

LEARNING DOCUMENT:

# CO-CREATION WITH INDIGENOUS PARTNERS



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Credit: Adriano Gambarini

# LEARNING DOCUMENT: CO-CREATION WITH INDIGENOUS PARTNERS

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## SUBMITTED TO:

Matthew Baker; USAID COR

## SUBMITTED BY:

Jessica Wallach and Tulay Akoglu, NORC at the University of Chicago

## CONTRACTOR:

NORC at the University of Chicago

4350 East West Highway, 8th Floor

Bethesda, MD 20814

Attention: Matthew Parry

Tel: 301-634-5444; E-mail: [Parry-Matthew@norc.org](mailto:Parry-Matthew@norc.org)

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# ACRONYMS

ABA ROLI	American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative
ADS	Automated Directives System
AFRODES	National Association of Displaced Afro-Colombians
AMPB	Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests
APA	Amerindian Peoples Association
APS	Annual Program Statement
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
CEJS	Center for Legal Studies and Social Research
COICA	Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon River Basin
CONFENIAE	Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana
CORAPE	Coordinator of Popular and Educative Radios of Ecuador
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DRG	Democracy, Human Rights and Governance
FAA	Fixed Amount Award
HEARTH	Health, Ecosystems and Agriculture for Resilient, Thriving Societies
HRSM	Human Rights Support Mechanism
IEB	International Institute of Education of Brazil
IIRR	International Institute of Rural Reconstruction
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NPI	New Partnerships Initiative
OAA	Office of Acquisition and Assistance
ONIC	National Indigenous Organization of Colombia
PRO-IP	Policy on Promoting the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
RBJA	Brazilian Network of Environmental Justice
SERVINDI	Intercultural Communication Services
SFCG	Search For Common Ground
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WLH	Weaving Lives and Hope



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This learning document presents guidance, best practices, and lessons learned from USAID bilateral operating unit staff and their Indigenous partners who have gone through the process of co-creation for activity design.

The purpose of the document is to serve as a resource for USAID staff who are considering or beginning the process of co-creation with Indigenous Peoples' organizations. The document draws from eight case studies of co-creation in the Amazon Basin (Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana and Peru), Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru, and Ethiopia.

The document begins with best practices for initiating engagement with Indigenous partners, then moves through the process of co-creation, including choosing a mechanism to use such as the Annual Program Statement or New Partnerships Initiative (NPI), choosing an award type, deciding on a partnership model and choosing a prime partner (if applicable), and strengthening capacities of partners. Finally, the document ends with a compiled list of resources for co-creation, working with Indigenous groups, and using the mechanisms outlined before. Each of the eight case studies is described in detail in the annexes. Below is a selection of key points from each section:

## **Engaging with Indigenous Partners: Cultural Considerations, Inclusion, and Modes of Communication**

- Multiple day, in-person workshops are often more effective than weekly virtual sessions.
- Scheduling separate co-creation sessions with different groups (for example, sessions with only women or only youth) can ensure the inclusion of traditionally marginalized groups' voices.

## **Co-creation Mechanisms**

- USAID staff should start by consulting the Office of Acquisition and Assistance on appropriate mechanisms.
- The co-creation process does not provide advanced funding to the participating organizations until the award is finalized, and there is no guarantee of an award. It is important that USAID streamline and shorten the process as much as possible without sacrificing its technical integrity, so as not to overburden partners.

## Partnership Models

- Partnership models refer to how roles and responsibilities are allocated to implementing partners, for example having a prime who manages sub-awardees. Choosing a partnership model is a case-by-case decision that depends on the specific organizations that you choose as partners.
- Having a prime that is experienced with USAID requirements can allow small partners to participate as sub-awardees who would otherwise not be able to, or interested in, managing direct funding and assuming the requirements of partnering directly with USAID. In collaborative prime-sub relationships, sub-awardee organizations are still able to assert their needs and priorities.
- On the other hand, direct partnerships with Indigenous groups allow them to better assert their needs and priorities. Some mechanisms are designed to facilitate direct funding to new and local partners, such as Local Works or the New Partnerships Initiative.

## Choosing a Prime

- Prime organizations should be chosen for their ability to fulfill specific needs, such as translating sub-awardee ideas into USAID formats/requirements. Prime organizations can also help sub-awardees engage with USAID that would otherwise not partner with USAID directly.

## Strengthening Capacity for Partners

Capacity strengthening is more than learning to meet USAID requirements; consider other kinds of capacities identified by the Indigenous partners themselves. For example, Indigenous Peoples' organizations might want to improve the technical expertise of their staff or their strategies for communicating with the public.

At the same time, prime organizations (primes) should support sub-awardee capacity strengthening around USAID requirements, to set them up for future awards so that they have the option to be direct partners. Over the long term, Indigenous organizations should be able to take more ownership over the process.

## Types of Awards

There are advantages and disadvantages to using Fixed Amount Awards versus Cooperative Agreements, depending on the capacities of partners and specific needs for the award.

- Fixed Amount Awards can be simpler and less burdensome for small partners, but they also shift risk to partners to complete milestones for payment.
- Cooperative Agreements have more stringent financial reporting and administrative requirements for partners but can be less risky for them (as their payment does not depend on completing milestones), and more flexible in terms of adapting the work plan and overall budget in response to developments on the ground during implementation. Specifically, if there are many unknowns about working with the Indigenous communities involved in the activity, predicted costs for Fixed Amount Awards can be difficult, and Cooperative Agreements can better accommodate collaborating, learning and adapting approaches to allow USAID staff and partners to 'learn as they go.'

# INTRODUCTION TO THE DOCUMENT AND OVERVIEW OF CASE STUDIES



Credit: Carmen Calle

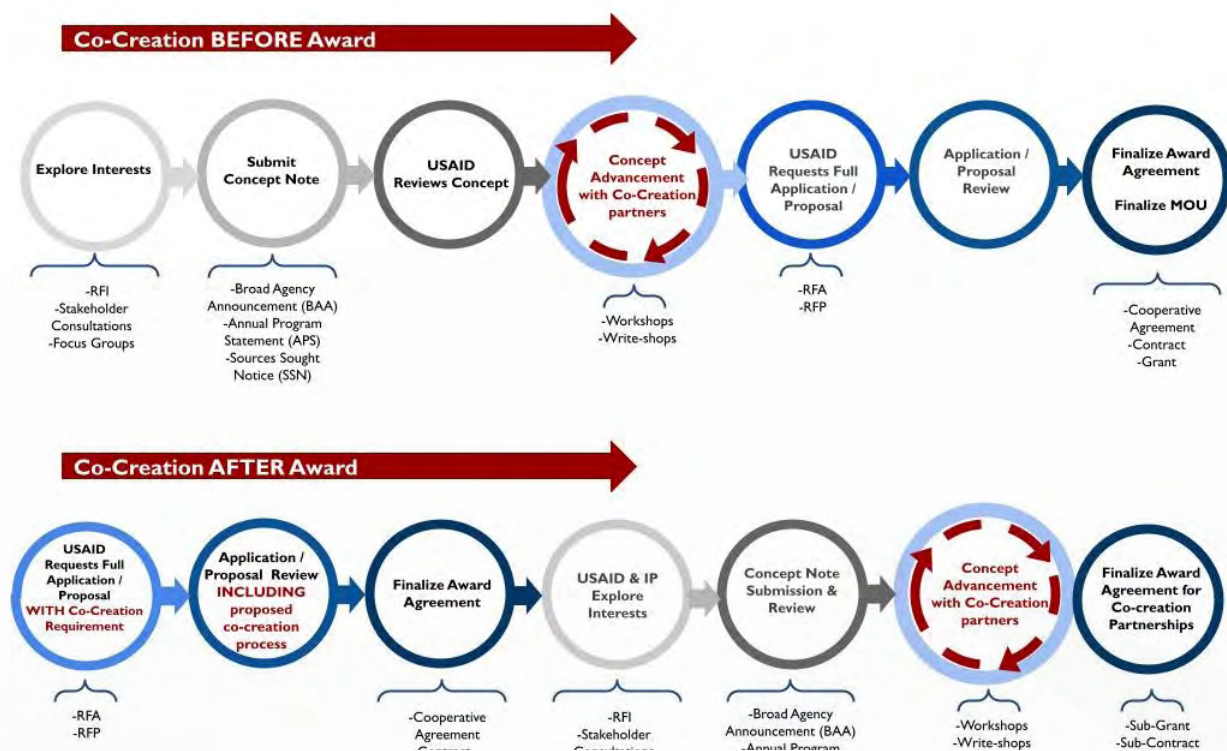
## RESEARCH METHODS

This document reflects learnings from eight case studies of co-creations with Indigenous partners. The research team developed two semi-structured interview guides: one for USAID Operating Unit staff and one for co-creation participants. These guides were reviewed by the USAID's Indigenous Peoples advisory team and revised based on their feedback. NORC then conducted 22 interviews with USAID staff and co-creation participants (13 with USAID staff and nine with representatives from participant organizations – three prime participants, five sub-awardee participants and one external co-creation facilitation firm), as well as a review of co-creation documentation. Interviews were conducted in English, with interpretation into Spanish and Portuguese as needed. The research team also worked closely with the USAID Indigenous Peoples advisory team to validate findings.



## DEFINING CO-CREATION<sup>1</sup>

Co-creation is broadly defined as, “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.” Co-creation can range from facilitated brainstorming to active listening to find innovation and a mutually valued outcome. The process strategically invites multiple partners and stakeholders (including beneficiary groups) to jointly produce a mutually valued result. The following graphic shows how co-creation can be organized into stages before and after funding is awarded.<sup>2</sup> Co-creation can happen at many stages. For more guidance on different approaches to co-creation, please see the compiled resources at the end of this document.



<sup>1</sup> Source: [2020 Co-creation Field Guide](#).

<sup>2</sup> Source for graphic: USAID/Guatemala: Co-creation Lessons Learned (not available online).



# USAID MOTIVATIONS AND THE POLICY ON PROMOTING THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES (PRO-IP)

USAID launched the [Policy on Promoting the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (PRO-IP) in March 2020, which established new standards for how USAID engages and partners with Indigenous Peoples and how to strengthen partnership, design, and management of programs affecting Indigenous Peoples. The goal of PRO-IP is to improve the sustainability and impact of programs through active engagement of Indigenous Peoples and respect for their rights and customs. USAID aims to build stronger relationships with Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Peoples' organizations, and co-creation is a key mechanism to achieve this goal.

## CASE STUDIES

Below are summaries of the eight case studies of co-creation that this document draws from. More detail on each case study can be found in the corresponding section of Annex I.

### **Human Rights Support Mechanism (HRSM)'s Amazon Basin Activity (Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana and Peru)**

With USAID support, the non-profit organization Internews developed the Human Rights Support Mechanism (HRSM) Amazon Basin activity to provide accurate and relevant information to Indigenous Peoples about COVID-19. In partnership with local organizations, Internews produced audio programs in native languages that could be shared through multiple means. Internews and HRSM partners also equipped local Indigenous communities with communication technologies and provided capacity strengthening to allow them to develop their own media, thus increasing visibility of Indigenous communities and helping to create culturally relevant information campaigns. This activity was developed through USAID's HRSM mechanism.

### **Ethnic Annual Program Statement (APS) Co-creations (Colombia)**

USAID/Colombia aims to co-create activities with Afro-Colombian and Indigenous Peoples' communities. An example of a co-creation activity supported by the Operating Unit in Colombia is the Inter-Ethnic Alliance for Peace. Implemented by the National Association of Displaced Afro-Colombians (AFRODES) and the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC), this activity develops Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities' capacity for self-governance, advocacy, and leadership, addresses food security and income generation, and promotes regional peacebuilding in alignment with the Peace Accord's Ethnic Chapter.

### **New Partnerships Initiative (NPI) Advancing the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Activity (DRC)**

USAID/Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) worked on the New Partnerships Initiative Co-design with Pact, Wildlife Conservation Society, and International Alert which focused on Livelihoods, Peace and Security, Natural Resource Management, Rights and Justice, and Services.



Credit: José Caldas

The activity focuses on the Batwa and Bantu communities in the DRC and was developed through two three-day workshops with groups of women, men, and youth. The aim of the workshops was to tailor recommendations based on the specific needs within sub-groups and to achieve buy-in from the local communities.

#### **Strengthening Governance and the Economies of Indigenous Peoples in Ecuador Co-Creation (Ecuador)**

The Raíz Foundation (Fundación Raíz) developed an activity focused on developing and strengthening the capabilities of Indigenous communities to respond to natural disasters and emergencies such as COVID-19 in Ecuador. The aim was to help communities locally manage their resources and make them more resilient to threats such as hurricanes, armed conflict, and the economic and health impacts of COVID-19. With support from USAID, Raíz Foundation worked with the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENIAE) in the Amazon region to develop project management skills within local Indigenous organizations, design response plans to emergencies, and develop an information sharing system with governmental and international agencies.

#### **B'atz Regional Institutional Strengthening Co-Creation (Guatemala)**

USAID/Guatemala received an unsolicited concept submission from the Rainforest US and the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests (AMPB). The Mission and the partner organizations engaged in a thorough co-creation process, resulting in an award made in September 2021. The B'atz Regional Institutional Strengthening Project aims to establish AMPB as a legal entity, create a centralized system for funding Indigenous communities in Mexico and Central America, and advance the Women's Coordination mechanism and Mesoamerican Leadership School within AMPB.

### **COVID-19 Awareness Campaign Co-Creation (Peru)**

The Congress of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon River Basin (COICA) and Rainforest Foundation US submitted an unsolicited concept to USAID/Peru for an activity to develop a COVID-19 awareness campaign, producing informational materials in eight Indigenous languages, as well as Spanish. The co-creation, however, did not reach the award stage.

### **Health, Ecosystems and Agriculture for Resilient, Thriving Societies (HEARTH) Co-Creation (Ethiopia)**

USAID/Ethiopia implemented the Health, Ecosystems and Agriculture for Resilient, Thriving Societies (HEARTH) co-creation as part of the larger HEARTH activity portfolio. HEARTH operates in 12 countries and engages private sector partners to collaboratively implement integrated sustainable development activities that conserve high-biodiversity landscapes and improve the well-being and prosperity of communities that depend on these landscapes. In Ethiopia, the activity focused on developing eco-tourism as a sustainable economic activity that supports biodiversity through community conservation management and partnerships with the private sector. The HEARTH/Ethiopia co-creation took place from January 2021 to May 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the co-creation took the form of virtual sessions every one or two weeks, organized by an external facilitation firm that had worked on other HEARTH co-creations.

### **Weaving Lives and Hope Co-Creation (Colombia)**

The Weaving Lives and Hope Activity (WLH) is an activity that provides services to conflict survivors and conflict-affected communities in Colombia and collaborates with them to promote inclusive development through community-based interventions. The activity has been operating since April 2021 and is scheduled to run until March 2026. Interventions aim to address the effects of conflict-driven trauma by improving access to mental health and psychosocial services, as well as improving civil society organizations' (CSO) capacities to respond to conflict effectively. Furthermore, the activity aims to promote trust building and reconciliation by developing interpersonal and communication skills amongst community members and to improve livelihoods through job placement and business promotion. WLH is implemented in the regions of Bajo Cauca, Montes de María, Pacífico Medio, Alto Patía, and Northern Cauca and engages Afro-Colombian and Indigenous Peoples' communities.



# ENGAGING WITH INDIGENOUS PARTNERS: CULTURE, INCLUSION, AND MODES OF COMMUNICATION

This section outlines considerations for USAID staff as they plan engagement with Indigenous Peoples' organizations.

These best practices can help USAID staff align with and show respect for Indigenous cultures and communication preferences, while ensuring the inclusion of traditionally marginalized groups. USAID's Consultation Handbook<sup>3</sup> has more guidance on how to meaningfully engage with Indigenous Peoples and strengthen USAID's organizational capacity to partner with Indigenous groups.

## Topics for desk research before engaging with Indigenous partners:

- Traditional governance structures
- Terms of respect
- Calendars and conceptions of time
- Gender norms
- Local languages
- Socio-political context, including ecology and history
- Interactions with neighboring groups

### Box 1: Case Study:

#### HRSM Amazon Basin Co-creation

Due to severely limited internet access in Indigenous communities involved in the HRSM Amazon Basin activity, partners used a diversity of remote communication strategies, including:

- Sent WhatsApp audios and videos
- Mailed USB drives to Indigenous communities, who then used loudspeakers for everyone to hear
- Made a manual on how to record WhatsApp audios so that partners could send them back

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-02/5%20USAID-Social-Impact-Assessment-508.pdf>



**Being open to modes of communication that minimize written materials can streamline processes.**

- Allow flexibility in submission format. Partners may submit video or audio recordings about their activity ideas. This can streamline the process for them, although USAID staff will spend time translating these modes into required formats.
- Consider which communication channels are best suited and accessible to partners. For example, in places with limited internet connectivity, partners can often still use WhatsApp or social media, such as in the HRSM Amazon Basin Co-creation (Box 1). Some technologies like Talking Books do not use written communications<sup>4</sup>.

**Multiday, in-person workshops are often more effective than weekly virtual sessions.**

They make the process shorter; are generally more aligned with Indigenous concepts of town halls and allow for participation from partners or stakeholders with limited internet connectivity.

**Avoiding value judgements about how Indigenous Peoples' organizations structure themselves while making space for all voices to be heard can include more people in the process.**

Consider how Indigenous structures may not align with USAID inclusion practices, especially for gender, youth and LGBTQI+ groups. Expressing value judgements about this can make partnerships contentious; however, it is possible to ensure the inclusion of marginalized voices without value judgment rhetoric. For example, Indigenous leaders may be hesitant to including female voices in activities, but their inclusion is necessary to ensure that the activity addresses the needs of all in the community.

**Box 2: Case Study:**  
**DRC NPI Co-creation**

The DRC NPI Co-creation was co-facilitated with an Indigenous facilitator and a USAID facilitator to ensure that USAID concepts were adequately adapted to local cultures.

Application information and requirements need to be translated both in terms of language and in terms of cultural context

**Having separate sessions with different groups can ensure the inclusion of their voices, especially for women and youth.**

For example, having a session with just youth allows you to hear them, but if they are included in the same session with elders, they may not speak openly or at all.

Many Indigenous groups have different governing bodies or sections for women and youth, with their own leaders. Co-creation sessions need to bring leaders that represent different demographics.

<sup>4</sup> Amplio's Talking Books: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQuual3zNFA>

# MECHANISMS FOR CO-CREATION WITH INDIGENOUS PARTNERS

USAID Operating Units should consult with their colleagues in the Office of Acquisition and Assistance (OAA) about the best mechanism to use as early in the process as possible.

The selection of a mechanism for co-creation is a crucial first step and can protect small local partners from being overburdened with USAID requirements.

The table below presents the mechanisms used in our eight case studies to illustrate the factors that should be considered.

Type of Mechanism	Relevant Case Studies	Advantages	Limitations
<a href="#">Human Rights Support LWA Mechanism:</a> Rapid Response Mechanism	<a href="#">HRSM Amazon Basin Activity Co-creation</a>	Can be used to respond quickly to crises that impact Indigenous Peoples, such as COVID-19.  Primary partners under this mechanism have extensive experience with USAID requirements and can manage many sub-awardees.	Must be supporting USAID's Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (DRG) Strategy.  Must include one of HRSM's 5 primary partners as the prime organization: Freedom House, American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative (ABA ROLI), Internews, Pact, and Search For Common Ground (SFCG).

Type of Mechanism	Relevant Case Studies	Advantages	Limitations
New Partnerships Initiative (NPI)	<a href="#">DRC NPI Co-creation with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities</a>	<p>NPI is designed to help make Agency information, resources, and funding opportunities more transparent and accessible for 'nontraditional' partners, including Indigenous groups.</p> <p>NPI identifies processes, norms, and regulations that deter potential partnerships and finds ways to mitigate them.</p>	There is a specific window for solicitations, usually through an Annual Program Statement (APS) or an Addendum to an APS. There is also an overall cap for funding in this mechanism, which restricts what partners can apply and how many Operating Units can access this funding.
<a href="#">Colombia APS</a> (Annual Program Statement)	<a href="#">Colombia APS Strengthening Ethnic Communities for Inclusive Peace Co-creation</a>  <a href="#">Colombia Weaving Lives and Hope Co-creation</a>	<p>The APS is developed by the Mission for more direct partnerships with local organizations and has flexibilities around timelines for co-creation. The APS encourages potential partners to address a specific challenge.</p> <p>The APS allows for multiple awards over a period of time; the Operating Unit generally accepts and reviews applications on a rolling basis.</p>	<p>APS projects must be directly aligned with bilateral Operating Unit strategies and priorities.</p> <p>Eligibility is restricted to local organizations that do not already do significant business with USAID.</p>
Health, Ecosystems and Agriculture for Resilient, Thriving Societies (HEARTH)	<a href="#">Ethiopia HEARTH Co-creation</a>	<p>HEARTH is multi-sectoral and leverages funding from the private sector, allowing for holistic programming that engages a wide range of stakeholders and partners.</p> <p>HEARTH is already operating in 12 countries and has an established foundation of tools and knowledge to draw from.</p>	HEARTH draws from multiple funding streams which each have their own requirements. Biodiversity funds in particular have stringent requirements.

Type of Mechanism	Relevant Case Studies	Advantages	Limitations
<a href="#">Unsolicited Proposals for Locally Led Development (US4LLD)</a>	<a href="#">Ecuador Strengthening Governance and the Economies of Indigenous Peoples Co-Creation</a>  <a href="#">Guatemala B'atz Regional Institutional Strengthening Project Co-creation</a>  <a href="#">Peru COVID-19 Awareness Campaign Co-creation</a>	<p>Concepts eligible for US4LLD have an associated offer of funding support for Operating Units to move to award. Local Works' five-year funds may be used in any sector and need not necessarily align with a Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS).</p> <p>Moving forward with unsolicited concepts, as a non-competitive process, can enable streamlining the award process, so it can be less burdensome, simpler, and faster for partners than a competitive process.</p> <p>The Local Works office does the legwork of initially screening unsolicited concepts and also provides support throughout the process.</p>	<p>Bilateral OAA staff might not be familiar with or have experience using the more flexible and streamlined processes used by Local Works.</p> <p>Because the proposal is unsolicited and goes through USAID headquarters first, the priorities and constraints of the bilateral Operating Units might not be at the center of the original concept.</p> <p>Awards cannot be more than \$2,000,000.</p>



Credit: Kethley Uy





## MECHANISMS: OVERARCHING LESSONS LEARNED

Below are guidance and lessons learned from USAID staff and partners around choosing a mechanism and structuring the application and award processes.

- **The co-creation process does not provide advanced funding to participating organizations.** It is important that USAID streamline and shorten the process as much as possible without sacrificing its technical integrity, so as not to overburden partners. The Local Works and NPI mechanisms provide technical support and lessons learned to help Operating Units streamline award processes. Fixed Amount Awards can also help give the award sooner by including capacity strengthening activities in milestones after funding is awarded, if capacity standards for awards are not already met (more detail in the award section below).
- **USAID Operating Unit staff should include OAA staff in from the beginning of the co-creation process and in every co-creation session** so that they can help navigate award and contracting processes.
- **Allowing for submission of forms in multiple languages can help broaden the applicant base.** USAID Operating Unit staff should think about translation both in terms of language and in terms of culture: an Indigenous facilitator provided by either the Operating Unit or by partners can help partners understand USAID terms and concepts.
- **Terms of contracts should be continuously revisited and updated as the activity is being implemented.** USAID Operating Unit staff should consider opportunities for future modifications and discussions throughout implementation, so that agreement and consent are not static in time but instead are flexible and ongoing.
- **By building in opportunities for collaborating, learning and adapting (CLA) with Operating Units and partners,** it is possible to jointly re-evaluate and find new ways of working as the program unfolds.

## **USAID staff capacity is a cross-cutting consideration across all the mechanisms.**

Staff capacity and scope are primary limiting factors, particularly in the co-creation process. Operating Units need both enough staff and enough bandwidth to participate in the process itself, as well as either staff with the appropriate language skills or access to translation and interpretation services.

Additionally, Operating Units must allocate time for relationship building with partners, continual solicitation of consent, and capacity strengthening to meet USAID requirements. Continual solicitation of consent means that USAID frequently reviews the activity they are working on and asks partners, including Indigenous Peoples, if they are in agreement with the activity and its objectives and implementation. There are particular considerations when working with Indigenous Peoples, not only culturally and linguistically but also to respect Indigenous Peoples' rights to self-determined development. Operating Units need to have enough bandwidth and capacity to include those considerations.

- Support and interest from Operating Unit leadership is a necessary component for co-creations with more direct partnerships with Indigenous Peoples' organizations. They take more work and human resources than hierarchical partnership models, so leadership must be prepared to allocate the necessary resources.
- The Indigenous Peoples advisory team positioned in USAID/Washington's Inclusive Development Hub can help triangulate support when Operating Units are short-staffed during co-creations. USAID Operating Units should reach out to the Advisory team to assess support when limitations arise during the co-creation process, which could minimize delays and maximize results.

### **Box 3: Case Study:**

#### **USAID/Ethiopia HEARTH**

The HEARTH activity co-creation involved the use of Biodiversity funding, which draws from the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation. These standards are a set of principles and practices for conservation project design, management, and monitoring.

USAID/Ethiopia hired an external facilitation firm that had prior experience with HEARTH activities that used these standards. They were able to take the time that USAID staff lacked due to limited bandwidth to ensure these standards were used and key partners were fully engaged.

## **MECHANISMS AND PARTNERSHIP MODELS**

When structuring a co-creation model USAID staff can choose to establish a more hierarchical relationship between partners, with a prime (such as the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction in Ethiopia) and sub-awardees (such as Cool Grounds in Ethiopia), where sub-awardees have more indirect relationships with USAID (see examples below). Alternatively, USAID staff can establish a more horizontal relationship between partners, where roles and responsibilities are allocated more evenly (see examples below).



This is a case-by-case decision that depends on an Operating Unit's choice of award type and the specific organizations that will be partners in the award. There are benefits and drawbacks to both kinds of partnership models, and both should be assessed to determine appropriateness based on context, partners, model of approach and end goal, amongst other factors. Additionally, risks and benefits should be considered for each mechanism to maximize both USAID and partners' capacities and resources.

## EXAMPLES OF HOW MECHANISMS IMPACT PARTNERSHIP MODELS

For Rapid Response Mechanisms like in the HRSM Basin Activity Case, there needed to be a clear hierarchy with a prime organization (Internews) that was experienced with USAID requirements. Internews worked with nine partners: IEB, RBJA, CEJIS, Sinergias, CONFENAIE, CORAPE, APA, Instituto del Bien Común and SERVINDI<sup>5</sup>. Due to the rapid impact of COVID-19, there was no time to strengthen the capacity of sub-awardees to meet these requirements.

The Annual Program Statement (APS) Mechanism is better suited for horizontal or direct partnerships. In the Colombia APS co-creation, Operating Unit Staff could take time to support partners.

### Box 4: Roles of Primes/Direct Partners versus Sub-awardees/ Indirect Partners:

Primes are responsible for: 1) leadership of the development of the application or proposal; 2) identification of the project strategy; 3) selection of partners; and 4) the overall management of the project, including financial management of direct funding from USAID.

Sub-awardees are responsible for: 1) expanding the capacity of the team to achieve objectives; 2) being a partner in the proposal development stage; and 3) providing comparative advantages and expertise in a technical area or particular service. They financially and administratively report to the prime.

Source: [Work With USAID](#)

HRSM Basin Activity Graphic



Source: HRSM Basin Activity Final Report

<sup>5</sup> International Institute of Education of Brazil (IEB), Rede Brasileira de Justiça Ambiental (RBJA), Center for Legal Studies and Social Research (CEJIS), Sinergias, Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana (CONFENAIE), Coordinator of Popular and Educative Radios of Ecuador (CORAPE), Amerindian Peoples Association (Guyana; APA), Instituto del Bien Común, Intercultural Communication Services (Peru; SERVINDI)

## Case Study Example:

### HRSM Amazon Basin Activity

The HRSM Amazon Basin Activity implemented COVID-19 awareness and information campaigns in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana and Peru. Internews worked with nine partners so that they could tap into localized expertise to create culturally translated content for Indigenous communities in each country.

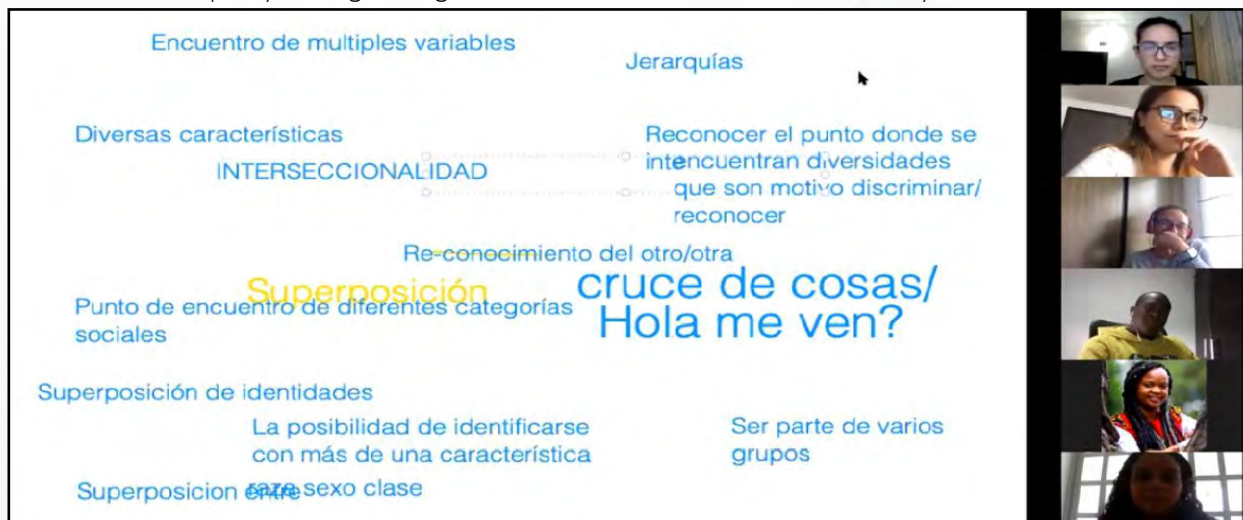
Due to the rapid nature of co-creation and implementation and the large number of partners, it was not possible to take the time to support partners to receive direct funding. Instead, Internews, who has extensive experience working with USAID and meeting USAID requirements, handled the management of administrative, financial, and reporting requirements so that sub-awardees could focus on rapid implementation.

## Case Study Example:

### USAID/Colombia

In Colombia, there were technical staff leads who were the main points of contact between USAID and the partner organizations involved in co-creation. They were able to give close and ongoing support to partners, and therefore it was feasible to have a more horizontal partnership model and direct partnerships with local organizations.

Screenshot of Capacity Strengthening Session from the Avanza Pacífico Activity



Source: [Avanza Pacífico Capacity Milestone # 8 Report](#)



## BENEFITS OF HIERARCHICAL PARTNERSHIP MODELS

Case study examples: USAID/Ethiopia had a more hierarchical partnership models, while USAID/Colombia's APS co-creations had more horizontal partnership models. Hierarchical partnership models can work well for Indigenous organizations in the present, while supporting them to engage with USAID directly in the future.

- Local organizations that are unable to meet USAID requirements for direct funding can still participate in co-creation.
- Sub-awardees can focus on project design and implementation without having to direct resources towards meeting the financial, administrative, and reporting requirements that come with direct funding.
- Having an organization experienced in working with USAID to manage funding reduces risk to USAID.



Credit: Kethley Uy

### Box 5: Case Studies:

#### USAID/DRC and USAID/Ethiopia:

In the DRC, having a prime allowed for the inclusion of small local partners that would otherwise have struggled with USAID processes. Several more organizations were able to participate in the co-creation process and agree to be part of the future award, since they would not have been able to meet USAID requirements without support from their prime.

This approach was effective because it brought in more local knowledge to the project from these small partners; by combining larger partners with smaller organizations, there was both technical and social expertise.

In Ethiopia, almost all partners except for the prime had never worked with USAID before. If there had not been a prime organization managing the financial administration of the activity, they would have had to hire more accountants to meet USAID requirements. This would have prevented them from This would have prevented them from partnering with USAID.



## BENEFITS OF HORIZONTAL PARTNERSHIP MODELS

- There is more space for Indigenous partners to assert their needs and priorities, and more direct funding goes to Indigenous organizations.
- Going through the process of co-creation builds the capacity of Indigenous partners to fulfill USAID requirements, and thus lays the groundwork for them to receive direct funding in the future, or even act as a prime in a future award.

## CHOOSING A PRIME

**Setting expectations:** USAID Operating Units should make sure that all partners understand what the partnership model is and how roles and responsibilities are allocated between them early in the process.

**What does the organization want?** Some Indigenous groups might be happy to be an indirect partner or sub-awardee because it takes a lot of capacity and effort to be a direct partner. They might just want to focus on implementing activities and might not want to change their organizational structure (such as establishing new financial accounting systems). Others might prefer to be a direct partner, especially if they are interested in receiving more direct funding from USAID in the future. However, even when Indigenous Peoples' organizations are indirect partners or sub-awardees, USAID staff should still ensure that their leaders are given voice and influence over the activity's design and strategy.

### Box 6: Case Studies:

#### USAID/Peru and USAID/Guatemala:

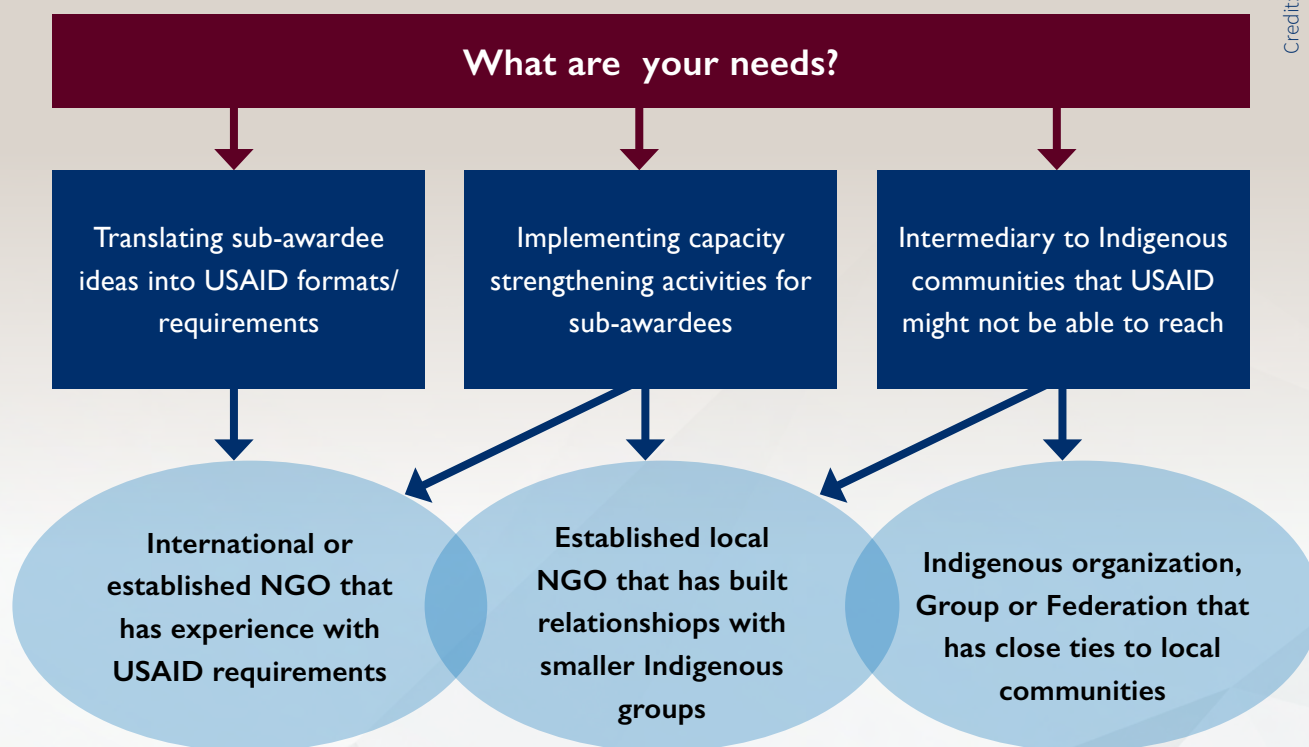
Rainforest Foundation US was the prime for co-creations in Peru and Guatemala. However, in Peru, there was tension between partners because the division of roles and responsibilities was contested, and eventually the co-creation fell through. In Guatemala, where partners were on the same page about the allocation of roles and responsibilities, co-creation was able to move forward.





Credit: Julie Larsen Maher

## DECISION CHART: CHOOSING A PRIME



# CAPACITY STRENGTHENING FOR PARTNERS

Through co-creation, USAID can help strengthen local organizations' capacities to manage finances and develop accounting systems.

USAID conducts audits of organizations to identify gaps, strengths, and weaknesses and provides feedback on their financial and administrative processes in the pre-award stage. USAID supports the strengthening of organizations' capacity with the goal of developing activities and making it easier for organizations to work with USAID going forward.

**There are two different types of capacity strengthening that USAID should consider:**

1. The capacity to work with USAID and to be able to “speak the language” of the agency. This may include learning about the bureaucratic processes of engaging with USAID and producing documents in the format USAID prefers.
2. Other kinds of capacity strengthening that organizations might want, such as building their technical expertise or their ability to communicate with the public. Operating Units should consult with the organizations about the kinds of capacity strengthening that they themselves want.



Credit: Rumbet Para



# THE AWARD STAGE: FIXED AMOUNT AWARDS VERSUS COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS

Type of Award	Relevant Case Studies	Advantages	Limitations
Fixed Amount Awards (FAAs)	<a href="#">Guatemala</a> <a href="#">Colombia APS</a> <a href="#">Ecuador</a>	<p>Less reporting requirements for partners, especially around financial management. FAAs are the simplest kind of award offered by USAID.</p> <p>Risk is shifted to partners to ensure that milestones are completed so that they can be paid. However, this can be mitigated by setting milestones for early administrative tasks like award signing to reduce risks to partners.</p>	<p>Unless FAAs are specifically written to include capacity strengthening milestones (as in the Colombia APS case), they do not necessarily push organizations to strengthen their capacities to meet USAID requirements.</p> <p>FAAs can be less flexible when there are major shifts in funding needs due to developments on the ground, and there is a limit on how much you can extend the period of performance.</p>

Type of Award	Relevant Case Studies	Advantages	Limitations
Cooperative Agreements (CAs)	<a href="#">HRSM Amazon Basin</a> : Combined grants and contracts depending on the partner  <a href="#">DRC</a>  <a href="#">Ethiopia</a>  <a href="#">Colombia</a> <a href="#">Weaving Lives and Hope</a>	<p>Cooperative Agreements can be more flexible to incorporate additional costs or change the total sums included in budgets.</p> <p>Once organizations have successfully implemented a Cooperative Agreement, this is evidence that they have the capacity to absorb larger funds or act as a prime with sub-awardees.</p> <p>If USAID has not worked with particular Indigenous communities before, it can be difficult to estimate costs due to lack of information. Cooperative Agreements allow USAID staff to 'learn as they go.'</p>	Cooperative Agreements are much more complicated. USAID is more involved in the implementation of the activity and may require more rigorous and higher levels of reporting.

Some programs such as Local Works encourage the use of FAAs, as they can be simpler and easier for new and local partners. Keep in mind that even going through the pre-award assessment of financial systems can be extremely burdensome for small partners for either a FAA or CA.

However, there are cases in which Cooperative Agreements are better, as they avoid shifting risk to partners (in cases where the partners cannot meet their milestones for payment because of unforeseen factors) and can have more flexibility to modify budgets.

## CASE STUDY EXAMPLES: FIXED AMOUNT AWARDS VERSUS COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS

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### **Fixed Amount Awards:**

**Fixed Amount Awards for partners with [USAID/Guatemala](#) and [USAID/Colombia](#) allowed for awarding funding sooner and strengthening partners' capacity post-award using milestones.**

While partners need to meet minimum capacity standards during the pre-award survey, their capacities can continue to be strengthened during implementation using milestones under a Fixed Amount Award. USAID/Guatemala and USAID/Colombia took this approach and were able to award funding to organizations that might not have been able to meet the stringent financial, administrative, and reporting requirements of Cooperative Agreements.

However, Colombia staff cautioned to carefully review how many milestones are included, as in some cases, too many milestones can be difficult to manage and create additional administrative burdens, for both USAID staff and partners.

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### **Cooperative Agreements:**

**Cooperative Agreements in the DRC allowed USAID to fund participation costs through partners and provide overall flexibility for budgets.**

USAID/DRC chose a Cooperative Agreement instead of a Fixed Amount Award. This way, the prime had the responsibility to engage with sub-awardees for financial management, and this mechanism was flexible in terms of being able to alter budgets and change the total sums of the grants in response to changes in scope.

USAID was able to fund the co-creation process in terms of venues, lodging and travel stipends. USAID/DRC staff wanted to support people from the villages to come stay in the city for the workshop but were unable to fund this from their end; however, their partners were able to provide financial support to participants to ensure a broader range of voices in the sessions.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ALL CASE STUDIES:

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## Engagement Processes:

- Start through a listening approach and respected leadership and communication structures.
- Ensure at least some staff engaged in the co-creation process have local language capabilities.
- Select venues that are more comfortable for Indigenous partners; for example, rather than choosing conference halls with laptops, choose open-air venues where people can sit under trees and speak easily. Implementers and USAID staff should go to Indigenous communities for co-creation processes.
- Focus the conversations on specific topics and have separate conversations with specific groups (such as women or youth) so that you can tailor recommendations more precisely.
- Ensure that there are sufficient interpretation and translation services for remote sessions to avoid miscommunication.
- Co-create agendas to respect appropriate communication procedures like opening conversation with traditional prayer.

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## Structuring the Co-Creation:

- Transfer leadership and decision-making authority to Indigenous Peoples' organizations for key aspects of co-creation whenever possible.
- Ensure that government and private sector stakeholders participate in the co-creation process from its early stages to ensure that their interests are accounted for.
- After developing a proposal plan, return to the Indigenous communities to solicit their consent and feedback on the workplan.
- Provide solicitation and co-creation documentation in local languages, rather than English.
- Include members of local communities that USAID wants to service in the process of co-creation, as they may have different priorities than the authorities.
- Engage staff from diverse technical, assistance and acquisition, program, and financial management offices in co-creation to build understanding of local organizations' contexts and needs.



- There must be clarity around the partnership model used for co-creation and the specific divisions of roles and responsibilities of partners for successful co-creation.
- When working with Indigenous federations or groups with politically elected leadership, think carefully about when to demand consensus to avoid competing agendas between leaders, and when to separate partner representatives into smaller cohorts to make it easier to hear them.
- Continually engage with sub-awardee organizations, particularly if USAID aims to be more inclusive with its development projects.
- Increase knowledge of co-creation process among USAID staff so that they can provide clear guidance to partners.

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### Timing:

- Develop concrete tasks with Indigenous groups and help provide a framework for implementation, while providing some flexibility in timelines.
- Take into account that many of these Indigenous communities have limited connectivity and have responsibilities such as agriculture and forest management that they have to prioritize. Timing of projects must align with the timing that is reasonable for communities.
- Build in extra time in the process to have participation of Indigenous communities, since USAID timelines often do not align with Indigenous cultural conceptions of time.
- Continued and consistent communication with organizations will help mitigate potential issues.

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### Award Types and Mechanisms:

- Consider results-based assistance mechanisms like Fixed Amount Awards (FAAs). Co-create capacity-building milestones for organizations to strengthen their administrative and financial management, develop policies and procedures, create sustainability and gender equity plans, and train staff, while simultaneously advancing technical objectives.
- Ensure that the number of milestones in an FAA is appropriate for the size and complexity of the award, keeping in mind that each milestone comes with reporting requirements.
- Activities that use Biodiversity funds can benefit from external facilitators that are familiar with the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation to help guide and organize the co-creation process according to these standards.

# COMPILED RESOURCES FOR CO-CREATION WITH INDIGENOUS PARTNERS

## RESOURCES FOR PARTNERS

[Training Series in English, Spanish, Portuguese and French](#) on how to work with USAID.

[WorkwithUSAID.org](#), a free resource hub that empowers organizations with the knowledge and networks to navigate how to work with USAID.

## CO-CREATION RESOURCES FOR USAID STAFF

[2020 Co-creation Field Guide](#)

Video: The 5Ws: Preparing for a Successful Co-creation (2 minutes)

[USAID/Guatemala Learning Lab Report: Building Bridges to Collaboration: How Co-Creation Led to the Puentes Project](#)

[USAID Learning Lab Publications on Co-creation](#)

[Co-creation Discussion Note \(ADS201\)](#)

[Simplified Budget Template \(only accessible to Operating Unit staff, not published for the public\)](#)

[Co-creation Discussion Note \(ADS201\) Additional Help Document](#)

## WORKING WITH INDIGENOUS PARTNERS: RESOURCES FOR USAID STAFF

[USAID Policy on Promoting the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)

[Indigenous Peoples Landscape Analysis](#)

[USAID Road Map for Engagement with Indigenous Peoples](#)

[Implementation Toolkits for USAID Work with Indigenous Peoples](#)

[Sector Specific Guidance for USAID Work with Indigenous Peoples](#)

[2021 Report: Policy Promoting the Rights of](#)

## INFORMATION ABOUT MECHANISMS AND AWARDS

### [Human Rights Support Mechanism: Rapid Response Mechanism](#)

Locally Led Development Fixed Amount Award  
Milestone Tips (not published online, contact Local Works for copy <localworks@usaid.gov.>)

### [New Partnerships Initiative \(NPI\)](#)

Assistance Flexibilities Guidance (not published online, contact Local Works for copy <unsolicited-solutions4LLD@usaid.gov>)

### [Webinar, Slide Deck and Executive Summary: Lessons Learned from USAID New and Local Partnerships \(2022\)](#)

### [ADS Chapter 303: Grants and Cooperative Agreements to Non-Governmental Organizations](#)

### [Annual Program Statement \(APS\)](#)

### [Unsolicited Solutions for Locally Led Development](#)

### [2018 Acquisitions and Assistance Strategy](#)



A woman with dark hair, wearing a white short-sleeved blouse with a decorative yoke and a dark blue skirt with a white pattern, is sitting outdoors. She is focused on weaving a basket using long, green palm leaves. She holds a leaf in her hands, positioning it over a wooden frame that consists of several parallel slats. In the foreground, there is a large pile of harvested palm leaves. The background shows a natural, outdoor setting with dry ground and some green plants.

## ANNEX I: CASE STUDIES

Photo Credit: JHolly Ferrette



# CASE STUDY: NPI CO-CREATION IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC):

## Co-Creation Overview<sup>6</sup>:

The New Partnerships Initiative (NPI) in the DRC involved a co-creation process with representatives of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs).

The NPI co-creation consultation was a two-day event, held May 11-12, 2021 in Kalemie and May 18-19, 2021 in Bukavu. The organizers framed the discussions broadly on five themes: livelihoods, peace and security, rights and justice, services, and natural resource management.

The two-day collaboration workshop was divided into five parts:

1. Introductions and consultation process and objectives;
2. Plenary brainstorming of key issues;
3. Small group discussions of issues and solutions;
4. Plenary discussions; and
5. Closing.

Two main facilitators lead the consultation process: an Indigenous Peoples consultant who had worked with USAID previously and also the founder of an NGO for Indigenous people and a Peace & Stability Officer from the Peace and Security Office who has experience working in eastern Congo. USAID also benefited from having an anthropologist with 30 years of experience in Central Africa working with local communities to inform how to go about the co-creation process as well as representatives from the Democracy, Rights, and Governance Office, the Environment Office, and the Office of Acquisitions and Assistance.

### Benefits of two-day in-person workshops as opposed to a series of virtual sessions:

- The sessions were able to include more local partners and more participants from local communities, especially those who might not have good internet connection.
- There were opportunities to check in with one another after sessions or during breaks during the workshop.
- There was continued communication after the workshop, and the door remained open for partners to ask questions or propose ideas.

<sup>6</sup> Monitoring, Evaluation, and Coordination Contract (MECC): Meeting Report - USAID / NPI - New Partnerships Initiative Co-design workshop AID-660-TO-16-00002; July 30, 2021

Swahili was the main language of the meeting; the local language was used by both the Indigenous facilitator and participants as needed. Interpreters translated from Swahili to French for USAID and staff at both consultation sites. IPLC representatives were supported financially to be able to travel and stay in town for the consultation.

Participants were grouped according to ethnicity (Batwa or Bantu), gender, and age (adult or youth). In reality, the divisions were not clear cut. For example, Bantu and Batwa youths were put all in one group; only male youths participated at both sites. In Kalemie there were five breakout groups and in Bukavu there were four. Working in pairs, USAID/IP staff served as moderators for the groups.

## Partnership Model:

Three partner organizations went through the co-creation process, and two out of the three acted as primes and had sub-awardees. However, all organizations, both primes and sub-awardees participated in the co-creation sessions alongside Indigenous Peoples' groups and community representatives. While the prime organizations were responsible for general management responsibilities, many stakeholders and partners were able to contribute and express their priorities and needs.

## Contracting and Type of Award:

The co-design process was a little different than other co-creation experiences, as USAID was able to fund the process in terms of venues, lodging and travel stipends. USAID/DRC Staff wanted to support people from the villages to come stay in the city for the workshop but were unable to fund this from their end; however, their partners were able to provide financial support to participants to ensure a broader range of voices in the sessions.

USAID/DRC chose a Cooperative Agreement instead of a Fixed Amount Award. This way, the prime had the responsibility to engage with sub-awardees for financial management, and this mechanism was flexible in terms of being able to alter budgets and change the total sums of the grants in response to changes in scope.

## Challenges:

The primary challenge for this co-creation was that USAID/DRC faced staff shortages and limited staff bandwidth which slowed down the process. The entire process took 2.5 years. In order to move things along, USAID/DRC worked with staff from other Operating Units who agreed to support the process, including USAID/El Salvador. However, this meant that once staffing increased in DRC, the DRC team then had to spend a significant amount of time onboarding and getting up to speed on the process.





Credit: Kethley Uy

## Recommendations:

- Transfer leadership and decision-making authority to Indigenous Peoples' organizations for key aspects of co-creation whenever possible.
- Ensure at least some staff engaged in the co-creation process have local language capabilities.
- Select venues that are more comfortable for Indigenous partners; for example, rather than choosing conference halls with laptops, choose open-air venues where people can sit under trees and speak easily. Implementer and USAID staff should go to Indigenous communities for co-creation processes.
- Focus the conversations on specific topics and have conversations with specific groups (such as women or youth) so that you can tailor recommendations more precisely.
- After developing a proposal plan, return to the Indigenous communities to solicit their consent and feedback on the workplan.

# CASE STUDY: HUMAN RIGHTS SUPPORT MECHANISM (HRSM) AMAZON BASIN ACTIVITY

## Co-Creation Overview:

The Human Rights Support Mechanism (HRSM) Amazon Basin Activity was a 12-month rapid response activity aimed at providing accessible and accurate information on COVID-19 within Indigenous communities throughout the Amazon region. The activity also supported Indigenous communities to use communication tools and increase their capacity to advocate for themselves. The co-creation was led by Freedom House, and the activity was designed by Internews. HRSM Amazon worked with communities in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, and Peru.

### Benefits of rapid response mechanism:

- Rapid approval of partners by USAID.
- Flexible mechanism to implement activity the way Internews wants.
- Less bureaucracy for the partners. .

## Partnership Model:

The lead organizations in the co-creation were Freedom House and Internews. Freedom House and Internews partnered with multiple organizations throughout the Amazon region such as Indigenous organizations with experience receiving funds from international NGOs, organizations that are not Indigenous-focused but have experience working with Indigenous communities, and Indigenous communities themselves. Due to the nature of the rapid response, organizations selected as partners had to have immediate capacity to receive funds and work on the activity. However, Internews worked with some community-based organizations to strengthen their capacity during the activity.



Photo source: Internews: <https://internews.org/resource/hrsm-amazon-addressing-covid-19-in-bolivia-brazil-colombia-ecuador-guyana-and-peru/>



## Contracting and Type of Award:

The rapid response mechanism used in HRSM Amazon allowed for a great deal of flexibility in the activity, compared to other activities Internews has worked on with USAID. The mechanism resulted in rapid approval of partners by USAID, and Internews selected many partners with USAID experience, which smoothed over administrative hassles. The main disadvantage of this mechanism was the limited timeframe for the activity, which was a year. The relative brevity raised concerns over sustainability of the activity and its goals. Fortunately, Internews has found ways to stay connected with communities and organizations that were a part of the rapid response.

There was a combination of grants and contracts used, depending on what was needed for the activity. For organizations that Internews wanted specific deliverables from, they focused less on capacity strengthening and used contracts that did not require any changes to the organization. In other cases, sub grants were used for organizations that needed capacity strengthening.

## Challenges:

Given that HRSM Amazon was working in six different countries, Internews noted that navigating the political context of each country was challenging. For example, in Bolivia, Internews had to be conscious of the politics of the organizations they were working with as some had ties with Evo Morales and his administration. There were also social protests in Colombia, and the government of Brazil was both hostile to Indigenous communities and in denial of COVID-19. Internews focused on technical aspects of the activity because of the politicization of COVID-19. Internews did not tell organizations to modulate their political message but were aware that what organizations had to say could have an effect on the activity and their ability to participate.

Another challenge was connectivity. Internews could not monitor or evaluate organizations with limited connectivity as closely as those with stronger internet access. As a result, organizations would have to work independently and check in with Internews when they could. Limited accessibility made it challenging to study impact, and many Indigenous organization may not have the monitoring and evaluation framework to capture impact.

## Recommendations:

- Provide solicitation and co-creation documentation in local languages, rather than English.
- Include members of local communities that USAID wants to service in the process of co-creation, as they may have different priorities than the authorities.
- Develop concrete tasks with Indigenous groups and help provide a framework for implementation, while providing some flexibility in timelines.



# CASE STUDY: B'ATZ REGIONAL INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING PROJECT IN GUATEMALA

## Co-Creation Overview:

The B'atz Regional Institutional Strengthening Project was led by Rainforest Foundation US (RFUS) and the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests (AMPB), aimed at establishing AMPB as a legal entity, creating a centralized system for financing Indigenous communities, and strengthening the Women's Coordination mechanism and Mesoamerican Leadership School within AMPB. The application was received as an unsolicited application to the Operating Unit, and the award for the project was granted by USAID/Guatemala. AMPB is an alliance of Indigenous People's organizations throughout Central America and through this project, AMPB and RFUS aimed to increase local communities' capacity to protect themselves from the consequences of climate change and to protect the environment around them.

## Partnership Model:

RFUS was the prime organization and AMPB was the sub-awardee. Typically, USAID would develop the co-creation process with the prime partner only, but in this process, USAID/Guatemala requested that AMPB participate in the co-creation process from the start. The Operating Unit wanted to give Indigenous Peoples the opportunity to express themselves and their feelings about the project and USAID generally. This created a space of trust with IPs and USAID, which was key for the process. Through this model, the main ideas and suggestions for the project came from Indigenous leaders with support from RFUS and USAID/Guatemala. There was a great deal of collaboration between the organizations and the Operating Unit because USAID/Guatemala was trying to acknowledge the needs of IPs and because it was the first time AMPB had worked with USAID. This co-creation is illustrative of best practices around co-creation since the IPs participated throughout the process and had decision-making power.

### Benefits of early engagement with sub-awardee organization(s):

- AMPB was consulted at the beginning of the process to ensure that Indigenous voices were included in the drafting of the plan. Early engagement built trust with USAID and RFUS.
- Collaboration with AMPB helped them to learn how to submit the necessary information to USAID and to improve their capacity to engage with USAID in the future.

## Contracting and Type of Award:

The B'atz project received a fixed amount award from USAID/Guatemala. This type of award was selected because it is the simplest award that can be offered by USAID compared to other kinds of awards. Before granting the award, USAID/Guatemala conducted a financial audit and reviewed the legal structure of local organizations and determined the type of award to precede with.

## Challenges:

Messaging around the co-creation process presented itself as a challenge. Throughout the co-creation process, USAID/Guatemala had to repeat multiple times that co-creation funding had limits and that there were no additional funds that they could give out other than what was allocated for the activity. Co-creation participants expected more flexibility around the total amount of funds for the activity than USAID/Guatemala could provide. Additionally, USAID's objective of localization was challenged by the fact that the co-creation process is not funded. Smaller organizations do not have the bandwidth to go through the process of co-creation without funding and the guarantee of funding at the end of co-creation. Furthermore, even if a smaller organization is committed to completing the process of co-creation, they may not have the capacity to receive and manage large amounts of award money.

### Consistent Messaging:

Partner organizations were getting conflicting messaging about the co-creation process and funding.

This caused confusion and tension between organizations and USAID that also slowed down the co-creation process.

## Recommendations:

- Take into account that many of these Indigenous communities have limited connectivity and have responsibilities such as agriculture and forest management that they have to prioritize. Timing of projects must align with the timing that is reasonable for communities.
- Continued and consistent communication with organization will help mitigate potential issues.

# CASE STUDY: STRENGTHENING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS, COMMUNITIES, AND INSTITUTIONS FOR RESILIENCE AND SELF-DETERMINED DEVELOPMENT IN ECUADOR

## Co-Creation Overview:

Fundación Raíz (FR) submitted an unsolicited application for an award focused on threats facing Indigenous communities in Ecuador such as natural disasters, armed conflict, and the impacts of COVID-19. The activity aimed to strengthen crisis management capacities of Indigenous Peoples' organizations, develop communication and project management skills, and ensure the resiliency of communities and organizations in the face of threats. The activity worked with various Indigenous organizations throughout Ecuador.

## Partnership Model:

Fundación Raíz was the prime organization and the main connection between partner organizations and USAID/Ecuador. FR began the process of developing the activity with participatory workshops with

Indigenous Peoples to discuss what their needs are and asked for input from the partner organizations. FR worked with four partner organizations in four regions of Ecuador:

- Amazon: Amazon Indigenous Peoples Confederation (CONFENIAE)
- Cotopaxi Province: Indigenous Movement of Cotopaxi (MICC)
- Chimborazo Province: Federation of Evangelical Indigenous Peoples of Ecuador (FEINE)
- Esmeraldas Province: Federation of Chachi Centers of Esmeraldas (FECCHE)

During the FR-led co-creation, there was minimal intervention from USAID/Ecuador. However, USAID/Ecuador wanted to help FR strengthen their organization development and administration, as well as their capacity for risk management. USAID/Ecuador also wanted to help FR become more inclusive and to allocate funds efficiently.

## Contracting and Type of Award:

The activity is in the process of being awarded a Fixed Amount Award (FAA). The FAA allowed FR to use funds more flexibly and demonstrated trust in FR's decision making from USAID/Ecuador. FR is a smaller organization than others that have led co-creations and did not have audited financial statements to provide USAID/Ecuador at the beginning of the process. The Operating Unit was flexible and understanding about FR's capacity and financials. The contracts had to go through the office in Lima, however, because USAID/Ecuador did not have a contracting office. This back and forth slowed down the contracting process.

## Challenges:

Given that the Operating Unit in Ecuador was just starting up, USAID/Ecuador relied largely on USAID/Peru to help with the co-creation process. There was also no contract office at USAID/Ecuador, and they relied on the office in Lima to handle contracting. Communication between entities was also a challenge, and more communication between USAID/Ecuador, USAID/Peru, and Local Works would have likely decreased the amount of back and forth that occurred in the beginning of the co-creation process. The experience of co-creation was a learning process for the organizations involved and USAID/Ecuador.

### Improving Internal Capacities Related to Co-Creation:

Back and forth between USAID/Ecuador and USAID/Peru due to USAID/Ecuador not having OAA expertise in-house resulted in confusion and a slowdown in the co-creation process.

Organizations have critiqued the bureaucratic challenges of working with USAID and they need clear guidance from the Operating Unit.

## Recommendations:

- Continually engage with sub-awardee organizations, particularly if USAID aims to be more inclusive with its development projects.
- Increase knowledge of co-creation process among USAID staff so that they can provide clear guidance to partners.



# CASE STUDY: COLOMBIA ANNUAL PROGRAM STATEMENT CO-CREATIONS

## Co-Creation Overview:

The USAID Operating Unit in Colombia worked with Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities through co-creation to advance inclusive peace, self-governance, and socio-economic development. Through the Annual Program Statement mechanism, USAID/Colombia requested proposals from Indigenous and Afro-Colombian organizations that led to co-creation and eventually signing four awards, including:

- **The Inter-Ethnic Alliance for Peace Activity:** Implemented by the National Association of Displaced Afro-Colombians (AFRODES) and the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC), this activity develops Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities' capacity for self-governance, advocacy, and leadership, addresses food security and income generation, and promotes regional peacebuilding in alignment with the Peace Accord's Ethnic Chapter.
- **The Peaceful and Productive Atrato Activity:** This activity helps the Greater Community Council of the Atrato River (COCOMACIA) develop and update its internal strategic planning tools, improve its community radio station, and foster citizen engagement in peacebuilding.
- **The Avanza Pacífico Activity:** This activity provides scholarships, education support, leadership training, and capacity strengthening to Afro-Colombian and Indigenous individuals and organizations in Colombia's Pacific Coast region.

Convening for the Avanza Pacífico Activity:



Source: Avanza Pacífico  
Factsheet, Photo by Manos  
Visibles

- The Territories of Life Activity: This activity strengthens the capacity of Indigenous organizations and traditional authorities in the Amazon Basin to govern their territories. The activity provides technical assistance to five indigenous community organizations to establish and manage Indigenous Community Conservation Areas (ICCAs).

## Partnership Model:

The Annual Program Statement (APS) mechanism, as well as strong commitment and efforts from Operating Unit staff, allowed for more direct or horizontal partnership models in Colombia, as opposed to prime partners managing sub-awardees in a hierarchical fashion. In addition, many partners had significant experience working with USAID, which allowed for more direct relationships. The sub-awardee organizations that applied had worked with USAID in various ways and were familiar with USAID processes and requirements. Thus, they were able to interact more directly with USAID, as opposed to relying on the prime as an intermediary.

The co-creation process started with the publication of the APS, which asked organizations to propose ideas and projects based on four broad objectives, and the submission of concept papers. Some organizations were then selected to submit full applications, and after these were reviewed, USAID began a co-creation process with several successful organizations. Some of these organizations had previously been sub-awardees under other USAID/Colombia programs and had received capacity-strengthening support that prepared them to be direct partners.

There were no external contractors that managed co-creation for USAID; instead, USAID Operating Unit staff were the main points of contact between USAID and the organizations and led the processes. They pulled in people from the Office of Acquisition and Assistance, Office of Financial Management, and others that could help with the process as necessary.

### Designing Inclusive Application Processes:

USAID/Colombia respondents explained that the APS mechanism allowed them to adapt their application processes to be inclusive of Indigenous and Afro-Colombian groups. They allowed for application materials to be submitted in Spanish and conducted the APS co-creations in Spanish, which led to not only a greater number of applications, but higher quality ones. More members of the organizations and more diverse groups could participate. They also did not need to pay for translation costs which lowered the barrier to application, and the process was simplified without these extra steps..

## Type of Award:

USAID/Colombia respondents credited creative technical officers and acquisition and assistance officers who participated in co-creations with ensuring that funding was tailored to the needs of partner organizations.

Operating Unit staff chose to use Fixed Amount Awards instead of Cooperative Agreements so that first-time local partners could focus on achieving development results and learning how to work with USAID rather than meeting the stringent financial, administrative and reporting standards needed for Cooperative Agreements. Within the Fixed Amount Awards, Operating Unit staff co-created milestones aimed at strengthening partners' internal systems. While partners still had to meet capacity standards before implementation as measured by the pre-award survey, this approach allowed them to continue strengthening their capacities throughout the activity.

## Challenges:

One consideration highlighted by respondents from USAID/Colombia is that the financial auditing process can be very difficult for some small partners and can be a risk for local organizations. This is another reason why in this case, Operating Unit staff preferred to use Fixed Amount Awards, as financial requirements (yearly audits during an award) for partners entering into Cooperative Agreements are more stringent, no matter the amount of funding awarded.

While milestones were helpful in strengthening capacity of partners during implementation, one lesson learned during the APS co-creations is that it is also important to balance the number of milestones to avoid creating additional reporting burdens. One best practice is to co-create milestones that the partner organizations can propose based on their expected cash flow needs. This helps ensure that the number of milestones is appropriate for the size and complexity of the FAA and partners can balance implementation and reporting.

## Recommendations:

- Start through a listening approach and respected leadership and communication structures.
- Co-create agendas to respect traditional communication procedures like opening conversation with traditional prayer
- Consider results-based assistance mechanisms like Fixed Amount Awards (FAA). Co-create capacity-building milestones for organizations to strengthen their administrative and financial management, develop policies and procedures, create sustainability and gender equity plans, and train staff, while simultaneously advancing technical objectives.
- Ensure that the number of milestones in an FAA is appropriate for the size and complexity of the award, keeping in mind that each milestone comes with reporting requirements.
- Engage staff from diverse technical, assistance and acquisition, program, and financial management offices in co-creation to build understanding of local organizations' contexts and needs.

# CASE STUDY: COVID-19 AWARENESS CAMPAIGN CO-CREATION IN PERU

## Co-Creation Overview:

The Congress of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon River Basin (COICA) and Rainforest Foundation US worked together on a co-creation process in Peru to develop a COVID-19 awareness campaign, which was presented to USAID. The campaign was meant to produce informational materials such as podcasts in eight Indigenous languages, as well as Spanish. The co-creation, however, did not reach the award stage.

## Partnership Model:

The original partnership model for this co-creation process was to have Rainforest Foundation US as the Prime partner and COICA as the sub-awardee. However, this partnership model was contested; COICA pushed to be a direct partner instead of a sub-awardee, but USAID staff found that they did not have the financial and administrative systems to absorb the full amount of direct funds for this activity.

Rainforest Foundation US was the prime, but it was not clear what the split of roles and responsibilities was between them and COICA, leading to insufficient leadership and management of the process.

## Contracting and Type of Award:

The original application came through the Unsolicited Solutions for Locally Led Development Program. This initial application was for a COVID-19 response activity, but there was already work being conducted with USAID/Peru related to COVID-19, so the Operating Unit shifted the focus of the activity to COVID-19 awareness and communication tactics.

### Healing relationships for new co-creation with COICA:

USAID/Peru was able to heal their contentious relationship with COICA after this co-creation fell through. Currently, they are in the process of a new co-creation with them for a smaller direct grant (\$250,000) that COICA has the capacity to manage.

In this new co-creation, USAID/Peru has advocated for the president of COICA to be at meetings and has given them a platform to share honestly about their previous experience. This honesty allowed for both sides to build trust with each other for a successful partnership.



## Challenges:

A primary challenge for USAID/Peru was managing expectations of COICA and Rainforest Foundation US. COICA expected a more direct relationship with Operating Unit staff, and they also had expectations around funding and procurement processes that were at odds with the constraints that contracting staff faced. For example, they originally asked for \$4 million for the activity but Local Works can only provide grants of up to \$2 million, and this discrepancy caused tension.

There were also expectations for Rainforest Foundation US to manage the process more intensively, but instead they took on a smaller role. USAID/Peru respondents noted that even in the initial concept note, the relationship between COICA and Rainforest Foundation US was not clear.

Other challenges related to the political structure of COICA, which involves leadership in multiple countries. Holding remote sessions in 4-5 languages was very difficult, and translation issues led to poor communication in some areas. Finally, there were some competing agendas between leaders representing different countries within the governance structure of COICA.

## Recommendations:

- There must be clarity around the partnership model used for co-creation and the specific divisions of roles and responsibilities of partners for successful co-creation.
- When working with Indigenous federations or groups with politically elected leadership, think carefully about when to demand consensus to avoid competing agendas between leaders, and when to separate partner representatives into smaller cohorts to make it easier to hear them.
- Ensure that there are sufficient interpretation and translation services for remote sessions to avoid miscommunication.

# CASE STUDY: HEARTH ACTIVITY CO-CREATION IN ETHIOPIA

## Co-Creation Overview

The Health, Ecosystems and Agriculture for Resilient, Thriving Societies (HEARTH) Ethiopia co-creation was part of the larger HEARTH activity portfolio. HEARTH operates in 12 countries and engages private sector partners to collaboratively implement integrated sustainable development activities that conserve high-biodiversity landscapes and improve the well-being and prosperity of communities that depend on these landscapes. In Ethiopia, the activity focused on developing eco-tourism as a sustainable economic activity that supports conservation through community conservation management and partnerships with the private sector.

The HEARTH/Ethiopia co-creation took place from January 2021 to May 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the co-creation took the form of virtual sessions every one or two weeks, organized by an external facilitation firm that had worked on other HEARTH co-creations.

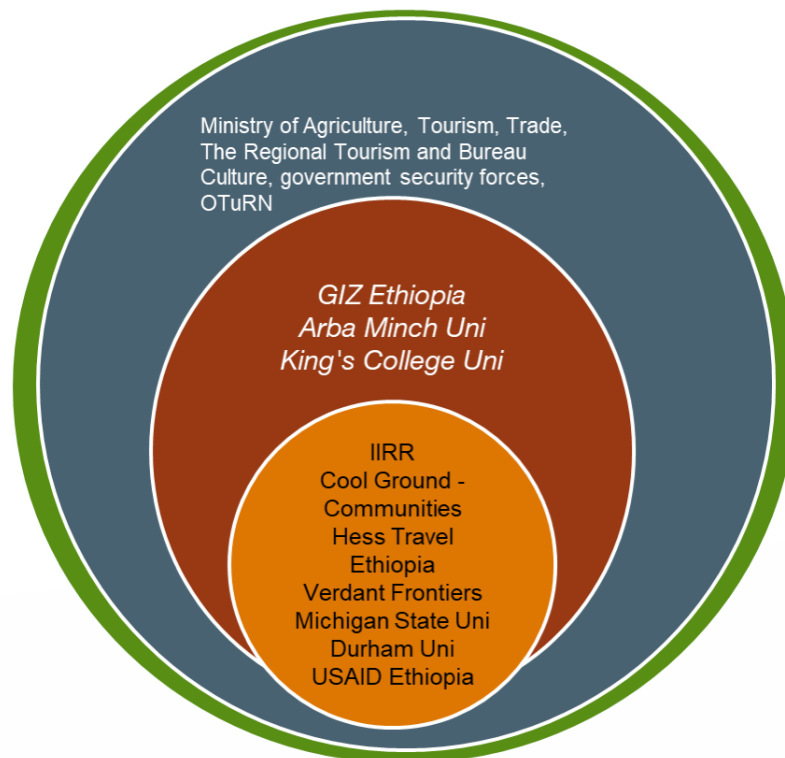
## Partnership Model

The prime organization for this activity was the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR). They had worked with USAID before, but most of the other partners had not. While they had high capacities in general, it took time for them to acclimate to USAID-specific requirements. Partners interviewed expressed that it was helpful to have IIRR as the prime, as they would have had to hire more accountants to meet USAID requirements if they had not had IIRR managing financial processes. USAID staff recommended that future co-creations with first-time USAID partners be less strict on deadlines and provide more USAID staff time to help partners meet these requirements.

HEARTH brought in an external facilitation firm to facilitate the co-creation sessions, who already had experience with other HEARTH facilitations and were familiar with the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation (hereafter: Conservation Standards). The Conservation Standards are a widely used set of concepts, approaches and terminologies for conservation activity design, management and monitoring. These standards were used for all HEARTH programs in different countries and are used for activities funded with Biodiversity funds. Having an external facilitation firm experienced with these standards was an important aspect of the co-creation. These standards can be rigorous, hence the utility of the experienced facilitators; however, they are also flexible and adaptable to different contexts and cases.

Key informant interview respondents emphasized that in practice, there was not one clear lead

organization managing other partners, so the facilitation of this firm was helpful in organizing the process. They divided participating organizations into categories to strategically determine who needed to participate in which sessions, as presented in the graphic below:



*Concentric circles of participation in co creation: Since sessions were cumulative and built upon work done previously, it was important to have consistency in participation throughout the workshop. The partners in the smallest circle participated in most or all sessions, and the partners in larger circles participated in fewer, select sessions.*

## Contracting and Type of Award

HEARTH, while a mechanism in and of itself, was also initiated as an addendum to Ethiopia's APS and drew from multiple funding streams, in particular Biodiversity and Democracy, Human Rights and Governance funding. USAID staff submitted expressions of interest and internal applications for these funds.

The award type for this activity was a Cooperative Agreement. Since Biodiversity funding was used, there were specific legal responsibilities around what interventions could be implemented. Therefore, USAID staff did not choose a fixed amount award, as they needed to stay closely involved to ensure these responsibilities were met. In addition, the activity was complex and worked with Indigenous communities that did not have long standing relationships with USAID. Therefore, USAID staff did not have a good enough understanding of the internal structures of these communities and their relationships with local governments to get the costing right for a Fixed Amount Award. A Cooperative Agreement allowed USAID to "learn along the way."

## Challenges



The preference of USAID staff initiating the co-creation would have been to have an in-person, five-day co-creation session, which would have allowed for more input with Indigenous Peoples. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, co-creation sessions had to be held virtually and spaced out. The facilitation firm came up with a community engagement strategy since it was extremely difficult for Indigenous communities to participate in virtual meetings.

The co-creation ended up depending on Cool Ground (an implementing partner of the activity that had close ties to Indigenous communities) staff to go to the communities in person, present summaries of the co-creation content, and gather their feedback to share back with the co-creation team. While this strategy successfully allowed for Indigenous participation in the process despite the pandemic limiting in-person engagement, it also had several challenges and limitations. Relying on Cool Ground was not ideal because co-creation for the purpose of leading up to a proposal and award is not funded in and of itself; Cool Ground needed to make up front investments to fund these trips to communities. While they expressed that they were happy to do so, future co-creations should consider this constraint for small, local partners.

In addition, since timelines for engagement with the communities were dictated by the virtual session schedule and the schedules of Cool Ground staff, the approach used sometimes felt rushed according to respondents. They noted that USAID timelines do not always align with Indigenous communities' own timelines or cultural conceptions of time; having to move quickly through the process limited the communities' participation. Future virtual co-creations should consider other strategies to ensure Indigenous participation, even if it means extra logistical steps to bring representatives to venues that have internet so that they can join remote calls.

Another challenge was that certain stakeholders—Ministry representatives and private sector tourism companies—were not involved until relatively late in the co-creation process. They ended up having some conflicting interests with the activity design, because all outcomes and sub-purposes of the activity needed to have direct and clear conservation outcomes, and these stakeholders wanted to prioritize economic outcomes.

## Recommendations

- Build in extra time in the process to have participation of Indigenous communities, since USAID timelines often do not align with Indigenous cultural conceptions of time.
- Ensure that government and private sector stakeholders participate in the co-creation process from its early stages to ensure that their interests are accounted for.
- Activities that use Biodiversity funds can benefit from external facilitators that are familiar with the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation to help guide and organize the co-creation process according to these standards.

# CASE STUDY: WEAVING LIVES AND HOPE ACTIVITY IN COLOMBIA

## Co-Creation Overview:

The Weaving Lives and Hope Activity (WLH) is an activity that provides services to conflict survivors and conflict-affected communities in Colombia, including Afro-Colombian and Indigenous or ethnic communities. The activity collaborates with these communities to promote inclusive development and address the effects of conflict-driven trauma by improving access to mental health and psychosocial services. The interventions also focus on improving civil society organizations' (CSO) capacities to respond to conflict effectively, and work to promote trust building and reconciliation by developing interpersonal and communication skills amongst community members. Finally, the activity also aims to improve livelihoods through business promotion. WLH has been operating since April 2021 and is scheduled to run until March 2026. The activity is implemented in regions of Bajo Cauca, Montes de María, Pacífico Medio, Alto Patía, and Northern Cauca.

The WLH co-creation was organized into three phases: the design phase, inception phase and the intervention phase which used the community intervention model 'Weaving Together.'

## Partnership Model:

The design phase of the co-creation, USAID staff consulted with numerous people in the Colombian government, local organizations and communities about the state of mental health services in conflict-affected communities. These consultations, along with desk research, informed what the activity and award would be. Once the solicitation was published, Operating Unit staff chose the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as the prime implementer of the award.

Once IOM was brought on board, this kicked off the inception phase of the activity. During this inception phase, the partners were then given opportunities to validate the theories of change, hypotheses, and desk study findings from the design phase in each included municipality. This gave them enough information to then go into the local communities during the implementation phase to hold in-depth meetings, using the World Cafés methodology.

The implementation phase included a Social Mapping exercise, World Cafés and institutional focus groups with community members, and then a Conceptual Pilot to provide feedback and validation of the interventions in each community before bringing activities to scale. World Cafés are a method of conversation; discussions are set up in environments like cafes with refreshments. Four to six people sit at a table and hold a series of conversations for 20 to 45 minutes and then change groups. WLH implemented a total of 15 Municipal Cafés in the 15 target municipalities, with the participation of

304 community members and 259 institutional actors. The participating communities, including Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities, were given the opportunity to share their experiences with conflict and what they would like the activity to focus on. These conversations allowed implementers to gather information to conduct Social Mapping and to understand where there may be significant challenges with communication or accessibility, thus allowing them to develop activities that are closely tailored to the needs of each community.

## Weaving Lives and Hope Intervention Model Infographic

### Model of intervention Weaving Lives and Hope WLH



## Contracting and Type of Award:

WLH Activity was funded through a Cooperative Agreement. The Cooperative Agreement allowed for substantial involvement of USAID during the co-creation process and continued dialogue between USAID, IOM, and local organizations.

## Challenges:



There were many partners involved in the WLH activity, such as multiple government ministries, NGOs, local government, and CSOs. Whilst this diversity in stakeholders helped develop a well-informed activity, there was a wide array of interests from the group, which made it challenging to narrow down priorities during the design phase. While it was challenging, the participatory design phase was structured to guarantee that WLH planned activities that responded to all needs and priorities in an accurate and pertinent manner. After the design phase, tailored co-creation of activities in each community during the inception and implementation phases allowed implementers to center their activity designs around the needs of the communities themselves, in particular Indigenous life plans.

## Recommendations:

- Working with Indigenous communities requires time to build trust, establish relationships, and facilitate meaningful engagement and consultation so that activities can be tailored to their specific governance systems and realities. Building time for continued consultation and rigorous co-creation into implementation ensures sufficient time for sustainable change.
- Harmonize concepts from Indigenous communities' own languages. For example, the concept of mental health problems for the Nasa people is based on spiritual disharmony and disharmony with their territory. Therefore, mental health interventions must be aligned with this conceptualization.
- Maintain fluid, constant, and timely communication with ethnic or Indigenous authorities, as their guidance and support are crucial to the success of activities. Consider and respect the community's time to work through their authorities and governance structures for decision making.



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