

# The Peaks *and* Pitfalls of Co-Creation:

Observations and Lessons from  
SCS Global's Co-Creation Experiences  
2018-2020

Updated December 2020

“There is no one-size fits all plan for co-creation.”<sup>1</sup>

Engaging stakeholders with different perspectives and skills to identify problems, set goals, plan programs, and collaborate in bringing about positive change is a fundamental principle of good development and has long been required of USAID projects. The concept of

“co-creation,” with a focus on Activity design, is also not new.<sup>2</sup> However, in recent years the approach has been greatly expanded to a wider range of programs, types of partners, and moments in the program cycle.

This paper shares co-creation key questions, experiences, lessons, and recommendations from 2018 to 2020 by the Strengthening Civil Society Globally (SCS Global) Leader with Associates (LWA) Cooperative Agreement, funded by USAID's Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights, and Government (DRG Center). SCS Global, implemented by FHI 360, includes 18 Associate Awards. In eight of these Awards to date, FHI 360 joined with respective USAID Missions to participate in or facilitate co-creation activities (see Annex). As such, this paper is written from the Implementing Partner's (IP) perspective, to add to the collective literature about co-creation, co-design, and related multi-stakeholder processes.<sup>3</sup>

## **BOX I: WHAT IS CO-CREATION?**

“Co-creation is a *design approach* that brings people together to collectively produce a mutually valued outcome, using a *participatory process* that assumes some degree of *shared power and decision making*. It is a time-limited process that focuses on generating a specific outcome. Co-creation is a technique that can be used at various points throughout the Program Cycle.”

– USAID Discussion Note: *Co-Creation Additional Help*

1. Discussion Note: *Co-Creation Additional Help* (USAID, 2017), p. 2.

2. USAID notes that earlier co-creation generally involved the private sector, host governments, and other bilateral and multilateral organizations (vs. CSOs and grass roots stakeholders) (Ibid., p. 2).

3. USAID's Discussion Note "... does not distinguish between 'co-creation' and 'co-design' and uses 'co-creation' as an umbrella term describing collaborative design and development of USAID activities." Similarly, this paper uses the terms co-creation and co-development interchangeably. The term multi-stakeholder process or anything similar may also be used; but if the latter is intended to refer to a specific process or methodology, it is made clear in the instance.

The co-creation experiences highlighted in this document took place at three distinct Activity “moments”: prior to executing an Associate Award (pre-award phase), immediately after executing an Associate Award (within 60 days post award), and during implementation of an Associate Award. In this last instance (Jamaica), co-creation focused on the design of specific interventions<sup>4</sup> at multiple points during the program. Another country (Kenya) facilitated both pre-award and post-award co-creation activities. Although the experiences in these eight countries varied greatly and provide insights about harnessing stakeholder participation in quite different development contexts, the examples are all specific to, and possibly because of, the flexibility accorded by an LWA.<sup>5</sup> Because an LWA by definition restricts eligibility for new Associate Awards, Missions and the implementing partner may have open exchanges of ideas prior to award.

As defined by USAID (see Box 1: What is Co-Creation?), the main objective of co-creation is *design*—and design focused on a *specific outcome* during a limited time (e.g., a program description, initial program workplan, intervention strategy). However, in each SCS Global example, the process of co-creating also brought significant value in itself—although such an outcome are more difficult to measure. (See discussion of Outcomes.)

Below we present a set of four overarching questions that emerged from our review of SCS Global co-creation experiences in which FHI 360 and SCS Global consortium partners participated between 2018 and 2020. The questions are followed by discussion of specific co-creation experiences and lessons drawn from them. The paper concludes with a set of recommendations for consideration for future co-creation efforts, and a note about co-creation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 1 Are all participants—including Mission(s), local partner(s), and implementing partner(s)—aligned vis-à-vis the objectives for a co-creation effort and how a co-creation process will unfold?

The specific goal of a co-creation process—and especially any limitations or requirements—must be clear to all from the start. Do stakeholders (e.g., donor, IPs, local partners) have the same vision of what the process is intended to achieve? Are the parameters understood?

Alignment of expectations is needed on two planes: internal alignment among USAID/USG actors, and alignment between USAID and all other actors.

The co-creation process for **SCS Kenya** was unique in that it included both a pre-award exercise and a post-award exercise for the Safeguarding Democratic Space in Kenya (**SADES-K**) program. The pre-award phase in the summer of 2018 involved only USAID and FHI 360, but the post-award process began with citizen-engagement forums in four regions of the country. For each forum, FHI 360 convened open conversations with civil-society leaders about local challenges in the governance arena and recommendations to address them. In October of 2018, FHI 360 then hosted more than 50 participants from different sectors (civil society, government, media, and private sector), including select regional participants, in a three-day co-creation workshop in Nairobi. This workshop had two purposes. First, extensive participant contributions informed the strategic and programmatic direction of SADES-K, including identifying the technical and geographic focus areas for the SADES-K grants program.<sup>6</sup> Second, participants were guided through a project-design process so they could “co-create” their own project frameworks that could be incorporated into grant proposals for submission to SADES-K (or other donors). The unique, dual co-creation experience—co-creating to inform our program, and assisting participants in co-creating their own projects—was well received by all involved.

4. Interventions during the course of a project’s implementation may take many forms, including, for example, grants competitions and multi-stakeholder processes.

5. A Leader With Associate (LWA) award involves the issuance of a Leader Award that covers a specified worldwide activity. The Leader Award includes language that allows a Mission or other office to make one or more separate awards, called Associate Awards, to the Leader Award recipient without using restricted eligibility. [www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov)

6. The Kenyan participants highlighted, for example, governance challenges and potential solutions to those challenges, which helped orient our advocacy with government and our grant programming for CSOs. Also, for example, advocacy for PBO Act implementation was national in scope, but grants were also issued to address local conflicts in West Pokot and Isiolo counties.

At the end of Year 1, SADES-K awarded 10 grants as part of program implementation. The grants to CSOs were designed to support three of the program's four objectives: to strengthen Kenya's national dialogue and governance structure (governance reform), to strengthen social and ethnic cohesion, and to protect civic and democratic space. CSOs were asked to collaborate with government institutions, other CSOs or networks, and design (if practicable) projects that addressed more than one of SADES-K's objectives. CSOs that were led by or served women or vulnerable populations were encouraged to apply. Five grants recipients had participated in the co-creation workshop, including several consortia that had worked on proposals together. Some CSOs that did not receive grants were disappointed, but it was made clear from the start the grant process was competitive. Some CSOs felt they had been invited in during co-creation, then shut out when they did not receive a grant, as SADES-K did not have activities planned outside the grants to engage the CSOs that had participated in the co-creation process. The lesson for FHI 360 has been the importance of continuous communication with groups who have felt invested in a collaborative process. Active co-creation may be "time-limited," but programs evolve in response to many factors—and participant buy-in (and expectations) cannot be turned "on and off." SADES-K is now building virtual networks for CSOs—including CSO stakeholders we have engaged at different stages of the project, such as co-creation—to mitigate the communication challenges mentioned above and has expanded capacity development in order to further strengthen these relationships.

**SCS Jamaica** co-creation experiences took place twice during the implementation phase of the award. The Local Partner Development (LPD) Activity strengthens collaboration among different actors to prevent youth crime and violence in communities. A Whole System in the Room (WSR) workshop—a component of the USAID- and FHI 360-developed SCALE+ multisectoral stakeholder-engagement methodology that empowers participants to collaboratively identify actions to address complex development challenges—was conducted in one region of the country (Clarendon) to plan initiatives and begin developing post-award grant proposals in 2019. During the co-creation process in February 2020 in another part of the country (Kingston), LPD took care to be transparent about its expectations, including

the limits of what LPD could fund.<sup>7</sup> During this process, collaborators were able to work efficiently within the prescribed limits to come up with proposals that were in line with LPD's expectations but also played to their organizational strengths and interests.

A pre-award co-creation experience with USAID/Cambodia illustrates the importance of internal USAID and/or USG alignment about the parameters of a new award. The **SCS Cambodia** program focuses on social accountability in a very challenging political environment where there is limited room for civil society and donors to maneuver. The pre-award co-creation process took place from late March until September 2019. USAID hosted a co-creation workshop in Phnom Penh involving USAID, FHI 360, Internews, DAI, and approximately 40 local stakeholders in June 2019 to generate local buy-in for the general approach of the program. Beyond general buy-in, however, internal (USAID and FHI 360) discussions about two important issues continued throughout the multi-month process. One focused on differing opinions within the USAID Mission about the extent to which the new award should align with an existing government-mandated, World Bank-funded Plan for Social Accountability Framework (ISAF) in Cambodia. Discussion between USAID and FHI 360 also continued after the co-creation workshop about the geographic reach of the program. Both of these issues were generally resolved prior to the signing of the Associate Award in late September 2019.

Given the political sensitivity of these issues, internal Mission uncertainty may have been unavoidable. However, resources could have been used more efficiently if FHI 360 had received clearer guidance from the Mission with regard to geographic reach and alignment with ISAF earlier. USAID ultimately instructed FHI 360 which SCS Global consortium members to partner with (and what their shares of the budget would be); these preferences were not clear at the start of the process. The sense that parameters were changeable was of course felt by the international partners (in particular, DAI and Internews).

7. There were high expectations from participants that LPD would provide funding for community-renewal projects, which had specifically been allowed under an earlier USAID project implemented by another organization. This led some participants to assume that construction projects might be possible under LPD. However, the SCS Jamaica cooperative agreement contained a standard provision prohibiting construction projects and, while we addressed it during co-creation sessions, we learned that setting up the clear(er) framework/dealing with expectations earlier would have been helpful.

## 2 Are there limits to the potential cost of pre-award co-creation? (And on the flip side, does co-creation make award budgeting easier?)

For an implementing partner, the high costs and difficulty of predicting the staff time and resources necessary for a co-creation process can be challenging. Two SCS programs (**Cambodia and Indonesia**) required FHI 360 and its partners to invest heavily in pre-award co-creation processes without a clear understanding up front of what the ultimate costs would be (or any expectation of reimbursement).<sup>8</sup>

The pre-award co-creation process for **SCS Indonesia** lasted from about October 2018 to February 2019; the Mission and SCS Global hosted numerous stakeholder-engagement sessions to co-create and refine the Program Description (PD) for the **MADANI project**. The process involved TDYs and/or travel for multiple individuals (including the proposed chief of party and deputy chief of party, requiring consultancy arrangements) to accompany a USAID team to a number of the country's islands. This was a large investment of time and money—for both FHI 360 (which spent \$183,997, including travel, FHI 360 staff time, and consultant LOE) and USAID.

FHI 360 and its partners DAI and Internews spent significant resources (\$228,765) for the pre-award co-creation experience in **Cambodia**. In addition to sending participants to the co-creation workshop in Phnom Penh, the three organizations absorbed the costs of a four-month development effort that included 13 separate proposal submissions requested by the Mission. As is true for all the co-creation efforts and traditional application-development efforts, these costs were not covered by project funds.

For the regional **Networks for Peace Award (N4P)** pre-award co-creation process, the Mission issued a letter confirming that USAID would pay for non-FHI 360 participants from the three participating countries (Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand) that they requested attend the co-creation workshop in Bangkok. These costs were then included in the award budget. However, FHI 360 covered the costs for its own staff who traveled for, and facilitated, the co-creation workshop and meetings with the Regional Development Mission for Asia (RDMA), as well as covering staff LOE for pre-award activities spread over the

period from November 2018 to August 2019, which amounted to \$132,355.

Other stakeholders, particularly local stakeholders, may also be affected by co-creation budget issues, as described in the next section.

On a positive note, the pre-award process can be very helpful in guiding budget development of a final cost application. For example, in **SCS Kenya**, the pre-award co-creation allowed the Mission and SCS Global to come to agreement on the broad parameters for the program and the specifics for post-award co-creation activities for the first 60 days. This made it possible to submit a detailed budget covering the first 60 days and notional budget amounts in other areas that were adjusted once further details of the project were clear.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, during SCS Indonesia's co-design period, FHI 360 was able to share drafts of the full budget for USAID's review and comment. This helped USAID understand up front the cost implications of proposed activities and geographic targeting. As a result of collaborating on the cost application, SCS Global was able to shorten the review time of the final cost application since many of the details were discussed ahead of formal submission.

## 3 How can we make sure the right people are around the table to create an effective co-creation environment, and are some groups more prone to be left out?

Engaging the right representatives/groups is arguably the most important challenge of a co-creation effort.<sup>10</sup> An effective systems approach to any development issue requires getting multiple sectors—and the widest possible array of concerned stakeholders—"in the same room" to share perspectives, strategies, and commitments.

Several SCS programs initially consulted with groups who knew local communities well to determine who should participate in co-creation activities. **SCS Jamaica** formed a steering committee with representatives of organizations involved in preventing crime and violence among youth. The members identified and helped recruit participants for the co-creation retreat. LPD noted the need for specific outreach—as opposed to just an invitation—for some stakeholders.<sup>11</sup>

8. FHI 360 did not at all compromise on the experience to ensure a high-quality design at its conclusion, which meant a healthy investment of resources; not all organizations might be able to do this.

9. SCS Global was also asked to submit a workplan that covered only the first 60 days, with a requirement that an updated workplan covering the remainder of year 1 as well as an AMELP would be submitted at that time based on the co-creation results.

10. Effective facilitation is a close second, or perhaps the first challenge; but the question of the many skills needed for the process falls outside the scope of this paper.

11. For Jamaica's first co-creation experience in Clarendon, we relied on local actors to advise on participants and extend invitations. Based on the lesson learned, for the second co-creation experience in Kingston the program staff undertook much more deliberate outreach.

The **SCS Zambia Youth Lead Activity (YLA)** formed an Advisory Board at project start-up that included youth leaders, civil society activists, and representatives of two ministries. The project was intentionally only partially designed at the time the cooperative agreement was executed, and one of the Board's first tasks was to assist in finalizing the design.

Beneficiaries are a specific category of stakeholders; securing their participation in co-creation may be both difficult and game changing. **SCS Jamaica** conducted co-creation events in two phases, allowing them to refine their approach. They took care to invite representative youth to provide input.

However, those invited to the first workshop were not at particular risk of criminal involvement (the program focus). In contrast, the youth invited to the second co-creation phase were all current or former beneficiaries of core partners' crime-prevention programming: two still had links to gangs and two had previously been affiliated with them. Youth input was positively received by the other participants and provided a reference point for intervention design. Collaborators' responses to a youth panel also gave LPD insight into the differences in their prior experiences with youth at highest risk.

In contrast, **SCS Jamaica** found the most challenging group to involve was the private sector. Although representatives from the private sector were invited to the Clarendon WSR workshop, only one (a steering committee member) ultimately came. This meant that an experiential perspective on how crime in Clarendon affected the business community was largely absent from small breakout groups. In addition, few WSR attendees were able to offer direct access to job or apprenticeship opportunities for at-risk youth as a means to counter the economic challenges they face. On reflection, significant additional outreach would have been needed to entice this sector to attend the workshop as most Jamaican business owners consider crime and violence to be a "social" challenge, to be dealt with by government with some help from civil society, and outside of their purview.

Location and cost of participation are two factors that can affect representation in co-creation activities. **SCS Djibouti**, which hosted a WSR for the Ministry of Education (as well as two WSRs for other ministries), felt they should have involved more elements of Djibouti society—especially, youth and more community-based organizations (such as PTAs). But partly because the events were held in the capital, mostly "big bosses" attended.

Stakeholders who pay their way may do so anticipating a "return on investment" in terms of support for their own activities. In the **SCS Cambodia** experience, one international partner who expended funds to attend the co-creation workshop felt it could then communicate directly with USAID about the program design. That put FHI 360, as the prime, in a difficult position.

**SCS N4P** faced particular challenges given the regional nature of the program (covering Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand) and the very sensitive mandate (promoting intra-and inter-faith harmony in the context of militant religious nationalism). The co-creation workshop in Bangkok gathered USAID personnel from across the region to identify and share their concerns and ideas. It also brought together IPs of existing projects across the three main country contexts relevant to the SCS regional program (e.g., in peacebuilding/reconciliation, civil-society strengthening, media support, and governance), which was useful in identifying where N4P could fill gaps in terms of addressing specific capacity-building needs among relevant local partners and/or supporting regional research efforts and local partner exchange and knowledge sharing. In scoping trips to the target countries after award, FHI 360 was able to build upon the foundation laid at the co-creation event by working with these other IPs to identify potential activities that complement their own or fill needed gaps.

#### What were the primary, secondary, and unexpected outcomes of co-creation experiences?

The eight SCS Associate Awards mentioned so far that engaged in co-creation all achieved the primary outcome as defined by USAID—i.e., *design of a product that is mutually valued*. They used *participatory processes* and most also used *some degree of shared power and decision making*, but the latter varied across awards. And, in some cases, secondary outcomes of co-creation may have been the most important ones.

*In most cases, the outcome was achieved and gained value because of the co-creation process.*

**SCS Jamaica** found that co-creation during implementation allowed for collaborators to introduce their own ideas for approaches to crime prevention, rather than merely validating or augmenting pre-conceived activities. While there was some initial misunderstanding (whether building roads and investing



in electricity infrastructure would contribute to the reduction of crime), by the third day participants were satisfied with proposed interventions, and felt that proposed interventions were developed by them and not dictated by LPD. Although it took time to ensure alignment of objectives between LPD and participants, by the third day, 55 of 57 participants who responded to a post-co-creation survey said the objectives of co-creation had been met.

In **SCS Kenya**, the post-award co-creation process was extremely helpful in drawing out views from the different regions of the country about the challenges to good governance and social cohesion and helped FHI 360 refine its technical and geographic areas of focus in designing a grants program for CSOs throughout the country. The primary value for the Kenyan participants in co-creation was that they were able to design their own projects—some of which were funded by SADES-K. This emphasizes the value of the participatory process: the program completed its design, and the CSOs completed a project-design workshop and had access to a funding source.

During pre-award co-creation for **N4P**, FHI 360 found it especially helpful to have in-person interaction with RDMA staff (USAID lawyers, M&E, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion, communications, and OAA staff) so as to better understand USAID expectations and concerns related to the program's design. Using their inputs and feedback as the basis for developing the proposal, FHI 360 was able to effectively address USAID's expectations and mitigate their concerns in the detailed design of activities rather than having to adjust during implementation, which likely would have required additional staff and budget resources.

For **SCS Cambodia**, the co-creation workshop essentially did not solicit stakeholder input on program design; the Mission's goal was to secure buy-in of stakeholders on an approach that was mostly pre-established. The outcome, regardless of the intention, was buy-in, and importantly, an opportunity for USAID to hear from stakeholders who were doing similar work, including what had been successful and what was challenging.

*In other examples, buy-in became an important secondary outcome of co-creation.*

Buy-in, trust, rapport-building, and goodwill are critical to programs, and these were valuable *secondary* outcomes of co-creation—across stakeholders.

In several programs, FHI 360 noted that co-creation ensured a strong relationship with the AOR and the implementation team. Because the AOR for **SCS Indonesia** was involved in conversations about the activity design for **MADANI** from day one and was involved in all aspects of field research and testing design assumptions, he was able to explain the activity approach and timeline to the Mission Director and other USAID stakeholders confidently—which increased its visibility within the Mission and led to formal pledges of cooperation with other offices flagship projects, allowing the AOR to secure additional funds from offices outside of DRG.

In **Djibouti**, the post-award co-creation process was essential for showing goodwill to the government and demonstrating transparency in launching the *Programme de Renforcement des Capacités des Associations de Djibouti (PRECAD)* with three of its ministries. The first WSR helped the project bring together government officials and civil society in a meaningful way to discuss potential areas of collaboration. Prior to this event, suspicion between the two sectors had prevented such collaboration. As one participant said, “That’s when the project really started.” After holding the Education WSR, other ministries were very willing to discuss holding WSRs and found that they wanted one of their own as well. The WSRs have served as a constructive way for government ministries to see the potential support that civil society can provide them in service delivery.

For **N4P**, the pre-award co-creation exercise resulted in crucial rapport building among key USAID and IP audiences. Co-creation allowed SCS Global to identify hot button issues up front. The group coalesced in ways that built trust among the IP and USAID participants, which has been essential to post-award engagement. For example, participants from USAID Missions in the region were comfortable providing concurrence on the Year 1 work plan, and they also gave valuable feedback on the potential local grantees identified by N4P. Mission support to the project team has been critical to its ability to implement activities across countries effectively and efficiently.

*An immediate (if also secondary) outcome of co-creation has been to instill strong motivation and create momentum for the new program.*

In bringing stakeholders with shared concerns together and outlining a shared way forward, the co-creation process tends to reduce the sense of isolation, motivate action, and instill optimism, and even a sense of agency among participants.

## BOX 2

“Yes, I’m optimistic because we have groups that are passionate and enthusiastic about what is happening in our parish. Once we can get together and share our different ideas, we can make a difference.”

“[Being part of this collaborative process] has helped me a lot. You see firsthand that we aren’t alone. Even if you have an organization it is good to collaborate.”

– Participants following the Jamaica/Clarendon co-creation

Participants in the **SCS Jamaica** Clarendon co-creation process felt emboldened to take action following the workshop. As one participant said, “I think each individual is now motivated to go out in their communities and make it happen.” The feeling persisted through the months it took to get the draft grant proposals ready for evaluation, with representatives noting the importance of partnership even though some group members had dropped out along the way.

The multi-sector Advisory Board launched at the beginning of **SCS Zambia** was excited to be able to provide input in post-award co-creation and helped spread the word about the program. The Advisory Board (as well as the youth mappers who gathered information and recommendations for project interventions) felt invested in the program since they helped create it. This has had a powerful impact on implementation: FHI 360 was able to reach diverse youth, and build momentum for the program quickly. The Advisory Board has also continued to disseminate information about ongoing program opportunities.

### *Building partnerships and networks—and social capital?*

Co-creation begins by bringing groups who are *not necessarily* partners together. But the hope is partnership(s) *will be created* and *will continue* long past the “time-limited outcome” has been achieved. Unquestionably, the SCS co-creations strengthened relationships and created new networks, for at least the short and medium terms.

In **SCS Kenya**, post-award co-creation helped build a broad network of civil society partners and other stakeholders across the regions whom **SADES-K** has continued to engage throughout the program. Some are grantees under the award, while others participate in the program’s virtual networks to discuss governance issues. Still others have created women’s networks to effectively advocate for governance reforms.

## BOX 3

“Partnership is the way to go. ... Now that we have different stakeholders from all over, everyone has responsibilities. So, I see where sustainability comes in because of partnerships.”

– Participants following the Jamaica/Clarendon co-creation

In **SCS Djibouti**, the post-award co-creation led to the formation of four working groups (WGs) with participants from multiple sectors (government, civil society, donors, and CBOs), which each produced a specific action plan. But it has been a challenge to motivate people to attend the WG meetings because the program does not have funding to support the full action plans developed by them. The program can only fund one small piece of each plan. In **SCS Jamaica**, the Clarendon co-creation led to the formation of five WGs with participants from multiple sectors and a specific action plan for each group. There have been some dropouts but, on the whole, group cross-sectoral participation has been robust. SCS Jamaica fully funded all five action plans.

How firm and long-lasting will these relationships be? It is difficult to know at this point in any of these programs.

While USAID has not articulated *increased social capital* per se as one of the goals of co-creation, it recognizes that co-creation offers “a valuable platform for forging new network connections, coalitions that cut across traditional silos, and partnerships to advance specific actions and agenda” (see Box 3). What these programs have clearly seen is *increased social investment as part of program activities*.

## 5 Recommendations

- Pre-award co-creation is worth the time and money if it is designed to get the most useful perspectives at the table to articulate the best program design. If there are overarching considerations yet to be addressed by the mission, then co-creation may not be the most effective way of supporting them.
- Parameters of a co-creation exercise (requirements and limitations) should be clearly defined and understood by all from the beginning. Lack of clarity, or changes over time, can create frustration during the process or disappointment later in the program.
- Pre-award co-creation can be very expensive. If a mission anticipates a multi-month co-creation effort—especially one that involves in-country travel—it would be helpful for USAID to cover at least a portion of pre-award costs (e.g., related to participation in joint field visits).
- Participants who pay for their own involvement in co-creation (especially if this involves considerable time or travel costs) may have expectations about their continuing role in the program or about their relationship with the USAID actors. Participants should be informed that involvement in no way guarantees them a share of the program budget or a special status.
- Although co-creation is a time-limited process, program buy-in by all stakeholders is critical to the success of activities, and communication with them should be ongoing. If local ownership is a critical result of the co-creation process, local CSOs, host-country government representatives, and private-sector actors need to be included (and in some cases beneficiaries as well). This can be challenging for cost and logistical reasons when multiple regions of a country, or even rural (as opposed to only urban) considerations are important.
- Striving to create local ownership in co-creation for a regional program is problematic by definition. It can also be impractical because of the cost of bringing stakeholders to one location from multiple countries, or the cost of doing co-creation in multiple countries (pre-award). This puts an excessive cost burden on an IP co-facilitator if USAID does not explicitly state that it will reimburse these costs upon award. A risk remains, however, if the activity is not actually awarded for some reason.
- In any group setting, it is not possible to safeguard what is shared, which can lead to reticence on the part of participants to get to the heart of matters and share design ideas and what would be useful local intelligence. In such cases, it may be more fruitful for the IP to conduct individual key informant interviews rather than attempt to elicit sensitive or proprietary information via a public co-design sessions.
- Beneficiaries can bring valuable perspective to co-creation. Local partners can help with outreach to involve beneficiaries, as well as other grassroots and/or marginalized stakeholders, and USAID, facilitators, and/or IPs should maximize this opportunity.
- The earlier that post-award co-creation takes place, the better, in order to build trust and immediately start building relationships with participants.



## A NOTE ABOUT CO-CREATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

During the preparation of this white paper, SCS Global had planned to facilitate an extensive post-award co-creation process in Chad. SCS Global had originally planned a series of co-creation activities, starting with a civil society and media assessment in November 2019, followed by regional consultation workshops with civil society outside the capital of N'Djamena in February-March 2020, and culminating in a WSR workshop in N'Djamena in April to gather a broad range of stakeholders from Chadian civil society, government, technical and financial partners, and private entities.

The project had no choice but to cancel the regional consultations and the WSR due to COVID-19. Not only was the primary facilitator unable to travel to Chad due to COVID-19-related restrictions, but the GoC also prohibited more than 50 people from gathering effective March 19. Since the objective of a WSR is to gather as many voices and perspectives at one time to agree on common priorities and co-create the way forward, there are typically about 100 participants to ensure that each sector is fairly represented. This type of activity would have violated Chad's COVID-19 prevention measures so was therefore canceled.

Unable to carry out both the regional workshops and the WSR to inform project design, SCS Global shifted its approach to produce a Theory of Change and Results Framework using online collaboration tools. The process started with a brainstorming of all potential activities that flowed from recommendations in the civil society and media assessment. Through a series of subsequent work sessions and online video conferences, SCS Global narrowed down the activities to three intermediate results focused on 1) civil society, 2) citizen engagement, and 3) the enabling environment, as well as cross-cutting social inclusion activities. SCS Global incorporated input from: its in-country Chad team, HQ-based technical and management experts, the project's civil society and gender expert (based in Mali), and a limited number of digital consultations with Chadian CSOs.<sup>12</sup> While the co-creation approach was less participatory than originally planned, it was informed by the needs of civil society and media identified during the assessment; the resulting Theory of Change and Results Framework leave sufficient room to address emerging needs as they arise and conditions on the ground unfold.

12. With FHI 360's full registration pending with the government of Chad, the USAID and U.S. Embassy advised that we curtail co-creation-focused consultations and restrict activities to COVID-19-related civic engagement initiatives consistent with our existing project protocol.

## ANNEX: SCS Associate Awards with Co-Design Experiences

Country/Program, Dates & Funding	Program Objectives	Co-Design Partners	Co-Design Experience & Duration		
			Pre-Award	Post-Award (within 60 days)	Implementation
<p><b>SCS CAMBODIA</b> Social Accountability in Cambodia (ISAC)</p> <p>2019–2024</p> <p>\$15 million</p>	<p>Improve local public services through increased citizen access to information, analysis, dialogue, and the use of social accountability tools in urban areas of Cambodia.</p>	<p>Approximately 40 individuals from USAID, the World Bank, FHI 360, DAI, Internews, and several local stakeholder organizations</p>	<p>FHI 360 and Mission: May–September 2019 (9 months)</p>	<p>FHI 360, Mission and partners: (2 months)</p>	
<p><b>SCS CHAD</b> Chad Civil Society Strengthening Activity (CCSSA)</p> <p>2019–2023</p> <p>\$8.5 million</p>	<p>Strengthen democratic culture through nascent accountability and participatory norms and institutions, with an engaged citizenry aware of its rights and responsibilities in a pluralistic society.</p>	<p>FHI 360, Humanity &amp; Inclusion, and USAID</p>			<p>Virtual process using a series of meetings on MS Teams and Whiteboard. April – May 2020 (2 months)</p>
<p><b>SCS DJIBOUTI</b> Programme de Renforcement des Capacités des Associations de Djibouti (PRECAD)</p> <p>2018–2020</p> <p>\$2.9 million</p>	<p>Strengthen CSOs to foster accountable governance and improve service delivery.</p>	<p><b>Education:</b> MENFOP (<i>Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Formation Professionnelle</i>)</p> <p><b>GESI:</b> MFF (<i>Ministère de la Femme et de la Famille</i>)</p> <p><b>Health:</b> MS (<i>Ministère de Santé</i>)</p>			<p>WSRs for three sectors. FHI 360 + USAID + one ministry each:</p> <p><b>Education:</b> April 2019</p> <p><b>GESI:</b> October 2019</p> <p><b>Health:</b> November 2019</p> <p>(2.5 days each over above months)</p>
<p><b>SCS INDONESIA</b> Civil Society Support Initiative</p> <p>MADANI</p> <p>2019–2024</p> <p>\$19.8 million</p>	<p>Strengthen government accountability and promote communal tolerance by strengthening the capacity and sustainability of Indonesian CSOs.</p>		<p>FHI 360 HQ and country office + proposed staff: active in-country co-design with Mission, Oct–Nov 2019</p> <p>(5 weeks including 4-day field visit for key informant interviews and focus group discussions with CSOs and local government)</p>		

Country/Program, Dates & Funding	Program Objectives	Co-Design Partners	Co-Design Experience & Duration		
			Pre-Award	Post-Award (within 60 days)	Implementation
<p><b>SCS JAMAICA</b> Local Partner Development (LPD)</p> <p>2017–2023</p> <p>\$15 million</p>	<p>Advance youth crime and violence prevention while increasing collaboration between government, business, academia, and civil society.</p>	<p><b>Clarendon WSR:</b> Local CSOs, educational institutions, government entities, private sector, media (observers)</p> <p>FHI 360, USAID (observers)</p> <p><b>Kingston:</b> Local CSOs, government entities, and a researcher/educational institution</p> <p>FHI 360 and USAID as observers</p>			<p>One workshop December 3–5, 2018, plus 8 additional LPD-sponsored meetings, plus three workshops</p> <p>February 12, 18, 25, 2020</p> <p><i>(One additional process – consisting of four days of sessions spread over four weeks, followed by a month of proposal writing before grant proposal submission – began in May 2020, with group sessions held by Zoom.)</i></p>
<p><b>SCS KENYA</b> Safeguarding Democratic Space in Kenya (SADES-K)</p> <p>2018–2021</p> <p>\$6.35 million</p>	<p>Strengthen the governance-reform agenda and secure democratic gains in the 2010 Constitution. Promote national dialogue and governance reform, build social cohesion, and safeguard democratic space through support to independent media and rule of law processes.</p>	<p><b>Internews</b></p> <p><b>Building Bridges to Unity Initiative (BBI) in Kenya</b></p>	<p><b>FHI 360 and Mission:</b> June–July 2018 (2 months)</p>	<p><b>Two workshops (FHI 360, Mission, CSOs):</b></p> <p>October–November 2018 (2 months)</p>	
<p><b>SCS NETWORKS FOR PEACE</b> (USAID/RDMA)</p> <p>2019–2024</p> <p>\$10 million</p>	<p>Foster collective engagement across Asia and support communities and countries to promote intra- and inter-faith harmony in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Lao PDR.</p>	<p>Approximately 25 individuals from USAID, FHI 360, other international IPs, and regional and international subject matter experts</p>	<p><b>USAID (5 countries), FHI 360:</b> April 26–September 27, 2019, including a co-creation workshop June 4–6 in Bangkok (5 months)</p>		
<p><b>SCS ZAMBIA</b> Youth Lead Activity (YLA)</p> <p>2018–2021</p> <p>\$2.8 million</p>	<p>Support, network, and elevate outstanding young leaders from across Zambia to amplify the impact of their work and inspire civic innovation and promote a culture of sustained, citizen-responsive leadership</p>	<p><b>FHI 360, USAID, a 14-member and Advisory Board</b> (20 youth leaders, civil society activists, representatives from the Ministry of Youth, Sport, and Child Development and the Ministry of Higher Education)</p>		<p>October 2018 – January 2019 (4 months)</p>	