OVERVIEW

For over 25 years, PCI has implemented a wide-range of development projects in Nicaragua, combining interventions in the areas of health, education, economic empowerment, water and sanitation, food and nutrition security, and disaster response. Central to PCI’s success is its focus on local capacity building, which ranges from strengthening rural farming cooperatives, to mobilizing schools to meet the needs of their students, to training networks of community health workers. Through this approach, PCI ensures that the impact of its work far outlasts the lifecycle of any given project.

IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AND HEALTH

With funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture McGovern-Dole International Food for Education Program, PCI is working with local stakeholders in some of Nicaragua’s most remote and vulnerable communities to improve health and literacy outcomes for Nicaraguan schoolchildren. Project “MESA” (which translates into “Better Education and Health” in English) is implemented in over 1,000 primary schools located in the department of Jinotega and in the Southern Caribbean Autonomous Region, and is building the capacity of local schools and communities to provide a daily school meal to 77,500 schoolchildren and improve their learning outcomes.

Key program activities include establishing and strengthening parent-teacher associations (PTAs) and building their capacity to source and prepare nutritionally-balanced meals; improving school infrastructure, with an emphasis on increasing access to clean water and sanitation facilities; and providing teacher training in literacy instruction, together with textbooks and other reading materials for students. Additionally, through targeted capacity building, PCI is supporting the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education to gradually take over provision of school meals for all participating schools, working jointly with school PTAs.

STRENGTHENING LOCAL AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

Since 2002, PCI has been working with small-scale farmers in Nicaragua to increase crop quality and diversity, improve productivity, and raise family incomes. Building on this experience, PCI is collaborating with USDA to improve the availability of locally-grown, fresh foods at 60 primary schools in Nicaragua’s Jinotega region. Through this Local Regional Procurement project, school meals – which feed over 10,000 students – are enhanced by beans, fresh vegetables, eggs, and milk products from local producers. Ultimately, the project is fostering a network of stakeholders (government leadership, market actors, schools, parents, farmers, and communities) to build sustainable capacity for a complete transition to locally-led school feeding.

THE NEED

Nicaragua is one of the poorest countries in Latin America, with approximately 29% of the population living below the poverty line. Despite the fact that Nicaragua is primarily an agricultural economy, many Nicaraguans struggle daily to obtain sufficient food for their families, and nearly one in five children under age five suffers from chronic malnutrition. Furthermore, approximately three-fourths of rural families do not have access to potable water, and 66% do not have adequate sanitary facilities (i.e. latrines), contributing to the high incidence of infant mortality caused by diarrhea.

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PROTECTING YOUNG CHILDREN FROM MALNUTRITION
With funding from USAID’s International Food Relief Partnership, PCI is working to improve the health and nutrition of 4,800 children under age two living throughout Nicaragua’s Southern Autonomous Caribbean Region (RACCS). Children are most vulnerable to malnutrition from 6-24 months of age when they are weaned from breastmilk and introduced to water and complementary foods that are often prepared without proper hygiene and have poor nutritional value. This vulnerability is intensified in remote regions such as RACCS, where according to the most recent data available, 63% of households are living in extreme poverty and malnutrition rates are high, with stunting rates at approximately 14%.

Through PCI’s “CRECER” (“GROW”) project, PCI is taking a three-pronged approach to improving health and nutrition in RACCS by: 1) distributing Nutributter (a high protein nutrient supplement) to children 6-24 months of age, 2) providing education and behavior change strategies for beneficiary caregivers, and 3) increasing access to complementary health services. By collaborating with local schools and local health posts to extend the project’s reach to all seven municipalities in RACCS, PCI is reaching a total of over 22,000 vulnerable children and their families.

ABOUT PCI
PCI (Project Concern International), a Global Communities Partner, is a global development organization that drives innovation from the ground up to enhance health, end hunger, overcome hardship, and advance women and girls — resulting in meaningful and measurable change in people’s lives. Founded in 1961, PCI impacted more than 21 million lives in fiscal year 2019 through programs in 13 countries spanning Asia, Africa and the Americas.

RECENT PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS
• **Combating Violence and Crime:** With funding from the U.S. Department of State, PCI’s “Possibilities Project” made lasting strides toward increasing citizen security and reducing the viability of drug trafficking in 46 high risk communities in Nicaragua’s Northern Autonomous Region. By mobilizing and building the leadership capacity of local stakeholders – such as youth, women, traditional community leaders and local business owners – Possibilities unleashed a wave of community-led actions in support of safer, stronger communities.

• **Strengthening Farming Communities:** PCI’s USDA-funded agricultural program effectively increased by 146% the incomes of rural farmers in seven municipalities in the departments of Jinotega and Nueva Segovia. Through this project, PCI built the capacity of 38 farming cooperatives and strengthened two Centers for Rural Development, which provide hands-on demonstration and training for agricultural producers.

• **Community-Led Water & Sanitation:** With over two decades of experience implementing water and sanitation programs throughout the country, PCI has become an expert in the development of sustainable, community-managed water and sanitation systems. To date, PCI has constructed 117 water systems and over 2,450 latrines in local schools and communities, and has organized and trained 117 water and sanitation committees to locally manage water and sanitation systems.

• **Family-Centered Maternal & Child Health:** By training a network of hundreds of community health volunteers, providing education on good health practices, and facilitating linkages to hospitals and clinics, PCI made strides toward better family health for over 7,200 children under two years of age and 5,700 caregivers in 353 rural communities in rural Jinotega where poverty, acute malnutrition and stunting are among the highest levels in the country.

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