



UNIVERSITY OF THE AUTONOMOUS REGIONS  
OF THE CARIBBEAN COAST OF NICARAGUA  
(URACCAN)

**TITTLE:**

**EXPLORING THE SITUATIONS OF AFRO-DESCENDANT STUDENTS  
WHO DROP OUT FROM URACCAN-BLUEFIELDS:  
CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES AND RETENTION STRATEGIES**

DIPLOMA IN INVESTIGATION, AFRODESCENDANTS, DISCRIMINATION AND  
VIOLENCE

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## ***DEDICATION***

We dedicate our work to all black people. We especially dedicate it to those students who are striving to finish their higher education amid all kinds of difficulties. Our message to you is, *“Don’t give up – let’s make a difference – let’s change our lives!”*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS .....	VI
ABSTRACT .....	VII
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
2 OBJECTIVES.....	2
2.1 General objective .....	2
2.2 Specific objectives .....	2
3 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK .....	3
3.1 Education .....	3
3.2 Afro-descendants in the RACCS .....	4
3.3 Concept of Dropout .....	5
3.4 Types of dropout .....	5
3.5 Factors or Causes of Dropout.....	5
3.6 Consequences of Dropping Out .....	7
3.7 Afro-descendants, Racial and Gender Discrimination, Language and Education.....	8
4 METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN .....	11
4.1 Study Area .....	11
4.2 Sampling Methods.....	11
4.3 Data Collection Methods .....	12
4.4 Data Analysis Methods.....	13
4.5 Ethical Considerations.....	15
4.6 Challenges Faced During Fieldwork .....	16
5 CONTEXT.....	18
5.1 Brief Introduction to Nicaragua and the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast...18	
5.2 Afro-descendants in Nicaragua: Garifunas and Creoles .....	20
5.3 Higher Education in Nicaragua .....	23
5.4 Introduction to URACCAN .....	24
5.5 Dropout Situation in Nicaragua.....	26
6 RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	27
6.1 Introduction to the Research Participants .....	27
6.2 Factors That Influence Why Afro Students Dropped Out of URACCAN-Bluefields .....	29
6.3 Consequences of Dropping Out from URACCAN-Bluefields on Afro Students .....	37
6.4 URACCAN-Bluefields' Retention Strategies and Actions .....	42
7 CONCLUSIONS.....	44
8 RECOMMENDATIONS .....	46
9 BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	50
10 APPENDICES.....	55
10.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics of Research Participants.....	55
10.2 Fieldwork Organization.....	59
10.3 Data Collection Instruments.....	63

## **List of tables**

Table 1 Socio-demographic characteristics of students. ....	55
Table 2: focus group participants characteristic.....	57
Table 3: Teachers and authorities characteristic .....	58
Table 4: schedule of activities .....	59

## **List of figures**

List of figures.....	¡ERROR! MARCADOR NO DEFINIDO.
Figure 1: Doing focus group .....	¡ERROR! MARCADOR NO DEFINIDO.
Figure 2: Field work in orinoco .....	61
Figure 3: Receiving community leader's approval .....	61
Figure 4: Participants hometown Orinoco .....	62
Pearl Lagoon, Marshall Point, Bluefields.....	62

## **ACRONYMS**

**CBA:** Atlantic Biological Corridor

**CNU:** National Council of Universities

**FUNIDES:** The Nicaraguan Foundation for Economic and Social Development

**IMTRADEC:** Institute of Traditional Medicine and Community Development

**HIV:** Human immunodeficiency virus

**NGOs:** Non-governmental organizations

**NiNi:** Neither study, neither work

**OECD:** The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

**RACCN:** Northern Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region

**RACCS:** Southern Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region

**UNDP:** United Nations Development Program

**UNEN:** The National Students Union of Nicaragua

**UNESCO:** United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

**UNFPA:** United Nations Fund for Population Activities

**URACCAN:** University of the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua

## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigated the factors that influence Afro students' decision to drop out of the Bluefields campus of the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua (URACCAN). It was guided by the following objectives: learn which factors affect why Afro students drop out from URACCAN-Bluefields; identify the factors that influence dropout; describe the consequences of dropping out; and ascertain the university's existing student retention strategies, plans or programs.

The analytical framework drew on both general studies of school dropout as well as the experience of gender and racial discrimination in the region. The study employed a qualitative approach and used snowball and purposive sampling methods. The sample consisted of eighteen participants divided into three categories: students, teaching faculty and university authorities. Some fieldwork was done on campus and some was done in the former students' home communities.

The study found that various factors jointly influence why Afro students drop out from URACCAN-Bluefields. They are: individual/personal (e.g. personal motivation affected by one or more of the factors; support provided by one's family and friends), structural (e.g. socioeconomic conditions, racial discrimination and/or discriminatory gender roles), and/or institutional levels (e.g. problems with the program/course offerings, with the quality of teaching and other educational supports, or the availability of full scholarships). The results also identified that there was no current program for student retention, but there were some informal or indirect methods that seemed to be effective. Some strategies used by URACCAN prevented the factors that contributed to dropout, such as encouraging the use of Afro students' first language, and these furthermore contributed to URACCAN's institutional vision and mission. At the same time, other institutional factors contributed to dropout. The structural dynamics of racial and gender discrimination identified in

the region one or two generations ago (Woods Downs, 2005) have improved somewhat, but they still are notable in the factors that influence dropout as well as the consequences.

Recommendations were proposed based on the findings and the suggestions by research participants. in the hopes they would contribute to more Afro students finishing their degrees. These proposals for actions and strategies were directed towards students and prospective students, URACCAN-Bluefields, CEIMM and the community, as well as parents.

Key words: University dropout, influencing factors, racial discrimination, gender discrimination, interculturality, retention strategies.



# **1 INTRODUCTION**

School leaving or dropout is a worldwide educational problem that affects the development of individuals, their families, their communities, and the wider society. According to Cañon and Hernández (2006, p.11-12) dropout is understood as the definitive or temporary suspension, voluntary or forced in different educational areas.

School leaving or dropout is a serious problem in Nicaragua, and the South Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region (RACCS) in particular. Studies done by the Nicaraguan Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUNIDES) reveal that 58% of young people entering university do not finish their studies due to early or late dropout.

Although there is now the opportunity to pursue higher education in the RACCS, students still quit university due to different factors. As such, the problem of dropout is an important matter for the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua (URACCAN), Bluefields campus. We have chosen to address the dropout phenomenon related to Afro students at URACCAN-Bluefields in the present day.

We are convinced that the present study is extremely important as it will contribute valuable information for identifying and implementing actions and strategies to increase the retention of Afro students. This investigation could also provide useful secondary information for other researchers and institutions specialized in this field of work.

This major paper is divided into nine sections. Section one presents the scope of the study. After this introduction, section two describes the objectives of the study. The analytical framework is presented in section three. The fourth section describes the methodology. Section five provides the context of this research. The research findings are discussed in section six. Section seven provides the conclusions, while section eight offers some recommendations. After the bibliography, the appendices provide information on the research process.

## **2 OBJECTIVES**

### **2.1 General objective**

To learn why Afro students, drop out from URACCAN's Bluefields Campus and what are the university's retention strategies.

### **2.2 Specific objectives**

- ☐ Identify the factors that influence why Afro students drop out from URACCAN's Bluefields Campus.
- ☐ Describe the consequences of dropping out on Afro students from URACCAN-Bluefields.
- ☐ Ascertain the university's existing student retention strategies, plans or programs.

### **3 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK**

This section presents the analytical framework adopted in this study. The purpose is to explain the main analytical terms related to university dropout or leaving, as well as introduce some relevant analytical approaches for understanding why Afro students drop out from URACCAN's Bluefields campus. This section covers: education; Afro-descendants and a discussion of dropout issues specific to Afro-descendants; the concept "dropout" and the types of dropout; factors or causes of dropout; as well as the consequences of dropping out for students, universities and society.

#### **3.1 Education**

This investigation uses the comprehensive definition of education put forward by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). It is:

the instrument of the integral development of the human person and their socialization. It can take place at any age, thanks to the action of multiple institutions such as family, community or work context, or through interaction with the natural environment, especially when that interaction is socially and culturally determined.

There are many important components of this definition that are relevant to understanding university student dropout in the RACCS. First and most importantly, education does not stop with learning multiplication tables and how to read and write. In fact, some of what is involved in education does not take place exclusively in the classroom, for example, always respecting others.

Second, "socialization" refers to how individuals learn to live in a society: the transmission of knowledge, values, customs and ways of acting. It involves a system of knowledge and practices that allow for life-long learning in community. Third, "integral development" can be understood as sharing through our ideas, culture, knowledge, etc. to build cultural, moral and behavioral linkages and awareness.

Fourth and finally, education is a multidirectional process. This means that anyone can teach and learn, no matter how young or old they are. Through education, new generations assimilate and learn the knowledge, rules of conduct, ways of being and world views of previous generations. At the same time, young people may develop new knowledge, technology or vocabulary relevant to their changing world, and share their ideas, information and experiences with older generations.

### **3.2 Afro-descendants in the RACCS**

The word Afro-descendants can be used to refer to a universal identity that encompasses all human beings regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, culture, physical features, etc. Some people use this definition because the origins of humanity have been found in Africa.

For the present study, the concept of Afro-descendants we will use begins with the definition given by Cabella (2008). A person is Afro-descendant or black if they respond that they have Afro or Black ancestry. This definition is in keeping with the Nicaraguan constitution, which allows people to self-define their ethnicity.

Further to this, we do not understand the concept to be a neutral demographic category.

"Afro-descendants" is a social and academic construction at the same time. It is also part of what we have called intellectual sovereignty linked to the concept of self-determination, the right of peoples and any human being to have a name. In this case, the children of the diaspora, we had to re-conceptualize ourselves, breaking with the colonial-western definition of "black" imposed in half a millennium of theoretical subjugation (García, 2013).

In this way, we use the term to refer to people who form part of the African diaspora, and whose ancestors were brought as slaves during the European colonial period to replace the labor of indigenous peoples exterminated in the United States and other countries of the Americas. Historically and currently, Afro-descendants are victims of racism, racial discrimination, slavery, and deep social and economic inequality. These conditions form the bases of the marginalization, poverty, exclusion, and the denial of human rights that continue to affect Afro-descendants.

### **3.3 Concept of Dropout**

Dropout, or school leaving, is a complex phenomenon. This framework looks at different components of it, starting with the conceptualization of the term itself. Cañon and Hernández (2006: 11-12) define dropout as “the definitive or temporary, voluntary or forced suspension” of a student from an educational institution. It refers to leaving school or university forever or for a specific period of time, either by choice of the student or their family or mandated by the head of the educational institution.

In keeping with our analysis of Afro-descendants, we would add to Cañon and Hernández’s definition that students may be obliged to leave school/university because of structural conditions.

### **3.4 Types of dropout**

Dropout can be divided into different categories, depending on when it occurs. These are:

- Early withdrawal: when an individual who is admitted does not enroll.
- Early dropout: when a student drops out of school in the first semester of the program.
- Late drop-out: when an individual leaves school in the last semester.

### **3.5 Factors or Causes of Dropout**

According to Elizabeth Santana Hilario (2017), the causes of desertion may be due to different factors. These include the following.

*Economic reasons:* the lack of household resources to meet education expenses, quitting school for work or to look for work, lack of educational facilities;

*Family problems:* household chores, early pregnancy and motherhood, emotional attachment, family breakup;

*Lack of interest:* the lack of importance that parents give and the lack of a life project;

*Problem of school performance:* low performance, behavioral and other problems associated with age;

*Social problems:* drug addiction, alcoholism, problems with justice, being part of a gang;

*Pedagogical problems:* School repetition, low level of learning, lack of motivation and interest, and behavioral problems.

*Other reasons:* physical or developmental disability, military service, illness or accident, attendance at special courses, among others.

We note that many of the factors Santana Hilario (2017) identifies are expressed primarily from the perspective of the student and/or their family. She found that family problems are the ones most frequently mentioned by adolescents.

Others authors place emphasis on problems in the university or institutional environment that does not encourage school education, poor teacher-student interaction, among others. Psychological problems can include the refusal to acquire a higher level of knowledge, which may be due to having low self-esteem and not believing in one's own capacities.

Jarquín Chavarría et al. (2011) analyzed dropout at another URACCAN campus. They took an approach that emphasized institutional and socio-demographic conditions. Somewhat similarly, Jáuregui identified lack of economic resources and family disintegration as the main causes of dropout.

We consider that many of the factors identified by Santana Hilario (2017) can also be understood from the perspective of socio-economic or structural barriers to education. For example, the economic reasons given all refer to structural barriers. We would add other, similar factors, such as a lack of education in one's language(s). Low self-esteem is often thought of as an individual problem, but it may also be the result of social marginalization or exclusion on the basis of race and/or gender, or other underlying factors.

One study we found did address structural issues related to poverty and the lack of family income to support education (Farrington et al., 2012) and their impact on dropping out of school. They found that, on the one hand, family pressures due to poverty and other causes tended to manifest in some of the precursors to dropping out, which include low achievement, chronic absenteeism and misbehavior. On the other hand, those privileged by unequal social power structures use a variety of strategies, attitudes and behaviors — sometimes referred to as non-cognitive skills — that were an important factor related to high academic achievement.

### **3.6 Consequences of Dropping Out**

Various authors underline that dropout has negative consequences for students, but also for institutions and the wider society.<sup>1</sup> In particular it affects the development of both the individual and their society (Cárdenas, 2007; Jáuregui). In the case of the RACCS, “society” could also refer to a student’s home community and the region.

#### **3.6.1 Consequences for the Student**

- ☐ Waste of one’s desire to study and grow;
- ☐ Interruption of personal and professional development;
- ☐ Loss of access to a better standard of living;
- ☐ Difficulty inserting oneself into the labor market and getting access to the well paid positions;
- ☐ Decrease in self-esteem and confidence levels; and
- ☐ Decrease in feelings of marginalization and exclusion.

#### **3.6.2 Implications for Institutions**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://proyectoramon.wordpress.com/la-desercion-universitaria/> Revisado: 04-04-2017

- ☐ Significant loss of human capital;
- ☐ Wasted expenditure and use of other resources;
- ☐ Promotion of a sense of fear and distrust towards the institution among youth and the society;
- ☐ Low academic performance; and
- ☐ Impoverishment of the student body and common welfare of the academic community.

### **3.6.3 Consequences for Society**

- ☐ Increase in unskilled or less qualified labor;
- ☐ Growth of the number of young people who neither work nor study, known in Spanish as *NiNi* ("neither study nor work");
- ☐ Increase in the levels of informal work;
- ☐ Decrease in the value of education as an engine of progress and personal well-being;
- ☐ Deterioration of the image of educational institutions and university authorities;
- ☐ Increase in levels of social violence as the frustrations felt by young people may affect their other social circles and other sectors of the community (family, work, friends, neighbors); and
- ☐ Possible increase in subtle forms of racial discrimination.

## **3.7 Afro-descendants, Racial and Gender Discrimination, Language and Education**

Many studies have focused on learning about dropout that focuses mostly on the individual and institutional levels of analysis. Few of the studies we found assessed the impact of poverty or income level, and none explicitly addressed issues of racial and gender discrimination. Given the marginalization of Afro-descendants in society in general, it is perhaps not surprising that there is a noticeable shortage of research on dropout regarding Afro students in particular. For this reason, we decided to complement the analytical framework by incorporating concepts related to



racial and gender discrimination that are relevant to what we found in our fieldwork. One such example would be the structural conditions affecting dropout, such as, lack of education available in one's own language, i.e. racial discrimination; and gender-based discrimination.

It is vital to explore these and similar conditions as structural, not matters of individual choice. To do so, we will present some key concepts related to racial and gender discrimination, language and education that draw on Woods Downs (2005) germinal analysis of Creole women's experiences in the RACCS.

One set of these concepts addresses racial discrimination. Unlike the Pacific coast of Nicaragua or elsewhere, Woods Downs identifies that racism is often masked or expressed in subtle ways, for example by referring to straight hair or babies with light skin as beautiful. A second important concept mentioned by the women interviewed is the ethnic ladder. Ashanti explained it as such,

It depends on which ethnic groups you belong to, [whether] you have more or less opportunity in Nicaragua and on the Atlantic Coast. Six ethnic groups, and each ethnic group have its place well defined on that ladder (Ashanti, quoted in Woods Downs, 2005: 60-61).

Language, culture, identity and the ethnic ladder also have been reflected in the education system. Woods Downs explains that before the Spanish became a dominant force on the Caribbean Coast, the education system was in English, the colonial language at the time. Since Nicaraguan mestizos became the dominant ethnic group, Spanish has become the dominant language, as well as the language of instruction. This has had a negative impact on Creole students' self-esteem. "Creole students became insecure at an early age, due to the fact that they were forced to speak an unknown language" (Woods Downs, 2005: 62) in school. At the same time, getting an education – in Spanish – is an important way to improve your life opportunities.

On the Caribbean coast if you are black but educated you stand a better chance than a black who is not. People may tolerate your color, but that does not mean things will be easier; [...] I guess with education you have an advantage. If you're educated they look up on you (Gladys, quoted in Woods Downs, 2005: 62).

Another insight we borrow from Woods Downs's (2005) work relates to what she calls the "double struggle" of intersectional racial and gender discrimination. The life historians in her book identify that they suffer both forms of discrimination together, and in different contexts, including in the family, at school, at church and in the community. This means that they have to "prove themselves" or prove that they are capable, both as blacks and as women. Brittany in particular expressed that "education is the most important thing" but also pointed out that,

years gone by they never educate the girls, you know [...] because the girls going to be married and be a housewife, because girls were not suppose to do anything else (Brittany, quoted in Woods Downs, 2005: 69).

Woods Downs' analysis provides important insights that we will use to assess Afro-descendants experiences with education, particularly around recognizing that individual experiences are linked to structural issues. We will address both racial and gender discrimination as they emerge in the research findings.

## **4 METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN**

### **4.1 Study Area**

The study was carried out with the Bluefields campus of URACCAN. A focus group discussion with Afro students who had dropped out was carried out on campus, while interviews with Afro students who had dropped out were conducted in their home communities.

### **4.2 Sampling Methods**

We chose to select a relatively small amount of research participants for two reasons. One was in keeping with the qualitative research methodology. The other reason reflected the insight it is better to have a small number of participants in order to ‘present the experience of the people in compelling enough detail and in satisfactory depth that those who read the study can connect to that experience, learn how it is constituted, and deepen their understanding of the issues it reflects’ (Seidman, 2013: 54).

When deciding the selection criteria, we considered the argument that “the phenomenon dictates the method, including the type of participants” (Hycner, 1999: 156). On this basis, we decided to use purposive and snowball criteria to select participants. Purposive criteria involve selecting certain units or cases “based on a specific purpose rather than randomly” (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003: 713). We used this approach to select participants who had dropped out from URACCAN since their experience was vital to the research. We also used the snowball method or chain referral sampling (Creswell 2007; Merriam 2009), which is widely used in sociological research to identify participants who may be hard to find (Blernacki and Waldorf, 1981). Participants referred us to others who fit the characteristics of our sample.

### **4.3 Data Collection Methods**

We selected a qualitative research methodology to enable us to grasp the complex dropout situation Afro students at URACCAN. For primary data collection we chose a combination of interviews and focus group discussions to contribute to the triangulation of the findings. Secondary data collection included analysis of relevant materials, whether books, journal articles or online materials.

#### **4.3.1 Interviews**

Interviews are face-to-face interactions between the researcher and participants. According to Gill (2008), the purpose of research interviews is to explore the opinions, experiences, beliefs and/or motivations of individuals on specific issues. Using semi-structured interview guides gave us flexibility to follow up on information provided by research participants.

The interviews had a high response rate and enabled researchers to probe as well as clarify some questions to participants when needed. We used the “life-mode interviewing” process. Participants told their story by recounting what they did in the previous day. Their story was of worth to this study. Researchers found it relevant that life-mode interviewing provided a good entry point to learn about the situation. This was because the initial question elicited stories about the person’s activities, interactions, and relationships (Ibid).

The question of language was very relevant to this study. As argued by King'ei (2006), research is a social undertaking and it entails the use of language for communication. It is through shared language that we can better understand phenomena. During the interviews, and throughout the visit to the study area, the local language was used as it is spoken in the area. Shared language was an auxiliary rationale for us to take the words that participants used seriously and follow up as appropriate (Seidman, 2013). This method yielded substantial vital information regarding the research topic.

Another aspect to the interview process was note-taking and recording. Note-taking helped keep us attentive to and actively engaged with our research participants. In order to avoid missing any relevant information, researchers required the consent of participants to record interviews on an audio recorder.

Interview questionnaires can be found in the appendices.

#### **4.3.2 Focus Group Discussion**

We carried out a focus group discussion to learn the opinions and perceptions of the Afro students in regards to dropout. Kombo and Tromp (2006) argue that the focus group discussion is a data collection technique that can produce a lot of information quickly and is effective at identifying and explaining the respondents' beliefs, ideas or opinions. It is not meant to generate facts, but rather in-depth interpretations that can be used to better understand everyday social behaviors and practices. In this way, it can also be used to uncover and learn more about hidden phenomena that emerge during the research process. As a result, focus group discussions can also be used as a process for producing information, not just collecting it. Another reason why we wanted to use this method was because it helped the participants to feel more connected to the study, hence they were more willing to share their ideas and perceptions.

The focus group discussion in this study involved five students who had dropped out of URACCAN-Bluefields and were currently living in Bluefields.

#### **4.4 Data Analysis Methods**

##### **4.4.1 Preparation for Data Analysis**

During this preparation phase, we transcribed the interviews and followed Seidman's (2013) guidance to approach transcripts with an open attitude, seeking what was to emerge as important and of interest from the text. During this process, we remained aware of the advice found in

various guides to qualitative research that emphasize that there is no simple or single path or recipe for analyzing qualitative data from interviews.

There are no standard methods, no *via regia*, to arrive at the meaning of what is said in an interview. Rather, such understanding is based on the experience and the craftsmanship of the researcher. The search for techniques of analysis maybe a quest for a 'technological fix' to the researcher's task of analyzing and constructing meaning. No standard methods of text analysis exist that correspond to the multivariate techniques available for statistical analysis (Kvale, 2009: 191-192).

We used content analysis for the data. According to Morgan and Kruger (2006), content analysis is any technique used for comprehending data that systematically and objectively identifies special characteristics of messages and derives coding categories from the textual data.

#### **4.4.2 Transcriptions and Data Collation**

We put together all field materials and transcribed each of the recorded interviews. The act of transcribing was tiresome as listening and typing required rewinding the audio several times in order to get the exact words. It was also difficult to type at the pace of the the audio recorder. However, it was an important activity as it helped to recapture vividly the scenario of interviews as well as keep the information fresh in our minds. We printed the transcripts and attached each transcribed interview to the corresponding field notes. We also read through the interviews several times and linked them where relevant to secondary materials.

#### **4.4.3 Construction of Analytical Categories**

To apply the principles of Morgan and Kruger (2006) and also Kvale (2009), we had a 'dialogue' of sorts with the transcriptions and recalled our interactions with the study participants. We read each of the interviews transcribed three to four times to get more acquainted with the text and the pattern of responses before we started identifying analytical categories and establishing the causal flow from factors and causes through to consequences, conclusions and

recommendations. We then reviewed those categories in connection with the analytical framework and the research objectives.

We then reviewed questions and responses and organized them based on the research objectives, the analytical framework and the draft analytical categories. For each question, we classified similar phrases, patterns, relationships, and commonalities in the responses; we also identified disparities in the answers. Categories were divided into sub-categories if necessary to encompass more specific responses. This sequence was followed for all objectives and specific questions. We also reflected on the secondary data relevant for each category and added notes on the relevant literature.

## **4.5 Ethical Considerations**

Ensuring ethical considerations are met is necessary to guarantee the moral integrity of any research project. The first step for this research project was to receive approval by the coordinators of the research center, administrative staff and university authorities. In each phase of the research – including design and planning, collection and analysis of data and writing up – we undertook measures to ensure participants' integrity, freedom and participation, informed consent, and confidentiality (Chambliss and Russell, 2013: 201).

### **4.5.1 Participants' Integrity, Freedom and Right to Participation**

As research involving human participants, it was necessary to recognize their integrity, freedom and right to participate. Participants are not passive objects. Hence, they need to be able to influence what happens to them in important areas of their lives (National Committee for Research Ethics in Norway, 2006). We made every effort to respect the dignity and integrity of participants. For example, during the interviews, participants could pause to attend to some other required activity, such as childcare, cooking, responding to visitors, and other tasks.

#### **4.5.2 Informed Consent**

Shahnazarian (2013) defines informed consent as a voluntary agreement to participate in research. The data collection process begin by informing the research subject(s) about the purpose and content of the study, as well as the process they will engage in and how the information they provide will be used by the researchers. On the basis of this information, research participants must agree willingly to take part in the research without being coerced in any way.

The current study also followed guidance provided by Chambliss and Russell (2013). According to them, consent must be given by persons who are competent to consent, have consented voluntarily, are fully informed about the research, and have comprehended what they have been told. As such, informed consent was a matter of adhering to basic human rights.

To ensure informed consent, we shared a copy of participant information sheet containing information regarding the study with the participant(s) and reviewed it together. If the participant had a low level of literacy, we read the form to them, we asked for questions, and provided clarifications. The consent form and participant information sheet were adapted from the standard forms used at URACCAN-Bluefields and can be found in the appendices. If any potential research subjects declined to participate, we thanked them and proceeded to the next possible subject.

### **4.6 Challenges Faced During Fieldwork**

#### **4.6.1 Interviews**

One obstacle faced was getting information on student dropout from the registrar's department. The researchers mitigated this problem by asking students and faculty to identify participants who met the criteria for the study. This was an extensive process. When we arrived at the communities, we found one key student to help us identify others in the community who met the selection criteria.



Climate change affected data collection process. On some days it rained so much that a few documents got soaked.

We had hoped to have a meeting with all the community leaders to explain the research to them. Since this was not possible, we went to visit each one at their home to get their approval.

#### **4.6.2 Gender Composition of Sample**

We considered it important to have equal numbers of female and male participants as we hoped to identify gender-specific factors and/or consequences of dropping out. However, this was not possible for either the interviews or the focus group discussion. For the interviews, we visited various communities and found gender-specific difficulties to finding available research participants.. While boys were often on the Pearl Cays or fishing, girls were frequently working in their community (although a few were working out of town). For the focus group discussion, researchers made a list of possible participants from Bluefields, which included both men and women. We then extended a formal invitation to each one, either by phone or a personal visit. The invitation included a brief introduction to the research topic, objectives, and the main purpose of the focus group. However, only five people attended the session, all women.

## **5 CONTEXT**

This section provides the social, cultural and educational context for this study. It includes: a brief introduction to Nicaragua and the autonomous Caribbean coast regions; Afro-descendant cultures in the RACCS; higher education in Nicaragua; a description of URACCAN; and the dropout situation in Nicaragua.

### **5.1 Brief Introduction to Nicaragua and the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast**

Throughout human history in this part of Central America, the Pacific and Caribbean regions have developed distinctly. During the colonial period, the Spanish arrived first to the Caribbean coast, but settled on the Pacific side of the country and created a colony there. Later, the British arrived on the Caribbean side and set up an enclave economy. Large amounts of British people did not settle in the region, but they did forcibly bring Africans as slaves to the continent, who arrived in Nicaragua by different means. Still today, even though the country is geographically divided roughly in half, there are many differences between the two “sides” of the country. The Caribbean Coast region – at the time called the Mosquito Reserve – was incorporated into Nicaragua in 1894 (PNUD, 2005). The Mestizos on the Pacific refer to this as the “re-incorporation”, while people from the Caribbean reject that the region was part of the Nicaraguan nation-state before that date. These two distinct worldviews and histories help to explain why today there is mutual mistrust between both populations (Gordon, 1998) as well as why Mestizos from the Pacific continue to believe many myths about the Caribbean Coast (PNUD, 2005). The ongoing differences between the two sides of the country is evident in many indicators and studies, a few of which will be reviewed here.

The name "Nicaragua" comes from the Nahuatl-speaking tribe who originally inhabited the area where Nicaragua is currently located. Their capital city was Nicarao. Later, when the Spanish

arrived, they combined the name of the capital with the Spanish word for water, "agua" (Nikola, 2012).

The country had an estimated population of 5.9 million in 2012, is growing at an annual rate of 1.2%, and approximately 63.5% of the population is younger than thirty years of age (UNFPA, 2013). A special *Human Development Report* of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 2005 studied the Caribbean Coast regions. It found that despite taking up about half of the territory, only about 12% of the population lived in the two regions, the Northern Autonomous Region of the Caribbean Coast (RACCN) and the Southern Autonomous Region of the Caribbean Coast (RACCS) (PNUD, 2005).

The ethnic composition in the Caribbean regions is distinct from the rest of the country. According to a 2009 survey, the population of the RACCN was made up of 57% Mestizos (who also make up the vast majority of the country's population), 36% Miskitus, 1.2% Creole and 6% Mayagna. In the RACCS, the population was distributed as follows: 90% Mestizos, 3% Miskitus, 6% Creole, 0.1% Mayagna, 0.3% Rama, and 0.8% Garifuna. Both Creoles and Garifunas are ethnicities of African descent. Overall, most Creoles and Garifunas live in the RACCS.

According to the UNDP's Human Development Index, Nicaragua is classified in the medium category of human development. In 2017, it ranked 124 out of 189 countries, and had a rating of 0.658, where the lowest possible ranking is 0 and the highest is 1. In 2003, Nicaragua's ranking was 112th, with a corresponding value of 0.690 (UNDP, 2005). The regional levels for the same year, as calculated in the Nicaraguan Human Development Report, are much lower: the RACCN (at the time called RAAN) had a value of 0.466 and the RACCS (then called RAAS) had a value of 0.454. Both of the regions were in the "low" category of human development.

The levels of poverty in the RACCS and the RACCN is much greater than the rest of the country, despite all the natural resources of the Caribbean Coast. Together the RACCN and the RACCS

contribute 21% of the gross domestic product of livestock farming, 31% of forestry, and 42% of fishing (PNUD, 2005).

Nicaragua's capital and largest city is Managua, which is located on the Pacific side. Spanish is the most widely spoken language and it is the official language of the country. In the RACCS, the second most frequently spoken language is Kriol,<sup>2</sup> followed by Miskito, then other languages.

With regards to religion, there is no official state religion, but the majority of the population is Roman Catholic. On the Caribbean Coast, the Moravian church was historically the largest church, but today Coast peoples practice a variety of Christian denominations and other religions.

The 1987 constitution of Nicaragua recognized the RACCN and RACCS (then called RAAN and RAAS) as two autonomous regions, which was further specified in law 28, the autonomy law. This and other laws recognize the collective rights of indigenous people and ethnic communities, including language rights, and a communal land regime. The autonomy law grants people the right to be educated in their first language as well as in Spanish.

## **5.2 Afro-descendants in Nicaragua: Garifunas and Creoles**

### **5.2.1 Garifunas in Orinoco, RACCS**

The Garifuna communities in Nicaragua are located in the RACCS, on the shores of Pearl Lagoon Basin. Orinoco is located between Marshall Point and Wawashan. It was founded in 1912 by Mr. John Sambola, son of Joseph Sambola, originally from Honduras. Currently, Orinoco is the most populous and largest Garifuna community and is considered "Capital of the Garifuna" in Nicaragua. Today, the community has approximately 1,500 inhabitants who live in 164 homes. The main form of transportation continues to be water transport, whether by motorboat or speedboat, canoes, sailboats or others. Their traditional economic activities are fishing, hunting

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<sup>2</sup> Kriol is a Creole language based on standard English and with other linguistic influences.

and agriculture, but the number of people who have emigrated and send remittances to families for their survival has increased in recent years.

The vast majority of residents speak Kriol and Spanish; very few people speak the traditional Garifuna language. The Garifuna language belongs to the Arawak family although they have borrowed words of Bantu West African, Spanish, Miskito, English and French. The diminished use of the Garifuna language is perhaps due to the "Creolization" of other ethnic groups living in the Pearl Lagoon basin, since Creoles were traditionally the dominant economic and even political population along the Basin. Garifunas adapted some Creole customs and developed proficiency in Kriol. At the same time, the compulsory teaching of Spanish in primary and secondary school also contributed to the loss of the Garifuna language, which constituted a substantial part of the distortion of the Garifuna identity.

Education occurs in the comprehensive ways encompassed in the UNESCO definition explained in the analytical framework. Of particular importance is the socialization of children in the extended family lineage and community. As for formal state educational facilities, Orinoco has a complete primary and secondary school attended by children and adolescents from Orinoco and surrounding communities.

There are some health care facilities in Orinoco today. There is a health center in fair condition that offers the services of a doctor, nurses, health brigade and two midwives. There is also the presence of a non-governmental organization (NGO) called Christian Medical Action (in Spanish, *Acción Médica Cristiana*). This NGO supports the community and the health center with its pharmacy that carries basic medicines for common diseases (CBA, 2003). Nevertheless, the use of traditional medicine for certain diseases is still common.

The Garifuna culture is a hybrid of Arawak, African, and European traditions. There are traces of their African heritage in their dances, their sacred drums and ancestor worship. Many Garifuna people are proud of their African roots and prefer to be called "Garinagu," the Africanized name

for Garifuna. Many aspects of Garifuna life also come from their Amerindian ancestors. This legacy is evident in the cultivation and use of cassava, the passion for fishing and the sea, the division of labor, the use of maracas in festive dances, and faith in the buyei as a healer or counselor.

The Garifuna worldview is comprised of natural and supernatural phenomena. Among the supernatural forces are the spirits of the ancestors. The ritual of Wallagallo, meaning the cry or the dance of the roosters, is one of the cultural specificities of the community. It is an ancient ritual practiced by the Garifuna in Nicaragua. The central aim of the rite is to heal a person who is very ill and is facing the possibility of death, which is caused by being possessed by an ancestral spirit. The rite of Wallagallo becomes the last resort to save the person's life. The ritual is subject to standards within the Garifuna tradition. Relatives of the ill person go to the Suquia, or healer, who has the power to communicate with the spirits of the ancestors through dreams. The spirits tell the Suquia whether and how to perform Wallagallo. they will communicate whether to perform or not Wallagallo. The whole event is accompanied by traditional foods and drinks, such as run-down or cususa drinks.

On the 19th of November, the anniversary of the arrival of the Garifuna in Nicaragua is celebrated. There are performances of dances and songs; typical foods are available; they hold sports competitions; and regional, national and international cultural exchanges take place.

Despite the loss of their language, Garifuna people identify strongly with their ethnic community. In a study published in 2005, 46% of Garifunas identified more with their ethnic community than as Nicaraguan (PNUD, 2005). The same PNUD report suggests that the fact that many people from the Caribbean Coast, such as Garifunas and Creoles speak two or more languages is an indication of greater interculturality (PNUD, 2005).

### **5.2.2 Creoles on the Caribbean Coast**

The ancestors of the Creole ethnic group were slaves brought from Africa to America. Creoles came to Nicaragua at the end of the sixteenth century, with the arrival on the Caribbean Coast of Europeans and Africans and their interaction with the Amerindian population.

The total population of Creoles on the Caribbean Coast is estimated at 18,890 people. More than 50% of this total resides in the city of Bluefields. Creoles are mostly located in urban areas of the Caribbean region, such as Bluefields, Corn Island, Pearl Lagoon and Puerto Cabezas (Gordon, 1998, Woods, 2008). In the RAACS, Creoles settled mainly in the area of Bluefields, Pearl Lagoon and Corn Island. In the RACCN, this group is currently concentrated mainly in the town of Bilwi (municipality of Puerto Cabezas), but a number of Creole families also live in the mining sector of the region (Siuna, Bonanza and Rosita).

The Creoles retain their Kriol language, and they also taught Spanish in school. They are mainly of Moravian and Anglican denominations. Their main economic activities are fishing and agriculture, while a large number is dedicated to skilled work in state institutions and private enterprise.

Unlike the Garifunas, 69% of Creoles identified equally as Creoles and as Nicaraguans (PNUD, 2005).

### **5.3 Higher Education in Nicaragua**

Higher education originated in Nicaragua in the year 1812, when a decree was issued constituting the University of León. Officially installed in 1816, it was the second university in Central America and the last one in Latin America founded during the Spanish colonial period.

The University of León was reorganized in the mid-1880s on the basis of the Napoleonic education system, which also had an influence on universities elsewhere in Latin America at that time. Its autonomy was conferred on March 27, 1958 by Executive Decree number 38. Its name

was then changed to the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua, whose institutional motto since then has been “freedom for the university.”

The Nicaraguan constitution of 1987 establishes that education is "a fundamental factor for the transformation and development of the individual and society" (Article 116). It specifically delegates to the universities and higher technical education centers the function of training highly qualified resources, for which it confers academic, financial, organic and administrative autonomy (article 125). The Law of Autonomy of Higher Education Institutions (Law 89) is rooted in the constitution and establishes the bases for developing higher education in the country.

By 2015, there were sixty higher education institutions duly authorized in the country. This data corresponds to twenty universities. Of these, ten were members of the National Council of Universities (CNU), where three of those ten had more than 50% of the country's total university enrollment. Ten private universities also had access to the information.

One report found that 264,000 people in Nicaragua have a tertiary education degree (FUNIDES, 2014) In 2013, according to CNU records, 10,601 people received a university degree.

## **5.4 Introduction to URACCAN**

### **5.4.1 General Description of URACCAN**

The University of the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua – URACCAN – is a community-based and intercultural university. It was founded in 1992, by notable academic and intellectuals from the Caribbean coast who saw the need to have a university that responded to the needs of the region. It began its academic activities in 1995 as the first intercultural community university in Latin America.

It was established with the purpose of responding to a historical claim by indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants and other communities of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast to have an institution of higher learning in both autonomous regions.



In this sense, URACCAN's curriculum has been developed based on the needs of the regions. Leaders from all communities – indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants and mestizos – participate in consultations to develop its programs. Furthermore, one component of the university's offerings involves community extension or outreach programs. One early example of this was a five-year cultural rescue program with the Garifuna community that contributed to the community's organization and linked cultural with economic development. This and other programs have contributed to strengthening communities and developing people's identity(ies), and they have contributed to the national government's campaign of "living clean, living healthy, living well."

Since it opened its doors to the Caribbean population, this university has provided an education model that responds to the philosophy and worldviews of indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants and mestizos from the Caribbean Coast. One way it achieves this is through course offerings that contribute to sustainable development and which aim to respect and value the specificities of each of the peoples living in the Caribbean autonomous regions. In so doing it contributes to strengthening autonomy and the creation of intercultural citizenships.

#### **5.4.2 URACCAN Vision and Mission**

##### **Vision**

To be a leader of the intercultural community university model at the regional, national and international levels, recognized for its quality and relevance, that accompanies management and advocacy processes for the construction of intercultural gender citizenships, which lead to quality of life and wellbeing, and the autonomy of indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, mestizos and other ethnic communities.

## **Mission**

To educate men and women with knowledge, wisdom, capacities, values, principles, humanistic attitudes, and sense of entrepreneurship and innovation, in balance and harmony with Mother Earth to strengthen the peoples' autonomies.

### **5.5 Dropout Situation in Nicaragua**

A FUNIDES study using CNU data found that 58% of students drop out, and only 42% complete their studies. This represents a substantial increase in the dropout rate over the past decade. In 2006, the statistics were reversed: 58% of registered students received their degree. The report did not provide a break-down based on gender or ethnicity.

## **6 RESEARCH FINDINGS**

This section presents the analysis and discussion of the research findings. It begins by introducing the research participants. After presenting some relevant socio-economic and demographic data, information about when the students dropped out of URACCAN is provided. Each of the subsequent sections addresses one of the research objectives.

### **6.1 Introduction to the Research Participants**

#### **6.1.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Participants**

Socio-demographic information of students is significant to this study because it helps understand the students' experiences of dropout. It also provides information to explore the supports and/or obstacles encountered by the student participants. This can then be related to the analytical framework by identifying what concepts and categories are most relevant to the causes and consequences of dropping out.

Using these sampling methods described in the methodology section, this study had eighteen participants divided into three categories. The first category consisted of five students who participated in the focus group discussion. Their ages ranged between 22 and 33 years. Four of them had children and four were single. None of them had a scholarship, and all paid for their studies themselves. All of the participants were women.

The second category comprised the nine students who were interviewed. They ranged in age from 18 to 35 years. Of the total, three were men and six were women. Seven reported being single, and only two women were married. Three participants had one child; one participant had 4 children; and five had no children. In regards to the education level of participants' parents, one of them had a university degree, two had completed secondary school, two had not completed secondary school, three had completed primary school, three had not completed primary school, and one participant did not remember.

The third category had four participants. Two were teaching faculty and two were university authorities who had been working at the university for more than six years. Their positions were: vice-rector, academic dean, coordinator of science education and full-time professor.

All students and two of the faculty/authorities identified as Afro, whether Creole or Garifuna. One professor and one university authority who were mestizos were included because the authors considered they had valuable information to contribute to this study. Of the 14 students who participated, only three were men. Reflections on the gender breakdown of the participants is included in the methodology section.

More detailed information about the study participants is provided in the appendices.

### **6.1.2 Information about When Student Participants Dropped Out**

Study participants dropped out of URACCAN-Bluefields between 1998 and 2017. Most students dropped out between their first and third year of studies. Out of 14 students: 5 dropped out in their first year, 4 in their third year, 3 in their second year, and 1 each in their fourth and fifth years. In other words, most could be categorized as early dropouts.

This finding is somewhat reflective of other studies. A World Bank report found that of the total number of students who drop out of school in Latin America, half do so in their first year. The fact that more Afro students are able to complete at least one year at URACCAN-Bluefields suggests that there might be more effective personal or institutional supports for students there. These might be: programs and activities to support intercultural and bilingual education, personal support networks, or others. This is especially interesting given the low level of human development in the region. At the same time, this was not a representative sample, so we should not extrapolate from these students' experiences to make assumptions about those of all Afro-descendant students in the region.

## **6.2 Factors That Influence Why Afro Students Dropped Out of URACCAN-Bluefields**

The factors that influenced whether Afro students dropped out comprise institutional, structural and personal factors. They were: program and course offerings; funding; educational support and quality of teaching; promotion of interculturality and bilingualism; gender roles and discrimination; support from family and friends; and self-motivation on the part of students. Any of these factors have implications for the other types of influencing factors. One important example of this dynamic would be self-motivation. Self-motivation was often impacted positively or negatively in relation to one or more of the other factors, as we discuss below. Often when students drop out of university, the explanation is multi-causal.

### **6.2.1 Program and Course Offerings**

Program and course offerings refers to the programs and courses offered by URACCAN-Bluefields and whether they met students' preferences. All participants in the study indicated that they chose their program of study. However, the majority also expressed that they did not select their ideal choice, but they chose based on what the university was offering. As one participant stated,

I chose to study agroforestry because they didn't have any other programs that I liked (Interview, participant 7).

URACCAN faculty and authorities also noted that one of the major factors influencing dropout was the lack of offer of student's preferred degree program. Not studying their preferred choice is likely to affect that person's motivation to continue throughout the entire program.

While some students were able to take the degree program of their choice, they faced problems with specific courses offered. This issue was raised by a number of students and it led to their dissatisfaction with their university studies. One student did not receive the specialized courses they anticipated as part of their degree.

I registered for one specific degree program: marine biology. At the beginning they told us that everyone would take the same classes in first year, then afterwards we would take classes that were specific to our degrees. I found myself in the middle of third year and I was studying for a degree that I didn't choose.

Another participant was dissatisfied that the practical component was insufficient.

I studied computer administration and during the three years we only had theory classes, no practice.

For another formal student, the problem was the language of instruction.

I went to study English and every single subject was taught in Spanish, with the exception of the English class. It did not make any sense to me, since the courses I was taking were the same as the other degree programs, with the exception of the English class.

Not being comfortable with specific courses or not having the opportunity to study one's preferred program, especially if that program was the student's childhood dream, is one of the main factors discussed in the secondary literature that affects school leaving. This factor was also discussed in the secondary literature. Castilo (2007) identified that motivation and attitude were significant elements that affected whether students stayed in school.

### **6.2.2 Funding**

Funding is one of the most important factors that affected whether students remain in university, according to both the primary and secondary data. It includes various forms of funding of one's education: scholarship, funded by parents, and self-financed. This issue relates to both structural factors, especially the family's or the student's income level, and institutional factors, namely the availability of comprehensive scholarships.

A few of the students received an external scholarship and only one had an intern scholarship. For some of the students, the scholarship offer was not comprehensive. One research participant found out after she was studying at URACCAN that her scholarship had been reduced.

They promised to give me a three-year external scholarship, but in reality, it only lasted for eight months. Suddenly I was notified that the scholarship had been cancelled (Interview, participant 1).

Another student lost the possibility of receiving a scholarship because they did not complete the application formalities punctually.

The university promised to support me with an Alba scholarship, but I didn't give them a copy of my identification on time, so then I was taken off the scholarship list (Interview, participant 7).

In addition to those who received scholarships, most of the students interviewed said their parents paid for their education. All of those who participated in the focus group discussion said they paid for their own education.

While lack of funding was an important cause of dropout on its own, it could also be linked to other factors. One 33-year-old Garifuna man linked scholarship availability with program offering.

I wanted to study civil engineering but since the university gave me a scholarship, I had to study ecotourism because they didn't offer civil engineering (Interview, participant 3).

He could only enroll in the program that had a scholarship available, but even if he did not need the scholarship, civil engineering was not taught at URACCAN. When expectations are not met, one can become psychologically affected and if it has to do with income or funds for the studies, it can be a double blow that makes it difficult for students to stay and complete their studies. This experience also points to multi-causal explanations for dropping out of school, such as the work of Torrez et al. (2015).

### **6.2.3 Educational Support and Quality of Teaching**

There is an inverse relationship between the quality of the university's teaching, curriculum, and education supports and the student's level of motivation to drop out. If the quality is high, students will unlikely be motivated to drop out; the inverse relationship is also true. Even if learners are

resilient in the face of inadequate teaching and other educational supports, it still affects the outcome of the learning process.

In this study, several participants stated that they had a good relationship with professors. One participant related the following.

There is a good relation [with faculty] because when I didn't understand something and I asked the professor, they would help. But not all were like that.

Participants' responses varied depending on whether and from whom they received academic support. Most participants mentioned that they did not need help, while others said that only friends would help them, never teachers. Another did not ask for support from faculty, but assumed that they would have helped. The participants in the focus group also reported a variety of different supports.

"Yes, I had a professor mainly and also an alumnus who would help me out.

"Not maybe to do homework, but there was a teacher who always motivated and encouraged us to continue studying, who pushed us to get what we wanted.

"I had not a professor but a staff person who always encouraged me to keep coming and see what we could do. When the teacher said she had never seen me I had teachers who were comprehensive.

"Sure, one professor. She would help me outside of class time. We would meet in her office and she would try to help me out."

Interviews with faculty and university authorities showed that they also recognized the importance of faculty supporting students, as well as other means. One university authority highlighted several forms of support provided to students.

From the area of student welfare and IMTRADEC, students are provided with support. They also receive motivational talks on self-esteem and topics relevant to the socio-cultural context in which students develop. These include HIV, zika, chikungunya, gender-based violence, interculturality, etc.

We also learned from authorities that academic coordinators promote interactions between students and teachers with the purpose of clarifying students' doubts and concerns regarding



topics discussed in class. In some cases, they or faculty promoted study circles. Other forms of support will be discussed below as regards interculturalism and bilingualism.

A few participants considered that the relationship with university authorities was not very good since they never met any of them, including the vice-rector, the academic dean, or the representatives of the student union (UNEN) or the students' welfare department coordinator. As one participant put it quite clearly,

They never solve my problem or uneasiness, they left you on standby.

The primary data confirms the issues raised in the literature. Teachers play a significant role in the trajectory of students throughout the formal schooling experience (Baker, Grant, and Morlock, 2008). Positive teacher–student relationships allow students to feel safe and secure in their learning environments and provide support for important social and academic skills (Baker et al., 2008; O'Connor, Dearing, and Collins, 2011). However, the opposite is unfortunately also true.

When teachers form positive relation with students, classrooms become supportive spaces in which students can engage in academically and socially productive ways (Hamre and Pianta, 2001). Students who have positive relationships with their teachers use them as a secure base from which they can explore the classroom and school setting both academically and socially, to take on academic challenges and work on social-emotional development. This includes building relationships with peers and developing self-esteem and self-concept. Through this secure relationship, students learn about socially appropriate behaviors as well as academic expectations and how to achieve these expectations (Hamre and Pianta, 2001).

There is a need to strengthen the way faculty assist students beyond a subjective interest and one-to-one relationship. This is important to avoid misunderstandings and potential abuse in any direction. These supports need to be institutionalized.

#### **6.2.4 Promotion of Interculturality and Bilingualism**

Most of the students found that the university's commitment to interculturality and bilingualism was put into practice in the classroom and in other aspects of the learning environment. For them, this had a very positive effect on their learning experience and their level of satisfaction with their studies at URACCAN. However, there were a small number of exceptions that had a very negative impact.

One positive example provided related to classroom learning.

Professors give you the opportunity or choice as black people to talk in your own language. If the teacher doesn't understand he or she would ask one of the other students to translate.

URACCAN also contributed to interculturality in the sense that one Afro student was able to improve their Spanish. Another comment referred to exchanges among students outside of the classroom that were facilitated by the general environment on campus.

URACCAN has a nice view. There are several places to sit and meet other students from all around the region. It's a multicultural experience. You exchange experiences that enrich each other's knowledge and you make the environment even nicer (Interview, participants 6).

The promotion of both one's own identity and interculturality among identities was highlighted as a very positive aspect of studying at URACCAN, whose impact stretched through different aspects of participants' lives. One component of this two-pronged strategy consisted of providing a positive environment for expressing one's identity. Several participants mentioned that having other people around from their home community made them feel comfortable and contributed to their satisfaction. This also had the advantage that someone could translate for them in the classroom, if needed.

We were taught about identity and interculturality. This prevented us from having culture shock, especially when we went to the Pacific. We learned to appreciate and respect each other as brothers and sisters beyond any differences among us. [...] I thank URACCAN for that knowledge. It helped me a lot to accept myself and feel proud of who I am. Most of all, it helped in overcoming differences with Spanish speaking people. I will forever be grateful.

Additionally, the university offered an online course for full-time faculty to learn English as a second language. This will be a huge contribution to the institution, since most of the students with difficulties are from the Rama-Kriol territory or are Creoles. Improving communication between faculty and students will contribute to an even level of interaction.

At least two students had very different experiences. They reported that they had been discriminated against by faculty.

In several occasions I was not allowed to present my work in my language since the professor told me that he didn't speak Creole. Because of this I didn't present several works (Interview, participant 12).

When classes started, I had my hair long with dry curls, but after a while I decided to cut my hair. I guess this was the worst thing I could have done. After that, my teacher didn't accept me as part of the class. She claimed that she had never seen me before and that I was not part of that group. This was a reason why I decided to leave. I tried my best to show what I could do, but it was useless. At some point, I felt invisible and discriminated against (Interview, participant 8).

These experiences of gender and racial discrimination in the classroom were masked, but they nonetheless had a very negative impact on these students' education and, in turn, contributed to their decision to drop out. As Woods Downs (2005) also pointed out, these structural factors of being silenced and made invisible had a direct impact on the individual level, in the form of reinforcing the students' frustration and impeding their academic performance.

This negative relationship was also identified in the secondary data as contributing to dropout. A negative relationship between students on the one hand and university authorities or professors on the other leads to the students developing a negative attitude towards their studies and putting them at risk of dropping out. A student's negative relationship with a teacher tends to affect the learning and teaching process. Fornwalt (1947) argued that teachers who subject their students to shame sarcasm, name calling, ridicule and humiliations are a major contributing factor towards dropping out.

These diverging experiences of the Bluefields campus regarding its social and academic aspects point to the significance of the university providing an enabling learning environment.

#### **6.2.5 Gender Roles and Discrimination**

There were some comments collected during the research that indicated that female students still face stereotypical or traditional gendered roles or are discriminated against, and this contributes greatly to them dropping out. Two examples were provided. Female students dropped out after getting pregnant because they did not have additional support. Some female students had to quit to take care of their parents.

This can be due to the education boys and girls receive at home, where girls are taught that their role is to take care of the family, while men have to get an education to financially support their family and be involved in social activities. This shows that the situation has improved a certain amount as compared to the life experiences cited by Woods Downs (2005) of an earlier generation of Creole women. Brittany said that women were often denied an education because families decided it was not necessary due to their gender role. While Afro women now are able to complete secondary school and some at least start university, the care economy still discriminates against women.

#### **6.2.6 Support from Family and Friends**

All participants in the study mentioned that they had at least one family member who had a university degree. Most mentioned extended relatives except for one student, who mentioned their parents. Additionally, they also said that in their personal social network there were one or more persons who motivated them to study. These people included parents, relatives, and friends. Only one participant stated that there was no one in his social network who motivated him in his studies.

That participants had somebody to look up to in terms of their professional development was inspirational and showed that they had the possibility of beginning to learn about higher education before starting university. Additionally, having somebody within the family or community who has a university education is a motivation to young people.

The secondary literature, such as Albert Bandura's social learning theory, showed that through social interactions and observations, young people tend to form models based on others' experience. Students who have no one to motivate them rely on their inner incentive or their observations of other people to stay focused and complete their education.

### **6.2.7 Final Considerations**

Overall, this analysis of the factors that influence why Afro students drop out of their studies at URACCAN-Bluefields reveals that the reasons are multi-causal and that students' experiences were diverse. A few factors were common to many of the students, such as funding and socio-economic issues, as well as limitations in the degree programs or specific courses offered, or the discriminatory gender roles that affected many of the women students. At the same time, other factors motivated some or all to stay – such as support from people's family and friends or how the university's bilingual and intercultural commitments were put into practice. Finally, other factors had positive or negative impacts on students, such as the support provided by faculty and others at URACCAN-Bluefields. The factors that were the most influential were structural and institutional ones, where these also reflect structural issues in the region overall, namely socio-economic issues and racial and gender discrimination.

## **6.3 Consequences of Dropping Out from URACCAN-Bluefields on Afro Students**

This section reviews the three main responses from former students regarding the consequences they experienced after dropping out from university. They address disadvantages related to

employment, income and lost opportunities; psychological effects; and family response. While all or most of the students indicated problems related to income and employment and psychological impact, for almost all students, their families continued to support them. The section concludes by presenting the participants' reflections on their futures.

### **6.3.1 Employment and Income-Related Disadvantages and Lost Opportunities**

The greatest impact on their lives as a result of dropping out related to limited job opportunities, lower wages and related difficulties. Participants in the study recognized that not completing their university education resulted directly in less job opportunities.

Yes, we have less job opportunities because we don't have a university degree.  
Although sometimes people have a degree and they still don't have a job.

...You can't get a good job without a degree.

Not having a degree and not getting a job.

Related to this were the types of jobs and income levels they were able to get. Participants also reflected that not having a degree meant they might not be able to work in the formal sector, or they would have a very low income.

Their views reflected the secondary literature in that dropping out of university was associated with an increased risk of unemployment and lower lifetime earnings (Arulampalam et al., 2005). Another study found that those *with* a university degree had a greater possibility of finding work, of experiencing less unemployment, of having more full-time work, and of having a higher income (OECD, 2011).

Research participants associated the lack of a university degree with broader limitations in their lives. For example, in the focus group discussion, former students mentioned the following, in response to a question regarding would they have had better opportunities if they had finished their degree.

"I would have more benefits and more progress in life.

“I think so, because the system we are in now is [focused on constantly acquiring] more technology, cameras... Everything is internet-driven, which means if you have access to the most modern technology, you can have better opportunities.

“Sure, you would have the possibility to get a job and to maintain your family.”

Participants who were interviewed shared similar beliefs about having lost opportunities in terms of not only employment and income, but also more extensively in terms of life opportunities. They expressed that if they had finished their university studies, they would have had greater opportunities. Not only would they be able to get a better job, but their lives in general would be full of more opportunities. They used phrases such as one could ‘come up in life’ or gain more in life. They also thought that having a university degree would open doors wherever they looked for a job. These expectations reflect the Afrodescendant or Creole worldview expressed in Woods Downs’s (2005) work, in the sense that getting a formal education can be the key to improve one’s life and living standards.

The expression of not ‘coming up in life’ could reflect how participants thought that society might perceive them. In other words, they might receive criticism or be stigmatized for not having a university degree, then use that as a basis for discrimination. In this sense, the importance of getting an education identified by Woods Downs (2005) to mitigate gender and racial discrimination is reflected in a more subtle form in these students’ perceptions of their experience.

### **6.3.2 Psychological Effects of Dropping Out of University**

All participants agreed that leaving university could lead to personal frustration. They expressed that this was the result of seeing their lost opportunities as a result of dropping out in comparison to those who did finish and then got better opportunities. One issue of concern was not being able to support family.

Sometimes [I] think about continuing my studies, but because of lack of [financial] help, I get discouraged. [I] look for jobs, but most of the jobs I get are in the informal sector and they are hard.

It makes you feel so disappointed at times. I experienced that situation when I applied for a job but I didn't get it because I didn't have a degree. I had my parents and kids depending on me.

Not for me. You can't let anything bother you. Always look forward, and don't focus on negative things. That way you will be a better person in life.

Yeah, because you feel like a failure.

It is important to note that, unlike the others, one former student always maintained a positive attitude towards life, despite having less opportunities.

### **6.3.3 Family Responses**

A few of the participants said that family members had advised them to go back and complete their studies. Most of the participants simply said that they did not get into any conflicts with their family as a result of not completing their university degree. Some mentioned that they did receive criticism.

[I didn't get into a] direct conflict, but my father sometime criticizes me by saying, 'If you had finished your degree you would have a job today.'

This is an example of how people from one's close personal network may be critical, but generally speaking, the family relationship is not affected negatively.

### **6.3.4 Reflections on Their Future**

In this section we present the student participants' reflections about their future. The two main topics they discussed was whether they might return to school or not, and if they have a positive or negative perspective on their future.

All participants in the study indicated that they would like the opportunity to go back to URACCAN-Bluefields to finish their studies. Most said they would like to go back, but many also mentioned obstacles preventing them from doing so.

Yes, sometimes I feel like going back and finishing my coursework. But then I would need financial support because I have a child already.



If I had a good [financial] support, I would go back.

I don't think so, I have a job already, maybe in the future [I would go back to URACCAN].

Yes, but I would study another career.

The main obstacles they raised were similar to some of the barriers that had led them to drop out in the first place. The most frequent barrier discussed was of lack of funding. One also referred to their family and parenting responsibilities. Another person mentioned that they could not at the moment because they were working. Another would study a different discipline, which was a reference to the limitations of the programs and courses offered at URACCAN-Bluefields.

Participants' outlooks were divided between positive and negative. Those who had a negative outlook said they saw themselves as losers because they did not try harder to turn their dreams into reality. They also said that their future was less "bright" without a university degree. This was because whenever one applies for a job, the prospective employer expects to see a diploma or reference letter from a professor.

There were a few students who had a positive outlook, even though they did not have a degree and likely never would. They were happy with the work they were able to find. Even though they had a low income level, they were satisfied that it was stable.

The authors observed that their different viewpoints tended to influence how the research participants lived. Therefore, it would be important to devise interventions that would build people's self-esteem and assist them in developing their skillset for potential work based on their strengths.

### **6.3.5 Final Considerations**

Dropping out of university had a tremendous impact on people's daily lives and how they saw their future. One way of understanding the effects would be to consider them at the individual level. This comprises the former students' limited job prospects and lower income. Looking

towards the future, many wished to return to URACCAN to finish their degrees (or study a degree program of their interest). But it did not seem likely to happen as they continued to face obstacles, most of which were linked to funding.

In this sense, the individual level was also connected to the family level, the institutional level, and structural barriers. Not completing their degree had a direct effect on the research participants' parents, as well as on their own children if they had any. Even though it also affected their families as they had less income to contribute, most research participants still had the support of their families. This also speaks to the resilience of Afro-descendant cultures. At the same time, it seems that not being able to 'come up in life' or 'get ahead in life' by improving their income, lifestyle and other opportunities might contribute to a vicious cycle based on the articulation of structural forms of oppression. In this sense, the concerns expressed by Woods Downs's (2005) life historians may continue to hold true regarding the difficulties for low-income Afro-descendant youth to get a university degree and change their lives, plus those of their family and community. Women further face the "double trouble" of gender-based barriers related to the discriminatory roles assigned to them in the care economy that make 'coming up in life' that much more complex.

#### **6.4 URACCAN-Bluefields' Retention Strategies and Actions**

Faculty and university authorities stated that they are no official strategies for student retention. However, it does have a formal program and informal activities are carried out that contribute towards the goal of reducing the dropout rate.

The most important formal program is the unit specialized in Afro-descendant studies and the commission. The commission provides comprehensive care for students of African descent as well as students from other ethnicities. This commission programs seminars and other activities for Afro-descendant students. The topics include: the importance of ethnic and cultural identity,

the value of Afro-descendant peoples, and the contribution they have made to the construction of regional autonomy and development of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast. Among the talks given to students, they did receive information on HIV and gender-based violence. But there did not seem to be any systematic approach to dealing with the intersection of gender and race, and how it shaped women students' experiences of dropout.

One of the informal actions taken in class is that some professors allow students to express themselves in their mother tongue. If necessary, another student will translate for them. This is important, because it facilitates Afro-descendants participation in class and it establishes a virtual link between language, culture, and knowledge. However, this practice is not officially recognized so it depends on the willingness of each professor to implement it.

Research participants mentioned other informal or *ad hoc* measures. One was the campus environment, which was conducive to informal exchanges among students of the same or different ethnicities. Another was the informal outreach done by individual staff, faculty or authorities towards specific students; this was separate from the formal educational support provided by faculty, and was very important to keep students motivated.

Research participants provided many recommendations for retention strategies, and the authors also developed some suggestions. These are presented in the recommendations section.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

This investigation into the factors that influence why Afro students drop out of university has highlighted some important dynamics of their experience. One is that the reasons may be understood as occurring at the individual (e.g. personal motivation affected by one or more of the factors; support provided by one's family and friends), structural (e.g. socioeconomic conditions, racial discrimination and/or discriminatory gender roles), and/or institutional levels (e.g. problems with the program/course offerings, with the quality of teaching and other educational supports, or the availability of full scholarships). The students who participated in this investigation were influenced by several factors. This multi-causal dynamic was also identified in much of the secondary literature on dropping out that we reviewed, such as Santana Hilario (2017) and Torrez et al. (2015). Nonetheless, with the exception of Farrington et al. (2012), they did not discuss these issues in terms of structural barriers.

The issues addressed by Woods Downs (2005) regarding racial as well as gender discrimination were identified in the dropout experiences of Afro students analyzed in this study. The connections between second-/dominant language learning, education, self-esteem and racial discrimination were also relevant here. Some of the students in this sample also had to deal with further complexities related to living away from one's family and community. This finding leads to two important conclusions: one, the factors affecting Afro-descendent students' experience of dropout at URACCAN-Bluefields reflect broader structural dynamics in the RACCS and, two, these conditions and dynamics studied among Creole women of an earlier generation continue to apply to today's youth, despite some improvements.

Indeed, this study also identifies strategies that have contributed to those improvements, such as jointly promoting bilingualism (e.g. by encouraging students to speak in their own language), interculturality, and a positive ethnic identity. In turn, these strategies led to implementing URACCAN's institutional mission and vision regarding building intercultural citizenships and

promoting autonomy. That said, the university must also take responsibility for finding ways to address institutional limitations that are influencing dropout, namely issues related to degree and course offerings, as well as teaching and education quality, even if these may also be linked to structural conditions.

Similarly, the consequences of dropping out can also be understood within the social context of the RACCS. Although the testimonies by the students do not explicitly mention structural factors, we would argue that racial and gender discrimination intersect with socio-economic factors and are embedded with them. In this way, the possibilities that Afro students have of getting good jobs with a medium or high-level income, could be that much more restricted than other students, especially depending on their location on the so-called ethnic ladder. Not having a university degree could reinforce social stigma towards them, and have an adverse effect on life possibilities on a larger and longer scale. Changing discriminatory gender roles related to the care economy that keep women from pursuing their university education needs to be a priority for women and men of all sectors.

Although URACCAN-Bluefields did not have a formal policy or strategic plan to prevent dropout and mitigate its effects, there was a Commission that did work in this area. Also, participants gave multiple examples of different kinds of informal support they received. One of the most important being the possibility of speaking their first language in the classroom and submitting work in their first language. All sectors consulted for this investigation maintained that dropout was a serious problem that affected students, the university and the wider community. Therefore, one of the main conclusions of this study is that URACCAN will need to develop effective strategies in consultation with the community, then put them into practice as soon as possible. The recommendations that follow are offered as a contribution to developing that strategy.

## **8 RECOMMENDATIONS**

We propose the following recommendations based on the research findings and conclusions. They also contain the inputs from research participants. They address the individual, structural and institutional factors that influence dropout by Afro students and seek to build on the good, but insufficient, practices already being undertaken at URACCAN-Bluefields. They are organized by the sector to which they are directed.

### **8.1 To students and prospective students**

- Students should stay focused and not drop out of university so may have better job, income and general life opportunities.
- Students should be patient in order to increase their chances of maximizing their potential to learn and better themselves

### **8.2 To URACCAN and the Community**

- Design degree programs based on community needs.
- Develop a complementary curriculum that teaches non-cognitive skills relevant to academic achievement to all students (Farrington et al., 2012) and that is developed using a gender and intercultural perspective.
- Develop an intervention mechanism to identify early students who are at risk of dropping out. Faculty and others will play a role in identifying students that are having difficulties and offering them support. This would be a proactive and personalized approach involving follow-up and timely solutions to deal with risks.
- Introduce extension studies for people in the community to be able to go back to school and complete their studies.

- University curriculum should conduct motivational talks and career guidance program in the communities so that many young people and those who want to go to school can be motivated, inspired and informed.
- Expand the existing scholarship fund, including by reaching out to alumni and the private sector. This should lead to an increased quantity of comprehensive scholarships covering all relevant student expenses.
- Develop a guide with study strategies that are adapted to Afro students. These could include using technology as a motivational tool; motivational strategies for learning; and combining theory with practice, as practical aspects can be more accessible to some students.
- Through URACCAN institutes and centers, do outreach activities with parents and youth on the importance of education (motivation, leadership, self-esteem, life project, etc.) for personal and collective development.
- New programs for URACCAN's Afro commission and student welfare department: (a) support Afro student exchanges between students from different degree programs; (b) develop a buddy or mentoring system in which upper-level students mentor first and second-year students; (c) establish a special recognition for Afro students who achieve outstanding grades.
- Faculty should have more patience with students who come from the communities as some may not speak and write Spanish fluently. All students should have the opportunity to present their work in their first language.
- The study environment, relationship between faculty, authorities and students should be improved.
- Continue promoting interculturality and respect among all students from different ethnic groups.
- Develop programs that address the gender-specific factors that contribute to female Afro students dropping out, and incorporate gender considerations in all proposals.

- Develop a protocol to facilitate academic investigations at the university, for example that include access to the registrar's data. This would also ensure ethical considerations are fully implemented.
- Facilitate a mentoring or coaching system in which Afro students would be paired with Afro professionals in Bluefields.
- Promote greater integration of students in their learning process. Build better communication and coordination among students, faculty and support staff.
- Incorporate new information and communication technologies that facilitate the learning process
- Faculty incorporate participatory and innovative methodologies that motivate the student and facilitate their integration and active participation.

### **8.3 To Parents**

- Receive training on the importance of education so as to understand your role and involvement in your children's educational process regarding motivating them.

### **8.4 To CEIMM**

- Continue promoting activities/spaces in which Afro people can have the opportunity to meet, learn and debate important topics that contribute to positive changes by strengthening our knowledge on our identity, culture and our history in general.



It was additionally established that there is need to:

From university level, it was felt that much more needs to be done to improve attendance and avoid dropout. Particularly, there was mention of the need to identify and intervene in the educational needs of the students based on the particularities of each person in order to adapt the methodologies in a way that takes into account the diversity in the classroom. Other expressed views from the interviews included:

- need for more practice and / or combine practice with theory, this method helps students to discover or develop the talents they have.
- Motivation strategies must be sought for reading
- Use technology as a motivational tool
- Accompany the students, because they do not want to be left alone. Make them feel understood, cared for, felt that they are taken into account.
- Teachers must identify which students have difficulty and approach them to present different options that can help them in the classroom.

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# APPENDICES

## 10 APPENDICES

### 10.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics of Research Participants

**Table 1 Socio-demographic Characteristics of Students Interviewed**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>ethnicity</b>	<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Parents level of education</b>	<b>Student level of education</b>	<b>Career</b>	<b>No. children</b>
P1	F	28	Creole	single	Marshall Point	Mother, university graduate	3 <sup>rd</sup> year university	Ecotourism	1
P2	F	27	Garifuna	married	Orinoco	Primary incomplete	2 <sup>nd</sup> year university	Business administration	0
P3	M	33	Garifuna		Orinoco	Primary incomplete	4 <sup>th</sup> year university	Ecotourism	4

P4	F	19	Creole	single	Peal Lagoon	Mother secondary incomplete,	1 <sup>st</sup> year university	Psychology	0
P5	F	18	Creole	single	Haulover	mother secondary completed/ father illiterate	1 <sup>st</sup> year University	psychology	1
P6	F	35	Creole	married	Lagoon Pearl	Secondary completed	3rd year	Agroforestry	0
P7	M	20	Creole	single	Pear Lagoon	Secondary incomplete	1 year	Agroforestry	0
P8	M	21	Creole	Single	Bluefields	Mother, completed primary/Father completed secondary	2nd year	Communication	0
P9	f		Garifuna	single	Bluefields	Primary completed	5th year	Ecotourism	1



**Table 2: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Focus Group Participants**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>ethnicity</b>	<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Parents level of education</b>	<b>Student level of education</b>	<b>Career</b>	<b>No. children</b>
P1	F	27	Creole	single	Bluefields	university graduate	2nd year university	English	0
P2	F	24	Garifuna	Free union	Bluefields	accountant / secondary uncompleted	3 <sup>rd</sup> year university	Agroforestry	2
P3	F	22	Garifuna	Free union	Bluefields	accountant / secondary uncompleted	3 <sup>rd</sup> year university	Administrative computing	2
P4	F	33	Creole	Married	Bluefields	Secondary Uncompleted	1 <sup>st</sup> year university	Sociology	2
P5	F	24	Creole	single	Bluefields		1 <sup>st</sup> year University	psychology	1

**Table 3: Socio-demographic Characteristics of URACCAN Professors and Authorities**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>sex</b>	<b>ethnicity</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>No. children</b>	<b>Charge at the university</b>	<b>Years of Experience</b>
P 15	F	Mestizo	Bluefields	0	Vice- rector	18
P 16	F	Mestizo	Bluefields	1	Academic dean	16
P 17	F	Creole	Bluefields	1	Full- time teacher	3
P 18	F	Mestizo	Bluefields	2	Full- time teacher	14

## 10.2 Fieldwork Organization

**Table 4: Schedule of Activities**

No.	Activities	2017								
		March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.
1.	Presentation of research protocol	X								
2.	Include corrections suggested by Ms. Socorro Woods		X							
3	Presentation of research protocol for approval		X							

4	Validation of data collection instruments			X						
5	Fieldwork						X			
5	Collection and review of data							X		
6	Analysis of findings							X	X	
7	Presentation of study progress								X	
8	Formal presentation of the research									X

## Photos of fieldwork

**Figure 1: Field work in Orinoco**



**Figure 2: Receiving community leaders' approval**





**Figure 3: Research participants' hometowns:  
Orinoco, Pearl Lagoon, Marshall Point, Bluefields**

## 10.3 Data Collection Instruments

### #1 Interview Guide for Students

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

#### SECTION A: Background

Gender: F\_\_\_\_ M\_\_\_\_ Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Marital  
status: \_\_\_\_\_ Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_ Parents level of  
education: \_\_\_\_\_ Student Education level \_\_\_\_\_ No.  
children: \_\_\_\_\_ community: \_\_\_\_\_

**Objective:** To identify the causes of dropout of university education  
by students of the URACCAN-Bluefields Campus.

#### Section B: Causes of dropout

1. When did you start your studies? In which year did you stop attending university?
2. What program (diploma or degree) were you studying at URACCAN?
3. Who chose the career/the program mentioned?
4. Is that the career you wanted?
5. Did you have a scholarship or was it all funded by your parents?
6. How was the educational environment in the university?
7. Were you satisfied with your university studies? Why (not)?

8. What were some of the main reasons why you left the university?
9. Do you think there is a good relationship between university authorities and students? Why (not)?
10. Did you have support (guidance, mentoring or counseling) outside the classroom? From whom?
11. Do you have any relatives with a professional career? Who?
12. Do you have a person who motivates you to study a career? Who is it?
13. Do you currently have plans to continue your education? Why (not)?

**Objective 2: Describe the consequences of dropout from URACCAN-Bluefields Campus.**

**Section C: Consequences of dropout from University**

1. From your experience, what are some disadvantages of dropping out of university?
2. Do you think that if you had finished your studies, you would have better opportunities for life? Why (not)?
3. Do you think dropping out of university can lead to personal frustration? Please explain why (not)?
4. Have you experienced conflict in the family for leaving your studies? What and with whom was the conflict?



5. Do you have any image of what your future will be like, without having completed university education? Please describe it.

### **Section D: Recommendations**

6. What advice would you give to students who are currently in university, or those who have not yet enrolled?

7. Is there anything you would want the university or community to change regarding how education is provided?

8. What do you think can help to keep people in school?

### **#2 Interview Guide for Faculty**

Topic: Factors that influence why students of African descent drop out from URACCAN-Bluefields

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_. Gender: F\_\_\_\_ M \_\_\_\_ Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_

No. children\_\_\_\_ University Post: \_\_\_\_ years of work: \_

We thank you for your cooperation in answering the following questions:

Objective: To know the factors that affect the dropout of the students of the URACCAN-Bluefields Campus.

1.What do you think of dropout in college?

2. How do you think the environment affects and impacts your students?

3. What factors do you think influence why Afro students drop out of college?
4. Do you think it is an issue that should interest the university authorities?
6. What actions does the university implement where you work to avoid dropout?
7. What do you do in the classroom to avoid dropout?
8. What do you think about the academic performance of your students who do not speak Spanish?
9. How do you work with students who do not speak Spanish fluently?
10. Do you have any suggestions for how to improve the quality of the class?

### **#3 Interview Guide for University Authorities**

Topic: Factors that influence why students of African descent drop out from URACCAN-Bluefields

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ sex: F\_\_\_\_ M \_\_\_\_ Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_

No, children\_\_\_\_ charge at the university: \_ Years experience: \_\_\_\_

We thank you for your cooperation in answering the following questions:

Objective: Identify student retention strategies, plans or programs at the university.

1. What do you think of dropout in college?
2. What factors do you think influence the dropout of Afro students in college?
3. Do you think it is an issue that should interest you as university authorities?
4. What actions does the university implement where you work to avoid dropping out?
5. Are remedial or academic level programs for students with prior weaknesses that make them more vulnerable to dropout?
6. How do you support Afro students?

#### **#4 Focus Group Discussion Guide**

**Topic:** Factors that influence why Afro students drop out from the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua (URACCAN), Bluefields campus, 2017

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Schedule:

1. Welcome
2. Presentation of the moderators
3. Presentation of the objective: Identify causes of dropout of Afro students of the URACCAN-Bluefields Campus.

Ice-breaker activities.

Guiding Questions:

What do you consider influences the decision-making of dropout among afro students?

Did you had the opportunity to choose your own career? was what you really wanted?

Note: Additional question(s) may be added to probe for more information.

## #5 Consent Form



### UNIVERSITY OF THE AUTONOMOUS REGIONAL OF THE CARIBBEAN COAST OF NICARAGUA URACCAN-BLUEFIELDS

#### CONSENT FORM TO RESEARCH AND PUBLISH

The Territory / Community / Company / District \_\_\_\_\_ of the  
municipality of \_\_\_\_\_ or name: \_\_\_\_\_ hereby grant  
permission to URACCAN to do and publish the research entitle: -

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

With \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ objective \_\_\_\_\_ of:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_, which will be developed during the period of  
\_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.

This information will be used solely and exclusively for academic purposes. The corresponding instances authorize the publication of the results of the research, after validating the results in the community / organization/ person.

Name and surname of the emissary/representative:

\_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Place/address: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_