

How to grow without losing our essence?

Picnic de Palabras Case Study

1. Background information



Picnic de Palabras started in Bogotá, during June 2012, to foster reading in families through sharing meaningful experiences using quality children's books. Why? Because for us reading has the potential to open our minds and hearts, to imagine new worlds and characters that inspire us to take action and to become the main character of our own lives. Reading inspires us to dream, thus, this activity is necessary in a country where children's books are expensive and where there is a gap of cognitive development between families that have the resources and those who do not.

Colombia is an example of a country where reading is “mandatory”. Yet, its true potential, the enriching impact it can make on children's lives and their families, often slips through the cracks. This challenge made us wonder: “how might we cultivate a broader understanding of reading in parents and teachers, not as an obligation, but as a source of joy?”. The answer, we realized, was nestled within our own experiences: reading aloud children's books with our parents. Then another question arose, where do we find our target families and our answer was at public spaces like parks and squares.¹

1.1 MVP: What happens if we go to a park and invite others to read with us?

It all began with an initial reading in the heart of a public park. Who was going to be our audience? The daughters of an ice-cream vendor, who traded the day's usual fare for the rich flavors of children's literature.

After the initial reading experience with the ice cream seller's daughters in a public park, Picnic de Palabras decided to focus on this location rather than moving to different places. This experience revealed the project's versatility and the importance of quality children's books in promoting reading among families. So, success led to the development of Picnic de Palabras as a brand centered around the concept of "eating amazing stories". After six months of iterations in Colombia, the initiative was replicated in Monterrey, Mexico and other cities and countries

¹ [The original story of Picnic de Palabras](#)

joined in through social media and common connections, such as in Quito, Buenos Aires, and Rio de Janeiro.

Yet, back home in Bogota, our success bred a challenge. Public and private institutions began mirroring our idea. While being copied indicated the project's relevance and impact on promoting reading in communities. It also raised concerns about developing a sustainable business model if others could freely replicate the concept. This situation prompted the team to reflect on the value of our work over the first six years and recognize the social impact we had achieved in various reading-related aspects.

Developing a seemingly simple methodology required understanding both: the local and global social needs around the topic. Recognizing the value of reading as a cross-cutting sphere with a direct impact on children's cognitive development and its implications for a country's economy was key.² Reading practice has been linked to poverty reduction, improved well-being, soft skills, creativity, and mental health, among other benefits. This understanding highlighted the importance of Picnic de Palabras' role in promoting reading practices and fostering a positive impact on individuals and society as a whole.

Cognitive skills of young children are an important determinant of earnings later on in life. Cognitive skills are not fixed but can be influenced through investment in preschool training, education at school, but also through parental efforts. Previous studies have stressed the importance of early life interventions in the cognitive development of children. We contribute to this literature by showing the importance of parental reading to young children. (G. Kalb and JC Van Ours, 2014).

1.2 Picnic de Palabras Community: Social Impact + Local Innovation

The Picnic initiative empowers people in Colombia and other countries to become social leaders³ in their communities, using reading as a tool to bridge the gap between those with access to books and those without. The project fosters a collective reading community that unites people across borders around the love for children's books. The Picnic methodology is simple yet adaptable, allowing for customization to meet different needs, circumstances, and local cultures. In Monterrey, Mexico, the project had a profound impact allowing the transformation of a park from a site of violence to a place of hope and healing. Tere Farfan, a social leader, used the Picnic methodology to bring peace to her community and even presented her experience at an important conference.⁴ She organized special Picnics with

² The World Bank et al. (2022). The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update, conference edition, June 23, 2022.

<https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/e52f55322528903b27f1b7e61238e416-0200022022/original/Learning-poverty-report-2022-06-21-final-V7-0-conferenceEdition.pdf>

³ Picnic's social leaders are persons who do meaningful actions into their communities; provide wellbeing with their particular initiatives; facilitates spaces for community encounters, and inspire others through their example.

⁴ Tere Farfán Ibby Mexico Lecture 2014

https://docs.google.com/document/d/11chivsxzos2m55nLk_Odfudk8rMmdhWA/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=106166839292833567658&rtpof=true&sd=true

books in various languages, providing families and children with the opportunity to experience reading aloud in different languages and further fostering a sense of unity and understanding.

1.3 A powerful reading community

Picnic de Palabras evolved from a simple invitation to read, blooming into a community that recognized and shared the transformative power of stories, especially when faced with dire circumstances. This was brought into sharp relief when an earthquake ravaged a remote area of Ecuador near the Pacific Ocean in March 2016. Emilia Andrade, a Picnic leader in Ecuador, reached out. She yearned to bring the healing power of books and the Picnic experience to this hard-hit community.

The project faced financial challenges as it operated on a voluntary basis, but during the Bogota Book Fair in April 2016, Picnic de Palabras called upon its network of authors, illustrators, and publishing houses. Remarkably, many responded generously, providing more than 100 children's books, which would have cost around \$1,200 USD. Dipacho, a Colombian writer and illustrator, volunteered to travel with the books during his trip to Ecuador, delivering them to the community in need.⁵

This chapter in our story demonstrated the power of reading to create a network and the value of Picnic de Palabras' work, establishing it as a credible and impactful brand in the realm of reading practices and children's books. The social impact achieved was a result of people connecting with the purpose and generously contributing their resources to help those in need. The lesson learned was that reading knows no borders when there is a strong network of support, emphasizing the importance of finding innovative ways to deliver meaningful reading experiences and increase social impact for all stakeholders involved.

2. Problem

2.1 Problem description

Following the social impact we had generated through Picnic in the last 11 years, our next imperative is to forge sustainable avenues to ensure the longevity of our mission. Currently, Picnic stands at a juncture that demands the cementing of its global footprint for assured growth and magnified social impact.

Having in mind that our activities in 11 countries haven't been sustained up to now, we are asking ourselves: how to solidify our existing NGO alliance base as a channel to enlarge our footprint and to deliver our Picnic de Palabras services worldwide? We needed to know from our partners and their initiatives' experiences, in which ways can we support their actions, and their most relevant achievements across these years, we achieve this with a survey.

⁵ Picnic de Palabras Blog: [Cuando la tierra se mueve hay que volver a soñar juntos](#) and [Un Picnic de Palabras que acelera el corazón](#)

This query is the linchpin of our growth and execution strategy, and to answer it effectively, we believe it needs to be dissected into three fundamental sub-questions, driven by the feedback from our survey:

- a) How to reinforce relationships and trust with NGO partners with whom we haven't interacted for years?
- b) How to support our NGO partners when they represent our brand in their territory?
- c) How can we prioritize NGO partner relationships to better support the ones that have a strategic role in our scaling and execution?

2.2 Survey questions and its results

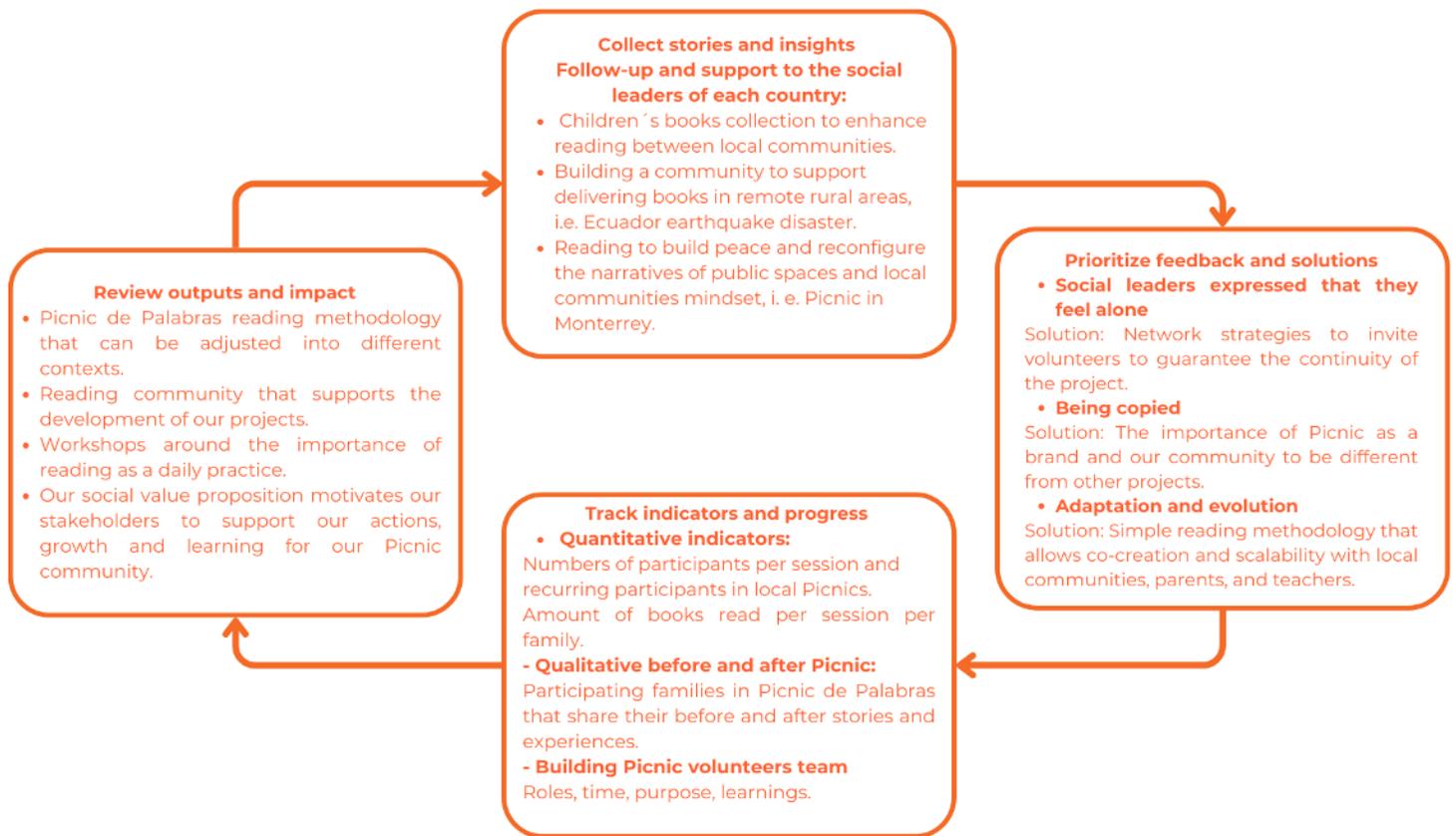
- What significant experiences would you like to highlight?
- How do you need us to support you in maintaining the continuity of Picnic?
- How can we support you to make Picnic in your country a success?
- Would you like to be part of the new stage of Picnic de Palabras from your country?

Our partners' answers highlighted their own challenges and, at the same time, possible solutions, through their own experiences. These allowed us to understand our organic growth and the relevance of our methodology iteration for enhancing family reading in each of these countries.

We found that the pandemic times was a turning point for many of them. However, from Colombia, it opened up new possibilities that have allowed us to evolve and expand our social impact beyond just parks, supporting access to children's literature to bridge the gaps in rural areas through alliances with other Colombian NGOs.

2.3 Learning loop methodology

Based on the methodology stated in the SBC 103 course section 3 Capital Development, we use the **learning loop methodology** to collect and organize information provided from our different Picnic social leaders and their chapters. We want to stand out three challenges we have found to transform our tracking engagement to strengthen our social impact growth and scalability.



The following section “3. Solution Proposed” has been developed based on these survey results that have been received during the week of July 24th, 2023.

3. Solution Proposed

Following our survey results, we want to highlight the importance of the simplicity of the Picnic de Palabras methodology to be replicated in other countries. And, at the same time, how each volunteer teams adapted under their own local needs. But longevity requires more than adaptability; it's our Picnic network that truly fuels sustained success. As we embark on this new phase, those who joined us in this journey are curious about our next steps. Their continued involvement is not just welcomed, it's essential. Inviting them to partake in shaping our sustainable, globally impactful future.

3.1 How to reinforce relationships and trust with Picnic NGO partners with whom we haven't interacted for years?

Our interactions with Picnic social leaders have been sporadic, centered around specific initiatives like the writing of a book on the Picnic de Palabras experience. This contact early in the year helped us touch base with the majority of them, and it was a good excuse to know how

everything was. This engagement reconnected us with our network, giving us the possibility of the survey questions and answers, and the new trajectories we are developing from Colombia, having in mind, the best ways to scale them.

Following our survey in July, we've decided our first step is to introduce a Picnic Program Manager to our team that supports all the actions related with Picnic implementation, volunteers, and allies. We are going to create with this person a strategy to present to our social leaders our new lines of work and the books collection. In this way, we could find ways with them that allowed us to reinforce our relationship in the short and in the long term. We are planning to call for meetings once per month, to follow their needs and share our actions, as well as to support the design of new projects to reach grants in each country, in order to fortify their process and social impact in their own communities.

In addition, finding new ways and opportunities to have alliances with local NGOs and organizations to implement Picnic methodology in different spheres like public and private schools and Universities and rural communities is part of the plan too, among others.

3.1.1 Picnic de Palabras Ecuador: Case of Success



In Ecuador, since the beginning, the Picnic team under Emilia Andrade leadership showed us a full commitment with Picnic's initiative and methodology. As they had their own books, they created their own library-car-box with wheels which they secure in a place behind the park, to guarantee having the books for each picnic. They also painted it with a Red Ridding Hood, on one side, and the Wolf, on the other.

After all of these years where they have had the Picnic brand, they have positioned it in different ways around a country where in terms of laws, there are not any special regulations about reading promotion nor of books to support those who need them more. This social and local needs allows Picnic to flourish and inspire this team to go further. They create their own structure to reclute volunteers every certain time through social media. They train the volunteers, and until now they have replicated the Picnic experience in more than 40 places in Ecuador. This is an example of an organization that new how to organize and work as a collective team. Thanks to this structure, other volunteers could come and they are now the ones who lead the initiative as part of a NGO. They have developed projects, won grants, and articulated with universities programs to have students learn how to read with others.

All this development is an example for us and the other Picnics, to value the simplicity of a project and the wings it had at the beginning to be adapted to local needs and be a powerful solution. We admired what they have achieved over these years, and they inspired us to understand their own model, how they work together and how we can enrich our own network with their experiences.

3.2 How to support our NGO partners when they represent our brand in their territory?

Our strategy is to understand our NGO partners' recent needs and requirements, so we can work together in finding new ways to support our mutual process. For example, there is a common problem about recruiting volunteers to guarantee the reading experiences. In the case of Ecuador, they developed a strategy to invite and hold a strong volunteer team, which allowed them to constitute as an NGO. This successful experience can give us, as Picnic team, the knowledge to improve in our own communities.

In addition, we are going to present and discuss with them our value proposition and brand to be differentiated from other NGO projects. We understood the importance of our brand and the experience behind it, so we are creating a marketing team with advisors, who are going to give us a line to improve our social media channels to reach more families around the world to join our community and support our social and economic growth.

We also want to go further and explain to our NGO partners our marketing materials for brand awareness in localities and have documents to allow grant requests easily done by NGO partners to their respective financial supports.

After the pandemic times, we have learned the importance of digital platforms, like YouTube and Instagram, as channels to deliver relevant messages about reading and its benefits to share with parents and reading mediators. We have also learned with the design of special content related to our first books collection, to show how to activate our books at home, by providing reading tips and, in the long term, by designing training courses for mediators, teachers, and parents. This will be possible because we are going to have in our team a community manager that will help us to engage the worldwide community.

3.2.1 Peruvian NGO: A translation in Quechua

As an example of how we can articulate with other NGOs, we are creating alliances with our books and methodology. For example, we have been working with a Peruvian NGO that is interested in translating our books collection in Quechua. This is an opportunity to apply for the [Colombian Government Grants](#) which are interested in supporting national books circulation in other languages and countries. For this NGO, our books are relevant because they fit with their own social proposal and their budget, and also because they provide quality children's books and meaningful reading experiences to indigenous families who live in a poverty circle and have a lack of access to reading and books. Being aligned in the same social purpose will allow the success of the initiative and it will also fortify our brand's message to support reading development across the region and work with our partner in the region.

3.3 How can we prioritize NGO partner relationships to better support the ones that have a strategic role in our scaling and execution?

Based on all this experience, we are designing a franchise model that ensures resource management to sustain the project both in Colombia and other countries. In 2023, we developed an MVP that included the publication and distribution of high-quality children's books with a financing model that guarantees the delivery and awareness of these collections in different rural areas of Colombia.

Following our survey answers and understanding the potential of working in each Picnic chapter, we are going to develop the following relationships levels to enhance and empower our whole team through:

- **Sponsorship Level - Picnic de Palabras experiences portfolio for companies**
 - Company as sponsor to support the implementation of the experience
 - Creation of custom books
 - Reading experiences for employees and families

- **Silver Level - NGO that creates a Picnic experience**
 - Brand name + Picnic's methodology = social impact

- **Gold Level - Word Picnic Franchise**
 - Trademark rights session x defined time.
 - Training and accreditation of mediators under the Picnic de Palabras methodology.
 - Sale of translation and distribution rights for the Arribabajo collection.
 - Advice and co-creation of new collections under the endorsement of the brand.

- **Platinum Level - Sale and distribution of books**
 - TOMs model for the sale of the Arribabajo collection for the distribution of books in rural areas.
 - Special sale of collections, NGOs, libraries, schools, public sector.
 - Trademark rights session x defined time.
 - Training and accreditation of mediators under the Picnic de Palabras methodology.
 - Sale of translation and distribution rights for the Arribabajo collection.

3.3.1 MVP of new alliances

We are working with a Brazilian organization that has its focus on sustainability, education, and tourism. When the leader knew about Picnic and our books collection, she wanted to join the whole proposal to translate the books and deliver the collection in Brazil rural areas. The size of Brazil's market and their reading needs represent a milestone for us to start developing strategic

alliances, so we can work with Brazilian organizations together to become a regional reference in terms of social NGOs who can gather private, public and social organizations to achieve our social goal.

- Designing the steps for Brazil's strategy:
 - a. Designing the project + budget + books' rights + allies
 - b. MVP execution: translating and publishing collections + picnic experience
 - c. Business model + escalating the project
 - d. Reaching our social goal
 - e. Working with them together - were all we win and we are like a society where I give my know - how + books and they share their knowledge + they work to find the grants to pay and the communities to implement the project

4. Conclusion

From Picnic de Palabras, we have evolved to strengthen our current and future channels to deliver our value proposition and increase our social impact by:

- Articulating and supporting Picnics' leaders in other countries through the design of strategies and project formulation to ensure their sustainability and social impact over time.
- Creating a franchise models to scale Picnic de Palabras' editorial, awareness, and social impact lines in other countries.
- Designing workshops for reading mediators such as teachers, parents, youth, social leaders, librarians, among others.
- Designing and translating Picnic de Palabras' collections.

Thus, we began Picnic de Palabras to sensitize families in public parks. Thanks to our 11 years of experience, our commitment is to raise awareness among families so that they themselves create spaces for meaningful reading in their homes, fostering imagination for the creation of new stories. Throughout this process, we are expanding and strengthening our local and international reading community through a digital strategy that we are sharing on our social media platforms.

Until now, this experience has demonstrated the power of reading to create a network and the value of Picnic de Palabras' work, establishing it as a credible and impactful brand in the realm of reading practices and children's books worldwide. The social impact achieved was a result of people connecting with the purpose and generously contributing their resources to help those in need. The lesson learned was that reading knows no borders when there is a strong network of support, emphasizing the importance of finding innovative ways to deliver meaningful reading experiences and increase social impact for all stakeholders involved.

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6. Appendix

Picnic de Palabras Survey results:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1IlaWCiKEdV3nZjtqZMVYIpQsAa8KdnD62ucCVSHpmiQ/edit#gid=0>