MEMORANDUM  

September 17, 1990

TO: William C. Doherty, Jr. - Executive Director

FROM: Richard Hough - Coordinator, Agrarian Union Development

SUBJECT: Agrarian Reform Review in Nicaragua

Attached is the other Richard’s paper on the above subject. It is a reflection of what we don’t know as much as what we know. Much of the information has been pulled together from oral interviews with limited hard data corroboration. The information base is soft with regard to Nicaraguan national agrarian reform policies and programs. However, below this level, we were able to get a reasonably good feel of what was going on in the land reform field, what the major problems were, the intentions of the government and how CUS/AIFLD might plug into the field programmatically.

The first point I want to stress is that there does not appear to be any possibility of a return to the pre-Sandinista days of land concentration in the hands of the few. Notwithstanding Sandinista rhetoric to the contrary, we encountered no one in the democratic trade union movement or in the Government that gave any credibility to the likelihood of reversion to land distribution policies calculated to re-establish the traditional Nicaraguan landed elites. However, the apparent heavy movement of campesinos out of the failed State Farms and Production Cooperative System indicates that some restructuring of the Sandinista collectivist handiwork of the past decade will be imperative economically and politically in the not too distant future.

Second, one reason that the Chamorro government lacks agrarian reform policies and programs is that it is presently short of the authority and leverage to carry them out, or at least the government wants to avoid the confrontation and conflict that would be entailed. The result of this is that the most significant land reform activities are being carried out ad hoc, without a specific policy mantle, at regional and local levels, e.g. the informal cooperation of local CUS and Land Reform Institute operatives in settling landless campesinos on unoccupied lands.
Third, please note that with the disarray and dislocations on the land the past few years in Nicaragua, the approximate number of landless has mounted to over 50,000 families (this does not include the substantial number of near-landless) while the amount of un- or underutilized land is perhaps as high as 300,000 hectares in Regions I and II. Figures of this magnitude suggest the requirement for a new national agrarian reform program not too far down the line.

In a separate draft statement and budget (part of the Addendum to the Nicaragua Cooperative Agreement), we have developed a modest proposal in the land reform field, inter-alia, to position CUS and AIFLD to play a significant role in this field once the government sorts out its priorities and decides that it is propitious to act.

cc: Holway
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