

2003, Grupo Civico Etica y Transparencia Nicaragua

Nicaragua: **Media Campaign Against Serious Abuses in the Remuneration of Top Officials** (A grant agreement for \$25,000 was signed with ET on July 2003; a Project Completion Report was submitted in March 2004. A project Completion Assessment was issued in May 2004.)

This grant is assisting Grupo Civico Etica y Transparencia Nicaragua (ET) to broadcast a series of radio and TV 'spots' aimed at building a public campaign for the passage of new legislation to limit the compensation paid to the country's President and top political leaders. These greatly exceed Latin American norms. Given Nicaragua's extreme poverty such payments represent a serious and corrupt abuse in the management of public finances. ET has a track record of similar campaigns that have been successful in achieving their objectives. The campaign was high profile and consequently somewhat risky, but the risks were considered worth taking.

ET reports that all project activities were undertaken as planned or were exceeded (e.g. two TV spots instead of one and airtime for 3 months instead of one) and the goal was attained. The issue of top officials' remuneration was raised prominently daily in all media. As a result, the two National Assembly commissions with responsibility for the matter sent to the Assembly their recommendation for legislation on two counts: one law to reform the immunity law that now includes very excessive perks for former heads of state and vice presidents even if still employed by the state; and a second law which would regulate salaries and benefits of all public employees. The media campaign ran for more than 3 months, ending in November 2003. On December 18, 2003, the National Assembly cut salaries of all public officials who earned more than \$50,000 annually by 10% and eliminated all pensions and other benefits for former presidents who are still public officials. ET deems the project a complete success.

Anabel Cruz prepared Project Completion Assessment in mid 2004; it has been posted on the PTF website. This report confirms that the project was fully successful and achieved its main objective.

2005, Grupo Civico Etica y Transparencia

Nicaragua: **Strengthening Investigative Journalism**. A grant agreement for \$25,300 was signed with ET on February 22, 2005, and the two main tranches, totaling \$22,000, were disbursed on April 1, 2005 and January 31, 2007. The project was completed at the end of 2007 although the final report was only submitted in April 2008. The final tranche was withheld. A Project Completion Report is under preparation and should be available in May 2008

This grant was to enable Grupo Civico Etica y Transparencia (ET) to run a Master's degree program on governance, public policy and anticorruption strategies for a group of 25 journalists from the principal media enterprises in the country. These were selected on

merit jointly by a committee consisting of representatives of the media owners and the board of ET. The aim was to make the journalists more motivated and better trained to investigate and effectively publicize all forms of corruption. Through this Master's program, ET and civil society groups working on corruption have contributed to the training of key journalists, broadening their outlook, and thereby increasing their access to key opinion makers, while strengthening cooperation between the media and anti-corruption workers.

With an increased capacity and understanding of corruption, the journalists will provide the general public with more and better information, communicating more effectively, on all corruption matters, thus increasing public pressure on public servants to show greater probity in the performance of their duties. As part of their program, the journalists received training and also were required to undertake an investigation into some aspect of corruption in Nicaragua, thus generating 25 in-depth studies on corruption. The best of these have been published, thereby contributing directly and immediately to ET's anti-corruption campaign.

The start up of this project was delayed some nine months while final agreement was reached with all the stakeholders. ET decided to work with their preferred institution, UPOLI (Politechnical University of Nicaragua). Classes for 25 journalists, from radio, television, newspapers, academia and civil society, began in January 2006, on a half-day basis each Saturday. The modules taught included: the Legal Framework of Nicaragua and the Rule of Law; Constitutional Law; Elections including Political Financing; Democratic Governance and Human Rights; the Legal Framework of Investigative Journalism; Administrative Law; Local Government; Public Accountability; Economics for Investigative Journalists; Tax Law (vis-a-vis corruption opportunities); Legal Issues in Anticorruption Investigation; and Military/Police Law. Two former ministers, two former presidents of the National Congress, as well as, arguably the best known academic/analysts in the fields of elections, economics, and tax, were members of the faculty.

To receive their degrees, all students had to complete an actual investigation of corruption, under the supervision a faculty member. Additional credit was available for those who published in any form of media the results of their investigative work, while the course was ongoing. There have been a number of such articles, in newspapers and on radio and television.

The training was completed by the end of May 2007, with the graduation ceremonies held in early June. Of the 25 original students, 16 are now considered eligible to pursue masters' degree. The publication of the students' journalistic work on corruption cases was also impressive. Over 100 articles have been published since the training started.

In ET's own assessment noted that, while the idea of enhancing journalistic skill focused on corruption is vital, organizing such training had to overcome a number of obstacles. They encountered difficulties in obtaining the cooperation of academic institutions and in managing the inputs of the various academics. Asking the "best and brightest" journalists to do the course work had also been difficult because they are busy people and were not

always released by their supervisors as promised. It was also difficult to formulate clear measures of the students' performance.

In view of these lessons, ET has decided not to replicate the project. Instead, the Instituto de Estudios Juridicos (IEJ), ET's partner institution, is adapting the idea and will continue with the masters' program. Another batch of students is expected to enroll soon.