

School meals for improved literacy and increased health, nutrition, and dietary practices

Overview

Since 2001, Project Concern International, a Global Communities Partner (PCI) has served as a continual USDA partner and has implemented a total of 16 McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition (McGovern-Dole) and three Local and Regional Procurement (LRP) programs, reaching over 1 million students. PCI's integrated school feeding approach focuses on mobilizing and developing the capacities of local communities and governments to improve students' literacy outcomes, increase the use of health, dietary and nutrition practices, and transition school feeding to locally owned, sustainable school meal programs. With almost two decades of implementing McGovern-Dole and LRP programs in **Bolivia, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Tanzania**, PCI has created and refined its tools and approaches to achieve lasting impact of these integrated school feeding programs.



Customizable Integrated Programming

PCI's **integrated school feeding approach** is a multidisciplinary, student- and community-focused approach that improves primary school students' learning outcomes by increasing attendance rates, enhancing academic performance, and improving their nutritional status. PCI's approach is flexible and tailored to the unique context of each country, school, and community. The main pillars of this approach include:



1) DAILY NUTRITIOUS MEALS

PCI's sustainability approach measures and intentionally plans for a **gradual transition** away from USDA-provided commodities towards government and community led school feeding programs that provide locally contributed or procured commodities for daily school meals. Stakeholder knowledge and skills are strengthened and coordinated to determine meal requirements and rations, support production and supply of nutritious foods, and ensure proper food storage and hygienic preparation of school meals.

Through PCI's school feeding programs, more than 300,000 students from 1,640 schools in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Tanzania receive a daily nutritious school meal.



2) LITERACY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

PCI supports quality education and targeted literacy interventions through a variety of approaches, with an emphasis on improving reading in grades 1 through 3; promoting early childhood development; and supporting parents and their pre-school children to enhance their school readiness. In all participating schools, PCI works with local governments and school administrators to co-create instructional materials and train teachers on improved literacy teaching methodologies; ensures students have access to textbooks and other learning materials; and equips classrooms with libraries or reading corners. In **Nicaragua**, PCI has provided literacy training to 1,728 1st -3rd grade teachers and school principals in over 900 schools. Many of these educators work in remote areas and are unable to participate in the regular training activities organized by the Ministry of Education.

"PCI awakened us. They encouraged us and made us realize that we were able to change our situation."

- Juana Geleno, mother of two schoolchildren in Nicaragua

3) CLIMATE-SMART, NUTRITION-SENSITIVE AGRICULTURE

Schools and communities increase the local production of nutritious crops for school meals, thus improving student nutrition and increasing school and community income. Utilizing climate-smart agronomic techniques, school gardens, school demonstration plots, and community farmer groups improve community food security, increase resilience, and improve nutrition.



SUSTAINABILITY

Beginning with program inception, PCI works to ensure that key stakeholders – including parents, teachers, and local governments – are empowered and equipped to continue implementation of key activities for sustained impact of PCI’s school feeding programs long after program funding has ended. Through PCI’s tools and custom-tailored approaches to planning and measuring sustainability readiness, PCI continues to build local ownership at all stakeholder levels and gradually transitions programs to locally owned school feeding programs.

Exemplary of PCI’s approach is the successful transition of program activities to 49 municipal governments in **Bolivia**, whereby over a decade later, schools continue to provide daily meals to over 110,600 Bolivian students.

ABOUT PCI

PCI, 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.

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School gardens are used as a hands-on, participatory learning tool to teach children and community members on improved climate-smart production techniques and the importance of consuming nutrient-rich, diverse diets. Garden production serves as valuable supplement to school meal staples and builds pride and self-reliance among students, schools, and their communities. In **Tanzania**, farmers and schools are partnering to increase and enhance food production and nutrition for thousands of students. PCI has connected 100 farmer groups with local schools. To date, over 1,175 metric tons of food have been donated for school meals by farmer groups, parents, other community members, and harvests from school farms and gardens.

4) HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Improving the health and nutrition of vulnerable children is a key focus of PCI’s school feeding programs. PCI implements child-friendly, school-based activities that strengthen the knowledge and skills of parents, teachers, and students while promoting social and behavior change on topics including good hygiene practices, proper nutrition, and the importance of clean water. Parents are trained on the preparation of nutritious school meals utilizing nutritionally balanced menus, which typically incorporate fresh produce grown in school gardens or supplied by local farmers. PCI also works with local governments to provide Vitamin A supplements and deworming medications for students.

5) SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE

PCI improves learning environments for children through infrastructure improvements including repairs and construction of school latrines accommodating adolescent girls, hand washing stations, sustainable water systems, and fuel-efficient stoves. PCI’s approach ensures that local stakeholders are invested and develop ownership of infrastructure projects through cash and in-kind contributions, as well as volunteer labor. PCI ensures that schools have separate latrines for boys and girls and include a changing room for girls’ menstrual hygiene management to eliminate cultural barriers that can limit access to education.

6) STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND LOCAL CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

To ensure essential stakeholders at all levels are equipped with the skills, information, and the motivation necessary for sustainable success, PCI works through an integrated top-down and bottom-up approach:

- **National**: advocate for and support development of national school feeding policies/laws; strengthen capacity to design, mobilize, and manage feeding programs; support multisectoral collaboration across ministries
- **Regional**: strengthen regional-level government capacity to provide support, supervision, and coordination of programming
- **School**: provide tools for planning and resource mobilization; strengthen capacity to implement and manage integrated school feeding programs
- **Community**: engage communities and leaders, fostering a sense of commitment, empowerment, and ownership of the program

In **Guatemala**, PCI’s advocacy for municipal ownership of the school feeding program has led to the approval of three municipal public policies, two of which are already being implemented with designated budgets. Three additional policies are currently in development.

PCI’S SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMS WORLDWIDE

