketches related to hygiene and sanitation could be organized. Contests for the cleanest school, village or for the cleanest and most frequently used latrine could be organized to stimulate community participation and interest around hygiene and sanitation.

In some of the municipalities supported by PROSERBI the coverage of water is quite high. Depending on the geographical conditions, the availability of water sources and the concentration of settlements of "non covered" population the cost of the construction of water systems per beneficiary could become excessively high. Naturally it is important to continue the development of appro-

priate technology for dispersed settlements. However, considering the low level of water coverage in some adjacent municipalities, it may be worthwhile to consider whether it would be more efficient to include nearby municipalities with low coverage instead of investing only in PROSERBI municipalities. This issue is already being discussed by ENACAL and UNICEF, but an in depth analysis is called for. Factors like poverty and availability of other investors should be included in the analysis.

It is suggested that UNICEF analyze the need for institutional strengthening of ENACAL (the rural management division). A management consultant could be contracted to identify needs and to develop a plan for institutional strengthening. The plan could be financed jointly by the donors.

In view of the upcoming elections in Nicaragua, special actions are recommended to reduce the temptations of political use of water and sanitation projects. It is suggested that UNICEF increase its support to ENACAL and that the contract amendment includes paragraphs defining the mechanisms for hiring and firing of staff (directors and as well as technicians), rules regarding the use of technical and transparent criteria for the selection of communities to benefit from the project, the use of ENACAL's equipment and vehicles and the inaugurations of constructed systems. It would be beneficial if UNICEF could coordinate with the other main donors to ENACAL in the development, implementation and supervision of the adherence to these protection criteria. Considering the apparent increased political polarization in Nicaragua it is suggested that such protection criteria are maintained over time, i.e. also applied after municipal and national elections.

Recent Sida Evaluations

- 99/20 Sida Support to the Energy Sector in Egypt. Rolf Eriksson, Edward Hoyt
Department for Infrastructure and Economic Cooperation
- 99/21 Sida Support to the Energy Sector in Jordan. Rolf Eriksson, Edward Hoyt
Department for Infrastructure and Economic Cooperation
- 99/22 Environmental Aspects in Credit Financed Projects. Gunhild Granath, Stefan Andersson, Karin Seleborg, Göran Stegrin, Hans Norrström
Department for Evaluation and Internal Audit
- 99/23 Sida SAREC Marine Science Programs in East Africa. Stephen B. Olsen, James Tobey, Per Brinck
Department for Research Cooperation, SAREC
- 99/24 Sweden's Assistance to Bosnia Herzegovina. A study of aid management and related policy issues. Claes Sandgren
Department for Central and Eastern Europe
- 99/25 Psychiatry Reform in Eastern Europe. Nils Öström
Department for Central and Eastern Europe
- 99/26 Sida Projects in the Forestry Sector in Poland. Kristina Flodman Becker, Roland Öquist
Department for Central and Eastern Europe
- 99/27 FARMESA. Farm-level applied research methods in Eastern and Southern Africa. Clive Lighthfoot, William W Wapakala, Bo Tengnäs
Department for Natural Resources and the Environment
- 99/28 The African Association of Universities (AAU) Study Programme on Higher Education Management in Africa. Ad Boeren, Jairam Reddy
Department for Research Cooperation, SAREC
- 99/29 Apoyo al Programa Nacional Indígena en Bolivia. Lars Eriksson, Maria Cristina Mejia, Maria del Pilar Sanchez
Department for Latin America
- 99/30 Support to the Micro-finance Sector in Bolivia. Lars-Olof Hellgren, Leonel Roland
Department for Infrastructure and Economic Cooperation
- 99/31 Proyecto VNU Promotores de la Paz en Guatemala. Kristina Boman, Göran Schill, Eberto de León
Department for Latin America
- 99/32 Programme Assistance to Mozambique. A joint donors review. Grayson Clarke, Jens Claussen, Rolf Kappel, Jytte Laursen, Stefan Sjölander
Department for Africa
- 99/33 Technical Assistance to the Ministry of Planning and Finance in Mozambique. Dag Aarnes, Svein Jørgensen
Department for Africa

Sida Evaluations may be ordered from:

Infocenter, Sida
S-105 25 Stockholm
Phone: (+46) 8 795 23 44
Fax: (+46) 8 760 58 95
info@sida.se

A complete backlist of earlier evaluation reports may be ordered from:

Sida, UTV, S-105 25 Stockholm
Phone: (+46) 8 698 5099
Fax: (+46) 8 698 5610
Homepage: <http://www.sida.se>



SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY

S-105 25 Stockholm, Sweden

Tel: +46 (0)8-698 50 00. Fax: +46 (0)8-20 88 64

Telegram: sida stockholm. Postgiro: 1 56 34-9

E-mail: info@sida.se. Homepage: <http://www.sida.se>