

Background of NSEL struggle

December 2008

Many workers/community members have been organizing for years to trying to get Nicaragua Sugar Estates Limited (NSEL) in the states of Chinendega and Leon to address serious environmental and health issues. In March 2008, with help from the Center for International Environmental Law, 680 community members and workers filed a complaint with the International Finance Corporation (IFC). The complainants "seek redress for injuries to their health, environment, and livelihoods resulting from the failure of the IFC (the private lending arm of the World Bank) to comply with its own Policy on Social and Environmental Sustainability and its Environmental and Social Review Procedures in its \$55million loan to NSEL in 2006". The complainants include residents of Goyena and Abangasca, communities located in León, Nicaragua, in which NSEL cultivates sugarcane and the residents of the Chichigalpa (in Chinendega), Nicaragua, the community in which NSEL's sugar mill is located; and (3) former NSEL employees.

The CAO (the internal auditing arm of the IFC) has accepted the complaint and has visited Nicaragua three times as of December 2008 and is discussing the issues with the company and the community. Among the many concerns the community has is that there is an epidemic of Chronic Renal Insufficiency ("CRI") among NSEL sugarcane workers (over 1000 cases) and members of communities adjacent to NSEL sugarcane fields. NSEL hires workers for six month periods and tests workers for elevated levels of creatinine - a CRI indicator - and will not re-hire those with elevated levels. Over 1000 deaths have been reported in Nicaragua from CRI, mostly in areas where there sugar cane production (although this number isn't solid).

The Complaint also raises concerns of:

- o Interference by NSEL in attempts to establish a union independent of NSEL control and associated retaliation against those workers who sought to form or join the union;
- o Impacts to indigenous Sutiaba lands from pesticide drift;
- o Depletion of groundwater as a result of NSEL's irrigation of sugarcane fields;
- o Suspected contamination of community drinking water supplies and natural water bodies with pesticide, runoff from sugarcane fields, and improper treatment and disposal of effluent from cane processing; and
- o Incarceration and/or persecution and harassment of community members, and current and former employees, who raise concerns about NSEL's activities.



Leoanadro de Jesus Oliva Rivera (above) holding a photo of himself and one of his four brothers who recently died of chronic renal insufficiency CRI. As of June, 2008, (when this photo was taken) Mr. Rivera, who also has CRI, was told he had 4 months to live if he does not get dialysis. Mr. Rivera is the youngest of 5 brothers, of which 4 of the brothers, and their father, have died of CRI. He has worked at the Nicaragua Sugar Estates since he was fifteen and was diagnosed with CRI when he was 20 years old. When asked what scares him most of the disease, he said, "I don't want to leave my 9 year old son, he is too young to be without a father". Mr. Rivera was 13years old when his father died of CRD.

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