

MEMORANDUM

To: Lunches for Learning supporters
Date: June 10, 2020
Re: L4L options during the COVID-19 Shutdown in Honduras



Overview

Because of the COVID-19 situation, all schools in Honduras remain closed for the foreseeable future. There is no indication that schools will re-open anytime soon. The children in L4L-sponsored schools have gone without lunches for more than 12 consecutive weeks now.

With no end in sight, and with the kids in the L4L program receiving no lunches for an extended period of time, we are motivated by concern for the kids who should be receiving lunches each day. As the L4L staff, we see two options at present: (1) maintain The Status Quo and be ready to re-supply schools once they re-open; and (2) implement A Stopgap Measure. The pros and cons of each are detailed in this document.

Key Point – As of this date, the COVID-19 nationwide “lockdown” in Honduras remains in place. L4L staff have received permission to move around our Valle Department communities as needed, but Hondurans in general have not been given the “all clear” to freely travel outside of their homes.

Option 1 – The Status Quo

This essentially would be a continuation of the approach taken thus far in 2020, confirmed by our staff in March 2020, in April 2020 and again in May 2020. With this approach, we would remain true to our original founding by waiting until schools re-open and immediately re-supply all schools as quickly as possible. Under this approach, food would not be provided outside of the traditional L4L daily school lunch model.

Pros:

- Remaining true to our original founding maintains a high degree of integrity in the way the L4L program is deployed long-term.
- We are able to maintain the well-established consistency L4L has come to be known for. Current practice allows us to effectively manage food quantities and maintain full accountability (students, parents, and principals).
- This allows us to continue doing what we have done efficiently for 15 years without potentially confusing our constituents by completely changing our methods.
- While this option does not address the hunger these kids are experiencing currently, our Rapid Response plan is ready-to-deploy immediately when schools re-open – guaranteeing quick re-supply for all schools in the program.
- Ensures that L4L funds are utilized for feeding students only and helps to ensure the long-term financial feasibility of the program.

Cons:

- Children traditionally served by L4L would continue to struggle with daily hunger – until the Honduran Government allows schools to re-open.

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Option 2 – A Stopgap Measure

Because this COVID-related shutdown seems to have no end in sight, and the kids we typically serve are again struggling for daily nutrition, we have considered the possibility of **a one-time delivery of food to the communities currently in the L4L program**. The proposal includes the following:

- A limited menu (rice, beans and corn only) would be provided to every family in each community. It would not be limited to only those families with kids in the school, but for all members of each community. We would include families with school-aged children, grown children, pre-school-aged children only, and even families with no children at all.
- Food would be packaged into family-sized quantities and would be intended for all families in each community where L4L currently has a presence.
- School principals would be recruited to coordinate the distribution of food in their own communities. In cases where principals live too far away from the school, L4L staff would coordinate food distribution in those locations.

Pros:

- Children traditionally served by L4L would receive at least some food through this one-time outreach.
- We would be assisting our school communities during a time of need ... contributing to the health of the school children even though their education is on-hold.
- This would give us the satisfaction of taking action – actually doing something – rather than continuing to simply wait.

Cons:

- The concept of “handouts” is contrary to the L4L mission. The entire process would be outside of our wheelhouse. It could conceivably change the way L4L is viewed in the region.
- Any food we hand out, though intended as a one-time effort, would likely create an expectation among many in these communities. In other words, if we do this once, we might be creating the expectation that we will do this again a month or two down the road ... even if we clearly state that this is a one-time-only initiative.
- Food distribution would be difficult to regulate and manage in some larger communities ... and also in communities which are located near communities where we do not yet have a presence. Word travels fast, but we simply can't feed everyone everywhere.
- It would be inconsiderate and appear as if L4L were “playing favorites” if we deliver only to the families of kids in the school. We would need to provide food for the whole community in every case. If we were talking about 1 or 2 schools, this would not be difficult, but we're talking about 46 different school communities. We have no idea what the cost would be for the volume of food needed.
- While the menu would be limited to only a few items (no milk, oil, or sugar, for example), the additional cost of feeding entire communities – at a time when charitable giving is down due to economic uncertainty in the US – could jeopardize L4L's long-term financial outlook.
- We have no way of knowing how many individuals are in each family. This would make it difficult to determine the amounts of each food item we would need to purchase.
- While our Honduran L4L team members do not believe that their safety would be in jeopardy, the possibility exists that desperately hungry people from nearby communities may show up asking for food. This would require that we either turn people away, or that we increase the amount of food purchased to cover this possibility. Because of the number of communities involved, this could increase our costs further or create potential safety concerns for our L4L team members.

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- Potential damage to L4L's reputation is a significant, although intangible, impact. If L4L is viewed as playing favorites, or doesn't provide enough food in the minds of the recipients, or comes across as inconsistent in the application of the stopgap measure, we could do irreparable damage to our ability to effectively serve the area in the future.

Conclusion

It is our conclusion that we should remain with Option 1 – the Status Quo – until Honduran schools are re-opened and we can implement our Rapid Response plan and enable schools to immediately resume school lunches.

We find ourselves facing an unprecedented challenge. While our hearts are breaking for the kids we want to be receiving lunches right now, we also feel it is incumbent upon us to maintain the integrity of the L4L school lunch program and the safety of our L4L team members.

To implement a large-scale food distribution program like Option 2, there are too many variables to consider for the number of communities and the number of people we would need to serve. Deviating from our well-established, well-managed and well-coordinated school-day model includes potential risks which are simply too significant to ignore. Even though the effort would be well-intentioned and altruistic, any outreach which is perceived by recipients or other community neighbors as being unfair, inconsistent, or insufficient could negatively impact the very strong reputation in the region which L4L has built over the past 15 years.

Further, the cost increases associated with large-scale food purchases – particularly at a time when L4L revenues are significantly lower than normal – could negatively impact L4L's strong financial position and our ability to maintain the L4L school lunch program long-term. We simply cannot risk L4L's ability to serve these communities long-term because of the uncertain financial impact of a short-term initiative.

Finally, it is our decision that the long-term benefits of maintaining the integrity of our program's 15-year tradition outweigh the potential short-term benefits of one-time food deliveries to the school communities currently in the L4L program. Because we have grown to serve more than 2,000 students in 46 different schools now, our program is simply not built for a system of providing unstructured food handouts in any efficient manner to this many communities over such a wide geographic area.

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