



Together Women Rise Interim Report

Grantee Name: Soccer Without Borders

Reports Due: October 2023

Progress Report Content

1. Please provide the following information:
 - a. **Organization:** Soccer Without Borders Nicaragua
 - b. **Project Title:** SWB Nicaragua Education & Leadership Program (ELP)
 - c. **Grant Amount:** \$41,500 (over 2 years)
 - d. **Contact Person:** Larkin Brown, larkin@soccerwithoutborders.org
 - e. **Address:** 3700 Eastern Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21224

2. **Recap briefly what outcomes the project was designed to achieve.**

Through funding from Together Women Rise, Soccer Without Borders Nicaragua planned to enroll more than 275 girls in our program in 2022 providing over 100 school scholarships, and enroll more than 300 girls in 2023, providing over 130 school scholarships. Beyond this enrollment goal, SWB Nicaragua had four categories for intended outcomes:

Personal Development: 80% of regular participants would record improved or sustained high outcomes in SEL competencies including self-management, social awareness, responsible decision making, and self-awareness.

Academic Advancement: The participants in the ELP would maintain an academic advancement rate of over 90%. In other words, over 90% of participants who participated in the ELP would enter the next grade level the following school year.

Healthy Lifestyles: 80% of SWB's older participants (ages 12+) will attend workshops where they receive information to support healthy lifestyles with topics such as reproductive health, healthy relationships, dating violence and domestic violence.

Social Capital: More than 90% of participants will report that they trust their coach and see their coach as a role model and mentor. More than 90% of participants will also report making new friends in the program and feeling like a part of the community.

3. **Has funding changed for this project? For example, have you received unexpected funding from another source?**

Funding for this project has not changed. As initially noted in our proposal, prior to the political upheaval of 2018, SWB Nicaragua earned 40% of its revenue through cultural exchange trips and camps, with another 30% coming from two family foundations, 15% from in-kind equipment donations, and the remaining 15% from individual donors. As SWB Nicaragua is still unable to host those cultural exchange programs, the funding from Together Women Rise has been instrumental in allowing the Education and Leadership Program to exist and grow over the last 2 years.



4. Is your organization or project situation different than presented in the approved proposal? For example, new executive director, significant project staffing changes or NGO affiliation, loss of large funding, or other significant changes?

While Soccer Without Borders continues to grow as an organization in our reach and impact, in Nicaragua, our program continues to work through the dual crises of the socio-political unrest and the ensuing effects of the pandemic. As mentioned in our contact report, we have experienced some turnover of a few longtime staff, including one assistant coach who secured a special visa for Nicaraguans to come to the USA (and is now working with us in Boston). Still, our team has been incredibly resilient to the difficulties of this moment. Through these changes, SWB Nicaragua has worked to promote women in leadership positions by providing a pathway for program alumni to become full time staff members and coaches. In fact, this year, 75% of our coaches are female and program alumnae, and 100% of all staff are women including our Director. Girls seeing women in leadership positions, but particularly girls from their own communities who graduated from the program into leadership positions, is an important way to inspire and encourage younger girls in the program.

As an organization, we welcomed Jennifer Tepper as our new Executive Director in April. From April through October, Jennifer worked closely with Mary Connor, our outgoing ED, to transition smoothly into her role. In September, Jennifer traveled to Nicaragua to meet our program staff and visit with our participants (photos included in our folder!). She also participated in SWB Nicaragua's annual 3-day tournament, Copa de Paz (Peace Cup)! Jennifer prioritized visiting every SWB local hub in her first 6 months in the role, in order to meet, in-person, with all of our staff and to make personal connections with our participants. As travel to Nicaragua has been limited over the last few years, Jennifer making the effort and having the opportunity to spend a week in Nicaragua was an exciting event for SWB!

Since our Contact Report in April 2023, one of our graduates-turned-coaches and university scholarship recipients, Michell Guadamuz, was [selected](#) as one of 70 global delegates to attend the Women's World Cup Festival in Sydney in August. Michell was the first-ever Nicaraguan representative at one of these World Cup Festivals. Prior to leaving for the event, Michell said, "I am very happy to have the opportunity to represent SWB in Australia during Festival '23. I am very excited to know that I am going to live a new experience that will allow me to learn and see other points of view about the impact of sport on social change. I hope to return to Nicaragua with a better understanding of these ideas in order to share with my community the experience and knowledge learned throughout the festival."

5. Have the number of beneficiaries changed? To report this please refer to the original numbers in your grant proposal under Number of women and girls Directly Impacted and population Indirectly Impacted.

Our goal, through this funding opportunity, was to enroll more than 275 girls in the SWB Nicaragua program in 2022 providing over 100 school scholarships, and enroll more than 300 girls in 2023, providing over 130 school scholarships. In 2022, we enrolled 314 girls in our program and provided 126 school scholarships. As we approach the end of 2023, we enrolled 354 girls in our SWB Nicaragua program and provided 134 scholarships.

6. What challenges are you facing as you move forward with this project? How are you approaching these challenges?



While we started the year with 134 scholarship recipients, we are ending this year with 116 of those recipients advancing to the next year or graduating. While we are proud of this 87% success rate of our scholarship recipients, we found three themes that contributed to the challenges SWB Nicaragua faced to achieve 100% success.

1. Educational Disparities

Due to the effects of COVID, the quality of education at the public schools in Nicaragua has dropped significantly. This disparity in education quality has made for extremely difficult transitions for scholarship recipients moving from public to private school. Additionally, many of the scholarship recipients are balancing the expectations and responsibilities of their home life with those of school. While SWB Nicaragua continues to offer office hours and tutoring, we have found that some participants have trouble taking advantage of those offerings. Our coaches and staff have worked hard to adjust and provide tutoring hours and resources that match the needs and availability of our participants. While this demonstrates a systemic challenge to our scholarship program, we are confident that our staff and coaches can continue to support our recipients and prepare them for the transition and ensure their ability to succeed and graduate.

2. Families

After noticing a number of our scholarship recipients being pulled into greater household expectations, SWB Nicaragua requested greater communication between the families and our program staff. This communication requirement included clear and reasonable justifications for school absences, doctor notes for sick days, and more. This year, SWB Nicaragua also created higher expectations for attendance for all programs and monitored attendance more closely to justify participants' participation in the scholarship program. These expectations and requirements were met with hesitancy and frustration from some families, which created challenges for the scholarship recipients to meet their goals.

Additionally, a number of our participants faced family emergencies or changes in family's ability to support participation in the program. For example, a handful of girls dropped out of the program after their parents either started a new job or moved out of the country, which limited their ability to transport their children to and from school or SWB. Another participant dropped out after her mother gave birth and needed more support at home.

In an effort to support our participants, SWB Nicaragua hosted a workshop for all of our participants' parents where program staff shared information about the program, provided our reasoning behind the greater expectations, and provided space to improve relationships and communication. Our hope was that by hosting this workshop and maintaining the connections built through the workshop, parents and families will be more supportive of their daughters to complete their scholarships and advance in grade level and graduate.

3. Technology

While SWB Nicaragua continues to provide office hours and tutoring space for our scholarship participants, our office only provides three very slow and old computers. These computers are always available for participants to use for research projects and completing assignments, but oftentimes, the computers' limited utility make them ineffective for participants' efforts.

7. Have you revised your original objectives since the project began? If so, why? What are your new objectives?



Early this year, SWB Nicaragua noticed that there was a collective decrease in attendance for the office hours provided for our older, secondary school participants. Despite that decrease in attendance, their academic performance and achievement was not affected. While SWB Nicaragua continued to offer attendance hours, we adjusted our initial objective of facilitating leadership workshops monthly. Instead, we incorporated leadership lessons into other components of our programming. In fact, 11 of the 12 participants in our youth leadership group are scholarship recipients. These youth leaders receive training as assistant coaches for on-field practices and in-office activities with younger teams.

8. What progress have you made toward achieving your objectives? Please address each stated objective.

Personal Development:

While our youth survey results did not reflect the goals we set at the start of this program, we have seen growth in SEL competencies for both our primary and secondary school participants from the initial baseline survey to the endline survey in most competencies.

- *Self-Management*: SWB Nicaragua found a 10% increase from baseline to endline surveys in positive response rate for self-management
- *Social Awareness*: SWB Nicaragua found a 4% increase in participants' social awareness from baseline to endline surveys.
- *Responsible Decision Making*: positive response rates for questions related to responsible decision making dropped by 2% from the baseline to endline survey. The main cause of this drop came from one specific survey question asking youth if they pay attention in class. Participants' responses dropped 12%, which we attributed to the fact that by the end of the year, many participants completing this survey have a more difficult time staying focused and paying attention.
- *Self-Awareness*: SWB Nicaragua participants showed a 6% increase in positive response rates for their self-awareness.

In September, SWB hired its first Monitoring and Learning Director, Larkin Brown, who returned back to SWB after a number of years working in ESOL education. Larkin worked in Nicaragua with SWB from 2010 through 2013 and continued working for SWB from 2013 through 2015 in Massachusetts. Her return to SWB in this capacity will lead to a greater push for MEL capabilities and more positive results for our youth survey moving forward across the organization, but specifically for our Nicaragua Hub.

Academic Advancement:

Over the last year, 87% of scholarship recipients graduated or advanced to the next grade level. Of the 134 scholarships provided to participants, 94 participants advanced to the following grade and 22 participants graduated from primary or secondary school. Of the 18 participants who dropped out over the course of this year, 7 participants dropped out due to family issues, 4 dropped out due to school changes or sport changes, and 5 dropped out due to coach changes within SWB. There were only 2 participants who, despite efforts from our staff and coaches, were unmotivated or unable to meet the expectations of the scholarship program.

**Healthy Lifestyles:**

SWB Nicaragua only held one workshop this year and it was targeted for parents. Information about healthy lifestyles and reproductive health, healthy relationships, dating violence and domestic violence is incorporated into programming day-to-day as a part of the curriculum experienced by all 354 participants in the 45-week TEAM calendar year. However, in the upcoming year, SWB Nicaragua plans to prioritize facilitating more workshops, particularly workshops on leadership skills, for scholarship recipients.

Social Capital:

Participants in SWB Nicaragua's program demonstrated great strides in social capital. Through our youth survey, SWB found:

- 93% of participants reported trusting their coach and seeing their coach as a role model and mentor
- 95% of participants reported feeling that they are a part of the community
- 98% of participants reported that they would support their friends in the program if they were suffering or struggling

9. Do you anticipate any difficulties in completing your project in the timeframe outlined in your proposal?

We do not anticipate any difficulties in completing this project in the timeframe outlined in our proposal. The results we have already seen over the past year suggest that SWB Nicaragua is on an upward trajectory and we are eager to reach and support more youth and more scholarship recipients moving forward.