



PEACE
CORPS

Nicaragua HOST COUNTRY IMPACT STUDY

Purpose

In 2008, the Peace Corps launched a series of studies to determine the impact of Volunteers in meeting two of the agency's three goals: building local capacity and promoting a better understanding of Americans among local people in host countries. These Host Country Impact Studies are unique in providing feedback from the people who lived and worked with Peace Corps Volunteers. A Nicaraguan research team conducted this study from July-August 2009, interviewing 162 respondents in 30 communities, and submitted a final report to the post upon completion of the fieldwork. The Peace Corps Office of Strategic Information, Research, and Planning developed the methods and protocols and trained the local researchers. OSIRP has produced a series of reports from this and other Host Country Impact Studies.

Study Focus: Community Health Education Project

As of 2013, 2,222 Volunteers have served in Nicaragua since Peace Corps opened in 1968. The goals of the Community Health Education project were to increase community awareness of diseases, increase knowledge and adoption of healthier behaviors among youth, and reduce illnesses in women and children.

Peace Corps Goal One

"To help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women."

Findings

Health education objectives achieved:

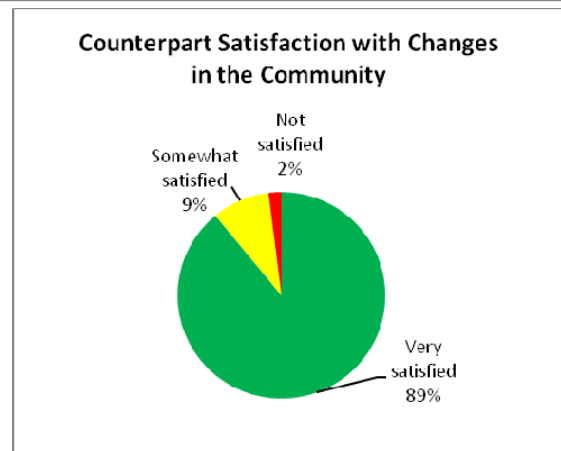
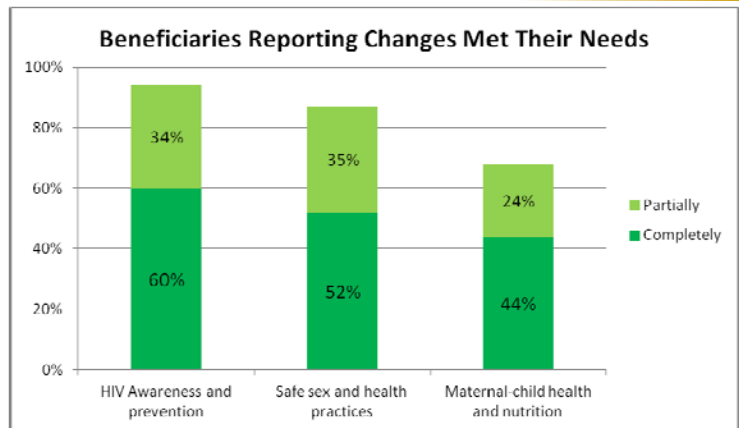
- 89 percent of the counterparts interviewed reported that the work of the Volunteers contributed significantly to increasing their knowledge and skills.
- 93 percent of the counterparts and 87 percent of the beneficiaries reported improvement in awareness and prevention of HIV/AIDS as a key change at the community level.
- 89 percent of counterparts saw healthy behavior and life skills improve among youth, specifically the use of condoms, counseling and testing services for HIV.
- 72 percent of counterparts rated maternal/child health and nutrition practices as improved.

Sustainability:

- 91 percent of counterparts interviewed reported continuing to use the skills they developed on a daily or weekly basis.
- 75 percent of beneficiaries who reported improved HIV/AIDS awareness said it was continuing.

Project participants shared what they learned:

- "Youth have a better understanding of how to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS."
- "Now we know that condoms not only prevent pregnancy but also STIs" [sexually transmitted infections].
- "[The community] increased knowledge of food preparation."
- "There is more hand washing in preschools."



Counterparts reported:

- "I am very satisfied because the changes in new knowledge, skills and practices have been evident; the Peace Corps Volunteers are a channel for providing the information."
- "The work with the youth has been a good example [of the collaboration that took place], because we succeeded in getting land and everything else we needed, to build a clinic which the Volunteer negotiated with an organization in Texas, an unprecedented accomplishment."



Peace Corps Goal Two

“To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the people served.”

Findings

Before interacting with Volunteers:

- Prior to their first contact with Peace Corps Volunteers, project participants learned about Americans from TV and movies. Many distrusted the U.S. after the civil war in Nicaragua and felt that racial and cultural differences separated us.
- Nicaraguan respondents thought that Americans were intelligent, hard-working people “who believe they can achieve anything.” They also thought that Americans had money and just came to ‘loot’ Nicaragua. They expected discrimination, thinking that Americans would not relate well to the poor and that they would be reserved, closed-minded, proud people who “liked us to depend on their aid.”

After interacting with Volunteers:

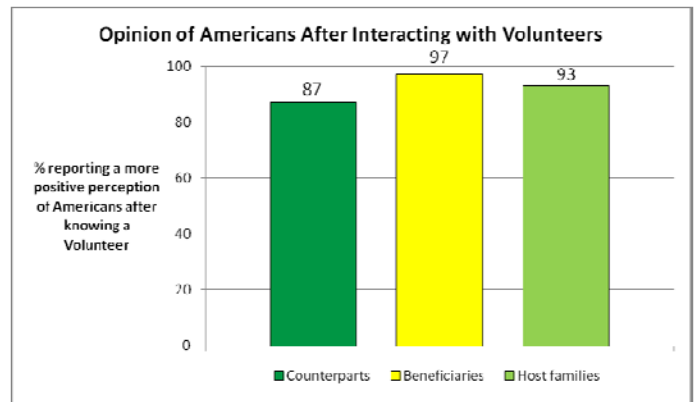
- Counterparts and beneficiaries described Americans as ‘good people’, friendly, helpful, caring, supportive, and hard-working.

Counterparts said:

“...They like to offer support to other countries sending health and education brigades.”

“They are disciplined people; they fight to obtain their objectives and goals; respectful.”

Beneficiaries liked *“...their way of dealing with people as equals; they are humble people and they like to teach.”* They reported that Volunteers *“...offer friendship and respect and care for others...”*



Overall, health care counterparts placed a high value on the training on communication methods and tools. They valued the creativity of the Volunteers, their ways of connecting with youth, their perseverance, and their dedicated pursuit of results. Youth leaders’ confidence in dealing with sensitive subjects like reproductive health and HIV prevention grew as they learned about health and developed new skills in planning and organizing their communities.

Before working with the Peace Corps, the Volunteers’ local counterparts and beneficiaries had little understanding of Americans and many negative perceptions due to the U.S. government’s support of the prior regime during the civil war. As a result of the Peace Corps’ presence in their communities, Nicaraguans learned that while Americans may have different physical and cultural characteristics from them, they are people with the same feelings and values. This realization contributed to lessening both the idealization and the stigmatization of life in the United States.