



LEADERSHIP IN SUSTAINABLE IMPACT AND ITS MEASUREMENT



CONTEXT

Sustainability has long been one of those concepts that is discussed more than it is understood. Even though many donors require it, very few (if any) require that it be well planned, managed, or provide the resources necessary to measure it. As a result, “sustainability” is rarely appraised and quantified. Moving sustainability from a vague concept to a planned approach requires incorporating sustainability at every phase of the project lifecycle. Very little is known about what truly leads to sustainable impact, what strategies are most cost-effective and how best to maximize high impact strategies for optimal program sustainability. There is a critical need to understand the long-term impact of investments in food and nutrition security (FNS); health; and other related development efforts. However, typically because project funds, by definition, are not available to fund measures of sustainability once a project ends, post-project measures are few and far between, and therefore our collective understanding of what does or does not lead to sustainable impact is meager at best. PCI has been striving to facilitate a global ‘community of practice’ to rescue sustainability from its current status as a broad, imprecise concept, and transforming it into an achievable and measurable outcome.

PCI’S COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABLE IMPACT

Worldwide, PCI is increasingly recognized for its forward-thinking leadership, particularly in the area of sustainable impact. We have prioritized sustainability measurement at the organizational level and have invested private resources in: developing standards, tools and guidelines; conducting extensive literature reviews; and implementing post-project sustainability studies. We have emphasized implementation of sustainability strategies from program design through close-out/transition, rather than focusing on it as a task to be undertaken only in the final phase of a project. We have also published and presented about the issue of sustainability, and in so doing have gathered information about the challenges, opportunities, and resources that exist. Over the years our core competencies in community and social mobilization and local capacity strengthening have contributed to long lasting impact. We have gone beyond the rhetoric to learn from our experiences to explore, investigate and identify what does and doesn’t lead to sustainable change and results.

LEADERSHIP IN ADVANCING THE STATE-OF-THE-ART IN SUSTAINABLE IMPACT

Over the past year (2014-2015), PCI has deliberately sought to document its lessons learned, as well as compile proven and promising practices from the development field, and – thanks to funding from USAID’s Food For Peace-funded TOPS program – develop a **Resource Guide for Enhancing Potential for Sustainable Impact**,¹ a guide for FNS practitioners and other stakeholders that can be shared broadly to improve the capacity to achieve greater sustainable impact in FNS programming. Drawing from a limited but growing body of knowledge about sustainability, this guide offers a useful resource that can help implementing organizations, project teams, local partners and stakeholders, and donors to better understand how a “sustainability lens” can be applied practically throughout the project cycle through effective project design, management, capacity strengthening, and clear exit (transition) strategies.

LOCAL OWNERSHIP

Any discussion about local ownership should be predicated on the relationship between partners over time, where local actors can increasingly assume the role as development actors in their own right alongside international partners and donors, rather than simply implementing partners. Without genuine local ownership by and shared accountability with partners, the project will struggle to achieve any significant level of ‘readiness’ to sustain positive benefits after the project ends.

In **Bolivia**, 49 municipal governments have graduated from PCI’s Food for Education program since 2005. The local governments were trained by PCI to procure food from local markets, ensure proper storage and handling, as well as program monitoring at the school level. **Today they continue to provide daily meals to over 110,600 children.**

¹ <http://www.pciglobal.org/publications/toolkits-manuals/>

The guide orients project teams to best practices, common pitfalls, and flexible steps and adaptable tools to tailor the most effective sustainability strategy for their program context.

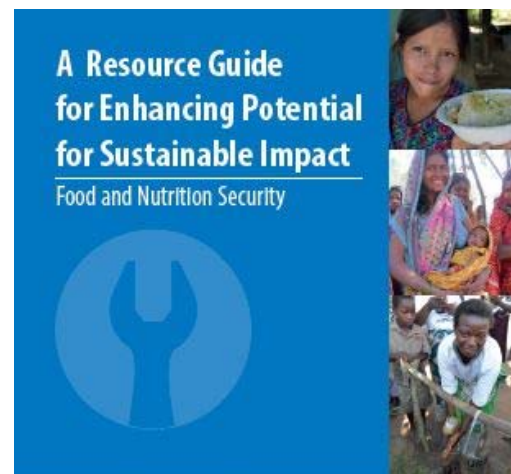
Since its completion in the spring of 2014, PCI has rolled out the guide (which has also been translated into Spanish) to PCI staff and representatives from other NGOs implementing food and nutrition security programming via three-day regional workshops held in Guatemala, India, and Malawi, reaching a total of 127 participants representing 62 organizations from 11 countries. Furthermore, in collaboration with USAID's Learning Lab, a learning-in-action blog was developed and posted on their website.² And in early 2015, the FSN Network's Social and Behavioral Change Task Force hosted a webinar entitled: How to Use the New Sustainable Impact Resource Guide.³ PCI was also requested to present the guide at the Asia Regional Knowledge Sharing Meeting March, 2015, in Dhaka, Bangladesh and participate in the post-project sustainability session to share our experiences, tips and knowledge in planning for sustainability. More recently, the TOPS Social and Behavior Change Task Force voted to make the Resource guide one of its "recommended tools". Plans are also underway to post the guide on the K4Health website, a USAID-funded clearinghouse for toolkits. Through the development and rolling out of the guide, PCI continues to further reinforce its growing reputation as a thought leader, convener and global change agent in the area of sustainable impact and its measurement for learning and improved performance.

MEASURING SUSTAINABLE IMPACT

Measuring sustainability, both during the life of a project (testing for sustainability readiness) as well as post-project, has proven to be a persistent challenge for many programs. As the conceptualization and approaches to sustainability vary greatly, it is not surprising that operationalization and measurement are difficult. Furthermore, when a lack of project resources for post-project sustainability studies and therefore learning about what works and what doesn't and why or why not is added to the mix, the challenge becomes even greater. While the available literature does not yet support a single research paradigm or set of measures to conduct sustainability studies, programs can take steps to mainstream sustainability into their overall design from the start.

MEASURING POST-PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY

While most project proposals will likely indicate sustainability concerns and may propose a sustainability strategy, it is rare that the study of what remains following the withdrawal of project funding occurs. This is unfortunate, since post-project sustainability studies have a significant potential to advance our understanding of how sustainability 'happens' both during and after a project period, which can be applied to improve the quality, cost-effectiveness, and sustainability of future programming. To some extent, programs can factor fundraising and advocacy efforts to support a post-project study as part of their exit (transition) plan. With the use of creative approaches, the costs of a post-project sustainability study can be kept down, and important lessons can be generated regarding factors that help to ensure greater sustainability of impact. This is rich information for both donors and the designers of new projects.



"We've been in development for decades, but no serious work has been done on program sustainability until now. Your resource guide is a unique approach and it is a very good resource for us all!"

- Amalendu Pal, Director,
Asian Institute of Poverty Alleviation,
Asia regional workshop participant

ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE IMPACT VIA MARKET FORCES

PCI's *Mis Llamas* program in the Bolivian Altiplano demonstrated that by showing rural llama farmers how to reduce llama mortality through innovative corral construction techniques and improve the quality of llama by-products, they can become true competitors in an industry where they previously had no voice. After scaling up to nearly 40 producer committees, today the *Mis Llamas* brand has made a name for itself in both national and international markets.

² <http://usaidlearninglab.org/lab-notes/learning-action-how-pci-engaged-stakeholders-generate-new-learning-sustainability>

³ <https://coregroup.adobeconnect.com/p52ybfauqw1/?launcher=false&fcsContent=true&pbMode=normal>

To this end, PCI has done the following:

- ✓ Prioritized moving beyond donor-driven monitoring and evaluation
- ✓ Recognized need to measure what we are all about...Real and lasting change!
- ✓ Identified private funding to pilot methodologies and support post-project sustainability studies
- ✓ Engaged in discussions with a broad "community of practice" of like-minded organizations who are measuring results post-project
- ✓ Partnered with academic and research institutes to further the post-project sustainability studies agenda and capacity at PCI

POST-PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY STUDY EXAMPLES

Impact of Maternal and Child Health Project 7 years post-project (Indonesia):



The post-project sustainability study carried out by PCI in partnership with Notre Dame University in 2014 assessed the USAID-funded CHOICE Child Survival project which PCI implemented in Banten Province, Indonesia, from 2003-2007. Conducted seven years post-project, the study found that mothers of children now 8-10 years old have better knowledge and practices in PCI villages than in control villages; the proportion of children undernourished is lower in PCI villages than in the other villages, and children now 8-10 years old are receiving better care when they have diarrhea in PCI villages than in control villages. A related study of cognitive development found that children now 8-10 years old in PCI villages have potentially greater cognitive development than their counterparts in control villages, likely as a result of CHOICE interventions. Several articles about the study are currently being readied for publication in mid-2015.

Development Assistance Program 6 years post-project (Bolivia): In 2008, a mixed-method (qualitative-quantitative) study⁴ was conducted in 14 rural intervention and control communities in Bolivia, six years after the completion of interventions designed to improve knowledge and practices related to maternal and child health and nutrition, community water systems, and household water and sanitation facilities. The study found that participants remained committed to sustaining the practices promoted in the interventions. The average rating for the functional condition of community water systems was 42% higher than the average rating in control communities. In addition, more than two-thirds of households continued to practice selected maternal and child health behaviors promoted by the project (compared to less than half of the households in the control communities).



Innovative Social Mobilization Strategies (South Africa): By mobilizing key civil society and public sector actors and thousands of community members to combat gender-based violence through innovative engagement and amplification communication strategies, PCI's USAID-funded "Prevention in Action" project (2008-2012) was successful in establishing 37 "Violence Free Zones" throughout South Africa. With funding from the City of Cape Town, a sustainability study has been conducted in two of the zones thus far, which confirmed their sustained presence and influence two years after project close.



Assessing Local Capacity to Sustain School Breakfast Program (Bolivia): In 2013, PCI worked with an external consultant to understand the lasting impact of PCI's USDA-funded Food for Education program in 29 of the municipalities that participated in the program. Funded by the municipalities themselves, the study sought to identify the conditions that influence sustainability of the school feeding program and provide recommendations for promoting sustainability in future programs. The study found that all participating municipal government operational plans have budget allocations for school feeding programs; all but one municipality in the study continued to administer a school feeding program; knowledge and practices in nutrition, health, hygiene, water and sanitation were generally sustained; inter-sectoral coordination at the municipal level was still present; and parents continued to provide complementary financial and food donations.



⁴ Eder C, Schooley J, Murguía J. Assessing impact and sustainability of health, water, and sanitation interventions in Bolivia six years post-project. *Rev Panam Salud Publica.* 2012; 32(1): 43-8.

FUTURE PLANS

For the coming year, PCI has prioritized two post-project sustainability studies: One related to assessing the continuation, results and sustainability factors of Cluster Level Associations established through PCI's **Women Empowered Initiative** in Ethiopia, and another related to assessing the sustained impact and sustainability factors of local organizations who were strengthened by PCI under the USAID-funded Building Bridges program in Botswana (2008-2011).

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES MOVING FORWARD

- ✓ Limited resources for post-project sustainability studies given that project resources by definition are no longer available
- ✓ Challenge of changing the habits of program designers and implementers in terms of investing in sustainable readiness throughout the life cycle of the project vs. at the tail-end
- ✓ The farther out in time, the less confident we can be about attribution and the more we have to "settle" for association
- ✓ There is a need to engage donors in clarifying and setting expectations (e.g., In funding opportunities they issue) in order to incentivize change in how we design and implement programs vis a vis sustainability, and avoid more traditional approaches to "exit" and "graduation"



ROLE OF PCI'S LEGACY PROGRAMS IN ILLUSTRATING OUR COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY

PCI's four Legacy Programs (Mexico, USA, Guatemala and India) have unique importance for PCI and are chosen because they represent some of our fundamental areas of focus: maternal/child health and nutrition, and economic empowerment. These valuable programs have a strong track record of saving lives in the most vulnerable communities worldwide, and providing measureable solutions for preventable complications. Collectively, for over 70 years the programs have been in continuous operation, providing a unique, although heretofore untapped resource and opportunity for studying sustainability and contributing to the state-of-the-art regarding what contributes (or does not) to lasting programming and lasting results.



Youth participating in PCI's vocational training program through the Orphans and Vulnerable Children Legacy Program in India

ABOUT PCI

PCI (Project Concern International) is an international nonprofit on a mission to enhance health, end hunger and overcome hardship worldwide. Founded in 1961, PCI impacted the lives of more than 10 million people last year alone through programs in 15 countries spanning Asia, Africa and the Americas.



INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
5151 Murphy Canyon Road, Suite 320
San Diego, CA 92123
ph: (858) 279-9690
www.PCIglobal.org

WASHINGTON, DC OFFICE
1220 19th Street NW, Suite 210
Washington, DC 20036
ph: (202) 223-0088