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## Media Statement

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## **Local collaboration in Nicaragua aims to catalyze an international response to address chronic kidney disease in Central America**

Washington D.C, January 26, 2012 - Since 2009, a team from Boston University has been researching what appears to be an epidemic of chronic kidney disease (CKD) with unknown cause affecting thousands of sugarcane workers in Nicaragua. The scientific research was requested by members of a dialogue table consisting of a local community group, the Chichigalpa Association for Life (ASOCHIVIDA), and the management of Nicaragua Sugar Estates Limited (NSEL), a major sugar producer in western Nicaragua. ASOCHIVIDA represents about 2,000 former NSEL workers and community members affected by the disease.

The dialogue and involvement of Boston University responds to a complaint filed by ASOCHIVIDA on behalf of affected people in March 2008 with the Compliance Advisor Ombudsman (CAO). The CAO handles complaints made by communities regarding the activities of the World Bank Group's private sector arm, the International Finance Corporation (IFC). NSEL, part of Grupo Pellas, received funding from IFC in 2006 to support its operations.

ASOCHIVIDA and company representatives jointly chose Boston University from a pool of nine institutions to conduct an independent study into the cause of CKD. The initial scope was funded by CAO, with the continuation of Boston University's research financed by the Nicaraguan Sugar Producers Association (Comite Nacional de Productores de Azucar - CNPA) which is managed in a trust fund by CAO with the agreement of the dialogue table participants. Boston University's work builds on that of other researchers and indicates that the unusual form of CKD observed in former NSEL workers is prevalent throughout the Pacific zone of Central America, goes beyond sugarcane workers impacting workers in other industries, and has also been identified in Asia. The disease appears predominantly in middle-aged males, and is likely exacerbated by work under strenuous conditions, such as heat. Boston University's work is unprecedented in Nicaragua considering its scope, rigor, and unrestricted access to the company's operations.

Building on the progress of the dialogue table, including Boston University's findings, the CAO, which reports directly to World Bank Group President, Robert D. Zoellick, is exploring opportunities to bring together public and private entities in Central America to address the disease. Since July 2011, the CAO has engaged institutions including the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the German Investment and Development Bank – DEG, as well as discussions with the Minister for Health in El Salvador, Dr. Maria Isabel Rodriguez,

who has been a leader in increasing public awareness about CKD. Discussions to date have outlined plans for a regional conference in 2012 to prioritize diagnosis and treatment of CKD.

Medical needs for the sick are profound, particularly in light of the lack of options for medication, dialysis, and kidney transplant. These needs are being addressed by proposed improvements to the community health center in Chichigalpa. NSEL and ASOCHIVIDA are also working together to provide food aid, develop a microcredit program, and provide income generation projects to support affected community members. Throughout the dialogue process, NSEL has provided about US\$4 million in support to community members through ASOCHIVIDA.

“Given the scope and magnitude of this disease, long term solutions will likely require a regional framework for research into its cause, inevitably linked to public policy.” said Meg Taylor, CAO and Vice President, World Bank Group. “It is CAO’s hope that broader engagement will lead to a collaborative effort during 2012 to tackle chronic kidney disease in Central America.”

More information is available at [www.cao-ombudsman.org](http://www.cao-ombudsman.org).

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*Note to editors: The Office of the Compliance Advisor Ombudsman (CAO) is the independent accountability mechanism for the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA)—the private sector lending and insurance arms of the World Bank Group. Reporting directly to the World Bank Group President, the CAO is mandated to address complaints from communities affected by IFC/MIGA-supported business activities in a manner that is fair, objective, and constructive, enhances social and environmental outcomes on the ground, and fosters greater public accountability of IFC and MIGA.*