

Community Entry Best Practices at Project Concern International: Experiences from Implementing Staff

A White Paper

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Community meeting during the Parivartan Project, India. Image Courtesy of PCI

Executive Summary

Community engagement is a hallmark strategy of Project Concern International (PCI) and is critical for ensuring that programming is as community-driven as possible. Unfortunately, best practices regarding community engagement, and specifically, community entry, have not been comprehensively studied. In January 2016, PCI conducted 23 key informant interviews (KIIs) across 15 PCI projects in 10 countries to understand challenges and successes experienced during their projects' entry process, and to identify best practices on community entry, an extremely important, but underrepresented component of community engagement in the literature. Using the Community Readiness Model as a theoretical lens, the key informant interview survey was designed to assess a range of topics, including planning and assessment, community readiness at entry, perceived changes during process, communication methods to and from community members and stakeholders, trust building activities and perceived results, inclusion of marginalized/vulnerable community members, deliberation and consensus on roles and responsibilities, and lessons learned. In addition to identifying the need for systematic community readiness assessment at entry, the findings from these key informant interviews are presented here and reflected in the recommendations for potential practices in future projects.

Special Thanks

It takes a village to raise a child, and an organization to create a document, and this particular one was a PCI community effort to the fullest extent. We want to thank the twenty-three wonderful PCI staff who took time out of their busy schedules to do interviews or who wrote out answers in the questionnaire. Your knowledge has been invaluable and your stories were fascinating. And thanks to all those who guided the direction of this project, including Clara Eder, Janine Schooley, Jessica Chen, Chris Bessenecker, Jerome Sigamani, Emily Epsten, Jason Rubin, La Rue Seims, Pascale Wagner, Leonel Arguello, Erin Graeber, Rajshree Das, Camilius Kapela, and Blanca Lomeli. Though this document merely scratches the surface of all that PCI stands for as an organization, we hope it does justice to all the fine work the organization does.

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INTRODUCTION

Project Concern International (PCI) has a long tradition of designing and implementing community-driven programming, which relies heavily on engaging with communities in a way that is respectful, asset-based, empowering and collaborative. According to the Clinical Translation Science Award (CTSA) Community Engagement Key Function Committee Task Force on the Principles of Community Engagement (2011), implementing best practices in community engagement (CE) can help set appropriate agendas, improve project design and delivery, ensure more ethical development practices, improve community and NGO capacity, and improve likelihood of local ownership for greater sustainable impact.

CE is a concept that is still being formulated within the international health and development sector. Based on a review of the literature, CE can be broken down into three separate but overlapping components: community entry, community mobilization, and community empowerment. In summary (and not without debate), community entry, mobilization and empowerment are distinct yet interrelated components of the overall community engagement process. There cannot be community empowerment without community mobilization, and there cannot be community mobilization or empowerment without community entry. In addition, the success of community empowerment begins with how empowering the entry and mobilization processes are from day one. It is necessary to understand what actions PCI takes, and what resources are required, to permit a smooth transition from the entry phase to community mobilization, to empowerment, and ultimately to sustained impact following the organization's "exit" from the community.

PCI has been successful in its use of CE strategies but documentation is lacking on specific practices that are used widely, systematically or work well across different projects. For PCI, and organizations like PCI, it is important to examine and document these practices because there are significant costs associated with them, such as time and opportunity costs, skills building and cash resources, as well as important benefits when done effectively, especially in terms of sustainable impact. Documented best practices can be shared and applied purposefully to improve project efficiency and effectiveness.

This document examines PCI's practices during the first component of CE, *community entry*, through systematic synthesis of information from key informants and as guided by the Community Readiness Model, or CRM. Community entry is a critical stage during which the initial interactions between the community and PCI staff occur. Key actions include environmental scanning and analysis, identifying the level of community involvement, identifying formal and informal leaders within the community, identifying stakeholders, building trust, conducting needs assessment, and designing projects through inclusive participation (Vermeulen et al 2015; PolicyLink, n.d).

The objectives of this documentation effort were as follows:

- Determine whether PCI has a systematic approach to community entry using the CRM's stages of community readiness.
- Identify similarities and differences in community entry approaches between projects.
- Identify PCI's best practices for community entry.

Successful practices for community entry from 23 key informants, who represent 15 past and current PCI projects across 10 countries, are identified and documented herein (full methodology is described in Annex I). The findings reflect the experiences and lessons learned from both past and current PCI projects, with the hope they will be applied to future programs to improve their effectiveness and sustained impact.

COMMUNITY ENTRY READINESS VARIES ACROSS PROJECTS

The CRM model describes five stages of readiness at the community level: no awareness, denial/resistance, vague awareness, pre-planning and preparation (described on right). Based on feedback from the staff interviewed, the model has a place in PCI's culture. As a "community centric" model, CRM offers PCI the tools for "meeting the community where *they* are" rather than assuming their priorities are in line with the project's priorities or that priorities do not change (Tri-Ethnic Center, 2014). Many of the best practices described below are in line with the principles of CRM.

Most PCI projects involve working with many communities who are all at various levels, whether it be a district, ward, block, village, hamlet or school. Each community has its own set of attitudes, knowledge levels, resources, and efforts, which can vary across different population segments within that community. Among communities that had not previously worked with PCI, most had a combination of *No Awareness* (3), *Denial/Resistance* (3), and *Vague Awareness* (7) regarding the key challenges and issues the project aimed to address.

An example of *No Awareness* included *Parivartan* project villages in India, where lower caste people did not know at all about government health services. An example of *Denial/Resistance* was found in pastoral or fishing communities in Tanzania, where farmers and pastoralists believed education is useless because their sons become herders/fishermen and their daughters marry (KII from Tanzania). Another example of *Denial/Resistance* was found in Zambia, where many church members refused to believe that HIV was a problem among religious people like themselves (KII from Zambia). In general, however, most interviewees stated that community members, especially women, had some vague awareness of the problems the project aimed to address.

CRM Model: Stages of Readiness at Community Entry

Stage 1: No Awareness

- Community has no knowledge of issue or local efforts addressing the issue.
- Leadership and community believes issue is not much concern.
- No resources to address the issue.

Stage 2: Denial/Resistance

- Leadership believe is not an issue or concern, or they think it can't or shouldn't be addressed.
- Community members have false knowledge/misconceptions.
- Community members and/or leaders do not support using available resources to address issue.

Stage 3: Vague Awareness

- Some community members have heard about local efforts but have vague knowledge about the issue.
- Leadership and community members believe the issue may be a concern but are not immediately motivated to act.
- Limited resources to address the issue.

Stage 4: Pre-Planning

- Some community members have heard about local efforts but have vague knowledge about the issue.
- Leadership and community members acknowledge this issue is a concern, and something must be done to address it.
- Limited resources to address the issue.

Stage 5: Preparation

- Most community members have heard about local efforts, and have knowledge on causes, consequences, signs and symptoms.
- Leadership is actively supportive of continuing/ improving current efforts or in developing new efforts.
- Community attitude is concerned and wants to do something about it.
- Some resources to address the issue.

Communities that were in *Pre-Planning* stage included those that had worked with PCI before, and segments of the communities were enthusiastic in working with PCI. For projects like Botswana's *Orphans, Vulnerable Children and Gender Program* and Tanzania's *Food for Education (FFE) Phase II*, successes from previous projects had created an atmosphere in which existing partner communities knew they could depend on PCI and were eager to expand existing activities or tackle new problems. Interestingly enough, according to informants, communities that had not previously worked with PCI but had heard from other communities of PCI's successful projects were in more receptive stages of readiness like Pre-Planning.

At least seven interviewees stated that women had a higher awareness of problems than men and were generally more eager to work with PCI. As leaders of the community, they play a key role in community readiness from the beginning and in turn influence project success. One interviewee even said schools and villages with women already in leadership roles were more likely to be successful in attaining the goals of the project.

Other differences in awareness tended to depend on an individual's perspective. For example, in the *Food for Education (FFE)* programs, teachers and school staff were more aware of lack of education as a problem, while parents were more aware of their children's lack of food as a problem. Interviewees reported that these differences created challenges as well as opportunities for the projects on which they worked.

BEST PRACTICES FOR COMMUNITY ENTRY

PCI's practices are in accordance with the following aspects of community entry adapted from Hendricks 2017:

1. Planning and assessment, including community readiness at entry and perceived changes during the process
2. Communication methods to and from community members and stakeholders
3. Trust building activities and perceived results
4. Inclusion of marginalized/vulnerable community members
5. Deliberation and consensus on roles and responsibilities

The following sections discuss successful practices at PCI within each aspect of the community entry process, from key informant perspectives and recommendations.

1. PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT

Utilize a Top-to-Bottom Entry Approach: Planning for entry followed a similar practice for most of the projects, in essence, a “top to bottom” entry plan, in which PCI works its way down the political hierarchy gathering support at a national, regional, district, sub-district, and finally village levels. Meetings at each level are usually followed by formal agreements, such as memorandums of understanding (MOUs). Though this top to bottom entry was typically a tedious process, it was necessary to have that clarity regarding what was expected on the part of PCI and on the part of the government and other key stakeholders at each level (KIIs from Botswana, Mexico, and Tanzania).

When top government officials were supportive, it was easier to gain support of their staff (KII from Tanzania). An added bonus of this approach, is that it avoids upsetting government officials who may feel PCI is competing with or trying to bypass them. Several interviewees used the same phrase regarding their respective projects, that this approach “use[s] the existing structures in place.” This refers to working within both modern government bureaucracy as well as within traditional political/social structures.

Identify New Stakeholders Through Existing Stakeholders: As PCI moved down the levels of

Best Practices Summarized

Planning and Assessment

- Utilize a top-to-bottom entry approach.
- Find new partners through past partners.
- Partner with traditional or natural leaders.
- Utilize Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) techniques to allow community to share priorities/concerns.

Communication

- Face-to-face interactions.
- Establish lines of communication with local leaders before communicating with whole community.
- Embed staff within communities for continuous feedback.

Trust-building

- Manage expectations (transparency, honesty, consistency).
- Use MOUs.
- Maintain constant presence in the community.
- Let trusted leaders/members to convince the resistant.

Inclusion

- Include certain percent of marginalized individuals.
- Make house visits to encourage stigmatized to join.
- Ensure cultural sensitivity through community participation.

Deliberation and Consensus Building

- Establish roles and responsibilities with partners using MOUs.
- Hold progress meetings throughout the year with stakeholders.

government, stakeholders were identified through endorsements from varying government officials. Also, at least eight interviewees stated that PCI tends to find new partners through old partners. A best practice in identifying stakeholders is to find partners with complementary strengths, especially those organizations already working with and trusted by the communities PCI wants to enter. For example, during the *Parivartan* community entry process, PCI partnered with Jeevika, a governmental organization specializing in creating financial self-help groups for women. These self-help models had already been accepted by the communities before PCI partnered with Jeevika. Therefore, they provided an existing structure for PCI to transition these self-help groups towards preventative health and nutrition in a way that complemented the groups' existing goals of saving money.

Partner with Traditional or Natural Leaders: Many communities have tense relationships with formal or centralized government structures. Sources of authority within communities include local or traditional leaders, such as elder councils, headmen/chiefdoms, priests or mullahs, teachers, etc. PCI's partnerships with local/traditional/informal/natural community leaders is well instituted (KIIs from Botswana, Liberia, Tanzania, and Zambia). Therefore, a PCI best practice in community entry is to identify and interact with traditional sources of authority whether political, religious, or social. PCI's *Church Partnerships for Positive Change (CPPC)* project in Zambia partnered with church leadership to address HIV, which led to great success due to the community's respect for the churches over local government.

Utilize Participatory Learning Techniques: In the context of community readiness assessment, Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) techniques should be used at any stage of readiness, including during other CE stages such as mobilization, but are especially useful entering, mobilizing, and empowering a community with no awareness. PLA techniques come closest to providing a community readiness assessment approach. The most systematic PLA experience was captured in India's *Parivartan* Village Entry Handbook, although other projects did use forms of PLA (KIIs from Botswana, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mexico, Tanzania, and Zambia).



PLA in action, Tanzania. Image courtesy of PCI



Community mapping in town. Image courtesy of PCI

This practice goes beyond surveying and collecting data on indicators. It includes the community members in the assessment process by having them assess themselves. Different activities of PLA include social mapping, Journey of Life, wealth ranking, etc. Not only do these activities provide PCI with important information, they also create buy-in among the community members who partake (KII from Mexico). For example, in the early stages of *SOLUCION TB* in Mexico, PCI used photography as a tool for Advocacy, Communication and Social Mobilization (ACSM). PCI provided cameras to groups of individuals living with TB. The groups decided on themes regarding barriers and stigmatization and went

out into their communities to capture images. Galleries were set up throughout Mexico's 35 TB priority sites (health jurisdictions) and the photographs had a profound impact on the stakeholders, community, and project. It worked so well to show the effects of stigmatization that it helped shift the Ministry of Health's policy away from a disease-centered focus towards human-centered focus (KII from Mexico).

2. COMMUNICATION

Engage in Face-to-Face Interactions: The most common communication strategies, and the most successful, as reported by key informants, are face-to-face interactions. All interviewees stated this as the major form for communicating with local leaders, resistant community members, and partner organizations. Interviewees occasionally mentioned the use of posters and the media, but these were specific to creating awareness over large areas. For higher up stakeholders like government agencies and NGOs, PCI holds formal meetings to discuss and plan. A common practice is to have follow-up meetings with stakeholders to check the projects' progress, provide and receive feedback, and formalize agreements. These follow-up meetings are quarterly so that if problems arise, or circumstances change, PCI and its partners can adjust with transparency.

Establish Lines of Communication with Local Leaders First: Within the community, PCI staff commonly meets first with local leaders to do KII with them if they are chieftains/mayors/religious leaders or focus groups with elder councils/ community development committees during assessment. One on one meetings with local leaders or small group meetings with different leaderships segments are also commonly done. It is important to note that a best practice is to communicate with the local leadership first before going to the community. These personal forms of communication set the tone for the project as the following example shows.

In Liberia, senior level PCI staff ensured their availability to visit and hear from local leadership in the communities; the act of visiting or opening lines of communication was believed to show respect from PCI to the local leaders.

Once lines of communication are established between PCI and the community leaders, then it is easier to hold general meetings with the communities or identify community members that would be good for participatory learning assessments. A best practice in communication that most interviewees stated was to have the local leaders facilitate the initial interactions between PCI and the community. Local leaders set up community meetings in which PCI can elaborate the goals, scope, activities, and limitations of the project. Community members can then ask questions or raise concerns. But having the leaders as facilitators of these large group meetings was consistently stated as a good idea by the interviewees. The benefit was that seeing local leaders collaborating with PCI improved PCI's image as a trustworthy organization.

One interviewee from Zambia wished community leaders had met first with their community without PCI, to explain the project. In this case, the issue was HIV, a very sensitive issue within the churches, and it was possible that buy-in would have increased earlier if the church leaders had the opportunity to discuss HIV first, without PCI's presence.

Embed Staff Within Communities to Allow for Continuous Feedback: When asked how community members were able to communicate their priorities and concerns, key informants responded that holding KIIs, focus groups and allowing for questions to be raised in general meetings provided community members with access to PCI. But according to eight interviewees, the most important practices PCI did were PLA and "embedding" PCI staff in the community. PLA not only helped the community share its priorities and concerns, but also helped community members express their overall quality of life beyond

the scope of the projects. Photo voice, Journey of Life, or "Chilling Sessions," were all very different in their approaches but all worked to acquire that understanding of quality of life.

Multiple interviewees stated that having PCI community mobilizers "embedded" in the communities was a best practice in communication. Not only did it create a familiar human face for PCI, it also allowed for timely messaging and allowed PCI to receive continuous feedback from local stakeholders. This ability to provide messages effectively and that would be trusted was very important during the Ebola crisis in Liberia. Local embedded staff were in a better position to challenge the rumors circulating around the disease. Because these PCI staff were members of the community, they were not perceived as outsiders so their words carried additional weight.

3. TRUST-BUILDING

Manage Expectations: No key informants stated PCI had an intentional trust-building strategy, but they did report there were several community entry actions taken by PCI that did build trust. These actions included managing expectations, communicating through trusted leaders and partners, embedding community mobilizers, and following through with promises.

Managing expectations was by far the most important contributor to building trust. Many interviewees stated that communities were either very hopeful of PCI solving all problems or very suspicious because past organizations had failed to deliver. Therefore, clearly and consistently stating the scope of the project, its intended results, and discussing PCI's resource limitations and what is explicitly outside of the project's scope makes it easier for the community and PCI to come to a consensus on what PCI will do and what the community will do. The key word brought up over and over was "transparency." Having a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or Cooperation (MOC) was considered the best method for achieving this transparency. The process of developing these written agreements allows PCI and communities to better understand each other and how they are going to work together. A written compact helps ensure that communities and involved stakeholders who may be initially suspicious have more of a reason to believe PCI will keep to its side of the bargain.

Communicate Through Trusted Leaders: Working with trusted leadership and organizations is another best practice in that it "fast tracks" trust-building by association with a reputable member of the community. At least seven interviewees stated that acquiring leadership buy-in was a priority especially in hierarchical societies. This is especially important when misinformation is rampant and communities are suspicious of outsiders. For instance, during PCI Liberia's Ebola response, misinformation about how the disease had spread needed to be counteracted. PCI utilized trusted community chieftains to convince their constituents that PCI was there to stop the disease and not to spread it. Likewise, three informants stated that partnering with local organizations experienced working with the priority populations and had implemented successful projects in the past made it easier to fit in or enhance their existing trust structures. For example, during the *Parivartan* project, PCI partnered with Jeevika to expand the role of Jeevika's women's groups into health promoters.

In another example, during the *PAISANO* project, some villages were not cooperating with PCI. So PCI went to the bishop who was well respected by those villages in his diocese, and convinced him to convince the villages to work with PCI. The bishop did this and the villages began to cooperate with PCI out of respect for the trusted bishop.

Embed Community Mobilizers: Having community mobilizers living within the communities that PCI is serving greatly builds trust. It is easier to trust a person living with you and experiencing your community's day to day activities than some distant organization that occasionally sends staff to visit for a day. At least eight interviewees said that recruiting and training members from the communities make it

even easier to foster trust, because these members already know the community and are already trusted by the community.

According to interviewees, another common best practice useful for trust building as well as inclusion, was the use of house visits for reaching suspicious or uncooperative community members. During one situation in Ethiopia's *Women Empowered (WE)* program, a husband did not want his wife to continue going to a women's group. So a PCI community mobilizer went to the man's house along with some women from the group and discussed the importance of his wife going to these meetings. After the discussions, the husband agreed. In these instances, PCI utilized ties with key stakeholders as well as individual community members to convince their own neighbors or constituents to trust in PCI.



Creating awareness. Image Courtesy of PCI

4. INCLUSION

Include Marginalized Groups: PCI specializes in shaping projects to help the most marginalized in communities. Whether these marginalized community segments are women, lower castes, people with disabilities, the stigmatized by disease (HIV or TB), or those in abject poverty, PCI does its best to counter local social norms to include these groups in the project. A best practice for inclusion is to require groups or committees to have a specified percentage of its membership be from the marginalized group. Most commonly, when PCI is trying to form committees for sanitation, for example, it presses for women to be part of the focus groups, the general meetings, and/or the committees.

During Mexico's *SOLUCION TB* and Zambia's *CPPC* projects, PCI pushed for TB-infected community members to be part of the process. In Mexico, PCI made sure that at least one TB-infected person was present during health worker training sessions. Healthcare workers were transformed by having these stigmatized people be part of the conversations, for example, when they pointed out how health workers' prejudices influenced the care of TB-infected people. The interviewee stated that in one scenario, health workers met with the TB-infected member to apologize for their prejudices against those with TB. In Zambia, the *CPPC* project made training HIV positive community members as health educators a priority so as to help encourage other HIV positive people to come out of the shadows.

During *Parivartan*, PCI trained women volunteers, called *sahelis* (literally meaning *friend*, these are women volunteers to communicate health messages), specifically from different castes so all the hamlets in the villages could have someone to depend on. There was also an effort to get these women to interact with other *sahelis* from other castes. One interviewee stated with pride that PCI's efforts were making headway in terms of getting these women to converse with each other.

Make House Visits: The most common practice to reach hard-to-reach people was making house visits. In the *Food for Education (FFE)* projects, children with disabilities were commonly kept at home from school due to society viewing education as unnecessary for them. PCI mobilizers spoke with parents and if they were still hesitant, PCI worked with trusted members (like other parents or teachers) or authorities (like the police in Tanzania’s *FFE*) to encourage parents to put all their children in school. In one recollection from a *WE* project in Ethiopia, a disabled woman would not go to the meetings because of the difficulty in getting out of the house. In response, her woman’s group began holding the meetings at her house.

Ensure Cultural Sensitivity Through Community Participation: Part of the inclusion process is making sure projects and PCI staff are culturally sensitive. This is a constant process that requires community participation. Ensuring the community helps make activities culturally appropriate is one of PCI’s strengths. By including the community from the beginning in the project design phase as well as



Jeevika group training, India. Image Courtesy of PCI

throughout the life of the project, community members can provide insight and feedback that avoid potential pitfalls. During Zambia’s *CPPC*, the Catholic Church leaders requested that condoms be discussed outside of the church meetings. PCI staff obliged so that church leaders were comfortable and PCI could at least continue to disseminate knowledge on safe sex.

Another strategy used is to bolster existing cultural practices that are helpful in attaining specific project goals. For example, in Ethiopia there are the concepts of *eder* and *gagoo* (a custom in which travelers tell each other all that is occurring in the area). *Eder* is a concept that requires the community to help those in distress, such as a heavy

financial burden. This concept fits in quite well with *WE*’s objectives, according to the interviewee. During the *SAPARM* project, PCI utilized *gagoo* to encourage community leaders to disseminate information on pasture mapping to all members of the community. Another interesting example in Zambia, was utilizing the traditional role of grandmothers. During the *Department of Defense HIV/AIDS Prevention Program (DHAPP)* project, PCI had worked with grandmothers to encourage their daughters or daughters-in-law to breastfeed longer during the first year of their grand child’s life (KII from Zambia). A grandmother’s traditional role was to guide young mothers through the raising of newborns, and PCI’s use of that cultural practice to promote healthy behaviors was an excellent example of this best practice.

Finally, the most successful practice for cultural sensitivity, as noted by interviewees, is recruiting staff from the local communities. They can bridge divides between PCI and the community and bring valuable information on specific cultural beliefs or practices. For instance, staff recruited from the community of interest can warn PCI about religious holidays (this happened for *Parivartan* in India and *Njira* in Malawi) or funerals (this happened in Tanzania’s *FFE Phase II*). Holding general meetings during those times would not be viable and adjustments to the schedule were made. Customizing PCI’s behavior towards each community requires the community to have a say. But if misunderstandings arise, a couple interviewees stated that consulting with an anthropologist helped or would also have been helpful.

5. DELIBERATION & CONSENSUS BUILDING

Enter into Memorandum of Understanding: The most successful best practice for deliberation and consensus building was the MOU or MOC. Creating explicit objectives, roles, and responsibilities, with clear timelines, with partners from central government down to the actual communities made sure there was as little miscommunication as possible. Also crucial, MOUs make PCI's limitations clear regarding the scope of the project and the resources that must come from the community. For some projects, every stakeholder, no matter how small, had a MOU with PCI. One interviewee stated that during Tanzania's *FFE Phase I*, there were hundreds of MOUs with all partners. Though the interviewee acknowledged the strenuous process, it was very helpful throughout the life of the project to keep the project on track and prevent issues before they happen. For example, whenever misunderstandings arose, PCI and partners could refer to the MOUs. And if circumstances changed, having a clear process for adjusting MOUs was viewed favorably by several interviewees. In most projects, MOUs were done with larger stakeholders like government agencies and partner organizations, but some projects created formal agreements with community leaders or groups. For instance, *FFEs* in Nicaragua and Tanzania had MOUs with schools and/or village councils.



Village mapping in Guatemala. Image courtesy of PCI

Hold Progress Meetings Throughout the Year: Another best practice is having quarterly, triannual, or biannual meetings with stakeholders to go over project progress. Not many interviewees spoke about this practice, but the ones who did (Malawi's *Njira*, Ethiopia's *WE*, Mexico's *SOLUCION TB*) said that these meetings were very valuable. These meetings would review the activities, challenges, next steps, etc. These meetings also allowed for MOUs to be renegotiated or clarified in instances where previous MOUs were too vague or were poorly written. For example, during a *FFE* agreement between PCI and a school, the agreement established that the parents would provide a cup for each of their kids for the school lunch. What resulted was that all the cups were different volumes. So PCI had to adjust the agreement so that it could buy the cups for the sake of fairness and uniformity. Having the ability to regroup and go over challenges reduces replication of failed strategies.

CLOSING REMARKS

According to PCI's 2020 Strategic Plan, there is a PCI Way, which is:

“We go where the need is the greatest, to the poorest communities, in many cases the poorest regions of the least developed countries of the world. We work for transformational change with the firm belief in the power of people to change their own lives. We leave behind lasting, positive community impact, enabling individuals, families, local organizations and governments to build on and sustain the successes we achieve together.”

PCI community entry practices fit within the PCI Way, in that the approach is community centric and aims at achieving the highest possible level of community-driven programming. It becomes difficult to mobilize, let alone empower, people to transform their own lives without an evidence-based, systematic strategy and practice for entry into communities - one that considers local context and effectively catalyzes local leadership.

Community entry is therefore a key stage in community engagement and should be a systematic process where best practices are followed during the readiness stages in which they are best suited. For example, communities with no awareness will benefit most from PLA, KIIs with local leaders, and focus groups with community segments. In comparison, communities in denial or resistance may benefit most through MOUs with national and regional government levels, intervening with resistant members through the local leaders, and managing expectations through transparency.

Many interviewed felt that assessments were either not adequate or there was too little time for it. Some wanted to systematize a continuous assessment (and feedback) process beyond community entry so that PCI staff can have a better understanding of what is happening in “real time.” Some projects had problems managing expectations of the communities they served and some wanted better methods for finding the most vulnerable in communities. Some interviewees felt that PCI should start connecting communities to business sectors or incorporating businesses as partners on projects. And finally some felt that the “vision” or the sustainability aspect of the projects were not incorporated into the community entry phase. All of these recommendations show that PCI is constantly in a state of self-improvement and is continuously working towards its aspirational goals.

This compilation of best practices, grounded in the extensive experience and lessons learned from project implementing staff, is the tip of the iceberg toward unlocking PCI's “hidden knowledge,” and bringing best practices to greater scale to help PCI attain its 2020 goals and continue to empower millions of people around the world through increasingly authentic community-driven programming.

APPENDIX I: Methodology

Community Engagement Definition and Components

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 1997) defines CE as, “the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people.” According to the CTSA Community Engagement Key Function Committee Task Force on the Principles of Community Engagement (2011), the CE process (according to this definition) has been increasing over the past decades as various organizations begin to understand how the social and physical environments underlie issues related to health, behaviors, and decision-making.

According to the literature, within the life of a project, the process of engaging the community involves community entry, mobilization, and empowerment; however, throughout the literature there has also been a great deal of confusion and debate over the proper use of these terms. Because of their overlapping nature, many in the international development community use these terms interchangeably, or use other related terms like social mobilization or community-driven development. But by teasing out the subtle differences between them, it can be argued that entry, mobilization, and empowerment are distinct phases of the overall CE process. A simplified representation of the CE process and its components is provided in the figure below.

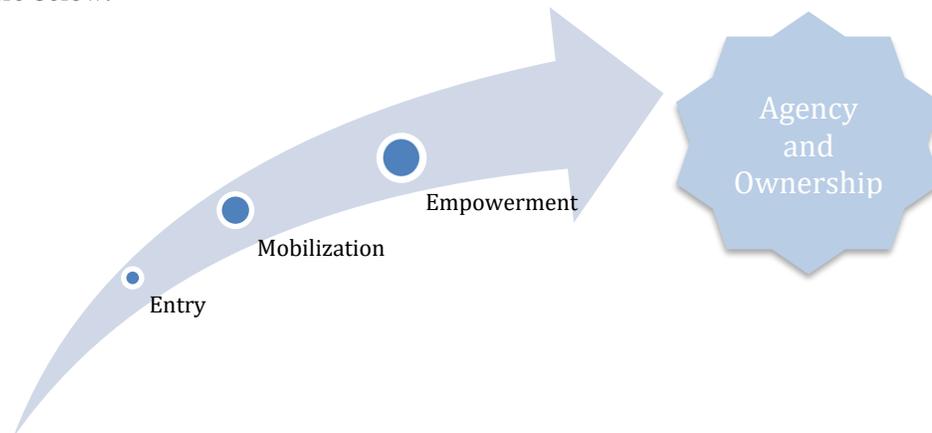


Figure 1. A simple representation of the community entry process and components.

Community entry definitions are difficult to come by and it may be the least understood aspect of CE (Vermeulen, 2015), as indicated by the quality of definitions and the quantity of articles found during literature review (a simple search in San Diego State University’s library databases yielded 1,635 results for community entry, as compared to 13,538 for community mobilization, 24,624 for community empowerment, and 108,065 for CE). Community entry involves a process that occurs between organizations [for example between PCI and the various actors within the community of interest] to assess the community’s needs, stakeholders and capacity, to establish reciprocal means of communication, to form relationships built on trust, to include marginalized community members, and to create consensus over the goals of the project (PolicyLink, n.d.). Community entry includes a conscious set of strategies that allows organizations, such as PCI, to satisfy the goals of the project while creating a shared vision with the communities so that eventually they take ownership of the project. Therefore, community entry is a critical stage during which the initial interactions between the community and PCI occur, and when most of the initial trust-building will also occur.

Community entry relates to community mobilization and empowerment in that a firm level of trust and buy-in is needed with the community in question, but differentiates itself in that community entry must occur *first* in order to move the project from an idea into an executable plan (Tareen and Omar 1997). For example, the manner in which PCI goes about community entry to establish initial relationships influences how PCI maintains those relationships and trust throughout the rest of the engagement process. Therefore, in order to understand community engagement as a whole, community entry must be understood before moving on to more well-known concepts as community mobilization and community empowerment.

“Community entry is a critical process that needs more time and resources. That will make implementation easier.”
- PCI key informant, Ethiopia

Terminology

Community Readiness Model (CRM) assesses a community’s readiness to adopt a new behavior by measuring a community’s (leaders and members) attitudes, knowledge, resources, and efforts & activities (Tri-Ethnic Center, 2014). This model provides this project with a “community centric” analysis of community entry best practices. Depending on a community’s stage of readiness to change behaviors, community entry practices may differ to accommodate that readiness or its lack of readiness.

Community engagement (CE) is defined as, “the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people,” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1997). This is an overarching concept that is continuous throughout the life of a project. Within community engagement there are roughly three subcategories: community entry, community mobilization, and community empowerment.

Community entry is defined as, “the process of entering community spaces intending to meet people where community members are most comfortable. Staff leave their traditional work places and go into the community to seek out and speak with members who live there,” (Physical Activity Strategy, 2010). Community entry consists of community involvement identification, authority (formal/informal) identification, stakeholder identification, constituency development, and needs assessment.

Community mobilization (CM) is defined as, “a capacity-building process through which community individuals, groups, or organizations plan, carry out, and evaluate activities on a participatory and sustained basis to improve their health and other needs, either on their own initiative or stimulated by others,” (Howard-Grabman and Snetro, 2003).

Community empowerment is defined as, “the process of enabling communities to increase control over their lives. Community empowerment, therefore, is more than the involvement, participation or engagement of communities. It implies community ownership and action that explicitly aims at social and political change,” (WHO, n.d). It recognizes that if some people are going to be empowered, then others will be sharing their existing power and giving some of it up (Labonté, and Laverack 2008). Community empowerment is what allows communities to tackle issues on their own or expand efforts to new problems.

Assessment Model

The process of documenting PCI’s community entry practices was guided by the Community Readiness Model, or CRM. This model offers a theoretical approach in line with PCI’s community-centric

philosophy in that it “assesses a community’s readiness to adopt a new behavior by measuring a community’s (leaders and members) attitudes, knowledge, resources, and efforts and activities” (Tri-Ethnic Center, 2014).

The CRM presents nine stages of community readiness (no awareness, denial and resistance, vague awareness, preplanning, preparation, initiation, stabilization, confirmation and expansion, and high level of community ownership; Figure 2; Tri-Ethnic Center, 2014) that can be applied to assess a community’s readiness to engage with PCI regarding the challenges a project seeks to address. Community entry covers the first five stages, from no awareness to preparation. Given the overlap of CRM with CE, this assessment also looks at whether PCI uses the CRM during community entry and whether certain best practices did move communities from lower stages of readiness to higher stages of readiness.

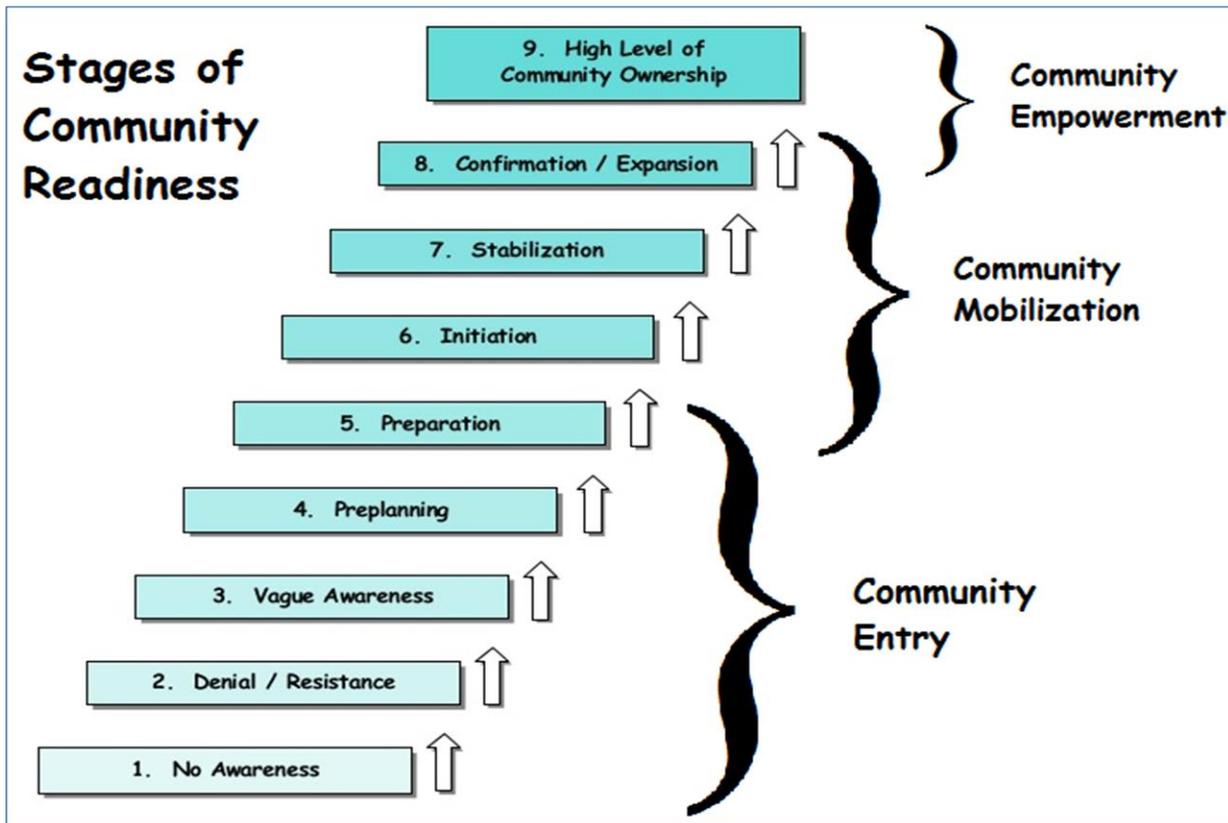


Figure 2. Image modified from Tri-Ethnic Center's Community Readiness Handbook, 2014. Community entry covers the first five stages, community mobilization covers stages five through eight, and community empowerment covers stages eight and nine. Note that there is overlap.

Data Collection

To document the practices associated with community entry at PCI and communities, it was determined that key informant interviews (KII) would provide the best means of investigating the opportunities and challenges regarding best practices for community entry. A well-developed KII is an excellent tool for teasing out information from complex issues such as community entry (NIH, 2011), and as such, is an appropriate methodology for this review. Information gathered from these interviews was analyzed for patterns of behavior and organized within the CRM’s stages of community readiness.

A total of 23 key informants were interviewed across 15 PCI projects in 10 countries who currently or previously served as PCI country directors, chiefs and deputy chiefs of party, project managers, coordinators, advisors and community mobilizers. Due to time and resource constraints, a basic qualitative analysis of community entry practices was most feasible and effective since qualitative methods “do not require pre-determined variables and can be used for exploratory or open-ended questions” (Johnson and Christensen 2014). Not only did the KIIs allow PCI to determine what the best practices for community entry are, but why they are best practices and how they became incorporated into a given PCI project.

Projects were included based on the feedback from 12 veteran and senior PCI staff and following a review of project documents for evidence of community engagement. Projects that were known for successful community entry or for uniquely difficult barriers to quick community entry, were chosen for this review. Another factor in deciding which PCI projects to look into was the availability of key informants.

Country	No. Projects	No. of Informants
Botswana	1	3
Ethiopia	2	2
Guatemala	2	2
India	1	3
Liberia	1	2
Malawi	1	2
Mexico	1	1
Nicaragua	2	2
Tanzania	2	4
Zambia	2	2

Table 1. Included in this assessment are 23 respondents from a total of 10 countries and 15 PCI projects.

The KII methodology follows the methodology established by the *Evaluation Framework for Community Engagement Based on the United Nations Brisbane Declaration* (Hendricks, 2017),

to acquire an overall sense of the entry process between the community and PCI. Modification was necessary in order to adapt Hendricks’ framework to the community entry phase rather than the whole of CE; interview questions were refined and structured so that they included the following aspects of the community entry process:

- Planning and assessment, including community readiness at entry and perceived changes during the process
- Communication methods to and from community members and stakeholders
- Trust building activities and perceived results
- Inclusion of marginalized/vulnerable community members
- Deliberation and consensus on roles and responsibilities
- Lessons learned

The final KII tool included twenty-three main questions plus follow-up questions. Questions were categorized into seven topic areas: Assessment, Community Readiness, Communication, Trust-building, Inclusion, Deliberation and Consensus Building, and Additional Questions (see Appendix II for the full KII tool). Interviews were done face-to-face, through Skype, or through telephone, and interviews generally lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour in order to acquire meaningful feedback.

Six key informants could not participate by phone or Skype interview, either due to scheduling conflicts or internet problems, and so were given a copy of the questionnaire which they completed and returned for analysis. One interview was emailed to a staff member who answered them in Spanish; their answers were then translated back into English by a Spanish-speaking PCI staff member based in San Diego.

Analysis

Transcript notes from all 23 interviews were analyzed for patterns in practices across each of the categories listed above. KII responses were also analyzed collectively for evidence of adoption of best practices based on CRM's stages of community readiness. This determined whether community entry practices differed by the level of readiness. Using what interviewees said about the communities they worked with, key words provided an estimated level of readiness for a project's communities.

The practices used in each project were described according to the level of detail provided from the KIIs and written documentation such as donor reports and/or evaluations. This assessment provides a checklist of what practices seem to work best for each community readiness stage.

Discussion on Limitations

As with any process, there are limitations to what can be achieved in the time given. There are several factors that reduced the effectiveness of this review's methodology and analysis, and these should be noted for future such processes seeking to understand best practices in community entry, community mobilization or community empowerment.

As stated above this review focused solely on community entry within the community engagement process. We believe this limit of scope was necessary because CE is too broad a topic to acquire a useful level of detail, using KII. Had we tried to do KIIs for the entire process of CE, the findings would have been diluted into unhelpful, unspecific actions. It would be potentially beneficial to build upon this study with another two studies looking at community mobilization and empowerment with the same focused scope. Also due to the time limitations for administering a KII within 45 minutes to an hour, lower priority questions and specific topics had to be dropped in order to achieve the general objectives.

Not all PCI countries and projects were included in the KIIs. This was due to time and accessibility constraints. Further, most projects were represented by one key informant who provided one perspective. Although each interviewee was very informative in terms of being able to recall and provide information on practices used within their respective projects, their individual perspective and experiences may not be representative of other project personnel, and therefore, we cannot know the amount of personal bias that may have influenced the interview. For those projects that had multiple interviewees, there was consistency in what were best practices, but the perspectives were slightly varied, adding richness to the analysis.

Though this review used a rigorous methodology, the qualitative analysis was conducted manually and without the assistance of voice recorders. Therefore, specific ideas could only be paraphrased instead of directly quoted, and could not be referenced back to a direct informant quote. Furthermore, using qualitative analysis software could have enhanced the analysis process, and reduce the risk of bias in the interpretation of findings.

Another limitation was that the KII was only administered in English except for one which was administered as a translated survey. This limited KII participation to individuals who could understand and speak English fluently, precluding many staff from PCI's Latin American projects. Future analyses could plan for additional time to translate the questionnaire into Spanish, thereby increasing the number of PCI staff members from Latin America who could participate in the KIIs, either by allowing them to read the questionnaire on their own and answer the questions in Spanish, or by having an interviewer who is fluent in Spanish to conduct the interviews live in Spanish.



Finally, only PCI staff were interviewed. Stakeholders, local leaders, or beneficiaries did not partake in this review, which potentially biases the findings in favor of PCI. A possible expansion that includes these other important members of PCI's development projects would give a more holistic understanding of community entry.

APPENDIX II: KII Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to do this key informant interview (KII). The purpose of this KII is to discover what best practices PCI takes regarding community entry during PROJECT and why certain actions are taken or not taken. Information from all interviews will be organized and assessed for patterns that describe the “PCI Way.” A report on the findings will be written and disseminated, as well as a presenting the finding in a “Brownbag Meeting.” You have been asked to participate because you have been recommended as a PCI member with an in-depth understanding of the project being discussed. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You can stop at any time, can refuse to answer any questions you want without any negative consequence, and your name will not be disclosed without prior written consent. However, we may report on general respondent information such as your roles/titles. This questionnaire will receive an “Interviewee Number” that corresponds to your name on a key informant list document. This secure document will only be accessible to Jennifer Simpson, Technical Advisor in the SII Unit. There are no wrong answers in this KII and if clarification about a term or question is needed, please feel free to ask. This interview is meant to take 45-60 minutes. Again we appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule to help us discover what best practices make PCI successful and what can be adopted to make PCI even better in community entry.

Do you wish to proceed with the interview? YES / NO

Assessment

Question
<input type="checkbox"/> Had PCI been in this community before this project?
<input type="checkbox"/> Did you plan for entry into this community for this project?
<input type="checkbox"/> If yes, how did you do this?
<input type="checkbox"/> If not, why not?
<input type="checkbox"/> Did you do any assessment to analyze and determine the community’s strengths, weakness, and resources (ex SWOT analysis)?
<input type="checkbox"/> How soon was this done before to entry?
<input type="checkbox"/> How valuable was this assessment?
<input type="checkbox"/> How did PCI identify key stakeholders like local organizations, influential community members, and leaders, including informal leaders at entry?

Community Readiness

Question
<input type="checkbox"/> Did you assess the readiness of the community to work with PCI to solve the problems that this project would address?
<input type="checkbox"/> If so describe the process of assessment?
<input type="checkbox"/> Did this process help the project?
<input type="checkbox"/> If not, why was assessment not done?
<input type="checkbox"/> What was the community’s knowledge of the problem this project sought to address?
<input type="checkbox"/> Were there differences between stakeholders (ex. women vs men, or government vs organizations vs community leaders)?
<input type="checkbox"/> What was the community’s beliefs towards the problem?
<input type="checkbox"/> Were there differences between stakeholders (ex. women vs men, or government vs organizations vs community leaders)?
<input type="checkbox"/> What community efforts were taken to try to solve the problem?
<input type="checkbox"/> Were there differences between stakeholders (ex. women vs men, or government vs organizations vs community leaders)?
<input type="checkbox"/> What resources were available to the community to address the problem?

- Were there differences between stakeholders (ex. women vs men, or government vs organizations vs community leaders)?

Communication

- | Question |
|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> What forms of communication did PCI use to engage the community during the entry process (ex. face-to-face, meetings, media, posters, etc.)? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Why were these forms used and with whom were they used? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> How was the community able to communicate its priorities or concerns with PCI? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> How did they describe their <u>quality of life</u> ? |

Trust-building

- | Question |
|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Did you do any activities that improved trust during the entry process? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> If so, describe your most successful activities. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> If not, explain why not? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Did any stakeholders need extra effort by PCI to improve their trust? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> How was this done? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> For this project do you feel that the entry process was successful in improving the community’s trust towards PCI? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> If so, why? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> If not, what inhibited that trust? |

Inclusion

- | Question |
|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> What actions did PCI take to include <u>marginalized</u> community members into the decision making process during community entry? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> If no actions were taken, why? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> What were the barriers to marginalized community members participating in the decision making process? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Were these barriers overcome? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> If so, how? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> If not, why? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> How did community members help make sure that the project was culturally sensitive? |

Deliberation and Consensus Building

- | Question |
|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Was there agreement over how to reach the goals of the project among stakeholders? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> If so, what steps were taken by PCI to build consensus? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> If not, what were the barriers to building consensus? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> How were project roles and responsibilities decided on and assigned between leaders, local organizations, stakeholders, and PCI? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> What roles did the leaders or local organizations play in the project during community entry? |

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> How was that determined?<input type="checkbox"/> How did their roles change during the rest of the project's timeline? |
|--|

Additional Questions

Question
<input type="checkbox"/> What best practices did you discover during the community entry process for this project, which you would want to apply to future projects?
<input type="checkbox"/> If you had to do community entry for this project again, what changes to the process would you make?
<input type="checkbox"/> Are there any other comments to be made on community entry in this project?

Thank you for your time. We really appreciate your help in finding best practices in community entry!

APPENDIX III: Key Informant Closing Comments

Key Informant's Project Name and Country	If you had to do community entry for this project again, what changes to the process would you make?	Are there any other comments to be made on community entry in this project?
<i>Orphans, Vulnerable Children and Gender Program</i> , Botswana	Traditional leaders are continuously updated on program process. Create report for district level.	Communities have knowledge and experience that needs to be untapped.
<i>SAPARM</i> , Ethiopia	Get community to demand services. Right now communities are not assertive so that should change.	Community entry is a critical process that needs more time and resources. That will make implementation easier.
<i>Women Empowered (WE)</i> , Ethiopia	Only basic business skills are currently taught. Need to create linkage with market. Link <i>WE</i> with private sector. Improve assessment.	
<i>Barrio Mio</i> , Guatemala	Combine the processes of participation, training, and community strengthening. For example the <i>WE</i> groups could be formed after the acceptance of the community, another example is the formation of <i>COCDE</i> and <i>COLRED</i> .	It's important to analyze and consider the past, and I'm talking about how other projects work in the area. With the <i>PCI</i> team knowing its past (I'm referring to getting to know what institutions are coming in, what was the type of work that was implemented), I'm talking about this because at the start we received a lot of internal and external pressure to facilitate for example nutrition, school supplies (pens, notebooks, hats and others) because they knew this was the traditional model of <i>NGOSs</i> .
<i>PAISANO</i> , Guatemala	Better assessment (cost-benefit analysis). Better advertisement to allow them to take the initiative (organize themselves and seek out <i>PCI's</i> help). An ongoing rural appraisal in strategic villages (to be like sentinel sites) in which assessments can be made continuously. Systematically	

	collect this assessments in short concept papers to have ready for donors or for small pilot projects. This requires reaching less villages but increasing the quality per village.	
<i>Parivartan, India</i>	Need more time for community entry.	
<i>Parivartan, India</i>	I would like to get more information and analysis from the social map and compare with secondary information available.	
<i>Parivartan, India</i>	Catch younger female age groups (15 to 18 yr old girls) delay the age of marriage, delay first birth, increase interval between births.	
<i>Parivartan, India</i>	Transition process to be insisted during community entry as part of project sustainability mechanism	
<i>LAUNCH, Liberia</i>	Managing community expectations was a problem. Communities wanted more activities outside the scope of LAUNCH. Communication was not well organized so this led to misinformation and hopes rising about unrelated project ideas. PCI staff must be trained on the scope of the project and should consistently share a similar message about the scope of the project.	PCI staff should know where the community is and where it wants to be in the allotted amount of time for the project. Clear objectives on the end goals are necessary.
<i>LAUNCH, Liberia</i>	Late starting WASH. Not a unified entry process which would have been better.	
<i>Njira, Malawi</i>	Activities should be a continuous process. Constant adjustment is needed. Community entry should not be one time but continuous. Involve local government at all levels of entry.	With GIS/tech to compare information to community analysis. Use tech to show community about progress. Ask community about how community entry should be done.
<i>Njira, Malawi</i>	No true strategy for entry and a lack of systematic assessment.	Sustainability and community entry need to be done together. Entry point and ownership need

		to be together. Ownership also needs to be defined better.
<i>SOLUCION TB</i> , Mexico	Nothing really. Identify readiness more properly. Engage other NGOs better.	
<i>MESA</i> , Nicaragua	<p>In agreement with any country or ministry, make clear established agreement and responsibilities of stakeholders, at all levels, ensuring that these are disseminated before the entrance to a community project.</p> <p>Not try to cover as many communities or entirely in a first stage of the project with so few resources and in an unfamiliar area where it will run the project. So it is better to work with more geographical areas defined goals unknown to later be adding more communities based on experience is gained. Thus better results and impacts are obtained in the target community.</p> <p>Strengthening the institutions or allied organizations is vital for the successful implementation of the project, allowing everything to flow consistently.</p>	<p>The lineament with the ministry of education to regional and municipal levels were not well defined or were not very clear, because there was great resistance to the entrance of the project.</p> <p>The lack of promotion of the project and the executing agency at the regional level hampered the project ownership by the community and the Ministry of Education, by ignorance of the actions to be undertaken with this project and the role of PCI as the implementing organization.</p> <p>The amount of technical allocated for 100% attendance of schools was rather low in relation to the number of schools to be served, preventing further assistance to them and more systematically; no community access or geographic dispersion of schools was considered.</p>
<i>Food for Education (FFE) Phase I</i> , Nicaragua	No, would do the same thing over.	A cyclical pattern of feedback to evaluation, to planning to feedback needs to be better. When staff are embedded in the community, they should be gathering continuous feedback.
<i>Food for Education (FFE) Phase I</i> , Tanzania	Better mechanisms to find the most vulnerable in the communities. More time needed for fuller needs assessment and planning. Systematic way to capture feedback from	In these development projects there are natural power imbalances due to donor driven goals that prioritize donor's perceived community needs versus the community's actual

	community. Sustainability needs to be considered seriously from the very beginning.	needs. Therefore creating mutual respect in a genuine way is needed and that requires releasing control of project so community can have ownership.
<i>Food for Education (FFE) Phase II, Tanzania</i>	Transition process to be insisted during community entry as part of project sustainability mechanism	
<i>Food for Education (FFE) Phase II, Tanzania</i>	Gaps in time between entry and implementation. Improve the planning process.	
<i>CPPC, Zambia</i>	The period of engaging the church leaders and community was too short. Engage the church leaders first, then let them meet the church members without PCI to establish confidence. Then let PCI get involved.	
<i>DHAPP, Zambia</i>	Engage the private sector (external stakeholders) like mining companies. Link the communities to these business to get them to create innovative solutions.	

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