

Situation of Social Science Research in Central America



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This is an independent evaluation. The views and interpretations expressed in this report are those of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency Sida.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AECI	Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional
BICU	Bluefields Indian & Caribbean University
CASC	Centro de Análisis Socio-cultural
CEDAC	Centro de Diseño, Arquitectura y Construcción
CEDOH	Centro de Documentación de Honduras
CELATS	Centro Latinoamericano de Trabajo Social
CETRA	Centro de Estudios del Trabajo
CIDCA	Centro de Investigaciones y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica
CIERA	Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios de la Reforma Agraria
CIES	Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios de la Salud
CIHAC	Centro de Investigaciones Históricas de América Central
CIRMA	Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica
CLACSO	Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales
CNU	Consejo Nacional de Universidades
CONARE	Consejo Nacional de Rectores
CONESUP	Consejo Nacional de Educación Superior Privada
CONPES	Consejo Nacional de Planificación Económica y Social
CSUCA	Consejo Superior Universitario Centroamericano
DAAD	Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
EAP	Escuela Agrícola Panamericana El Zamorano
EIAG	Escuela Internacional de Agricultura y Ganadería
ESNACIFOR	Escuela Nacional de Ciencias Forestales
FLACSO	Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IES	Instituto de Estudios del Sandinismo
IHAH	Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia
IHCA	Instituto Histórico Centroamericano
IHNCA	Instituto de Historia de Nicaragua y Centroamérica
INAP	Instituto Nicaragüense de Administración Pública
INIES	Instituto Nicaragüense de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales

ISEP	Instituto Superior de Educación Policial
ITCR	Instituto Tecnológico de Costa Rica
NITLAPAN	Instituto de Investigación y Desarrollo
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
OEА	Organización de Estados Americanos
OPES	Oficina de Planificación de la Educación Superior
PLATS	Postgrado Latinoamericano de Trabajo Social
RENIDA	Red Nacional de Información y Documentación Agraria de Nicaragua
SAREC	Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SINAES	Sistema Nacional de Acreditación de la Educación Superior.
SINIES	Sistema Nacional de Investigación de la Educación Superior
SMNS	Seminario Mayor “Nuestra Señora de Suyapa”
SUED	Sistema Universitario de Educación a Distancia
SUPRICORI	Acreditación de la Enseñanza Superior Universitaria Privada de Costa Rica
UCA	Universidad Centroamericana (Managua)
UCA–(JSC)	Universidad Centroamericana (El Salvador)
UCATSE	Universidad Católica Agropecuaria del trópico seco “Presbítero Francisco L. Espinoza Pineda”
UCE	Universidad Cristiana Evangélica
UCENM	Universidad Evangélica “Nuevo Milenio”
UCR	Universidad de Costa Rica
UES	Universidad de El Salvador
UJCV	Universidad José Cecilio del Valle
UMH	Universidad Metropolitana de Honduras
UNA	Universidad Nacional de Agricultura-Honduras
UNA	Universidad Nacional Agraria-Nicaragua
UNAH	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras
UNAN-	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua (León and Managua)
UNED	Universidad Estatal a Distancia
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNI	Universidad Nacional de Ingeniería
UNICAH	Universidad Católica de Honduras “Nuestra Señora Reina de la Paz”
UNIRE	Unión Nacional de Rectores de Universidades Privadas
UNITEC	Universidad Tecnológica Centroamericana;
UPNFM	Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán
UPOLI	Universidad Politécnica
URACCAN	Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense
USPS	Universidad de San Pedro Sula
UTH	Universidad Tecnológica de Honduras

Foreword and Acknowledgments

This is the final evaluation report of the analysis of social sciences in Central American academic institutions, based on a long professional experience in the area and on field work done in Nicaragua and Honduras during January 2007. The key objective is to provide the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) with practical guidance on its Central American development and research assistance policies. The evaluation was carried out by a two-person team with standard evaluation methods.

The report makes use of comments to previous drafts provided by Sida. Interviewees are listed in the appendix. They contributed in Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and El Salvador. Some interviews were made by e-mail. We wish to thank all those who have generously assisted with this evaluation, especially the interviewees, Sida's staff and partners alike. Their support, opinions, information and insights have been much appreciated. The experience, knowledge and effective support of Dr. Inger Lundgren of Sida deserves particular thanks. Her collaboration has been professional throughout, and we stand in her debt.

It has become obvious during this work that many new processes are facing Central American societies. Accelerated economic globalization and effects of free trade treaties are not the least of them. Arguably, they are also challenges for Central American social sciences. We hope that this report can help the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and other international cooperation communities to improve the quality of cooperation to the benefit of all partners.

Jussi Pakkasvirta & Florencia Quesada

Executive Summary

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) has decided to carry out an overall evaluation on the state of social science research in Central America. Since the 1980s Sida has actively offered its cooperation in the area, and positive results of this international cooperation are visible in many countries. Sida's assistance programs and projects have also been a long-standing and valuable feature of Swedish commitment to academic and research cooperation in Central America.

This report evaluates the state of social sciences in Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Guatemala. While providing a general analysis of the region, the main goal of the study is to give a more detailed picture of social science research in Honduras and Nicaragua. In doing so, the institutions (universities, research institutes, and centers) working in this field are analyzed, and their strengths and weaknesses addressed. Also possible partnerships for the enhancement of social science research in the two countries are identified.

The objective of the evaluation is to help find the best existing and also potential social sciences institutes and actors in Central America, and, to give tools to strengthen the co-operation between Swedish and Central American academic and research institutions, especially in Nicaragua and Honduras.

There is an urgent need for both basic and applied social science research in Nicaragua and Honduras. It is needed to understand the most striking of today's dilemmas, including poverty, social inequality, violence, migration, and insecurity. Rural/urban migration is increasing as well as international migration from the poor to richer countries in the region, and from Central America to the United States in particular. It is essential to understand the impact of these processes at the socio-economic and cultural level.

The crisis of the 1990s had a shocking effect on the universities, especially on research. This is reflected in the whole higher education sector (also in teaching), and both in public and private universities. The repercussions were particularly negative in the development of social sciences. A scientific and academic community must be created. Cutting back on permanent posts and relying on short-term contracts does not encourage the development of an academic community. To reinforce and promote research, one should develop a real professionalization of social sciences with stronger theoretical and methodological tools.

The academic communities of research fields and disciplines must be strengthened both regionally and inside the Central American countries. There should be more resources to facilitate cooperation and regional exchange. This could be done through the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales FLACSO, which has proved to be a leading regional institution in the area. On a regional level, some institutes and departments have relationships with FLACSO but not a strong and solid network – and most do not have any funds or institutional support for academic exchange between universities and FLACSO. To remedy this, FLACSO could be used as an academic platform to address other urgent problems in the area. This means endorsing a regional research vision in Central America to encourage dialogue in the future between institutions and to promote academic collaboration. In general, more support from the most consolidated institutes to other, weaker programs and departments could be organized.

The international accreditation and academic quality evaluation systems should be promoted and reinforced in all Central American countries. If this is not done soon, there will be no ways to measure and guarantee institutional academic quality, and yet, such measuring and quality control could push the universities to higher standards.

There should also be a system through which the best research-oriented Central American academic institutions could present their research proposals or institutional ideas for competition. This might in the future create something like a “Central American International Research Council” – for example, with Sida/SAREC funding, organized together with internationally renowned academics and with FLACSO and CSUCA as basic units.

Introduction

History and Present of Social Sciences in Central America

Central America has always had a dual role, posing a dilemma for world history: the marginalized and peripheral region is also a geo-politically important isthmus dividing two oceans and uniting North and South America. These economic and geographical facts – the regional long *durée* – are in certain ways also evident in present academic life, and obviously in the history of regional educational systems and social sciences. The Central American dilemma is compounded by poverty and inequality, together with the region's small economies, and on the other hand, by the area's potential strategic importance in world politics. The complicated regional history has made the isthmus extremely dependent on and vulnerable to external economic, social and political influences. Although it is impossible here to analyze in more detail the history of the region, it is nevertheless important to point out that the civil wars of the 1980s – followed by post – Cold War neoliberal politics – did not change the historically difficult economic, social or political situation for any better, quite the opposite. The repercussions of contemporary history and a new kind of crisis are clearly felt in the educational sector in general, and in the academic field of social sciences in particular. Crucially, what Central American social sciences need today is identify these difficulties and study alternative solutions for the new kinds of problems brought on by accelerating trends of globalization.

Definition of Social Sciences?

In the widest definition, the generic term of “social sciences” can include the following disciplines: anthropology, economics, education, geography, history, international relations, law, linguistics, political science, psychology, social policy, and sociology. Since the 1960s, interdisciplinary perspectives – such as area studies, cultural studies, gender studies, development studies, environmental studies, health studies, etc. – have challenged the classical social science definition, giving rise to many master's programs. In our assessment, we made the practical choice of seeking to evaluate the state and “hard core” of Central American social sciences through a more “limited” disciplinary vision. Some words to justify this choice. Not all of the academic careers mentioned above exist in all Central American countries, nor are all of them included in the basic licenciatura degrees at the universities. Geography – understood as a natural science – is not included, but in many history departments a

geographical perspective is present (and in some cases, geography and history co-exist, or have co-existed, within the same institute). Linguistics is not understood here as a social science, but rather as belonging to the humanities, although perspectives of disciplines such as social linguistics are close to more “classic” social sciences. Also, a detailed analysis of economics (business administration programs in particular), educational, and psychological sciences is beyond the scope of our evaluation. These should be assessed in a separate study. Thus, the emphasis of this report is on history (social, political, or economic), sociology and anthropology, and political sciences. Our regional focus lies on Nicaragua and Honduras, as defined in ToR. Most of the field work was done in these two countries in January 2007, complemented by a long experience of Central American social sciences since the 1980s.

Previous Evaluations

“Social science” has been the focus of many previous evaluations. Institutes, such as the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO, based in Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Guatemala) have for a long time been involved in an on-going debate on the state of social science research in Central America. The Ford Foundation, too, has commissioned evaluations, panels and seminars on the state of Central American social sciences. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA-SAREC) analyzed the state of social sciences in 1992–1995, and FLACSO, too, was evaluated during 2005–2006 by Sida (which is why we have not analyzed FLACSO in detail; for FLACSO in this report, see pp. 43–48). In short, a lot of mapping and assessment has been carried out. Drawing on the previous work and our own evaluation, made in January–March 2007, there is now enough information for a general analysis.¹ Also, as explained in ToR, it should be noted that our evaluation, unlike the previous assessments, is not a program, project or aid impact evaluation but rather an overview, mapping and analysis.

To begin with, social sciences at the universities faced a serious crisis in all countries of the region in the 1990s. Most of the social science disciplines lost their high profile to economically more “profitable” academic tracks. This is reflected in the basic research infrastructure: until the 1990s, social sciences – say, political economy or sociology – were among the “trendy” subjects in the region. In revolutionary Nicaragua in particular there was a social science boom during the Sandinista government both nationally and internationally. Many renowned researchers from the U.S., Latin America, and Europe came to the region, interested in the Sandinista project through social sciences and contributing remarkably to the development of many research areas, academic tracks and institutions.

The general enthusiasm of the 1980s was strengthened also through international cooperation. Nicaragua gained technological research aid and resources from European development agencies in Germany, Austria, Netherlands, and the Nordic countries. Here, we need to acknowledge the Swedish Sida’s influential SAREC Program for Research Cooperation, which started in 1983. At the same time, with such international investment in academic infrastructure, the public sector in Nicaragua supported social science research to an exceptional extent. Research institutes were set up in Nicaraguan ministries and other public institutions, including *Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios de la Salud CIES*; *Centro de Estudios del Trabajo CETRA*; *Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios de la Reforma*

¹ See the list of evaluations in the bibliography.

Agraria CIERA; Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales INIES; Centro de Investigaciones y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica CIDCA; and Instituto Nicaragüense de Administración Pública INAP.

At the Central American level, a crucial role was played in the 1980s by the *Consejo Superior Universitario Centroamericano* CSUCA. They engaged the best academics of the region in improving the quality of research and to creating higher education planning tools at the regional level.

The Effects of 1990s

During the 1990s many of the best Central American social scientists left – or had to leave – academic and governmental institutions (universities, research departments in ministries, etc.). One reason was the neoliberal economic and political trend which became evident in national public sector policies: there was little interest or investment in basic social science research.

The structural changes have affected the upbringing of a following “social science generation”. Basic university diplomas or *licenciaturas* are not offered in all social science disciplines. The most competent and qualified students have to look for other possibilities.

One way out of the deadlock has been the rise of consultant offices (*consultorías* and *diagnósticos*) and non-governmental organizations or NGOs, which have bursted into the field of Central American social sciences. For many researchers and academics, forming an NGO was a strategy of survival. Although the NGO sector and consultant offices have in many cases done valuable applied or short-term research, it is important to note that their research policies and profiles differ from those of academic institutions: the one who pays also gets to define the topics and research areas. This process favored, on many levels, short-term research projects and applied science needs and attitudes. The publicly funded national policies were no longer able either to define or control the common social needs in relevant long-term research. Public educational policies, too, were monetarist in a neoliberal and market-oriented way. Educational planning was passive and mainly encouraged opening up a significant sector of higher education to private profit-making universities.

At the regional level, then, the 1990s structural adjustment programs proved almost disastrous to traditional social sciences. Privatizations and fiscal crises hit heavily at the Central American public sector, while at the same time the public sector’s interests (and opportunities) to support social sciences crashed. This happened in Nicaragua in particular and to some extent in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. In Costa Rica the public universities of repute have been able to maintain a leading role in higher education, in spite of the competition and growing pressure from private universities. In general, the Central American public sector crisis affected natural and technological sciences, too, but not as dramatically as social sciences.

As a result, and especially in Nicaragua, traditional social sciences could not compete with other related academic tracks offered by private universities. Programs in business administration, law, international relations, tourism administration, etc. have become more popular than social sciences (sociology, political science, history, economics, or anthropology). The new and more competitive tracks are provided by private universities without permanently contracted teachers and obviously with little research. Most of the private universities in Central America are not engaged in any research. They function to make a profit. The busi-

ness idea is to sell educational services at the lowest cost to those who are able to pay the highest price. This change has led to a significant sector of Central American higher education losing the classical Humboldtian idea of university where education is free and competent, and teaching is based on academic freedom and research.

The situation has hit hard at research opportunities and will probably hit even harder in the future. This trend in Central American social sciences has also changed the focus of the remaining research. During the 1980s “boom”, degrees in political economy, sociology, anthropology, economics, and economic history delved into topics such as the debt crisis, dependency theories, integration, violence, militarism, etc. The high quality of the research and growing international cooperation created a generation of experts, but not all of them were able to attract sufficient support or opportunities in national universities. Many began working as short-term consultants or set up an NGO. In some cases this created, with the financial support of international cooperation, a “po-bretología”, as is shown in the case of, for example, Dora María Téllez, the former Sandinista Minister of Health. This means that there is abundant information and research done on poverty issues, but at the same time these research findings are not distributed to the students through the higher educational system. Research and higher education do not meet because of structural and institutional problems. Many of the professional researchers do not work in the universities, and if they do, they cannot do research. If the present situation continues, there will be no kind of positive generational change. Central America might be facing a situation where the efforts and investments made in the research structure and resources are lost.

For many university teachers – for those working in permanent posts in public or semi-public universities² – the lack of research time and resources has meant that the idealistic dream of academic freedom has disappeared almost completely: they just teach to earn a living. Those who want or try to do research have to find all the resources from outside the university. The little time that is left from teaching is used in finding or applying for research funding, not in research itself.

The changes have led to a situation where the young are now looking at education and society in a different, more individualist, competitive way. Many intellectuals in Central America speak about a general lack of interest in common social issues and about a new consciousness of consumerism: there is no “structured common vision” on the direction of the development of the society or the future. Most analysts agree that the creation and maintenance of a functional civil society needs the input of social sciences in creating the basic knowledge and in analyzing different possible futures. The prevalent situation of Central American politics and social life is not based on a profound analysis of the society but more on the idea that everybody is on their own.

In a contradictory way, in twenty-first century Central America, there are more social problems than ever, but less basic social science to analyze these problems. The issue is there on a structural and academic (disciplinary) level both in absolute and relative terms. There is no such thing as the best way to *use* the research already done. This is a vicious circle. “No hay, o no pueden existir, universidades exitosas en una sociedad fracasada”, as one of the interviewed researchers said.

² These include private universities with less of a profit-making profile, such as UCA in Nicaragua or Universidad Rafael Landívar and Universidad del Valle in Guatemala.

Research Fields and Topics

As mentioned above, topics including the debt crisis, fiscal crisis, effects of structural adjustment programs, dependency theories, integration, violence, militarism, etc. came under social science scrutiny in the 1980s and 1990s. While they are still analyzed, there is less emphasis on theory or the structural point of view. Rather, the effects of these phenomena have been studied from a micro-analytical perspective, through something called “pobretology” above. This research, in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua in particular, has been financed by foreign cooperation which is channeled through research NGOs or in some cases through FLACSO. Many of the interviewed Central American intellectuals mentioned that “We know a lot about the poverty, ecological problems, corruption, violence, and health issues; now it is time to act and use the results of the research”.

Hopefully the NGO research of the 1990s is being used in the many popular interdisciplinary programs such as “gestión de desarrollo”, “gestión de género y salud”, “gestión de recursos materiales y medio ambiente”. The very real problem is how to guarantee the academic quality of these programs, if traditional social sciences are not taught on a basic undergraduate level at the universities. Many of the fashionable and trendy programs are also planned as master’s programs. This creates problems of its own, as there are few local PhD or master’s level professors with permanent academic (university) posts. Some criticism has also been raised at the way in which some university teachers in permanent posts plan these programs for themselves in order to get an MA or even a PhD. This takes resources from basic social science education. On the other hand, the education of more experienced university teachers (with *licenciatura*) might also be a tool to improve local university research – if the teachers of these programs are qualified enough and if the added value of the research is distributed through basic social science careers (such as anthropology, economics, history, political science sociology, or social policy).

On a regional Central American level, FLACSO has emphasized the critical objective of creating sustainable spaces for social scientists in the region and the setting up of common research priorities. Such agendas would help generate research and scientific knowledge, which would then be transmitted to students in the region, particularly in public universities. This, in turn, means strategies for addressing the problem of generational renewal of social science expertise in Central America. How to do this is one of the key challenges for social sciences in Central America.

Topics which emerged in the interviews (with the need of further research)

- Flow of capital and, on the other hand, the social and cultural impact of *remesas* (money sent to Central America by familiars living outside the region)
- Regional development and decentralization
- Urban /rural studies and local identities
- Different impacts of *migration* (also gender aspect)
- *Maquiladoras* (duty-free zone production, gender and child labor aspects)
- Criminal gangs, social effects of drugs use
- Family, youth, childhood
- *Political studies* in general (administration, political culture, corruption, power and the state, democracy and participation)

In addition, FLACSO has suggested the following more specific case studies

- Explore the implications for economic development of the emergence of a new model of accumulation in which traditional export agriculture is replaced with services and manufacturing as the engines of growth.
- Consider how consequent changes in the structure of the domestic private sector and its relationships with foreign investors and trends in labor markets facilitate or impede efforts of political democratization. Migration could be a central part of this analysis, because the composition of political actors in the region is increasingly transnational. The constellation of actors that shape political processes is becoming increasingly diverse and includes governments and pressure groups outside the region.
- Consider how economic and political changes are influencing collective identities and cultural practices of communities across Central America. Migration is central to this question as well, since the movement of people (not only to the U.S. but also from Nicaragua to Costa Rica, or from Guatemala to Mexico) has profound implications for the everyday life and for the cultural identities of people, in both sending and receiving communities.

Thus, FLACSO also suggests similar topics (impacts of migration and remesas, political culture, identity). The effects of migrations need urgent research at many levels. It is telling that none of the Central American countries has a well-structured migration policy.

Somewhat surprising is also the lack of good programs in political sciences in most Central American universities. The academic tracks that are there normally offer international relations and diplomacy, with a poor theoretical basis (no theories or perspectives of international politics or global political economy, no current political theories on democracy, etc.). It is striking that in societies where the global economy, general politics, bad administration and corruption are everyday hot topics, the analysts of these phenomena in the media are often lawyers, writers or even medical doctors and veterinarians. Theoretically and analytically prepared political scientists are absent. This says something, too, of the political culture and of the lack of study of political culture, which came up repeatedly during the interviews.

Research Infrastructure

Many of the basic problems of the research infrastructures are caused simply by the lack of resources. Many university departments do not even have an internet site. Many institutes have only one computer for the students and researchers. Universities do not have resources to buy licenses to use internet-based online services (JSTOR, e-thesis, EBSCO, etc.). The use of internet materials is limited to “googleing”. At the same time there are few books and other study materials available, and the libraries are in general very poorly equipped. Researchers and teachers mainly do their research at home, because the departments cannot offer offices or other research facilities.

University bookstores stock basic textbooks, but they are relatively expensive. This has proven a lucrative business to copy shops, located in abundance near the universities. It also causes “piratism”. A short survey in some university bookstores showed that there is little material (some textbooks) and only for basic teaching (and for undergraduate students).

Planning a research project at a university almost always needs extra funding. Some of the Central American universities have been able to create research institutes which have been successful in securing international cooperation and funding (such as IHNCA in UCA and CIHAC in Costa Rica). This has created possibilities for networking, and, institutionally, research groups and academic communities. Also, some promising generational change has happened. These good practices should be better distributed regionally through FLACSO or some other regional cooperation mechanisms. Some regional postgraduate programs (functioning in FLACSO and in CIHAC) have given resources to many, and there should be mechanisms to guarantee that these academic structures and communities survive in the future. If they can cooperate even better with other regional institutes and universities – and if they do not start to compete with each other – they could also build better regional research infrastructure.

Methodology (and timetable of the analysis)

December 2006

- collection and reading of background materials (previous evaluations, etc.)
- desk study of institutions (through internet, etc.)
- preparation of field work (contacting persons, making appointments for interviews)

January 2–8, 2007

- preparing of semi-structured interviews (questions, topics, etc.)
- checking appointments, interviews
- background reading

January 9–28, 2007

- field work in Nicaragua and Honduras (and in Costa Rica)
- interviews, institutional visits, checking statistics and pedagogical materials
- analysis of social science publications

February 2007

- analysis of interviews
- desk study (checking)
- write-up of evaluation report
- further interviews through e-mail

March 2007

- discussion on a draft report with Sida's representatives
- checking of details and statistics
- write-up of the final report

Institutions

Nicaragua

Since 1990, national-level higher education in Nicaragua has been coordinated and organized by the *Consejo Nacional Universitario* (CNU). The body was created following the passing of Law No. 89 (Law on the Autonomy of Higher Education Institutions), which stipulated the fundamental functions of higher education. CNU authorizes the founding of new universities or advanced technical education centers pending approval by the National Parliament. The political lobbying for approval of new private universities has resulted in new challenges for the national educational system, because many of the private institutions aim to benefit individuals and specific economic interests, without almost any control mechanisms on the quality of the education or research.

CNU is in charge of the allocation of funds from the national budget for the universities and higher technical education institutions, also overseeing the administration of international cooperation funding for research and higher education. According to CNU, there are 48 institutions of higher education in Nicaragua: four public universities and 44 private.³ Among these, only ten universities belong to the CNU and receive six percent from the national budget earmarked for higher education. Four of these universities are public: *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua* (UNAN-León), *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua* (UNAN-Managua), *Universidad Nacional de Ingeniería* (UNI), and *Universidad Nacional Agraria* (UNA). Six are run privately: *Universidad Centroamericana* (UCA), *Universidad Politécnica* (UPOLI), *Escuela Superior de Agricultura y Ganadería* (EIAG), *Universidad Católica Agropecuaria del trópico seco “Presbítero Francisco L. Espinoza Pineda”* (UCATSE), and the community universities from the autonomous regions *Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense* (URACCAN) and Bluefields Indian & Caribbean University (BICU).

From 1990 to 2004, the CNU authorized the establishment of 34 new private universities or technical schools.⁴ Private universities offer programs focused on technical and business sciences, and engineering and natural sciences. Few basic requirements exist in the approval process of a new private university and, as we mentioned, quality control is almost

³ Saravia Sánchez, Regina. *Educación Superior Privada en Nicaragua*. IESALC-UNESCO, Managua, 2006. <http://www.iesalc.unesco.org.ve/>

⁴ Torres Godoy, Edmundo. *Diagnóstico sobre la investigación universitaria en Nicaragua*. IESALC-UNESCO, Managua, 2006. <http://www.iesalc.unesco.org.ve/>

non-existent. Therefore, the academic quality is not guaranteed, and educational planning is limited to selected careers in response to market logics.⁵ The function of most private universities is primarily to teach only, and teaching is based mainly on the reproduction of knowledge, not on the creation of new knowledge through research-based teaching. Research does not figure in the approval process of a new university in Nicaragua, nor is it a priority on the agenda of most of the private universities founded since the 1990s. Closely related to the nature of the private universities is the fact that there is no academic career for professors. Few teachers or professors at private universities have permanent positions, and very few of them are able to conduct research. This impedes the production of knowledge, for example, through national, regional or international academic publications.

It is also important to acknowledge that there is a significant, although unknown, number of private universities not recognized by CNU in Nicaragua, with no national control on the quality of the programs and the degrees offered by these institutions.

Even though there are a great many universities in Nicaragua, there is not a comparable amount of research production. Most of the universities do not engage in research. Research remains weak in Nicaragua today for lack of resources and because there is no general consensus on the benefits and contribution of research to the development of the society in general and of social sciences in particular. In 2004, 87.5 percent of the teachers doing research in different fields in Nicaraguan universities belonged to CNU.⁶ Only the CNU member universities conduct social sciences research. Most research resources at the universities come from external funds, including the various international cooperation agencies (mainly European, such as Sida/SAREC, DANIDA, NORAD, AECI, DAAD) and other non-profit international organizations.

The CNU approved the creation of the National Research Framework for Higher Education (SINIES) in August 2005 to set up a research agenda. SINIES aims to promote interaction in research activity and between universities, students and professors; to further links between research and development policy; to create new postgraduate programs; to encourage national and international research exchanges; and to identify a common research area between universities. However, social sciences have not been included in SINIES research agenda.

Most of the interviewees in this evaluation agreed that one of the reasons for the crisis in social sciences in Nicaragua is its exclusion from higher education. Of the dozens of universities recognized by CNU, only the CNU's member universities, such as UNAN-Managua, León, UCA, and URACCAN, offer academic tracks in social sciences. The most important research centers or institutes in social sciences at the university level are based at UCA.

⁵ For an evaluation of the private universities in Nicaragua see Saravia Sánchez, Regina. *Educación Superior Privada en Nicaragua*. IESALC-UNESCO, Managua, 2006. <http://www.iesalc.unesco.org.ve/>

⁶ CNU universities had an average of 33 researchers in 2004 (excluding research assistants) whereas there were only two researchers on average in the other Nicaraguan universities. See Table 7.1. Torres Godoy. *Op. Cit.*

Research Institutes related to Social Sciences in Nicaragua

University	Name of the research institute/center	Research topics
UCA	Centro de Investigación y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica-CIDCA	Socio-economic develop.
UCA	Centro de Análisis Sociocultural- CASC	Socio-political studies
UCA	Instituto de Historia de Nicaragua-IHNCA	History and Literature
UCA	Instituto de Investigación y Desarrollo NITLAPAN	Rural-economic develop.
UNAN-Mana	Instituto Nicaragüense de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales-INIES	Economic development
UPOLI	Centro Interuniversitario de Estudios Latino-americanos	Latin American Studies
URACCAN	Centro de Estudios e Información de la mujer Multiétnica?	Gender inequality

Source: CNU main page, and Torres Godoy.

To evaluate the actual state of research in social sciences in Nicaragua, we analyzed these public and private universities, some of the tracks, programs, and infrastructure. As a case study, we examined some of UCA's research centers and institutes.

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua (UNAN-Managua)

UNAN-Managua is the biggest public university in Nicaragua, with a student population of 24,612 in 2005. Main social sciences tracks at UNAN-Managua are social anthropology, political sciences and diplomacy, history, Latin American and Caribbean historical studies, and social sciences for high school teachers. After four to six years of full-time study, the student is awarded a *licenciatura*, the highest degree for most of these fields at UNAN-Managua. Social science students are a minority of 2.68 percent of the total student population.⁷ In 2005, the most popular degrees in social sciences was diplomacy and political sciences (241), followed by social sciences for high school teachers (226), social anthropology (167), history (15), and Latin American and Caribbean historical studies (11).⁸ Most of these degrees were introduced in the 1990s after the national reforms in higher education. One of the few social sciences research institutes at UNAN-Managua is the *Instituto Nicaragüense de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales* INIES.

SAREC (Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries) has established permanent research funds for the Research Unit at UNAN-Managua to promote inter/multi- or transdisciplinary research.⁹ To be eligible to apply for these funds, one has to have a permanent full-time post at the university. At the same time, it seems – judging by the interviews – that many teachers are not aware of the availability of this funding, as most of them complain about the lack of research funding.

⁷ According to the number of students enrolled in 2005 in the above mentioned tracks. Consejo Nacional de Universidades. *Información estadística de las Universidades miembros del CNU, año 2005*. Managua: CNU, 2006, pp. 43.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ UNAN-Managua web page. http://www.unan.edu.ni/dir_invest/dirinvest_sarec.htm

Department of Philosophy and Sociology

Overview of the department

The diploma of diplomacy and political sciences was opened in 2001. It is a full-time five-year degree with a high demand among first-year students at UNAN, but only 50 students per year are accepted.

The department also offers basic and general courses of philosophy and sociology to other faculties and departments at UNAN-Managua.

The teachers and professors have a heavy working load in teaching, thesis supervision, and extra courses. Full-time positions are few. Most of the teachers at the department have temporary contracts or contracts per course (*horarios*). In 2005, only 25 percent of the staff at UNAN-Managua had full-time contracts, while 38 percent were *horarios*.¹⁰ Most of the teaching staff in the highest positions hold a *licenciatura* degree; a few have a master's degree. Even those in leading positions in the department often come from academic fields other than political sciences, including law, education, or the basic social sciences tracks offered at UNAN-Managua. The concept of "research-oriented staff" does not exist. In practice, there is almost no research conducted at the department, as the staff focuses on teaching and administration.

The profile of the track is to prepare professionals for the public sector, NGOs, private consultancies, public relations, and for political movements. The syllabus is currently being reformed. Students are required to do voluntary work and internships in other institutions and write a monograph (thesis). Although there are some initiatives to introduce a new and updated study plan for the academic track, the highly bureaucratic system at UNAN-Managua does not promote change. The department does not have enough academic contacts or networks with other political sciences institutes in Central or Latin America or even with other universities in Nicaragua. According to the director of the department, the relations and academic exchanges with FLACSO are weak because the resources are not there to travel and participate in FLACSO seminars or workshops.

Most urgent needs and infrastructural problems

The department should have more permanent posts, first of all to meet the heavy teaching loads and student supervision and in order to make more time available for research. Second, more posts could guarantee a space for students interested in studying abroad, so that they might have a job upon completing their degree. They could further develop the program when they return to the country.

Other urgent needs of the department are the reform of the syllabus and the creation of a Political Research Institute, since there is almost no research conducted at the department. There should be a real professionalization of the study program with qualified personnel in political science. The most talented students should have opportunities of scholarships to pursue their career abroad (in Central America or in other countries) and to obtain a doctoral degree. They should also have the possibility to come back to the department, to renew the staff and to bring with them fresh theoretical and methodological approaches.

Course readings are mainly photocopies of books. The department has very limited resources to obtain an updated bibliography or textbooks for the courses. What the department badly needs is a specialized library. There is not even a website to promote the studies which would

¹⁰ Consejo Nacional de Universidades, *Op. Cit.*, p. 233.

give general information about the staff, career, courses, etc. Technical tools are very scarce: a few computers, no data bases, and no conference or meeting rooms for students. The general infrastructure is very limited and inadequate.

In interviews with the director and some of the staff of the department, certain topics emerged as suggestions for future research, including economic integration, impacts and analysis of globalization, analysis of the political culture and ideology in Nicaragua, and the new social movements in Latin America.

Department of Social Anthropology

Overview of the department

The creation of the first anthropology department at UNAN-Managua was the initiative in 1991 of Dr. Leo Gabriel, an Austrian anthropologist. In its early years, the academic unit of anthropology sought to pursue and promote research in Nicaragua. Some seminars and basic course were also organized with CSUCA funding. From 1994 to 1996, they also ran a master's program, organized and financed by Austrian cooperation; seven students graduated from this program. Four of these graduates now constitute the department's staff (with full-time positions). They are assisted by 14 *horarios*. The five-year anthropology program has several fields of specialization: identity and culture; economic development strategies and survival; legal anthropology and indigenous groups; political and urban anthropology; communitarian and political authorities of the Caribbean; multiculturalism; autonomy; and sustainable development. In the third year of their studies, the students must choose their thesis topic. They are also required to do voluntary work and internships in other institutions. The internship opens up the possibility for future work in the same institution upon completing the degree. According to the director of the department, there is a generational change in the department, since some of the students of the program are hired as part-time teachers.

The department of social anthropology is part of a regional anthropology network in Central America that also includes Panamá and México. In 1994, the department organized the *V Central American Anthropology Congress*. For the director of the department, these congresses, held every two years, are the best way to engage in academic exchanges, create personal networks, get to know the most relevant research topics, and encourage and support anthropological research in the region. The anthropology student association has been active in Central American and Mexican student networks and associations. The department has had international exchanges with European, Mexican, and Cuban universities. Some invited anthropologists have also taught specialized courses.

Most urgent needs and infrastructural problems

The lack of incentives to do research at UNAN-Managua is one of the most urgent problems at the department. According to the director of the department there is no funding for research or to publish. Officially, there are no research posts, but the strategy of the department is to take time from teaching and do some research. According to the director of the department, with this strategy, 30 percent of the staff's working hours could be assigned to research. In general, the department shares the same problems with other departments at UNAN-Managua, such as the lack of computers, no access to online journals, and few updated textbooks or other specialized literature.

Universidad Centroamericana (UCA)

UCA was the first private university in Nicaragua, founded by the Jesuits in 1960. The most important and active research centers at the higher university level in social sciences are located here, including CASC, CIDCA, IHNCA and NITLAPAN. However, and in a contradictory way, UCA offers few opportunities to pursue a social science study programs or diplomas. The only three choices are a joint program in sociology and social work and development, and a diploma in gender and human development. Most of them have Saturday programs; classes are limited to one day per week.

Department of Social Sciences, Ethics and Religious Sciences

Overview of the department

A good example of the recent crisis of social sciences in Nicaragua is the history of the Department of Social Sciences, Ethics, and Religious Sciences at UCA. Since the 1990s, the diverse fields were brought together under one department because of the lack of students. The critical year was 1995, when the low enrollment numbers led to sociology and social work merging into one main program, limited only to Saturday classes to make it possible for working students to participate. In 2007, there were no takers for sociology at all. The program has now been restructured to make it more “attractive” for students. The plan is to reopen in 2008. Some initiatives are also in the pipeline to create a new political science track in the near future to attract more students to the department.

In 2005, only 7 percent of the teaching staff at UCA had full time positions and 17 percent were *horarios*.¹¹ The Department of Social Sciences has four full-time teachers, while twenty-five teachers have hourly-based contracts. There are two other permanent posts in specific projects such as the poverty observatory and opinion polls. The permanent staff must concentrate in teaching (four courses per semester) with no time to do research or write scholarly articles. There are no incentives for research; therefore, research is not done and applied on the courses. Critical thinking is not promoted in this model of university.

Temporary university teachers have a tenuous relationship with the university and students. Interaction with the students is limited to teaching hours in the classroom. Temporary teachers have unstable jobs and a very fragmented working environment, since they must teach several courses in different public and private universities to earn a decent salary. Some interviewees used the term *profesores taxi* in referring to these short-term contracted professors, moving fast from one university to another. All interviewees agreed that this “temporary” system has a very negative impact on the quality of the educational system as a whole and for many reasons. First, it does not promote or create a real academic community at the universities. Second, since there is no academic community, there is little space in the university to promote critical debate or critical thinking. Third, because of the unstable and temporary system, it is almost impossible to have long-term projects in the departments. Consequently, the faculty members do not have an active role in national debates, nor can they contribute to the public discussion in the mass media.

The professors of social work have quite active regional networks in Central and Latin American. In sociology there are very few regional or

¹¹ Consejo Nacional de Universidades. *Op. Cit.*, p. 223.

international academic exchange initiatives. The relations with FLACSO are scarce, because UCA lacks leadership in initiating cooperation or joint activities. UCA has a good main library and some access to specialized e-journals but there are still many limitations on access to updated literature in the different fields of the department. The *Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales* CLACSO has contributed to the department with new publications in the past years.

Most urgent needs and infrastructural problems

First, there should be more incentive and funding to promote research at the department. Secondly, there is pressure to change the profile of the department to attract more students and promote more community outreach partnerships in getting more involved in local development. Better permanent access to e-journals is one of the main concerns of the staff.

Instituto de Historia de Nicaragua y Centroamérica (IHNCA)

Overview of the institute

IHNCA (former *Instituto de Estudios del Sandinismo* IES) was established in 1987 and became part of UCA in 1990 in conjunction with the general reform of higher education in Nicaragua. It is something of a paradox, however, that there is no history track in UCA. The archives and library came from two institutions, *Instituto Histórico Centroamericana* IHCA and the IES. The first was founded in 1967 by Jesuit father Alvaro Argüello at UCA, and had an extensive collection of private archives and a library. The latter was the result of the literacy campaigns after the Revolution, and the compilation of more than 7,000 oral histories. Set up in 1980, the *Instituto de Estudios del Sandinismo* aimed to write the new history of Nicaragua and to promote research on the insurrection against Somoza, including biographies of martyrs and heroes.

Since IHNCA's foundation, research has been one of the main goals of the institution. In the 1990s, the research agenda focused on the nineteenth century with topics such as nationalism and the nation-building process, and the construction of national identity. Parallel to the research activities, the institution devoted considerable time and resources to the organization and consolidation of the library and archives. At present, IHNCA's research comes in three categories: cultural history, history of Nicaragua, and education (how to teach history at secondary level). To support and promote a new perspective on Nicaraguan history on primary and secondary levels, some of the researchers at IHNCA are involved in the production of didactic materials such as a portfolio with a Nicaraguan history textbook, and a compilation of maps. The researchers give workshops and training courses to high school teachers, seeking to build different ways of using the didactic materials to improve classroom methodologies. The materials are in use in many high schools, but they do not have an official or national status because of the politicization of society and state in certain key issues of Nicaraguan history.

The rich and unique archival materials – various private collections including Sandino's private archives, and photographs, maps, videos, cassettes, and popular music – and the specialized library at IHNCA are an important point of reference to any researcher interested in pursuing social sciences research in Nicaragua and the region. It is probably the only such library and archive, or modern documentation center, in Nicaragua.

IHNCA has seven permanent researchers, four with doctoral degrees, two with master's, and one with several *licenciaturas*. The interdisciplinary research team (four women and four men) specializes in history, art history, literature, social sciences, and education. As one of the researchers from the institute expressed in the interviews, IHNCA is an oasis in the desert thanks to the opportunity to develop research projects in a good academic and institutional environment. Some of the books published by IHNCA's researchers have obtained national recognition and awards.

Since the 1990s, the director of the institute has been very successful in international fund-raising, not only in promoting research but also in financing cultural activities and the exchange of international scholars in the history of Nicaragua and the region. Given the poor quality of social sciences in Nicaragua as a whole, IHNCA's contribution to the society has been very important both in research terms and as an active institution for the protection, conservation and promotion of the historical heritage (archives and library). For IHNCA's director it is essential to encourage basic research of the political history of the 1980s and 1990s in Nicaragua, given in particular the rich source material the institute holds in its archives, such as the official Sandinistas' records, different newspapers, and the archives of National Broadcasting Company (NBC) of the United States.

Social impact and the relevance of the institute's activities

IHNCA has become something of a national "cultural center" in Nicaragua. For example, the institute hosts photographic exhibitions in commemoration of historical events to promote a national identity among the population. One of these successful projects, and a good example of the dialogue between IHNCA and civil society, were the traveling exhibitions of the "Cultural Train" (built in three trailers) in 2006. The exhibition commemorated the 25th anniversary of the literacy campaign in Nicaragua. More than 20,000 high school students attended the itinerant exhibition in different parts of Nicaragua from February to September. The interactive exhibition (films, plays, concerts) promoted a critical but very attractive and mobile space to debate, confront, and understand the history of the literacy campaign for the younger generations.

Most urgent needs and problems

Half of the budget of the institute comes from external funding. The UCA authorities are pushing to reduce the university's share of the budget to 30 percent, which would raise the portion of the institute's external funding to 70 percent. The work of the director is mostly devoted to fund-raising, because the success of their research projects and other activities depends heavily on external funding.

NITLAPAN – Instituto de Investigación y desarrollo

Founded in 1990, NITLAPAN is one of UCA's leading research institutes. NITLAPAN comes from the *nahuatl* indigenous word "time to sow", and its main focus has been research in rural economic development to improve the living conditions of the rural population. NITLAPAN also promotes links between the university's expertise and applied research activities and producers' organizations for the implementation of sustainable economic development programs.

NITLAPAN has nine permanent researchers, four research assistants, and six associated researchers. The permanent research staff

consists of three PhD candidates, four with master's degrees, and the rest with *licenciatura* or other degrees. The interdisciplinary research team (six men and three women) specializes in economics, development studies, rural development, forestry, commercial engineering, and anthropology. Since its foundation, NITLAPAN has published 27 working papers and 32 books as the result of the diverse research projects mostly funded by international cooperation agencies.

The Institute promotes dialogue between the state and a number of institutions currently working in the field of agricultural technology (including NGOs) in order to harmonize their activities and render them more responsive to the needs of small producers. Its principal tools are micro-finance, and applied research and development.

NITLAPAN collaborates actively with other programs within UCA, contributing to the master's program in rural development, tutoring undergraduate and postgraduate theses, and lecturing in postgraduate studies. With other universities in Nicaragua, NITLAPAN participates in research programs with the *Escuela de Economía Agrícola* at UNAN-Managua and León.

At an international level, NITLAPAN has an active network and various academic agreements and research collaboration in Latin America, Europe, and the United States. Among the most relevant are those with the *Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza* CATIE in Costa Rica; the University of Antwerp in Belgium to support a program for training future researchers; and with the Danish Institute for International Studies DIIS to promote research in biodiversity, and local and environmental management. With the Overseas Development Institute ODI (Great Britain), NITLAPAN recently started a study for the regional analysis of commercial policies to fight poverty in Latin America. With the Department of Agricultural Economics at Michigan State University, NITLAPAN plans to start a joint project about small producers and restructured economies in Indonesia and Nicaragua. Finally, in collaboration with the World Bank (Department of Rural Development Studies), NITLAPAN recently finished the first phase of research about the effects of free trade in agriculture in developing countries that include México, Nicaragua, Morocco, Madagascar, Mali, Kenya, and Senegal.

Social impact and the relevance of the institute's activities

Since its founding, NITLAPAN has been active and has contributed to national issues such as rural development policies and small urban enterprises in Nicaragua. Three specific projects have been of special national significance: *El campesino finquero* (1996), *El desarrollo incluyente de la Región Central* (2001), and *Revisitando el Agro Nicaragüense* (2005). On each of these, NITLAPAN identified the regions and public sectors that should have a priority of public investment to promote and increase productivity levels.

In 2001, as a member of the UCA team, NITLAPAN presented at a national level the project of *Las bases para un Plan de Desarrollo Rural* to reconceptualize the concept of "rural" and move beyond agrarian approaches towards a more territorial development approach. NITLAPAN is a member and part of the advice committee of the *Consejo Nacional de la Producción*, coordinated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. NITLAPAN takes part also in other national committees, including Production and Infrastructure of the *Consejo Nacional de Planificación Económica y Social* CONPES in order to discuss state policies be-

tween the government and civil society. In addition, NITLAPAN is part of UNIFEM's board in setting an economic agenda for women among many others.

Most urgent needs and problems

Lack of funding to establish a permanent, long-term research agenda is one of the main concerns of NITLAPAN. The documentation center needs more specialized equipment (scanner and computers) to develop a virtual library in a joint project with *Red Nacional de Información y Documentación Agraria de Nicaragua* RENIDA and to digitalize on-line information. At the same time, NITLAPAN needs more resources for more updated literature and access to online journals on issues such as gender, environmental issues, economics, and agriculture.

Centro de Análisis Socio-Cultural (CASC)

CASC, or UCA-CASC (*Centro de Análisis Socio-Cultural*) is the smallest of UCA's research institutes. The history of the center goes back to 1983 when UCA was actively seeking collaboration with the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium). CASC was founded officially in 1986, with an academic profile oriented especially to the research of cultural and religious aspects of Nicaraguan political and social life. Later, the center's research policies have also emphasized cultural impacts in public sector, democratic participation, gender issues and decentralization. The director of the institute has been very active in the study of political culture, which at the moment is clearly CASC's strongest field.

There are six persons working in CASC, including the administrative staff. The institute has been able to publish most of its research in books, articles, essays, or pamphlets. Also, it participates actively in UCA's academic programs (for example, in master's or research programs in local development and demography). CASC contributes to the Network of Researchers of Socio-cultural and Demographic Analysis (*Red de Investigadores en Análisis Sociocultural y Demográfico*, RIASDE); coordinates the Nicaraguan National Network of Local Development (*Red Nicaragüense por la Democracia Local*); and also belongs to the *Coordinadora Civil de Nicaragua*. Despite its small size, CASC has been able to conduct an important role in the analysis of Nicaraguan political culture and in the research of democracy and participation. CASC's community outreach role is also visible, for example through the director's active participation in the media.

Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense (URACCAN) and Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University (B.I.C.U.)

Founded in 1995, URACCAN has campuses in Managua, Puerto Cabezas, Siuna, Bluefields, and Nueva Guinea. The mission of the university is to address various local and regional community needs. In 2007, the social sciences tracks at a *licenciatura* level approved by CNU at URACCAN were sociology (with a minor in autonomy) and social sciences specializing in local development.¹² URACCAN has a master's degree in social anthropology. URACCAN has played – with the Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University B.I.C.U. – a very important role in local and regional development. The academic and research cooperation between URACCAN, B.I.C.U. and CIDCA (UCA) – all working on indigenous and/or Caribbean issues – should be organized more efficiently.

¹² *Inventario de Carreras de las Instituciones de Educación Superior legalmente constituidas*. CNU, 2007, <http://www.cnu.edu.ni/documentacion/>

General Remarks about the State of Research in Social Sciences in Nicaragua

In 2004, the evaluation on the state of research at the member universities of CNU¹³ highlighted some of the core issues related to research in Nicaragua. Most of them can be applied to social sciences. During our field work in January 2007, the following problems were identified in the departments and institutions:

1. Absence of research agenda
2. No research incentives or initiatives
3. Model of the university focused only on teaching
4. No research budget in the university's yearly budget
5. Most of research carried out by individuals, with no evaluation on the results or quality of research
6. No interaction between research and undergraduate studies
7. Research based on individual interests, not on national priorities
8. Fundraising seems to be the major duty of the research centers and institutes, not research itself; the universities (central administration) should do more to finance research and publications

Honduras

The Law for Higher Education (1989) organizes the higher education system in Honduras. Founded in 1847, *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras* (UNAH) is the most important university in the country and, in practice, it is the institution coordinating higher education. There are 16 universities in Honduras: five public and eleven private. Most of the universities are located in Tegucigalpa (10) and San Pedro de Sula (2). The rest are in other smaller cities. The public universities are UNAH; *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional "Francisco Morazán"* (UPNFM); *Universidad Nacional de Agricultura* (UNA); *Escuela Nacional de Ciencias Forestales* (ESNACIFOR); and the *Instituto Superior de Educación Policial* (ISEP).

In 2003, the two biggest universities, UNAH and UPNFM, had around 80 percent of the student population.¹⁴ They are also the only universities to offer diplomas or academic tracks in social sciences in Honduras. UPNFM prepares teachers for secondary education with a general social sciences emphasis. There are no degree programs in archeology or ethnology, which is a paradox in a country with such a rich and extensive archaeological heritage.

The first private universities in Honduras were launched in 1978, after the passing of the Law for Private Universities¹⁵. Today, there are eleven private universities in Honduras: *Universidad Tecnológica Centroamericana* (UNITEC); *Universidad Católica de Honduras "Nuestra Señora Reina de la Paz"* (UNICAH); *Universidad de San Pedro Sula* (USPS); *Universidad José Cecilio del Valle* (UJCV); *Escuela Agrícola Panamericana El Zamorano* (EAP); *Universidad Metropolitana de Honduras* (UMH); *Universidad Cristiana Evangélica* (UCE); *Universidad Evangélica "Nuevo Milenio"* (UCENM); *Universidad Tecnológica de Honduras* (UTH); *Centro de Diseño, Arquitectura y Construcción* (CEDAC); and *Seminario Mayor "Nuestra Señora de Suyapa"* (SMNS). These universities offer specialized vocationally-oriented degrees in areas such

¹³ Evaluación del Desempeño de la Investigación en las Universidades Miembros del CNU (CNU 2004) cited by Torres. Op. Cit.

¹⁴ Salgado Peña, Ramón. *Informes nacionales sobre la educación superior, Honduras*. UNESCO-IESALC, Diciembre 2003, p. 26.

¹⁵ Oseguera de Ochoa, Margarita. *Diagnóstico sobre Políticas de Investigación en las Universidades. El caso de Honduras*. Tegucigalpa: CSUCA/IESALC/UNESCO, 2005, p. 6.

as forestry and agriculture, and other popular programs in business administration, tourism, finances, engineering, and architecture. There are few social sciences options.

It is the private consulting companies and NGOs – not the public or private universities – that are the leading and almost only research institutions in Honduras. The most talented and qualified professionals in social sciences in Honduras work outside the universities at institutions such as UNDP, NGOs, *Estado de la Nación* or *Estado de la Región* projects or even in their own private consultancy agencies. One of the most successful consultant companies in Honduras is *ESA Consultores*, with an interdisciplinary and qualified team of researchers (many former UNAH professors). Since its foundation in 1995, the Honduran government, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and World Bank have been among the most important ESA clients. Most of the ESA people interviewed for this evaluation used to be professors or teachers at UNAH, but many left the public university frustrated at the few research opportunities (lack of incentives and funding) and the low salaries.

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras (UNAH)

UNAH is the biggest and most important university with seven different branches around the country, including the main campus in Tegucigalpa and one center for long-distance education SUE (with several branches). UNAH offers some basic tracks in social sciences at a *licenciatura* level, including sociology, social work, and history. There are two postgraduate programs in political science (although no political science licenciatura degree!), two master's programs, and a doctoral program in social work. Today, there are only two research institutes at UNAH, one in economics and the other in law, both with low research activity and quality.

In the last years – in conjunction with the university reform at UNAH – new policies and guidelines to promote research have been issued through an overhauled *Dirección de Investigación*. Future projects include providing research scholarships as an incentive for the professors to do research, the creation of ten new research institutes to promote a closer relationship within institutes and the departments, the upbringing of a qualified research staff for the institutes and the development of new quality control systems. These initiatives are at a very early stage, which makes it hard to evaluate the potential outcomes.

According to a national report on higher education in Honduras in 2003, only 2.6 percent of university teachers do research.¹⁶ Most of the professors – possible research-active staff – do only teaching. The administrative personnel, who hold a lot of institutional power, define for each semester the number of courses that each faculty member must teach (usually 3–4 courses per semester). This is normally a full-time job. Teaching is the priority in meeting the demands of an increasing student population (there is no admission exam at UNAH). Therefore, there is little time left for research and precious little interest or incentive on the part of academic administration to promote lasting basic research in the university.

Honduras and Nicaragua share many concerns within the academic sector: the absence of an academic community, teachers with multiple jobs at different universities, no funding or incentives to conduct research or to publish. At the same time, there are no resources for updated literature or access to online journals. Even internet access is very limited

¹⁶ 57 percent of the professors in public universities in Honduras had full-time contracts in 2003. Salgado Peña. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 49 y 51.

in the university infrastructure. The authorities have not taken adequate steps for a generational change within the academic system, which poses severe problems in the current transitional period.

At UNAH, the old generations have many benefits and privileges while new generations have few incentives and very low salaries.¹⁷ Consequently, the most qualified and talented professionals seek better salaries and stable jobs outside the public university. There is an ongoing brain drain of qualified professionals from the public sector, which is very detrimental to the public higher education system in Honduras.

Postgrado Latinoamericano de Trabajo Social PLATS

In 1977, an agreement between *Centro Latinoamericano en Trabajo Social* (CELATS) (based in Perú) and UNAH marked the beginning of a Latin American postgraduate program in social work leading to a master's degree. Almost ten years later, CSUCA gave the master's degree the status of a regional Central American postgraduate program after an extensive self-evaluation process (1989), ratified in 2004. In 1996, a doctoral program was approved in Social Sciences, focusing on development management. Two years later, another master's degree in social demography started at PLATS. The program is marked by international academic cooperation, with ten participating universities annually. The funding for teacher exchanges, scholarships, research, and community outreach activities comes from Germany, Spain, Canada, Sweden, México, and Italy. PLATS is one of the few programs evaluated by external and regional institutions (such as CSUCA).

The five main research areas at PLATS are rural development, urban management, gender studies, family, and public policies. The program has taken part in many regional research projects coordinated by FLACSO and CSUCA. FLACSO-Costa Rica actively supports the program with workshops and other academic exchanges, and PLATS is part of its advisory committee. PLATS belongs to several regional networks, including CLACSO, and other international projects.

In 2005, PLATS started a new master's program in social demography financed by UNDP and other international cooperation agencies. PLATS has a documentation center but there is no funding for access to specialized e-journals or even to internet. They do, however, have a good website with general information about the programs. Lack of funding for independent basic research and publishing is one of the main concerns in PLATS. To solve the problem, they have been active in cooperation programs with NGOs or international cooperation agencies in specific projects. In these instances, research has been limited to an external agenda. Potential future research topics at PLATS are youth, and also more emphasis is put in women/gender studies.

Political Science postgraduate programs

There is no basic political science academic track at UNAH. Nevertheless, two master's programs in political science were proposed at the end of the 1990s. The first was an initiative of the Law Faculty, while the other came from the Social Sciences Department. The latter started in 2004 (*Maestría en Estudios Sociales y Políticos*) with sister groups in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro de Sula thanks to an international scientific coop-

¹⁷ The salaries vary according to the level of the professor in the academic system (régimen académico). The *horarios* with one course per semester have a salary of US\$200, while professors with a contract to teach three to four courses receive a monthly salary of US\$1,200 (depending on their degree). Full-time professors in the highest academic ranking can earn a salary between US\$2,500 to US\$3,000. Those with a director's position also get an extra bonus.

eration agreement with Havana University. Most of the teachers in the program are not political scientists but lawyers or sociologists, or invited professors from the United States and Cuban universities.¹⁸ The program takes a transdisciplinary social science perspective to analyze political phenomena. The other program, the legally oriented *Maestría en Ciencia Política y Gestión del Desarrollo* started at the beginning of 2005.

In their analysis of the state of political science in Honduras in 2005, Cálix and Sierra emphasized that one of the most important challenges in this field in Honduras is a real professionalization and institutionalization (creation of a political science *licenciatura*). In other words, build up a coherent, permanent and qualified academic community of political scientists that could promote basic research discussion and more involvement in national debates.¹⁹ Consultancy groups or foreign researches conduct most of the research in political science. Honduran researchers are few and they tend to be in short-term projects. Political analysts are prevalent in the national debate, but they come with an intuitive perception which is seldom based on empirical or serious research work. Also, there are no political science conferences in Honduras, nor specialized political science publications or journals of any type.

Finally, Cálix and Sierra suggest some urgent basic research themes that should be explored in the future: the political party system in Honduras, military power, and civil society.

Centro de Documentación de Honduras (CEDOH)

Founded in 1980, CEDOH is a non-profit organization which does consultancy work and research, and organizes seminars, public debates, radio programs, and other activities to promote a democratic culture in Honduras. CEDOH started off as a documentation center, and it has created an important public database of all the Honduran newspapers from 1978 until the present. The documentation center (the only one of its kind in Honduras) is public and attended by researchers, students, university teachers, journalists, and members of NGOs.

In the 1990s, research and the dissemination of knowledge became a central agenda of the institution. CEDOH had published several documents, including the series of *Cuadernos de Educación Popular* and *Documentos de Análisis*, which contain short documents about corruption, electoral and political reforms, political participation, youth gangs, civil society, and democracy. The most important contribution of CEDOH in research terms are the many books on democratization, political culture, decentralization and citizenship participation, relations between civil society and the, good governance, judicial reform, corruption, political parties, migration, state decentralization, security, and military issues.

CEDOH has a team of researchers from different backgrounds, including sociology, economy, law, but only the director and some administrative staff have permanent posts. The researchers affiliated to the center have priority when there is funding for specific projects. CEDOH has been active in regional networks such as FLACSO and CLACSO (in Honduras only CEDOH and PLATS belong to CLACSO). With FLACSO-Costa Rica they have organized and coordinated different activities and seminars, for example a workshop on poverty for young researchers. They also have an updated website with a list of books and other publications produced in the past decades, and

¹⁸ Cálix, Álvaro y Sierra, Rolando. Una Mirada a la Ciencia Política en Honduras: La necesidad de sentar bases para su institucionalización. Santiago. *Revista De Ciencia Política (Santiago)*, Vol 25, No. 1, 2005, 182–191, p. 188.

¹⁹ Cálix and Sierra. *Op. Cit.*, p. 184.

information about researchers, projects, activities and conferences organized by CEDOH. Possible research topics for the future, suggested by CEDOH's director, are public safety (because there is no integral public policy on highly topical security issues in Honduras), corruption, unemployment, migration and the socio-economic impact of *remesas*. CEDOH has played an important and active role in the Honduran society, but most of the research made at the center is in short-term projects dependent on international funding.

Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia (IHAH)

IHAH is an autonomous governmental institution founded in 1952 and now working under the Ministry of Culture. IHAH was created to protect the Cultural Patrimony of the Nation. The institution promotes research in the archaeology, ethnology, and history of Honduras.

The main office is located in Tegucigalpa in the beautiful *Villa Roy*, and the institute is organized in different departments and sections, which fulfill certain functions regarding the cultural patrimony of the nation. At a national level, the IHAH has regional and sub-regional offices in the central, western and northern areas of the country. Under IHAH's administration are eight museums and archaeological parks, including the famous archeological Maya cultural site of Copan.

IHAH has an Anthropological Research Department (DIA) with an archaeology section, charged with the study, protection, and promotion of the anthropological patrimony of the country. They do this by carrying out inspection, cooperation, research, restoration, and archeological consolidation projects with a team of researchers and professional technicians. Assistance and cooperation agreements with national and international institutions help them carry out their own investigations, which furthers the study, protection, and promotion of the anthropological cultural patrimony of the country.

The Department of Historical Research (DIH) focuses on historical research, the preparation and sale of publications, and on the organization of the document collections of the IHAH's main archive. In addition to the academic journal *Yaxkin*, IHAH has published several studies regarding the Pre-Hispanic and Colonial period and about the national patrimony.

Strengths and Weaknesses

There is an urgent need for both basic and applied social science research in Nicaragua and Honduras. It is needed to understand the most striking of today's dilemmas, including poverty, social inequality, violence, migration, and insecurity. Rural/urban migration is increasing as well as international migration from the poor to richer countries in the region, and from Central America to the United States in particular. It is essential to understand the impact of these processes at the socio-economic and cultural level.

Many of the problems in the development of social sciences in Nicaragua and Honduras are structural, closely connected with a deficient and limited primary and secondary education system. Public and private universities alike (although the problem is even more acute in private universities) hire new professors only for short contracts, mainly per hour. The teachers need multiple teaching jobs at public and private universities to make a decent salary.

In Nicaragua, few members of the academic staff have permanent jobs, whether in public or private universities, and mostly they teach.

In Honduras, most of the professors or teachers at UNAH have full-time contracts but they, too, are mainly dedicated to teaching. Since research in general is not a priority for university authorities, there is a heavy teaching load per semester, and almost no funding at the departments to conduct or propose research projects. In other words there are no incentives or funds for high-quality social science research in the universities in Honduras and Nicaragua.

There is an urgent need for a real professionalization of social sciences of stronger theoretical and methodological tools. A scientific and academic community must be created. Cutting back on permanent posts and relying on short-term contracts does not encourage the development of an academic community. In the current system, the creation of an academic community seems near impossible. The neoliberal economies of the last decades have had an adverse impact on the higher education system and on the development of social sciences. In Nicaragua and Honduras, social science research is mainly the duty of a few research institutes (Nicaragua) supported by international agencies or NGOs. In very few isolated cases, public university teachers, working extra hours, also do basic research but with little funding for publication.

The funding and support by some international agencies is mainly for short-term projects and in concert with the interests of the development cooperation agencies. This has not encouraged long-term research in social sciences in Central America. First, it limits the opportunity to pursue an independent research agenda. Second, it does not promote basic research in each country.

There is no generational change within the universities. On returning to their home countries, young, qualified professionals with postgraduate degrees from abroad are unable to find jobs in the academic sector or it takes many years to get into the university system. Poor salaries, unstable job conditions, and an extremely bureaucratic and rigid system are some of the most common problems that young academics face. The most qualified researchers are working outside the universities, mainly as international consultants or at international organizations with better salaries and excellent working conditions. On the other hand, they rely on an external agenda to do research. Those who can and would contribute to the development of research in social sciences in Nicaragua and Honduras do not have a space in public universities.

This is one internal cause for the brain drain in Nicaragua and Honduras. Also preventing the recruitment and incorporation of the ablest researchers are the bureaucratic university administration system and, in some cases, the staff's personal relations, or political or ideological disagreements. In some public universities, the unions also put the brakes on developing more efficient academic and research infrastructure.

Access to updated literature (textbooks or online databases) is limited, because resources are poor. In some cases, universities lack the most basic needs such as computers. The situation is particularly bad in public universities.

FLACSO in Central America

The *Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales* (FLACSO) was founded in 1957 with the sponsorship of UNESCO to promote learning, research, and cooperation in the social sciences throughout the Latin American continent. FLACSO is an international organization with regional and autonomous capacities. In addition to its Regional Administrative Departments, the General Executive Secretary of FLACSO is located in

Central America (Costa Rica). FLACSO is organized in ten academic branches or divisions. Three of them are located in Central America; in Costa Rica, El Salvador and Guatemala. Since their inception, FLACSO units in Central America have played a central role in producing quality social scientific research and teaching explicitly aimed at strengthening democracy and socioeconomic development in the region.

Despite shared financial vulnerabilities and significant differences in terms of size and degree of institutional consolidation, all three Central American FLACSO units stand among the most solid and important centers of social science research and teaching in the region. In addition, all three are influential and politically independent social actors in their respective countries. In a region marked by violent civil wars and an extreme need of intellectual capital for research, FLACSO has been crucial in the construction of the broader social and institutional infrastructure.

The main duties of FLACSO are:

- Conduct excellent academic research on social, political, economic and environmental issues, and to assist the definition of public policies.
- Ensure human resources in social sciences through doctorate and master's programs, and through specialization courses
- Cooperate with universities, national governments, local and international non-governmental organizations, to promote the development of social sciences
- Disseminate the diverse advances in social sciences with a special emphasis on the results obtained from research at FLACSO
- Promote the exchange of educational materials in social sciences within Latin America
- Offer technical assistance to national governments, multilateral organizations and civil society

FLACSO's regional postgraduate programs

The Central American Program of Posgrado in Social Sciences of FLACSO is designed to contribute to the development of social sciences in Central America and to the creation of a regional academic community that could respond – with academic excellence and social relevance – to the challenges that accelerated globalization poses for Central American societies. FLACSO offers both doctorate and master's programs, and there has been critical discussion on FLACSO's role as an educational unit – even as a challenge or competition for national Central American universities.

Nordic Funding

Nordic funding has been fundamental for all three Central American FLACSO units. Nordic (Norwegian, Swedish) support accounted for 44, 66, and 58 percent of total revenue in Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Guatemala respectively in 2005. Sida has recently made an evaluation on Central American FLACSOs (not yet published, Feb 2007).

Table 1, Nordic Funding (Norway and Sweden, USD)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Var 00–05
Norway	146,707	197,977	201,119	379,529	291,530	210,122	43%
Sweden	354,899	769,641	1,002,561	1,651,398	1,090,157	1,830,805	416%
NORDIC	501,606	967,618	1,203,680	2,030,927	1,381,687	2,040,927	307%

Source: FLACSO in Central America: An Evaluation for Sida, Draft of the Final Report, October 15, 2006.

Academic Personnel

The number of academic personnel in Central American FLACSOs has over the past five followed the ebb and flow of economic development. The numbers have remained constant in Costa Rica, while in El Salvador, there has been a strong variance. In both cases, however, absolute numbers remained small, compared to the total faculty in Guatemala.

Table 2, Academic Personnel in Central American FLACSOs

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Costa Rica	8	8	9	9	9	10
El Salvador	4	12	10	17	13	8
Guatemala	21	24	34	20	39	43

Source: FLACSO in Central America: An Evaluation for Sida, Draft of the Final Report, October 15, 2006

FLACSO-Costa Rica

According to its web page, the Costa Rican FLACSO promotes the exchange and comparative study of the experiences and conditions of social development in Central America. The regional experience and conditions reveal the realities and efforts of developing societies. International cooperation has opened up various academic opportunities for this unit, including research, instruction, and debate about the experiences of social development in Central America and beyond. Strategic alliances constitute a working mechanism of FLACSO-Costa Rica, which privileges cooperation with other organizations of FLACSO in the region, governmental institutions, NGOs, the private sector, and the academic branches in the hemisphere and throughout the world. The cooperation with universities from the northern hemisphere is emphasized as very important for the development of joint programs in research and education, but, for example, South-South cooperation, or cooperation with national universities is less pronounced, although it is there.

FLACSO-Costa Rica develops regular activities for education, professional enhancement, and research and dissemination of knowledge around eight focus areas. Every institutional activity seeks to incorporate analytical frameworks that are gender and ethnically conscious.

The focus areas of FLACSO-Costa Rica are:

- Social Development and Public Policies
- Globalization, Labor Market and Inequity
- Transborder Migration
- Local Economic Development
- Decentralization and Municipal Management
- Democratic Governability and Political Institutions
- Sustainable Tourism
- Population and Territory
- Social Movements

Each area comprises activities for education, professional enhancement, and research and dissemination. They also incorporate analytical frameworks affirmed to be gender and ethnically conscious. Thematically the research agenda addresses crucial problems of the Costa Rican society and prioritized on the national political agenda. These are problems and priorities that Costa Rica to a large extent shares with the rest of the region. In contrast to the other units, the research of FLACSO Costa

Rica is more outward-looking in the sense of addressing research questions and problems in a comparative way. This can be seen, for example, in the studies on migration that move beyond the examination of migrant influx to Costa Rica and cover migratory movements in and between different countries of the region. The unit is also involved in a comparative project on poverty alleviation policies covering all Latin America, and in the area of tourism. Many projects cover clearly global concerns.

The comparative approach characterizing many of FLACSO Costa Rica's projects is partly a consequence of its location in a country that is not directly a target of international development aid. Engaging in comparative endeavors which comprise neighboring countries with more severe political and social problems than has been one means to mobilize a certain amount of donor funds that would otherwise not be available. On the other hand, this does not mean that social problems in Costa Rica are diminishing, vice versa. In general, FLACSO Costa Rica has become a reference point in research throughout the sub-region, especially in Honduras and Nicaragua, and even beyond.

FLACSO-El Salvador

FLACSO's academic activities in El Salvador began in May of 1992 through specific projects of the General Secretariat. In December that year the Directive Committee formalized them as FLACSO-structured projects. Later, in June 1994, these activities became a permanent FLACSO unit with program characteristics specified by the FLACSO agreement and its regulations.

FLACSO activities in El Salvador cover the Central American sub-region, prioritizing the action coordinated with FLACSO's academic units in Costa Rica and Guatemala. The research in FLACSO El Salvador centers on: a) violence and youth, b) governance, democracy and the transformation of the state, c) educational policy and the labor market, and d) globalization: local and global dynamics. Thematically the research focuses on crucial areas of priority in Salvadoran national policy. Electoral democracy was installed in El Salvador during the 1990s, civic participation has increased, and the freedom of association and expression has improved, but the process of democratization is far from completed. Enormous social differences, segregation, exclusion, unemployment, and high levels of violence are still characteristics of the Salvadoran society. The research of FLACSO is highly relevant in attending to many of these continuous problems. It is also important to notice that there are generally more donor funds available in Guatemala than in El Salvador, probably because of the particular ethnic situation of Guatemala. This is reflected in the willingness of the agencies or NGOs to support research institutions. FLACSO El Salvador depends on additional funds supplementing the institutional support from Sida, which seems to be absolutely vital for the survival of the institution. Over the last years FLACSO has been also involved in a number of consultancies, mainly commissioned by state institutions to design and evaluate public policies.

FLACSO-Guatemala

FLACSO began its activities in Guatemala in 1987 in the propitious atmosphere prevailing during the transition to democracy after the 1986 elections. It was recognized by the State by means of the Legislative Decree. The activities of the unit spring from five perspectives or areas of

study: a) education, b) poverty, c) socio-political questions, d) social movements, and e) population, environment and rural development. Ethnic studies used to be a separate program, but has now been demoted to a project despite its strong quality and social pertinence.

Thematically, the activities address central areas of priority in Guatemalan national politics, such as economic and social development and institutional consolidation of democracy with special emphasis on inter-ethnic relations and multiculturalism. The fact that a central goal for FLACSO Guatemala is to influence political decision-making processes and contribute to the strengthening of civil society, adds to the institution's weight. However, the relevance of FLACSO activities is highly dependent on the relevance of the priorities of international donors.

Each area of study is funded by different international donors, two of them by more than one. The agreements between FLACSO and the agencies result from mutual negotiations, which means that the activities within each area are highly dependent on the current priorities of the different agencies – both regarding topics and the proportion of funds available for research activities. FLACSO tends to adapt proposals and applications for funds to the changing priorities of the agencies and NGOs. In Guatemala, FLACSO has to “fight” for resources with institutions like CIRMA, probably even more than in other countries of the region.

In regional perspective, the research of FLACSO Guatemala can be characterized as mostly “inward looking” in the sense that research topics center on national problems and conditions; few comparative projects have been carried out.

Costa Rica

The first modern public higher education institution in Costa Rica, the *Universidad de Costa Rica* (UCR), was founded in 1940. For many decades it was the only university in the country. In the 1970s, three new public universities were created: *Instituto Tecnológico de Costa Rica* (ITCR), the *Universidad Nacional* (UNA), and the *Universidad Estatal a Distancia* (UNED). Also, the first private university *Universidad Autónoma de Centro América* (UACA) appeared in the 1970s. The *Consejo Nacional de Rectores* (CONARE) and its technical secretariat, the *Oficina de Planificación de la Educación Superior* (OPES), coordinate public higher education in Costa Rica.

In 2006, there were 67 private universities recognized by the *Consejo Nacional de Educación Superior Privada* (CONESUP) (under the Ministry of Education), which supervises and approves the creation of private universities in Costa Rica. The foundation of new private universities was especially intensive in the 1990s; fifty new universities started their work between 1986 and 2000. The national-level consequences of the unlimited growth of private universities can be measured by the number of university diplomas given per year in the country. Until the mid-1990s, the majority were awarded by public universities. From 1998 onwards, half of the diplomas were granted by private universities, and by 2004, this had increased to 60.8 percent of the total number.²⁰

The unlimited and unrestricted growth of private universities, some of them with few quality controls, promoted the creation in 1999 of the *Sistema Nacional de Acreditación de la Educación Superior* (SINAES). Since its creation, the four main public universities voluntarily participated in the

²⁰ Programa Estado de la Nación. *Estado de la Educación. Una mirada profunda de la situación educativa en Costa Rica para señalar desafíos y fundamentar propuestas*. San José: El Programa, 2005, p. 100.

accreditation system. In 2005, thirteen universities (the four public and nine private) were part of SINAES. None of the postgraduate degrees are included in the accreditation system.²¹ At the undergraduate level, nine tracks have been accredited at UCR and ten in UNA. Private universities created their own accreditation system in 2002 as *Acreditación de la Enseñanza Superior Universitaria Privada de Costa Rica* (SUPRICORI). The accreditation system (that belongs to the *Union Nacional de Rectores de Universidades Privadas* (UNIRE)) elected a board in 2004, but it is still too early to evaluate the results.

Research in Costa Rica is conducted mainly at the four public universities. It is here that the teachers and professors have an opportunity to create an academic career. Therefore, these public universities are focally important in the research system of the country. Private universities do not do research, concentrating instead on teaching, as in other Central American countries.²² Most of the teachers at private universities lack permanent positions and teach a course per semester on temporary contracts.

In 2003, according to the *State of Education*, the leading public research university was the UCR in terms of its budget and researchers, with 70.5 percent of the total research projects in the four public universities, followed by UNA with 18.4 (Chart 1).²³

Chart 1

Research projects by discipline at public universities in Costa Rica, 2003

Disciplines	UCR	ITCR	UNA	UNED	Total
Basic Sciences	204	17	64		285
Health and Social Services	137		4		141
Social Sciences, Information, Administration, Law	127		50	2	179
Agriculture and other related	124	16	48		188
Engineering, Industry and Construction	60	14	3		77
Arts and Humanities	57		32	2	91
Regional branches	45	21	3		69
Education	31	1	12	47	91
Services	13	2			15
Administrative units	4	2			6
Total	802	73	212	51	1.142
Percent	70.5	6.4	18.6	4.5	100.0

Source: Estado de la Educación...Op. Cit., p. 109.

Academic units (departments with students) conducted 33.74 percent of the total research projects in Costa Rica, while research centers and institutes accounted for 58 percent.²⁴ The numbers vary in each university: at UCR, 67.6 percent of the research projects were developed by research centers or institutes, whereas at UNA academic units did 67.9 percent of the research. It is difficult to determine the real amount of social sciences projects in UCR and UNED, since in this analysis (chart 1) they appear together with administration, information, and law.

²¹ http://www.sinaes.ac.cr/carreras_acreditadas/acreditadas_por_u%207_oct06.htm

²² With the exception of the international higher education institutions such as FLACSO (analyzed separately) and in other fields like Escuela de Agricultura de la Región Tropical Húmeda EARTH and Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza CATIE.

²³ Estado de la Educación, Op Cit., p. 109.

²⁴ Estado de la Educación, Op Cit., p. 109.

The ITCR does research in technological, agricultural, and basic sciences, UNED mainly in education. Therefore, we will give a general overview of the public universities – UCR and UNA – that offer degrees and have the widest amount of social sciences postgraduate studies and research centers or institutes in the country.

Universidad de Costa Rica UCR

The biggest higher education institution in Costa Rica has a central campus in San Pedro (San José) and five regional campuses in the cities of Turrialba, Liberia, Limón, San Ramón, and Puntarenas. In 2004, UCR had 29,657 students, corresponding to 42.5 percent of the total student population of the public universities.²⁵ Most of the disciplines in social sciences are offered at the UCR as *bachilleratos* (4 years), most of them leading to *licenciatura* (1 year + thesis). The study tracks are political sciences, international relations, history, anthropology, sociology and social work, communications, and journalism.

Postgraduate studies started at the UCR in the 1970s. The *Sistema de Estudios de Posgrado* was created in 1975. For 30 years, the Graduate School has developed programs with important links to the Central American region, including inter/trans/multidisciplinary programs and inter-institutional ones as well. UCR offers a wide range of options at a postgraduate level in social sciences. Master's degrees come in two categories: academic and professional. The first is oriented towards research (thesis), whereas the second emphasizes course work and practical expertise. There are 48 academic master's programs at UCR, the following in social sciences²⁶: anthropology, political science, women studies, history, and sociology (focusing on social politics and social work). In the taught or professional master's degree, UCR offers 42, four in social sciences: political science, women's studies, history, and social work.

UCR also has seven doctoral programs, three in social sciences: government and public policies, history, and cultural studies and society. Most of the master's and doctoral programs offer some type of funding and scholarships for the students. Most also have CSUCA accreditation (for example, women's studies, sociology, history, and political sciences). The programs are thus recognized at a Central American level, making the degrees automatically recognized in the whole of Central America.

The good academic level and quality of some of the doctoral and especially master's programs at UCR allows the publication of the theses as books, many awarded with national and international prizes in their own field of research. Many master's and doctoral programs have competent academic staff, who are actively engaged in research institutes and centers or academic units.

At UCR, research is conducted mainly at the research institutes and centers.²⁷ Among the 26 research centers and 12 research institutes at UCR, four are linked to social sciences: *Centro Centroamericano de Población* (CCP), *Centro de Investigación de la Mujer* (CIEM), *Centro de Investigaciones Históricas de América Central* (CIHAC), and *Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales* (IIS).

²⁵ Idem.

²⁶ Calderón Saravia, Ana Lucía. *Diagnóstico sobre las políticas de las universidades públicas y privadas de Costa Rica en materia de investigación*. San José: UNESCO-IESALC, 2005, pp. 11–15.

²⁷ For statistical information about the researchers (by age, gender, and degrees in the different fields at UCR, see Calderón Saravia. *Op. Cit.*, Charts 10, 11 and 12, p. 77–78

The evaluation of the research projects and results at the institutes and centers is the duty of an academic committee *Consejo Científico* or a research commission in the academic units. At the *Jornadas de Investigación*, organized annually, the researchers present project progress to a general audience (free entrance) to discuss and improve the work. Colleagues and students also participate. In addition, the *Jornadas* are important in informing other faculties and research institute on the research already done.

The *Fundación de la Universidad de Costa Rica para la Investigación* (FUNDEVI) also strengthens UCR's research infrastructure. This foundation, established in 1988, is a non-profit private entity of a public character used as a bridge for financial and administrative transactions for research projects and other related activities at UCR.

The *Editorial de la Universidad de Costa Rica* (EUCR) is one of the most important Central American academic publishers, and it offers excellent possibilities for publication for many researchers at UCR. Many of the works to be published are of a high quality, but the distribution and commercial opportunities are still quite limited compared with other international Spanish-language academic publishers.²⁸ Other important publishing companies at a national level are UNED, EUNA (from the *Universidad Nacional*), and FLACSO.

Universidad Nacional (UNA)

The *Universidad Nacional*, established in 1973, is the second biggest public university in Costa Rica with 13,433 students (2006).²⁹ UNA has a central campus in Heredia and regional campuses in Pérez Zeledón and Liberia. The 85 study tracks in undergraduate and postgraduate studies offered at UNA cover diverse fields such as education, philosophy, literature, social sciences, basic and applied sciences, and fine arts.³⁰

The *Sistema de Estudios de Posgrado* at UNA has several master's programs in social sciences: Central American cultural studies, women's/gender studies, Latin American studies, history, international relations and diplomacy, sociology, human rights and peace education, and a doctoral degree in Latin American studies focusing on Latin American philosophy and history of ideas.

As mentioned above, research at UNA is mainly conducted through the academic units. Nevertheless, the university has several research units in social sciences such as *Instituto de Estudios Latinoamericanos* (IDELA), *Instituto de Estudios de la Mujer* (IEM), *Instituto de Estudios Sociales en Población* (IDESPO), *Centro Internacional en Política Económica* (CINPE).

The most important publisher at UNA is the *Editorial de la Universidad Nacional* (EUNA), founded in 1976 with two main sections, one in books and the other in journals. The six main fields of interest at this university press (for books) are: social sciences, natural and basic sciences, education and pedagogy, literature and literary studies, arts, and art production. EUNA is an important channel for researchers at UNA in particular to publish their research, including the social sciences.

The *Fundación de la Universidad Nacional* (FUNA) at UNA is a private foundation with a public character for the administration of research funding for basic and applied sciences. In comparative terms, the FUNA fulfils similar tasks in UNA as does FUNDEVI in UCR.

²⁸ See the list of academic journals from the UCR in the bibliography.

²⁹ <http://opes.conare.ac.cr/estadisticas/matricula/matricula2006.pdf>

³⁰ <http://www.una.ac.cr/facultades/index.htm>

El Salvador

In El Salvador the most important universities in the field of social sciences are *Universidad de El Salvador* and *Universidad Centroamericana “José Simeón Cañas”*. There are also many private universities, but none with a clear social science profile.

Universidad de El Salvador (UES) has ten research centers or institutes; five of them are interdisciplinary or directly working on social sciences (*Instituto de Estudios Históricos, Arqueológicos y Antropológicos; Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas; Instituto Universitario de Educación Superior; Centro de Estudios de Género; Centro de Investigaciones y Desarrollo En Salud*). The UES offers various master's programs, ten of them research oriented since 2000. Research activities at the UES are coordinated by the university's Research Council, which lists about 100 researchers as staff of the University. The faculties, study tracks and diplomas are listed at http://www.ues.edu.sv/academia/facultades_y_carreras.htm#. PhD programs are offered only in medical sciences (Doctorate in Medicine and Doctorate in Dental Surgery).

Universidad Centroamericana “José Simeón Cañas” (UCA-JSC), a Catholic university, has since 2000 had one doctoral program, *Filosofía Iberoamericana* (also offered at master's level) and 12 master's programs in various interdisciplinary fields, such as *Gestión de Medio Ambiente or Desarrollo Local*. There are also more traditional social science academic master tracks, including political science, and communication. These are listed at <http://www.uca.edu.sv/interna/institucional/fhis.htm>.

Most of the UC-JSC programs have been quite successful in attracting students. Although the professors of master's programs cannot do research directly in the programs, they are often involved in other research projects. The students also have some possibilities to participate in these research activities. Compared with many other national or Central American universities, UCA-JSC also has relatively good library services.

Guatemala

Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala (USAC) is the only public university in Guatemala and the biggest and most important university in the country, with a central campus in Guatemala City and ten regional branches. Founded in 1676, USAC absorbs 67% of the student population in all the public and private universities in Guatemala.³¹ The university offers the following tracks at *licenciatura* level in social sciences: political science, sociology, international relations, history, anthropology, archaeology, and social work.

Guatemala and Honduras are the Central American countries with the fewest private universities, and Guatemala the only country with only one public university.³²

The first private universities appeared in Guatemala in the 1960s. These were *Universidad Rafael Landívar* (URL), *Universidad del Valle de Guatemala* (UVG) and *Universidad Mariano Gálvez* (UMG). The organization that authorizes the approval of private universities in Guatemala is the *Consejo de Enseñanza Privada Superior* (CEPS). Once a private university is authorized, further supervision of the quality of education is not a duty of CEPS or any other institution. Six more private universities have been founded after 1970: *Universidad Francisco Marroquín* (UFM), *Universidad*

³¹ Álvarez Mejía, Williams Guillermo. *Diagnóstico sobre las políticas de las Universidades públicas y privadas de Guatemala en materia de investigación*. Guatemala: IESA-UNESCO, 2005, p. 17.

³² Álvarez Mejía, Op. Cit., p. 9.

Rural de Guatemala (UruralG), *Universidad del Istmo* (UNIS), *Universidad Panamericana* (UP), *Universidad Mesoamericana* (UM) and *Universidad Galileo Galilei* (UGALILEO), but few of them offer social sciences tracks.

Guatemala offers few options to pursue postgraduate studies in social sciences in public or private universities. USAC has 49 master's programs but only two options in social sciences: social anthropology (*Sede Occidente*) and social work. At UVG there is a master's program in anthropology, at UFM a doctoral program in social sciences and two master's programs in international relations and social sciences. Finally, UMG has a master's program in political science focusing on social development, legislative development, and economic development.³³

Research in social sciences is carried out in both public and some few private universities and by other institutions such as CIRMA and AVANCSO analyzed later.

Research at USAC

USAC research policies were established in 1981, but it was only after 1994 that a coordinating research unit was put into place. Research at USAC is organized in research programs called *Programas Universitarios de Investigación* PUI. In 2005, of the twelve PUI, five were related to social sciences:

- *Programa Universitario de Investigación en Cultura, Pensamiento e Identidad de la Sociedad Guatemalteca* (PUIC)
- *Programa Universitario de Investigación en Estudios de Coyuntura Económica, Social y política* (PUIEC)
- *Programa Universitario de Investigación en Estudios de Género* (PUIEG)
- *Programa Universitario de Investigación en Estudios para la Paz* (PUIEP)
- *Programa Universitario de Investigación en Historia de Guatemala* (PUIHG)

In addition, of the five research institutes or centers at USAC, three work on social sciences: *Instituto de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales* (IIPS), *Instituto de Estudios Interétnicos* (IDEI), and *Centro de Estudios Urbanos y Rurales* (CEUR).

According to an evaluation of higher education in Guatemala, USAC has the following research problems internally³⁴:

- Inefficient administrative organization and personnel policies (bad appointments, salaries paid irregularly).
- Limited methodological and theoretical capacities of researchers.
- Inadequate planning of research projects.
- Scarce diffusion of research results into the society.
- No research evaluation by an external committee once the research is completed.
- Insufficient research budget.

On an external level, the coordination between private and public institutions is limited, and there is almost a total absence of joint research programs and collaboration with other national or international universities.

³³ Ramírez Alvarado, Juan Francisco. *Diagnostico y Perspectiva de los estudios de postgrado en Guatemala*. Guatemala: IESALC-Unesco, 2004, appendix 2.

³⁴ Asociación Maya de Estudiantes Universitarios. *Ciencia, Cultura, Juventud y Tecnología: Cuatridad Universitaria para el Desarrollo Humano. Informe sobre la educación universitaria en Guatemala*. Guatemala: IESALC-UNESCO, no date, p. 54. <http://www.iesalc.unesco.org.ve/>

One of the few private universities conducting research in social sciences in Guatemala is the URL. This Jesuit University has several research institutes, three of them in social sciences. In 2006 these institutes had the following research projects:

- *Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales (IDIES)*, projects on migration and its impact on the family and culture
- *Instituto de Transformación de Conflictos para la Construcción de la Paz (INTRAPAZ)*, projects on justice and indigenous women, maras (juvenile gangs) in Guatemala, peace and reconciliation, land property rights.
- *Instituto de Gerencia Política (INGEP)*, projects on political culture, identity, citizenship, politics, and democracy.

In addition to university research, there are two major important independent research institutes in Guatemala which have been crucial for the development of social science research: *Asociación para el Avance de las Ciencias Sociales en Guatemala (AVANCSO)* and *Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica (CIRMA)*.

Asociación para el Avance de las Ciencias Sociales (AVANCSO)

AVANCSO, a social science research institute in Guatemala City, was founded in 1996, the year of the peace accords in Guatemala. AVANCSO has been one of the leading institutions for the development of social science research in Guatemala in its commitment to rigorous research and analysis based on long-term fieldwork and archival investigation. The institute carries out advocacy work promoting an alternative development plan for Guatemala's rural districts and marginalized groups of the population. Researchers reach out to the society and are dedicated to building relationships with a wide range of national organizations and to producing useful knowledge, so that these organizations might contribute to a broad debate on development alternatives. This active position has led the institution and its researchers to be threatened by paramilitaries on several occasions. Such was the case of one of the founding members of AVANCSO, the anthropologist Myrna Mack. She was brutally assassinated outside the institute by Guatemalan paramilitaries in 1990. Mack conducted important work on the displacement issues during the armed conflict.

Key research topics and interests in AVANCSO have been the relations between the state and civil society. Today the institute has four main research topics in peasant studies, socio-urban studies, social imaginaries, and local history. AVANCSO has a publication unit for several working paper series, including *Cuadernos de Investigación* and *Textos para el debate*. AVANCSO also publishes documents in a series of Invited Authors and books on the major topics of the institute's research projects. In addition, they have a documentation center of around 5,000 books and documents mainly on social sciences.

Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica (CIRMA)

CIRMA, founded in 1978, is one of Central America's premier social science research centers, located in the old colonial capital of Antigua. CIRMA is a non-profit institution that works to promote a new culture of research and public dialogue on the current problems of Central America, to preserve and protect the region's historical memory, and to foster a new generation of social, cultural, and academic leaders.

Since 1996, CIRMA has taken an important role in designing and implementing trans-disciplinary research in Central America. The research has focused on relations between the different ethnic groups in the region. According to many distinguished academics and social critics, the books published in 2003 and 2004 on these topics establish a new baseline in the understanding of ethnic relations in Central America.

CIRMA also seeks to strengthen Central America's intellectual and social community through supporting the formation of new generations of intellectual and social leaders that reflect the region's cultural and social diversity. Today, CIRMA coordinates the Ford Foundation/CIRMA International Fellowship Program for Guatemala, and the Kellogg Foundation's Leadership and Social Development Seminar for Central America and the Caribbean, along with other initiatives in support of higher education.

CIRMA's library and historical archives

The Central American Library is the leading collection of social science materials in the region with a collection of 40,000 books (including 3,000 rare volumes and more than 250 periodicals), dedicated to Central American social sciences and history. The Guatemalan Historical Archive at CIRMA is Guatemala's most extensive collection of personal papers and private institutional archives. With current holdings of approximately seven million documents dating from the 1700s, this collection is being built with an emphasis on materials which shed light on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including the recent 30-year civil conflict. CIRMA also has the best photographic archive in Guatemala, which holds more than one million images, including artistic and documentary work of local and international photographers from 1845 to date. The archive is building a visual record of Guatemala's diverse social groups and of life and social processes in towns and rural areas throughout the country.

In 2004, CIRMA organized and inaugurated a traveling exhibition *Why Are We Like We Are?*, an important public education and dialogue campaign that examines inter-ethnic relations and racism in Guatemala. The exhibition forms part of the national campaign *Our Diversity is Our Strength!*, which traveled throughout the country until the end of 2006.

CIRMA works closely with and has the publishing support of Plumsock Mesoamerican Studies, a non-profit press on social sciences and humanities based in Vermont (USA). The academic journal *Mesoamérica* is published regularly. Also published are monographs series (15 books so far), *memoirs* and documents (3 books), and other titles co-published with other Central American publishers (31 books). The journal, monographs and other publications are sold and distributed through CIRMA's own bookstore.

Mesoamérica is a scholarly journal of humanities and social sciences, devoted to the study of the region stretching from southeastern Mexico to Panama. Since 1982, it has appeared in Spanish with articles by Latin American, North American, and European authors, with a focus on anthropology, archaeology, epigraphy, ethnography, geography, history, demography, linguistics, and other disciplines. Special theme issues come out from time to time.

Conclusions and Recommendations

One of the greatest needs in social sciences in general in Central America, and Nicaragua and Honduras in particular, is simply and crucially the development of basic and applied social research. The crisis of the 1990s had a shocking effect on the universities, especially in the research sector. This is reflected in the whole higher education sector (also in teaching), and both in public and private universities.

The following recommendations and suggestions are mainly directed to the Honduran and Nicaraguan cases, but are partially applicable also in other countries of the region.

Because *licenciaturas* (and also BA degrees) are still the principal university diplomas, the provision of these basic diplomas should be guaranteed in most social sciences. There is a transition towards master's programs, but at a time when the primary and secondary education is facing various problems it is impossible to jump to a master's degree without good basic higher education. *Licenciaturas* and BA tracks still need support. The quality of these basic academic tracks should be evaluated independently or externally, in detail. After a more specific evaluation, *the best programs should be identified at national level, and support should be given to one most qualified national study track in each discipline*. It is not necessary to have many national-level programs in one specific career, as these will often struggle on scarce resources. In the worst case, the result will be that there is not a single qualified social science program in any university in any basic social science discipline.

The academic communities of research fields and disciplines must be strengthened both regionally and inside the Central American countries. On a regional level, some institutes and departments have relationships with FLACSO but not a strong and solid network – and most do not have any funds or institutional support for academic exchange between universities and FLACSO. There should be more resources to facilitate cooperation and regional exchange. Since FLACSO proves to be a leading regional institution in the area, it should be used as an academic platform to address other urgent problems in the area. This means endorsing a regional research vision in Central America to encourage dialogue in the future between institutions and to promote academic collaboration. In general, *more support from the most consolidated institutes to other, weaker programs and departments should be organized*.

It has to be remembered that FLACSO is not the only existing institutional mechanism in Central America. There is promising infra-

structure in regional social science conferences and some regional master's programs. Regional master's programs (such as the Central American History program, coordinated by CIHAC, University of Costa Rica) create possibilities for more qualified and efficient knowledge distribution. Also the researcher-teacher-student exchange is easier when the mobility does not necessarily entail expensive travel. International cooperation programs could also offer a more solid visiting teacher's grant system for qualified academics (including Central American and international professors) interested in teaching in such research-oriented programs. Visiting professors could do both research and teach, preferably during at least one semester, although also intensive regional seminars/courses could be encouraged. In other words, *promote more regional and international academic exchanges and bilateral academic agreements* (professors and students) with top universities in Europe and the United States. In general, *investment in education and research at the master's level* promotes real expertise in the different fields of social sciences and secures the continuation of programs with a high academic level and quality. Master's and some doctoral programs should be directed to the most promising young students in order to guarantee a generational development in social sciences. Now, in some cases, university teachers with permanent posts and with only a *licenciatura* degree, plan postgraduate programs just for themselves.

Also, the *international accreditation and academic quality evaluation systems* should be promoted and reinforced in all Central American countries. If this is not done soon, there will be no ways to measure and guarantee the institutional academic quality. Such measuring and quality control could push the universities to higher standards. Units including the CSUCA should be encouraged to continue this work with the same intensity as during the 1980s. Fortunately, some promising development is happening in CSUCA.

There should also be a system through which the best research-oriented Central American academic institutions could present their research proposals or institutional ideas for competition. This might in the future create something like a 'Central American International Research Council' – for example, with Sida/SAREC funding, organized together with internationally renowned academics and with FLACSO and CSUCA as basic units. Proposals should be evaluated academically, independently, and externally. The local academic and research institutes could search for partners for these projects also from NGOs or from the private sector. This could promote cooperation between civil society and the academy. The added value of such cooperation might be a new and mutually valuable relation between the qualified consultants, NGO professionals and best university teachers (laboring under teaching obligations). This could also help in analyzing the best academic tracks nationally and changing the image of social sciences through actively oriented national research agendas.

Academics are often isolated from one another. This is the case also in Central America. There is a small Central American 'academic elite group' – the members know each other well, meet up nationally, regionally and internationally, conducting academic debates. This group of distinguished academics also reserves, quite jealously, international evaluation tasks for themselves. There is some competition, but the tasks – often also financially very profitable – are divided within a small select group. More dialogue should be encouraged with the majority of university teachers, and more inter-institutional coordination inside the univer-

sities should be developed to promote academic and professional communication and dialogue. There is also *lot of politicization and rivalries and, for sure, normal personal politics at the universities* (defense of one's own academic and personal space and private interests, etc., common in all universities, not only in Central America). This is reflected, for example, in the academic recruitment systems: permanent posts are seldom open to free competition, which would find the most qualified candidates. It is important to try to take into consideration these effects of the politicization and academic rivalries in the future when implementing new Sida projects. What should also be encouraged is more space for cooperation and contact with university teachers, NGO representatives and consultants. Ideas to generate structures such as the 'Central American International Research Council' could produce such collaboration, teamwork, and added value. Such a structure might also serve as a think-tank for governmental, academic and NGO interests.

Last but not least, there should also be some kind of effort to *change the common current perception of social sciences as "non-productive" fields of knowledge*. We believe, as most Central American social scientists, that the creation and maintenance of a functional civil society needs the input of social sciences to analyze and respond to the emerging local, regional, national and global problems, and to build different possible futures, more positive futures. Social sciences should be presented as more attractive to the new generations which did not experience the social science 'glory' or the golden years of the 1980s. Central American future still needs active and well-educated intellectuals. The region has always been able to produce such scholars interested in studying, who would shape new perspectives on the importance of intellectuals for society and understand the meaning of research for the development of a better society. Giving more of a role to intellectuals and researchers is a strategy that combines the production and dissemination of knowledge. This means open spaces for a more active interaction between social sciences research and all the sectors of the society.

Some minor or "technical" suggestions:

- The excellent work of CLACSO (Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales) is used in many departments, but there should be more of this kind of Latin American cooperation and use of freely available international www services. The access to electronic databases (JSTOR, EBSCO, etc.) should be guaranteed, especially to the economically least resourced institutions. NGOs, universities and international agencies could work together to create mechanisms and funding to organize this basic infrastructure.
- Many of the public university departments do not have well-organized, functional www pages (some have none). This situation should be changed rapidly. If the departments or the universities cannot do this, national public sector projects should be organized. Because private universities are very dynamic in their advertisement and through their www pages, public universities should react with equal quality. Also national, or even regional, higher education portals could be generated. There are some networks such as RECA (Red de Estudios Centroamericanos), but these are not concentrated in one portal, blog or www service. Excellent examples of electronic databases and other www services can be found in many European and U.S. Latin American Studies organizations or institutes (REDIAL, LASA, University of Texas at Austin, etc.).

- There is a lot of evaluation done on the state of Central American social sciences, and the academic sector in general. The vast amount and variety of the evaluations should be used better, also by Central American academic institutions. Most of the evaluations should be presented in a structured way through regional higher education systems. Most of the evaluations are available in digital form. Institutions such as CSUCA or FLACSO could gather and present this information in a concentrated way. Other publications, including all Central American academic social science journals, could also be accessible on the same www page. The best regional Master's and PhD thesis might also be published in a digital form on such a portal.
- It is also important to note that the basic language skills (reading academic English) are not too common among the Central American university teachers.

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<http://www.iesalc.unesco.org.ve/>

Some Social Science Academic Journals in Central America

- Abra Revista de la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales* (UNA, Costa Rica) Latin Index
- Anuario de Estudios Centroamericanos* (UCR, Costa Rica) Latin Index
- Anales de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala* (Guatemala) Latin Index
- Antropología e historia de Guatemala* (Guatemala) Latin Index
- Cuadernos de Antropología* (UCR, Costa Rica) Latin Index
- Cuadernos de Ciencias Sociales* (FLACSO)
- Diálogos Revista de Historia electrónica* (UCR, Costa Rica) Latin Index
- ECA Estudios Centroamericanos* (Universidad Centroamericana “José Simeón Cañas”, El Salvador) Latin Index
- Encuentro* (UCA, Nicaragua) Latin Index
- Herencia* (UCR, Costa Rica) Latin Index
- Istmo* (IHNCA-UCA, Denison University, UCR) Latin Index
- Mesoamérica* (CIRMA, Guatemala) Latin Index
- Paraninfo* (ICH, Honduras)
- Pensamiento Propio* (CRIES, Nicaragua)
- Población y Salud en Mesoamérica* (UCR, Costa Rica) Latin Index
- Reflexiones* (UCR, Costa Rica) Latin Index
- Relaciones Internacionales* (UNA, Costa Rica) Latin index
- Revista de la Academia Hondureña de Geografía e Historia* (Honduras) Latin Index
- Revista del Archivo Nacional* (Archivo Nacional, Costa Rica) Latin Index
- Revista Centroamericana de Ciencias Sociales* (FLACSO, UNA, Asdi, Costa Rica)
- Revista de Ciencias Sociales* (UCR, Costa Rica) Latin Index
- Revista de Historia* (UCR-UNA, Costa Rica) Latin Index
- Revista de Historia* (UCA, Nicaragua))
- Universidad y Sociedad* (CNU, Nicaragua)
- Vínculos: revista de antropología del Museo Nacional* (National Museum, Costa Rica) Latin Index
- Wani* (UCA, Nicaragua) Latin Index
- Yaxkin* (IHAH, Honduras)

**Some social science didactic materials/textbooks reviewed
during the evaluation (examples in the university book-stores):**

Amaya, Jorge Alberto: *Introducción al Estudio de la Historia* (UPNFM, Honduras, 2002)

Bernal, César A: *Metodología de la Investigación* (Pearson, México 2006)

Bulnes, Marcio: *Lecturas de Sociologías* (UPNFM, Honduras, 2006)

Ciencias Sociales: Ciencias Políticas (UPNFM, Honduras, sin año)

Delgado de Cantú, Gloria: *El Mundo moderno y contemporáneo I*
(Pearson, México 2005)

Sequeira Calero, Valinda & Cruz Picón, Autralia: *Investigar es Fácil I-II*
(UNAN-Managua, 2000, 2004)

Appendix 1 Interviews

Main activities and interviews by Jussi Pakkasvirta and Florencia Quesada in Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Honduras

Dates 2007	Main activities and interviews
Thursday, January 11	Interviews FLACSO-Costa Rica, director Carlos Sojo; discussion in FLACSO-Regional; revision of bibliography at FLACSO (interview cancelled by Juany Guzmán, force majeure).
Friday, January 12	Visit to several bookstores in San Pedro to get bibliography and other research materials. Arrangement of logistics and several interviews in Nicaragua.
Monday, January 15	Arrival to Managua. Visit to UCA and IHNCA, arrangement of interviews Interview Manuel Ortega, director of CASC.
Tuesday, January 16	Interview with Leonel Delgado, Miguel Ayerdis, and Josefina Vigil, researchers UCA, INHCA. Interview with Iris Prado, director, Department of Social Sciences-UCA; Lorenzo Romero and Juan José Soza, professors of the same department.
Wednesday, January 17	Embassy of Sweden, interview with Helena Reuterswärd Embassy of Finland, interview with Mari Lankinen and Riitta Työläjärvi Interview with Margarita Vannini, director UCA. INHCA Interview with ex-minister and historian Dora María Téllez.
Thursday, January 18	Arranging logistics, visit to libraries and bookstores Interview with Josefina Hidalgo, director of Anthropology-UNAN-Managua and Freddy Montenegro, coordinator of social sciences for high school teachers at UNAN-Managua
Friday, January 19	Interview with Iran Carrera, director, Department of Philosophy and Sociology; Mario Urtecho and Carlos López, professors of the same department. Interview with Marko Lehto, NGO project for decentralization in Nicaragua.
Monday, January 22	Interview with Arturo Collado at CNU Arrangement of other contacts and information through email.
Tuesday, January 23	Arrival at Tegucigalpa Sida, interview with Orlando Valladares Interview with sociologist Rafael del Cid (ESA, Private consulting company).

Dates 2007	Main activities and interviews
Wednesday,	Interview with Leticia Salomon, director of research UNAH
January 24	Interview with Víctor Meza, director of CEDOH. Also interview with Clariza Pérez from GTZ, arranged by Orlando Valladares. Interview with Ana Corina Hernandez, director of PLATS-UNAH (social work).
Thursday,	Interviews with sociologist José Ramón Salgado at UPNFM; Rocío Tábora, UNDP; Sergio Suazo, professor and researcher of Political Sciences at UNAH; Rodolfo Pastor, historian and Ministry of Culture.
January 25	
Friday,	Interviews with Julio Raudales, economist UNDP; Dario Euraque IHAH historian and director of the institute.
January 26	
Saturday,	Interview with Mario Posas, sociologist, UNDP and professor and researcher at UNAH.
January 27	
Monday,	Interview with José Antonio Funes, director of the public library of Honduras, former vice-minister of Culture.
January 29	

Interviews

Nicaragua

Leonel Arguedas: UCA, researcher

Miguel Ayerdis: UCA, researcher

José Irán Carrera: UNAN-director department of philosophy and sociology

Arturo Collado: CNU-Technical secretary

Arturo Grisby and Ligia Gómez: NITLAPAN, director and chief of the documentation center, by email.

Josefina Hidalgo: UNAN-director department of anthropology

Marko Lehto: Decentralization Project (Progestión) in Nicaragua, sociologist, expert

Freddy Montenegro: UNAN-Managua, coordinator social sciences for high school teachers

Manuel Ortega: UCA-CASC, director

Lorenzo Romero: UCA, sociologist

Juan José Soca: UCA, sociologist

Dora María Téllez: President MRS-historian

Margarita Vannini: UCA-IHNCA director

Josefina Vijil: UCA, researcher

Honduras

José Rafael del Cid, ESA Consultores, sociologist

Darío Euraque, IHAH-Director

José Antonio Funes, Director Nacional Honduran Library

Ana Corina Hernández, UNAH-Director *Postgrado Latinoamericano Trabajo Social*

Victor Meza, CEDOH-Director

Rodolfo Pastor, Ministry of Culture

Clariza Pérez, GTZ-Educational program

Mario Posas, UNAH-PNUD

Julio Raudales, PNUD-researcher

Ramón Salgado, UPNFM

Leticia Salomón, UNAH-Director research unit
Sergio Suazo, UNAH-professor-researcher
Rocío Tabora, PNUD-researcher

Costa Rica

Carlos Sojo: FLACSO-Costa Rica, director
Héctor Pérez, by email
– various contacts, by email

El Salvador, Guatemala

– various contacts, by email

Appendix 2

Terms of References

1. Background

Contrary to research in natural and technological sciences most social science research in Nicaragua is carried out outside the learning and teaching institutions. A brief historical review reveals that in the 1980s research in Nicaragua was generally carried out at centres and institutes closely related to the Sandinista government and subsequently the focus and outcome of the research were ideologically and politically biased. In the 90s researching NGOs became common as a result of the reduction of the public sector which liberated a large number of university educated professionals to the market of the unemployed. These former state employees responded, as a strategy of survival, to the demands of international development agencies and organisations that now turned to the new national civil society organizations to implement projects. The need for basic information and analysis of Nicaraguan reality, both in order to create projects as well as implement them, was taken care of by the former state employees who started to carry out investigations or so called *diagnosticos* in social science as well as in other areas. These *diagnosticos* were of varying quality and they mostly provided quantitative information about a specific issue followed by recommendations on how to come to terms with the addressed problems.

The development in Honduras has essentially been the same. In the 1980s however, with the entrance of the neoliberal economic model, it could be observed that social sciences, both in undergraduate education as well as in research, was diminishing in favour of the hard sciences. The increasing amount of private universities in the region also favour market oriented subjects and those that are related to ICT, and rarely promote social science education or research.

2. Purpose and scope of the assignment

In Nicaragua and Honduras, there is a high demand both from donors as well as from local and national institutions and organizations of knowledge and analysis of the society. This demand has given rise to a vast production of consultancy reports or *daignosticos* of dubious character, and more seldom highly qualified research. The political, economical cultural and social contexts are subject to rapid changes due to events occurring both on national and regional level. It is in relation to this framework that Sida finds that regional competence in social science research will play a crucial role generating adequate knowledge and

understanding of the complexity of the problems and the changes occurring, employing adequate methods for analysis and evaluation.

The goal of the study is to give an ample picture of social science research in Honduras and Nicaragua, to identify its location and scope, its strengths and weaknesses. The study shall present a descriptive and analytical overview in order to identify possible partnerships for the enhancement of social science research in the countries mentioned.

It is a general belief that the social science education in the region suffers from a low academic level and therefore cannot participate in post-graduate studies. It is also argued that the lack of an academic system of incentives, that promote postgraduate studies and research, contributes to the low interest of teachers to participate in post-graduate training.

It is within the scope of this study to determine if such assumptions are correct or not and, depending on the results, recommend measures to be taken in order to support research capacity building in the area of social sciences.

The report of this assessment is expected to serve as input into Sida's decision regarding the scope and orientation of possible future support to capacity building in the social sciences within the framework of the bilateral cooperation.

3. The Assignment

a) To investigate the overall state of social sciences in Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador and Costa Rica. To find out what kind of social science research is carried out, and at what kind of institutions (universities, research institutes and centres) by:

- describing each researching institution and its trajectory
- investigating the role of universities in social science research
- identifying what type of research they carry out i.e. if they specialise on some kind of thematic research or if there is a high variety of research subjects.
- finding out the extent to which they collaborate with other disciplines
- assessing the relevance of research taking into account national PRSP and other development strategies.
- assessing the research capacity in these institutions; how many researchers, what qualifications do they have PhD, MSc, etc, the production of articles, books, postgraduate education, what type of courses do they offer, how many times a year, what standard do they hold, what is the duration of the courses, how many students are graduated, what are the requirements
- evaluating the quality of research results and the extent of publication
- assessment of the source of funding for the research?

b) Identification of potential areas of social science research cooperation at the public universities by:

- identifying their social science profile, and take into account the relevance of research capacity building in those specific areas and their relevance to the development of society.
- identifying departments in social sciences with a strong capacity in undergraduate education, and with highly qualified teachers.
- estimating the quality of education (through the quality of undergraduate theses, the number of students enrolled vs graduated

- comparing the quality of education with others institutions in order to establish the “level” of the department/institution
- investigating the CV of lecturers
- assessing the English skills of lecturers.
- evaluating the quality of administrative management
- measuring skills in IT management
- finding out about the interest in research and the setting up of post-graduate studies
- looking into systems of accreditation and evaluation
- quality indicators
- enrolment procedures

c) Analysis of strengths and weaknesses

- What assistance would the departments/institutions need in order to be able to participate in creating research capacity at their institution?
- Could the capacity of the regional organization FLACSO be used to promote and develop social science capacity at the universities? According to earlier experience it has shown to be difficult to engage Nicaraguan university teachers in the FLACSO programs. Why?
- As it is most likely that future support to Social Science in the Central America will be centred to Honduras and Nicaragua it would be of interest to consider areas of comparative advantages that these countries may have in comparison the other countries in the region.

4. Method and timetable (2x4 weeks)

It is anticipated that the assignment should be carried out independently. The study should provide an analysis of the strengths and the weaknesses of the social sciences in general and in particular, of the social science institutions that might be considered as local partners for the creation of social science research capacity. It is anticipated that the inventory of Guatemala, El Salvador and Costa Rica will be made as a desk study, while the information on the situation in Honduras and Nicaraguan will be of in-depth kind.

The consultants should

- use a broad definition of the concept social sciences as ideas of its content may vary from country to country.
- take into account Sida/SAREC program-related documents such as guidelines for applications to be able to measure requirements against capacity.
- review available documents on former Sida support to social science research in Central America.
- take into account documents available at the institutions being evaluated.
- interview key persons with knowledge and experience in social science research in the region.
- interview key persons that would be affected or targeted by a possible future cooperation.

The consultant will be briefed by Sida and shall thereafter prepare a working plan to be submitted to Sida for approval at least two weeks prior to the start of the study. The consultant shall make his/her own arrangements for all travelling and visits related to the assignment.

5. Reporting

When the mission has been concluded, the conclusions and, recommendations should be compiled in a report. First, the consultants shall prepare a draft report in English to be submitted electronically Sida for comments no later than ????. Three weeks after receiving comments on the draft report a final version shall be submitted to Sida (electronically and in two paper copies). The report shall be written in Word for Windows and should be presented in a way that enables publication without further editing.

The major findings and conclusions from the report should be presented and discussed in a seminar at Sida in Stockholm in ????? and also at the Swedish Embassies /offices in Managua and Tegucigalpa in ?????

6. The consultants should have (2 consultants)

- solid teaching and research experience in social sciences
- experience in assessing the needs of research capacity building
- broad knowledge of research management and experience of organization analysis and organization development
- experience from international cooperation
- knowledge of universities in low income countries
- knowledge of Sida and its policies, strategies and methods for capacity building within research and post graduate education
- knowledge of Nicaragua, Honduras and the Central American region
- fluency in English and Spanish

7. Remuneration and travel costs

See accompanying Contract

Halving poverty by 2015 is one of the greatest challenges of our time, requiring cooperation and sustainability. The partner countries are responsible for their own development. Sida provides resources and develops knowledge and expertise, making the world a richer place.



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