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Approaches in complex and challenging environments for sustainable SRHR

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Principles into practice
Co-creation of learning in complex and challenging environments

Discussion guide and toolkit

IPPF   FRONTLINE AIDS   Internews   LONDON SCHOOL of HYGIENE &TROPICAL MEDICINE   The Open University   WOMEN'S REFUGEE COMMISSION

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Abbreviations

ACCESS	Approaches to Complex and Challenging Environments for Sustainable Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
CSE	Comprehensive Sexuality Education
CSO	Civil society organisation
FPAN	Family Planning Association of Nepal
GTA	Gender transformative approaches
LMIC	Low-and middle-income country
LSHTM	London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
IPPF	International Planned Parenthood Federation
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OU	The Open University UK
RHU	Reproductive Health Uganda
SALAMA	The Lebanese Association for Family Health
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
TYTO	Take your training online
UK	United Kingdom
UNFPA	United Nation Population Fund
WRC	Women's Refugee Commission

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Cover Image:

Family planning services at the mobile clinic at the accomodation center Dugudiua, Nicoadala, Zambezia province, Mozambique (Amodefa - IPPF - Australian Aid). Copyright: IPPF/Isabel Corthier

Introduction

Our world is increasingly affected by natural disasters, prolonged conflict, economic and political crises and disease outbreaks such as COVID19. These, alongside many complex and interconnected barriers, can prevent people from gaining access to essential services such as healthcare, especially in countries with the lowest levels of development, and among populations in the poorest and most marginalised communities. In response to these major societal challenges, in recent years there has been a drive towards co-creation in international development programmes. This is an approach in which researchers, practitioners and communities work together, sharing power and responsibility from the start to the end of the project, including the generation of knowledge[1]. Funding bodies and agencies assert that collaboration and co-creation of research with communities are important for research equity and impact[2].

These new ways of working and engagement lead to new partnerships, improved processes and outputs, and offer exciting opportunities to improve learning and practice. They may also lead to changes that address significant power imbalances in decision-making processes and representation in policy, practice and research. However, they also present considerable challenges:

- How to ensure that people across a range of organisations with different motivations, agendas and goals develop work that shares a common vision and commitment to improving the lives of the most marginalised populations?

- Which forms this work should take to ensure that mechanisms are established that recognise and harness the different types of knowledge and experiences brought by of particular communities?

- How to involve various affected groups / communities /stakeholders meaningfully in such processes?

- What tensions exist and what is the impact of these?

This guide offers several practical examples drawing on a major multi-stakeholder UK Aid Connect project, Approaches to Complex and Challenging Environments for Sustainable Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) (ACCESS) (2019-2021), as a way of exploring these questions. All the examples included illustrate some co-created activity that promoted co-produced research and programme/intervention development. The guide is a result of consortium work trying to understand, design and implement projects that are co-created, participatory and community-led and underpinned by the principles of gender-transformation and decolonisation. It aims to offer an actionable set of tools to help researchers, practitioners and policymakers in universities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other civil society organisations and the public sector learn more about co-creation and take concrete steps to improve how they do it.

1 National Institute for Health Research. (2018). Guidance on co-producing a research project. https://www.invo.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Copro_Guidance_Feb19.pdf.

2 National Institute for Health Research. (2020). Promoting equality, diversity and inclusion in research. NIHR. https://www.nihr.ac.uk/about-us/our-contribution-to-research/equality-diversity-and-inclusion.htm.

Terminology

Many of the words and concepts used in this guide have multiple definitions, some of which are contested. We have provided brief definitions of four key terms used and shared reflections on the tensions around these.

Co-creation

The term co-creation is used to signify an approach in which researchers, practitioners and communities work together, sharing power and responsibility from the start to the end of a project. We recognise that terms such as co-production, participation, community engagement and mobilisation and community involvement are also widely used in the literature with similar meanings. We are also using these terms. However, we take the view that co-creation is wider in scope and encompasses a range of different activities, such as co-planning, co-developing, co-delivering, co-designing, co-collating, co-producing, co-evaluating and so on that together aim at the active involvement of various stakeholders at different stages of a project. We thus define co-creation as the critical mix of activities[3] and knowledge/expertise that lead to the development of new or adapted programmes, resources, products or services through regular, long-term relationships established between various stakeholders, where all these groups and individuals together make substantial contributions to, and use of the knowledge and other outputs generated. The term is highly political and bound up with power relations and this underpins our values and approaches to co-creation of learning. We encourage you to think about power, who is invited and who is excluded from this process but also who is able to co-create. We also invite you to provide the space for continual reflective practice during co-creation.

Communities

In this guide the term communities is used to signify marginalised and under-served populations living within complex and challenging environments (e.g. people in fragile states and humanitarian settings, people living in remote areas or mobile populations, refugees and internally displaced people, adolescents and young people, women and girls in all their diversity, people living with HIV, sex workers). We also use the term to signify community organisations or community groups that are formed and are related to and/or provide services to these populations.

Complex and challenging environments

We define complex and challenging environments as those settings where social disadvantage intersects with oppressive political, climatic or conflict situations. Such environments might include weak or unstable political situations (armed conflicts, weak governance or economic crises); poor health infrastructure (severe shortages of medical staff to serve refugees, lack of rural health infrastructure); physical disaster (earthquakes, floods, drought); disease outbreaks (Ebola, Zika, covid); and oppressive political environment (severe gender, ethnic, sexuality, disability-related inequities).

Gender Transformation

Gender transformative approaches (GTA) are programs and interventions that create opportunities for individuals to actively challenge gender norms, promote positions of social and political influence for women in communities, and address power inequities between persons of different genders. GTA create an enabling environment for gender transformation by going beyond just including women as participants .

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3 Brudney, J. L., and Robert E. E. (1983). "Toward a Definition of the Coproduction Concept." Public Administration Review, 43 (1), pp. 59–65, https://doi.org/10.2307/975300.

4 https://www.healthcommcapacity.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Gender-Transformative-Approaches-An-HC3-Research-Primer. pdf

Who is this guide for?

The guide is aimed at people and organisations that are considering putting co-creation of learning and learning resources at the heart of existing or future projects. It introduces some of the key principles that informed approaches developed as part of the ACCESS project and presents cases and suggests tools and activities to help you to critically reflect on them.

This toolkit targets practitioners, at all levels of experience and working in different contexts:

- **Researchers** from any organisation and discipline interested in co-creation and participatory, community-led research.

- **Staff in NGOs, INGOs and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)** with roles in supporting projects, education, training, research and evaluation of programmes (e.g. health programme managers, peer educators).

- **Societal partners** who wish to engage in knowledge co-creation with their partners, e.g. partners from industry, the cultural sector, the public sector, community organisations, the public.

What does this guide include?

The guide is a collection of resources organised around topics (such as the role of co-creation in participatory and community-led projects) and some guiding principles for co-creation. A few cases have been included in the guide because they illustrate different ways that co-creation has been tried within the ACCESS programme. The cases also illustrate how co-creation was implemented at a distance and remotely given that the work described here was carried out during a period of global and local lockdowns due to COVID19 pandemic. Case studies include testimonials from project team members and our assessment of the degree of
co-creation achieved.

The guide is a collection of three tools:

- **Tool 1** provides some information on why co-creation is important when working with communities in complex and challenging settings. It is designed to help you consider the most important issues when involved in the co-creation of programmes and resources in such environments. Tool 1 also includes three reflective tasks that you could do independently or with your team.

- **Tool 2** gives you access to four case studies from the ACCESS programme. These highlight some of the opportunities and challenges in undertaking or supporting co-creation. Tool 2 also includes two reflective tasks that you could do independently or with your team and encourages you to consider aspects of your own programme that is either work in progress or is in the planning stage.

- **Tool 3** provides "Top Ten Tips" for planning and putting co-creation in practice and for doing co-creation online. These tips, shared by partners of the ACCESS consortium, offer brief introductions and links to shared ACCESS learning on key aspects around the co-creation of programmes. This tool encourages you to consider and share your own tips based on your experience in co-creation.

Although the guide predominately draws inspiration from work on the ACCESS programme, it may serve a wider audience whose work is with marginalised and under-served populations in complex and challenging environments.

How to use the guide

The guide includes four cases that reflect difference aspects of co-creation. While we recognise that co-creation could take place from the start to the end of the project[5], we are also mindful that you and other stakeholders may choose to engage in co-creation only in specific aspects of a programme (e.g. adapt a training resource). Reasons for this could include time, funding, limited human resources, access to stakeholders or addressing specific objectives of a project.

We have included these four cases as they highlight issues that you may also want to consider in your work in complex and challenging environments. These focus on:

- Understanding the context, including mapping the stakeholders;

- Making decisions of the purpose of the work to be co-created;

- Re-purposing existing resources and tailoring these to be used in context;

- Co-designing learning materials or outputs of a project;

- Engaging in co-creation at a distance and remotely.

We recognise that each project and context of work are different, and projects do not often run in a smooth, predictable way. This guide is designed to be flexible and adaptable. It does not need to be read in any particular order and you can choose which tools/cases to use.

The primary aim of this guide is to enable you to make links between theory and practice in ways that make you more confident in taking action and engaging in co-creation.

You may want to use the guide in three possible ways:

i. **Individually** - to explore your own assumptions and understandings of work around co-creation, and to use some of the cases included in the guide to consider and reflect on some issues that might arise in a project.

ii. **Within a team / across teams within your organisation** - to explore your team and organisations' assumptions and understanding of co-creation and build understandings about what forms of co-creation could be most suitable for strands of work you are undertaking.

iii. **Across collaborative organisations / stakeholders** - to build understanding between stakeholders and explore how each sees themselves and their organisation in work around co-creation and to agree principles and processes around co-creation.

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[5] National Institute for Health Research. (2018). Guidance on co-producing a research project. https://www.invo.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Copro_Guidance_Feb19.pdf.

You and your team may consider the following to make the most of the tools included:

- **Facilitator** - Ensure you have a facilitator. This is likely to be you or one of your stakeholders, though if you are working in challenging situations you may want to bring in an external facilitator. A facilitator is a person who is able to bring a team together and influence stakeholders within his/her own organisation but also across organisations.

- **Capture discussions and contributions** – Ensure that you are capturing the key points raised in the discussion (e.g. in post-it notes, virtual whiteboards) or create diagrams as part of this process. Either create a shared space to store the outputs or take photos to share. Having a record of what was thought about or agreed can help with tracing how ideas have evolved or troubleshooting in later stages of co-creation.

- **Use the tools in ways that suit your needs** - The way the resources are presented here is only a guide and we recognise that based on your needs, you can change, adapt and use them in a way that makes sense for you and the people you are working with.

- **Use additional materials** – To go through some of the activities you will need pens in several colours, sticky notes and large sheets of paper (eg, flipchart paper) or for example printouts of the cases.

- **Organise online meetings** – The activities could be organised online. Ensure you and your team have internet access, devices to allow for everyone to connect, access to videoconferencing tools (such as Zoom, MS Teams, Skype, Cisco Webex, Whereby or Google Meet) and access to online whiteboards (such as Google Jamboard, Miro, MS Teams whiteboard or the Canvas Chrome app).

How was this guide developed?

This guide has been made possible with funding under the UK Aid Connect programme and was developed as an output from the ACCESS project. ACCESS was led by The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and included Frontline AIDS, Internews, The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), The Open University (OU), and The Women's Refugee Commission (WRC). The consortium focused on complex and challenging environments in Lebanon, Mozambique, Nepal, and Uganda.

The guide was written by the team based at the Open University: Dr Koula Charitonos, Dr Rebecca Jones, Professor Peter Keogh, Professor Lesley Hoggart, and Ms Ellen Scott. It drew inspiration on the 'Rethinking Research Partnerships: Discussion Guide and Toolkit'[6], the SHAPE-ID toolkit[7] and the Tackling Antimicrobial Resistance Toolkit[8].

The content, including the diagrams, case studies tools and discussion points, emerged as part of a collective process with the consortium partner organisations listed above and the Family Planning Association of Nepal (FPAN), Reproductive Health Uganda (RHU), and The Lebanese Association for Family Health (SALAMA). The development was supported through two participatory workshops that took place with ACCESS consortium partners and in-country partners during the ACCESS consortium meetings in July and October 2021.

We welcome any feedback you have on the guide or reflections from your practice, as well as suggestions, additional discussion points, alternative resources and ideas. Please send these to oudo-international-enquiries@open.ac.uk

The Principles in Practice Discussion guide and toolkit is available from the Open University at https://wels.open.ac.uk/research/access

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6 Fransman, Jude, Newman, Kate and Cornish, Hilary (2017). Rethinking Research Partnerships: Discussion Guide and Toolkit. Christian Aid. Available at: discussion-guide-ngo-academic-research-oct2017_0.pdf (christianaid.org.uk)

7 The SHAPE-ID toolkit was developed by the SHAPE-ID project, a Coordination and Support Action funded by the European Commission under the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme Available at: https://www.shapeidtoolkit.eu/about/

8 Charitonos, K., Goshtasbpour, F., Dawadi, S., Badger, S., Littlejohn, A., Vaidya, A., Giri, S. and Owusu-Ofori, A. (2021) Tackling Antimicrobial Resistance: The AMR Surveillance Toolkit, The Open University. Available at: https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/view.php?id=7828.

Tool 1

Why is co-creation critical in addressing societal challenges?

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Tool 1: Why is co-creation critical in addressing societal challenges?

By the time you have worked through this section, you will have:

✔ An awareness of the reasons why co-creation is important.

✔ An awareness of a working definition of co-creation.

✔ An appreciation of the key principles that underpinned the ACCESS programme and influenced how co-creation was understood and implemented in practice.

✔ An understanding that co-creation may have many types and levels.

✔ An understanding of a framework to guide co-creation of learning.

✔ An appreciation of where your work stands in the co-creation approach.

1.1 Introduction

Development challenges are complex with multiple interconnected components that often cannot be solved by any single development actor or organisation. At the heart of work in this context are different and diverse knowledge, for example, knowledge based on work experiences, knowledge based on lived experience and knowledge based on academic work. Taken together these different forms of knowledge can lead to the creation of new objects[9] – whether it is a Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) course to be taught to students in a school or a new evidence-based medical protocol on abortion to be implemented through continuing professional education.

The definitions of the term co-creation differ widely. In this guide we take co-creation to encompass a range of different activities (Bovaird and Loeffler[10]) such as co-planning, co-developing, co-delivering, co-designing, co-collating, co-producing, co-evaluating and so on that together aim at the active involvement of various actors / stakeholders in the design and delivery of a programme or the provision of a service. We thus define co-creation as the critical mix of such activities[11] and knowledge/expertise that lead to the development of new or adapted programmes, learning resources/products or services through regular, long-term relationships established between researchers, practitioners, affected communities, where all these groups and individuals make substantial contributions to, and use of the knowledge and other outputs generated. We recognize that the extent to which the various stakeholders are invited to be involved and provide input in the process and the ways in which relationships are established varies. Echoing what others have already said[12] "it is somewhat misleading to speak of co-production [co-creation] as a single phenomenon; there are, in fact, many different types of co-production [co-creation]" (p.427).

9 Fenwick, T. and Edwards, R. (2010). Knowledge, Innovation and Knowing in Practice. 36-51. In Actor-Network Theory in Education. Routledge, pp. 36–51. doi: 10.4324/9780203849088-7

10 Bovaird T and Loeffler E (2012). From engagement to co-production: How users and communities contribute to public services. In: Pestoff V, Brandsen T and Verschuere B (eds) New Public Governance, the Third Sector and Co-production. New York and London: Routledge, pp. 35–60.

11 Brudney, J. L., and Robert E. E. (1983). "Toward a Definition of the Coproduction Concept." Public Administration Review, 43 (1), pp. 59–65, https://doi.org/10.2307/975300.

12 Brandsen, T. and Honingh, M. (2016) 'Distinguishing Different Types of Coproduction: A Conceptual Analysis Based on the Classical Definitions', Public administration review, 76(3), pp. 427–435. doi: 10.1111/puar.12465.

'Co-creation' is becoming an increasingly popular term in development work, policymaking, and research. It is an approach in which researchers, practitioners, affected communities and the public work together, sharing power and responsibility from the start to the end of a project[13] to ensure that the proposed solutions are relevant, timely, effective, and efficient. Co-creation is seen as 'putting people at the centre' of what we do[14]. It involves active involvement in shaping how a problem or challenge is understood or framed; identifying and appraising the range of possible responses to the problem or challenge; and designing and implementing a response (programme, intervention, project or resources). Co-creation thereby strives to be a meaningful collaboration between stakeholders as active participants in the process, constructing understanding and resources with one another[15].

It is important to pay close attention to elements such as relationships and mechanisms that allow co-creation to take place but also examine the challenges of doing co-creation and what the implications are for participants in the process. To this end, this guide will illustrate what co-creation might look like using four cases:

a. Case 1 Co-creation of an epidemic and pandemic module

b. Case 2 Co-creation of the Take Your Training Online course

c. Case 3 Co-creation of network mapping approach

d. Case 4 Co-creation work on Safe Abortion Care and Medical Abortion in Nepal

By providing these cases, it is not our intention to provide a blueprint or 'one size fits all' guide to co-creation. Co-creation is highly context dependent[16]. What works well in one situation and at one time may be impossible in another. There is no single formula or method for co-creation, and we hope that the cases will illustrate this. There is however much to learn from examining how co-creation works in diverse settings, including low-and middle-income countries (LMICs) where our cases are based.

Despite the promises held by engagement and involvement in co-creation as well as commitments made in the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 for a "participation revolution", recent evidence shows that these have not yet ignited[17]. 'Co-creation' is appealing to many groups and organisations, yet - as you may have experienced already - it can be more challenging to navigate as stakeholders active in humanitarian / development settings. Further to this, it is not always evident what counts as co-creation: what is being created, under what circumstances, and with what implications for participants. This is partly because in different fields (e.g. medical, education, design) how co-creation is understood, its scope and what is trying to achieve is envisioned differently. Co-creation could be viewed as an exploratory space and a generative process that leads to different, and sometimes unexpected, forms of knowledge, values, and social relations[18].

This guide provides some tools to support you and your collaborators in participating in this exploratory space and being involved in co-creation approaches.

13 National Institute for Health Research. (2018). Guidance on co-producing a research project. https://www.invo.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Copro_Guidance_Feb19.pdf.

14 https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/a-participation-revolution-include-people-receiving-aid-in-making-the-decisions-which-affect-their-lives#_ftn1

15 Bovill, C., Cook-Sather, A., Felten, P., Millard, L. & Moore-Cherry, N. Addressing potential challenges in co-creating learning and teaching: overcoming resistance, navigating institutional norms and ensuring inclusivity in student–staff partnerships. High Educ 71, 195–208 (2019).

16 Tembo, D. et al. Effective engagement and involvement with community stakeholders in the co-production of global health research. Bmj 372, n178 (2021)

17 https://odi.org/en/insights/five-years-on-from-the-world-humanitarian-summit-lots-of-talk-no-revolution/

18 Filipe A, Renedo A, Marston C (2017) The co-production of what? Knowledge, values, and social relations in health care. PLoS Biol 15(5): e2001403. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal. pbio.2001403

> **Co-creation means working with a number of different stakeholders in the project […] Working with each of the relevant stakeholders in as equal a way as possible, without privileging anybody's areas of expertise and knowledge […] It's really about working together and working out why each member of the team is there […] Making the best of the knowledge and expertise that each member brings, but then also the dynamic of sharing that knowledge in the co-creative process.**
>
> **Interview with ACCESS consortium member from the Open University**

Task 1.1

What has your experience of co-creation been?

Individually or as a team

Time needed: 30 minutes

In the context of your work, have you engaged in co-creation approach yet?

If yes,

- What made you decide to use co-creation?

- Who did you use co-creation with? For example, are they individuals or institutions? What sectors do they sit in? For example, are they part of a government, the public or private sector, or are they members of a community?

- Did you use co-creation in a specific part of your programme / intervention?
  This for example could be in scoping phase or needs assessment.

- How were relationships between the involved stakeholders developed?

- What are your thoughts after having used co-creation in your work?
  In relation to this, it is useful to determine if it supported or challenged your work in any way. Did this process lead to any unexpected outcomes?

- What do you and your organisation understand of what co-creation is?
  Make a note of this.

It's fine if you haven't engaged in co-creation yet. In this stage you may want to consider how co-creation could have been embedded in specific pieces of work you have already completed. How might co-creation have benefitted specific pieces of work you have already completed? Are there any reasons why it was not possible to use co-creation in the context of your work? What do you and your organisation understand of what co-creation is? Make a note of this.

1.2 Why engage in co-creation?

Co-creation approaches to knowledge can bring a range of benefits to organisations and stakeholders by involving groups and community members as partners instead of treating them merely as research 'subjects' in the traditional sense. Co-creation is responding to questions such as whose voice counts, and how, which are important in knowledge production. This way co-creation is well positioned to address various forms of 'epistemic injustice'[19] (p.44) that historically demeaned certain people and groups as knowers and excluded them from knowledge creation.

Processes of co-creation may yield unexpected insights into gaps in subject knowledge (e.g. medical, microbiology, education), needs, and/or service improvements. Engaging with individuals and communities on addressing 'wicked problems' and drawing on their knowledge and experiences may provide insights and lead to products and relevant solutions that otherwise would have been overlooked. By co-developing research questions and working closely with communities, people engaged in this type of research can respond to calls to be more sensitive to local needs and local concerns in their development of programmes, interventions, and services. Involvement of end users in the design of projects has also been shown to improve recruitment of participants, making implementation and the impact and uptake of the research results more likely[20][21] .

Nevertheless, there are some common challenges related co-creation. These barriers centre on problems of politics and power imbalances, finance and resourcing, access and inclusion, relationship building, and community disengagement[22]. Furthermore, co-creation is not free of risk or cost - five types of costs associated with co-produced research affecting the research itself are documented in the literature[23]: the research process, professional risks for researchers and stakeholders, personal risks for researchers and stakeholders, and risks to the wider cause of scholarship.

Sharing power is a key element of co-creation[24]. As you might have experienced already, programmatic work and research are shaped by power imbalances that usually depend on whose knowledge is valued in various interactions. For example, within researchers and research teams, and between those teams and the communities they engage with. Often power lies with who has the resources, the funding, the decision-making power, and the knowledge. We recognise a persistent tension between approaches to co-creation that aim to widen access and participation in knowledge production and traditional concepts of hierarchies of knowers (e.g. medical hierarchies) that overlook knowledge forms that emerge or exist outside certain settings (e.g. academia). We also recognize that the extent to which the various stakeholders inform or make decisions in the co-creation process can fluctuate and are affected by the different flows of power in the relationships, also dependent on specific contexts and individual positions. This is a matter of concern in co-creation approach and creates practical and ethical dimensions when building relationships with individuals and communities that carefully and critically pay attention to issues of power. Some of these issues will be illustrated in the four cases that will be presented in Tool 2.

19 Fricker M (2007) Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

20 Staley K. 'Is it worth doing?' Measuring the impact of patient and public involvement in research. Res Involv Engagem 2015;1:6. doi:10.1186/s40900-015-0008-5

21 Crocker JC, Ricci-Cabello I, Parker A, et al. Impact of patient and public involvement on enrolment and retention in clinical trials: systematic review and meta-analysis. BMJ 2018;363:k4738. doi:10.1136/ bmj.k4738

22 Tembo, D. et al. Effective engagement and involvement with community stakeholders in the co-production of global health research. Bmj 372, n178 (2021).

23 Oliver, K., Kothari, A. & Mays, N. (2019). The dark side of coproduction: do the costs outweigh the benefits for health research? Health Res Policy Sy 17 (33) doi: 10.1186/s12961-019-0432-3

24 National Institute for Health Research. (2018). Guidance on co-producing a research project. https://www.invo.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Copro_Guidance_Feb19.pdf.

Task 1.2

Reflections on power relationships and flows

Individually or as a team

Time needed: 1 hour

Fransman, Jude, Newman, Kate and Cornish, Hilary (2017). Rethinking Research Partnerships: Discussion Guide and Toolkit. Christian Aid. Available at: discussion-guide-ngo-academic-research-oct2017_0.pdf (christianaid.org.uk)

In the context of your work and a programme/project you are currently involved in or you are planning in the future:

- Who are the key stakeholders that influence (or could influence) developments in the programme? This might include individuals, groups or organisations in the public or private sector. Place these in a diagram drawn on a flipchart paper. Be as specific as possible e.g. write names of individuals and organisations.

- Are they related to each other and in what ways? Add the relationships to your diagram and draw connections with each other, if applicable.

- What are the key interests of these different stakeholders? These may include the reasons why they are involved in the programme (visible and invisible), what they would like to achieve and so on. Make a note of these.

- What gives each of these stakeholders the influence? For example money, access to other powerful relationships, domain expertise etc. List those in your diagram.

- How do you perceive their influence? How is their influence perceived by other stakeholders in the team? Make a note of these.

- Reflect on the resulting diagram. Are there stakeholders that are more connected? Which actors /people are least connected? Are there any actors/people that are not linked at all with others? What does the map say about who influences? Is the diagram pointing to anything you want to do or change because of your observations? What do you have to do to bring this change? What support would you need to make this change happen?

Remember that power relations are never static. Power relationships depend on specific situations and individual positions and are experienced differently at various points in time and across the lifecycle of a project. At various stages of a programme or a project revisit this task to examine flows of power in your team and consider what enabled or hindered any changes to occur in the diagram.

Considerations of power relations are particularly important when examining the model presented in Figures 1 and 2.

1.3 Levels and types of co-creation

When considering possible levels and types of co-creation in complex and challenging environments, Arnstein's well-known "ladder of participation" (1971)[25] was found helpful. Arnstein described eight possible levels of participation at which citizens might operate in planning for their communities. On the lower rungs of this ladder are manipulation, therapy, and placation of the public - processes that enable powerholders to maintain control. Then the more positive activities of informing and consultation; on the higher rungs, we find partnership and eventually even delegated power and citizen control, with the top rung implying that citizens are in complete control of decision-making.

By following Arnstein's model, but also adapting the 'Ladder of student participation in curriculum design' proposed by Bovill and colleagues[26] we suggest some levels and types of co-creation of educational resources and programmes in complex and challenging environments with marginalised communities. To do this we used ideas and concepts that were informed by both the literature and discussions among members of the authoring team, echoing our experiences from co-created projects in which we have been involved. Our objective is to use the concept of a ladder continuum with its different levels as an illustrative tool. We are using this tool in the presentation of the four cases. This adapted model is presented in Figure 1.
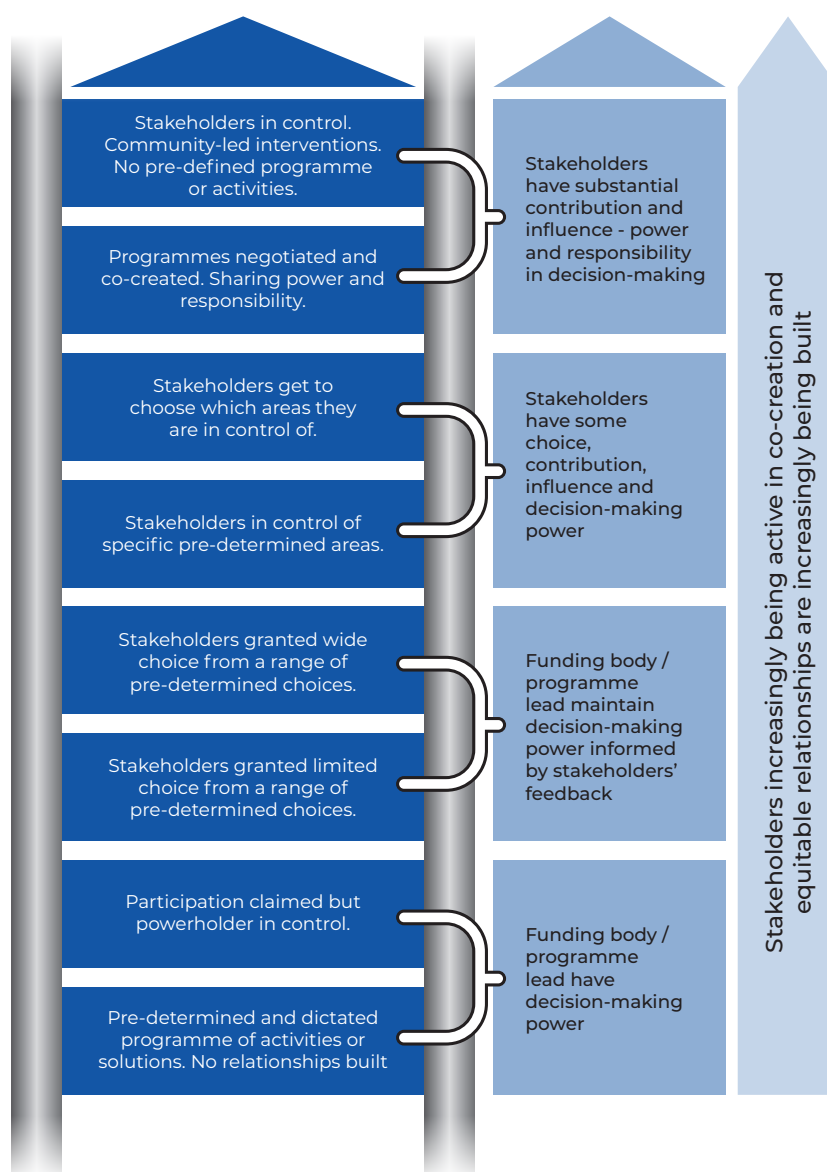

**Figure 1 The ladder of co-creation of learning** (based on Arnstein, 1969 and Bovill & Bulley 2011)

25 Arnstein, S. R. 1969. "A ladder of Citizen Participation." Journal of the American Institute of planners 35 (4): 216–224

26 Bovill, C. & Bulley, C. J. (2011). A model of active student participation in curriculum design: exploring desirability and possibility. In Rust, C. (ed.) Improving Student Learning (ISL) 18: Global Theories and Local Practices: Institutional, Disciplinary and Cultural Variations. Series: Improving Student Learning (18). Oxford Brookes University: Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, Oxford, pp. 176-188. ISBN 9781873576809

The following table / diagram illustrates the various rungs in the ladder of co-creation.

Example based on the ladder of co-creation

Rung	Example: The original idea from the funder/ fund-holding organisation is to design a set of easy-read leaflets explaining contraceptive options to girls	
Top rung	Stakeholders identify the need for educational resources for girls about contraception and a programme of work. The fund-holding organisation supports them to obtain and administer the funds but the key decisions are all made by the stakeholders.	Stakeholders in control. Community-led interventions. No pre-defined programme or activities.
7	The organisation and the stakeholders hold an initial discussion, before funding is sought, about the needs of girls for information about contraception. They conclude that a question-and-answer session on a local radio station would be the best intervention, not the leaflets that the organisation had originally envisaged.	Programmes negotiated and co-created. Sharing power and responsibility.
6	The stakeholders work together to identify which areas of responsibility each is best positioned to hold and the fund-holding organisation takes responsibility for the rest of the work	Stakeholders get to choose which areas they are in control of.
5	In addition to 4, the fund-holding organisation asks the stakeholders to identify where the leaflets should be sent and what programme of work needs to be done locally to promote them.	Stakeholders in control of specific pre-determined areas.
4	Stakeholders are shown three different drafts of the leaflets and are asked to suggest ways to improve them. This includes adding or removing particular leaflets but does not include changing the plan of using leaflets as the intervention.	Stakeholders granted wide choice from a range of pre-determined choices.
3	Stakeholders are shown three different finalised versions of the leaflets and asked to choose one.	Stakeholders granted limited choice from a range of pre-determined choices.
2	The organisation holds a 'listening event' with some carefully chosen stakeholders who are likely to agree with their approach, and makes no significant changes to their approach as a result.	Participation claimed but powerholder in control.
Bottom rung	The organisation holding the funds designs the leaflets, using their in-house specialist and graphic designer, and sends them out to clinics and schools.	Pre-determined and dictated programme of activities or solutions. No relationships built
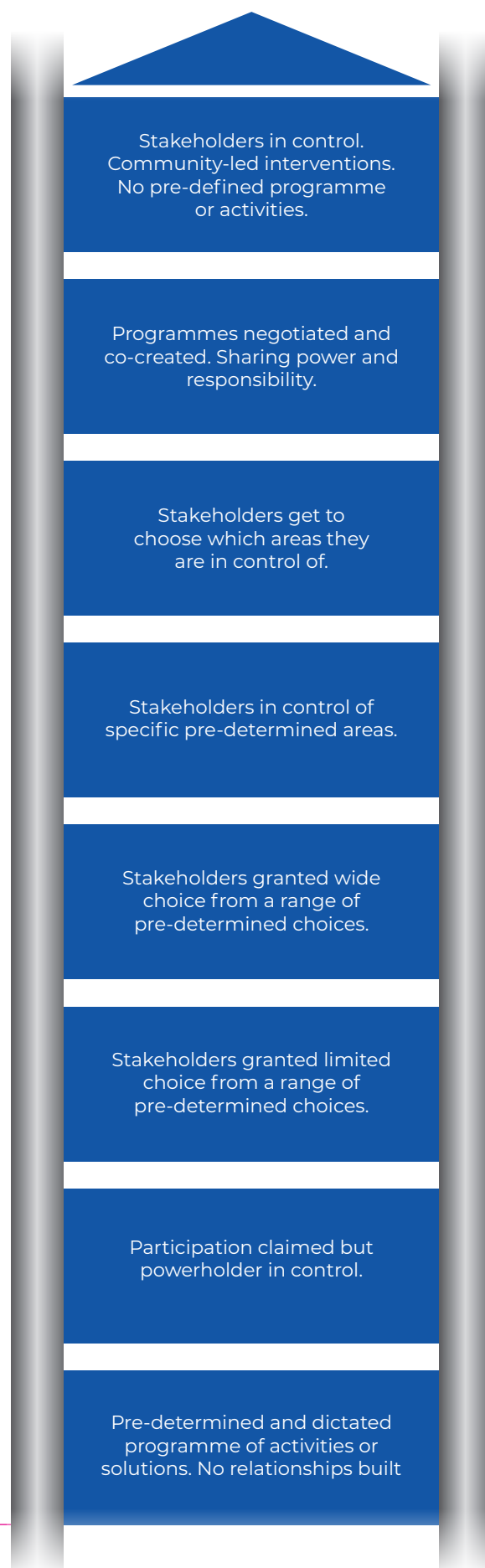
Reflecting on the ladder of co-creation

Individually or as a team

Time needed: 1 hour

- Consider the examples you provided in Task 1.1.

- On your own, select a couple of examples and consider where in the ladder of participation do these examples fit? You may find it challenging to distinguish between some levels in the ladder but place your examples where you think they are most appropriate.

- Be specific in the examples you are providing. Give names of stakeholders and other details of what the work involved.

- As a team, use the table below and add some examples from your past and existing work that may fit well with the eight rungs as illustrated in the ladder.

Rung and label	Examples

- Reflect on the resulting table. Are there rungs with more examples than others? Which rungs are less represented with examples? What does the table say about the levels and types of co-creation that are more preferred in your work as an individual/team? Is the diagram pointing to anything you want to do or change because of your observations? What would support you to making this change?

Even if you haven't engaged in co-creation yet you may want to fill in the table with some examples of activities / programme you are planning in the future. This will still allow you to go through the questions and reflection points.

1.4 The case of the ACCESS programme

The Approaches in Complex and Challenging Environments for Sustainable SRHR (ACCESS) Consortium was set to produce a set of scalable, evidence-based, participatory approaches that support and engage marginalised and under-served populations in complex and challenging environments to claim and access comprehensive sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information and services.

The ACCESS Consortium was committed to working with communities in an inclusive, dynamic process that would involve them in every stage of the project. The co-creation of knowledge would begin by engaging communities – including specific subpopulations of marginalised communities – to express their SRHR needs and concerns, identify their existing capacities to address these needs, and participate in key decision-making around testing and implementing new approaches to SRHR. In this way, ACCESS would support the collaborative development of knowledge, values, and identities that are rooted in community priorities, rather than delivering pre-defined solutions and knowledge. Through continuous cycles of reflection and community feedback, ACCESS was going to be in a position to adapt its programming in response to this and inform and promote accountability amongst humanitarian-development actors more broadly. The programme however was terminated early in December 2021 due to wider cuts to the UK Aid budget by the UK Government before we were able to implement all of this package of work.

The ACCESS project placed an emphasis on the process and from the outset it became clear that co-creation of knowledge was only likely to be successful if it adopted certain principles. Making programmatic work and research in complex and challenging environments participatory, co-created and community-led were deemed to be fundamental principles within the ACCESS project if we were to challenge and overcome deep structural social inequalities and inequities that have been historically entrenched in work in such contexts. These principles were also underpinned by a systems perspective that recognises the interrelationship between different parts of a system rather than focusing on any one part, positioning human experience at the core of our activities, and paying particular attention to the quality of relationships within the consortium and more widely, and also to issues of power.

A key challenge to the consortium was how to turn the rhetoric of the principles and values into action. To achieve this in a meaningful way the consortium partners engaged in a process that involved considerations and reflections of existing and future practices in a critical way - a process that took place over an eighteen-month co-creation period. The four cases that are presented in the next section offer insights of how the consortium put some of these principles in practice.

Although many of the consortium partners have in-country expertise, we recognise that a missed opportunity in this process was to include potential in-country partners, collaborators, and CSOs. Including this wider group of stakeholders in our earliest work would have enabled us to develop a more critical examination of structures and systems based on previous experiences of partnerships, collaborations and consortia work and might have led to helpful challenges to consortium members' assumptions. Including more in-country stakeholder in early discussions would also have helped us to begin to identify and address issues around knowledge production and which forms of knowledge are valued. In the case of ACCCESS, prolonged funding uncertainties affecting budget allocation, uncertainties around the scale and depth of potential engagement in countries, and the need to have collaboration agreements in place for any type of in-country engagement limited the prospects of starting co-creation from the earliest stages in the ACCESS project. The consortium reflected on this issue during the ACCESS final learning event in October 2021, and agreed that those in-country partners should have been central in this process from the launch of the project. We agreed that the fact that funding and regulatory requirements had precluded this was one of the consortium's biggest limitations.

Drawing on the ACCESS principles, we offer a more detailed framework of using the co-creation approach as part of a generative process that supports the development of learning and learning resources, which was the unique contribution of the OU in the ACCESS consortium. We have illustrated this framework below in Figure 2. This diagram has emerged from reflection on practice, team discussions, discussions within the consortium and a broad range of influences we had as a team at the Open University in our work within the ACCESS project.

Phase 1

Co-collation and synthesis of knowledge on an area of interest

Where could we get information about the area of interest?

What assumptions do we have about the area of interest? Are these assumptions justified? What impact might they have on the process?

What knowledge and evidence exists in the area of interest?

What forms of knowledge do we have access to (or not)?

What are the evidence gaps?

Which promising topics/ areas of interest are identified?

What might be the objective of the co-creation process?

Which individuals/stakeholders could be contributing in the process and in what ways?

When should other individuals /stakeholders be involved in the process?

Value different sources and forms of knowledge

FEED TO

Phase 2

Co-design with communities and stakeholders

What is the objective of the co-design process?

What are the key motivations for individuals / teams / organisations in coming together?

How long is the co-design process for?

What are the preferred ways of communicating?

Who should we work with to achieve the objective?

Who are we excluding from the process?

What type of outputs or outcomes is the process leading to?

Which methods to use to co-design knowledge and learning on identified topic?

Are there any resources that we could re-purpose / reuse?

Who holds the power? How are issues of power affecting the co-design process?

Draw on different methodological approaches

FEED TO

Phase 3

Co-production of output(s) / learning resource(s)

Which (small) teams are we bringing together?

What are the key motivations for individuals / teams in coming together?

What do the individuals involved want?

What do the respective organisations want or expect?

Which roles and responsibilities are assigned?

What resources are needed?

What are the preferred ways of communicating internally and across teams?

Who holds the power? How are issues of power affecting the co-production process?

Who 'owns' the output / resource co-produced?

What are the learnings of this process and how can they feed to the next co-creation cycle?

Share power and responsibility

Figure 2 Framework of co-creation of learning

Tool 2

Co-creation of learning within the ACCESS programme

ACCESS
CONSORTIUM

Tool 2: Co-creation of learning within the ACCESS programme

By the time you have worked through this section, you will have:

✔ An appreciation of specific cases that illustrate co-creation of learning.

✔ An awareness of challenges and risks faced by the teams who worked on the cases.

✔ An understanding of limitations of co-creation process in each of the cases.

✔ A consideration of aspects of your own programme that is either work in progress or is in the planning stage of co-creation.

2.1 Introduction

The ACCESS programme supported partnerships comprised of diverse organisations to create innovative solutions to complex development challenges that deliver real change to people's lives. These partnerships often operated in dynamic contexts characterised by political instability, conflict, or natural disasters, and more recently have had to respond to funding challenges and Covid-19 pandemic.

Part 2 of this guide provides examples through case studies from the ACCESS programme that illustrate how individuals and organisations have adapted in response to recent changing circumstances to ensure progress, maintain relevance, and deliver impact but also remain 'true' to principles and values that underpinned the programme. We are drawing on the Ladder of co-creation (Fig. 1) and the Framework of co-creating learning (Fig. 2) to frame the following four cases. The cases are presented in an order that illustrate the increasing involvement of the stakeholders in the co-creation process as indicated by the Ladder of co-creation (see Fig. 1).

How did co-creation work in practice? How did co-creation unfold in real environments? What were the effects of co-creation? And how the teams experienced the co-creation process? These are some questions that Part 2 of the guide seeks to address. The cases present work that took place as part of ACCESS scoping phase. Due to the early termination of the ACCESS programme due to funding cuts by the UK Government this work did not proceed to an implementation phase, as originally planned.

Read through the case studies independently or with your team and use the two tasks in the end of Tool 2 to reflect on these cases and consider implications for your own work.

"

I think that what it [co-creation] has offered is the opportunity to be much more self-aware and self-critical about the limitations of what we do when we say we are doing something that is participatory or co-creative, to think, really, in what sense is this co-creative? […] It is just about thinking all the time about how you can do that better and in a more co-creative manner.

**Interview with ACCESS consortium member from the Open University**

"

2.2 Case 1
Co-creation of an epidemic and pandemic module

Family Planning Association of Nepal and Women's Refugee Commission

A pre-existing resource Facilitator's Kit: Community-Based Preparedness for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Gender was developed by WRC and UNFPA in 2014 . This resource aims to build capacity at the community level to prepare for and respond to risks and inequities faced by marginalized and underserved populations in emergencies and targets health providers and representatives from civil society groups and associated networks (e.g. women's groups). It includes a range of materials (e.g. tools for conducting community capacity and needs' assessments, guidance for facilitators, curriculum with information and activities for workshops). As part of ACCESS and in response to COVID19, a decision made was for these materials to be tailored for use in the context of Nepal with the addition of a component on preparing for epidemics and pandemics. For this reason, we placed this case in the third rung in the ladder of co-creation "Stakeholders granted limited choice from a range of pre-determined choices". This case also provides an example of hybrid mode of delivery of the work, where some initial activities took place face-to-face while others were conducted remotely / online.

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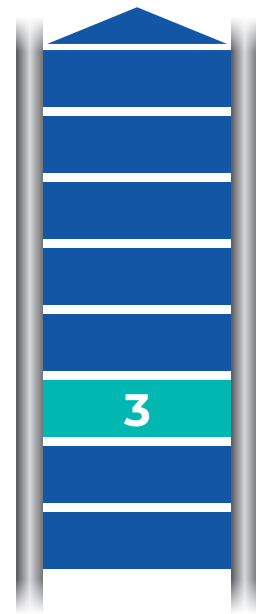
3. Stakeholders granted limited choice from a range of pre-determined choices

Figure 3 Meeting in Nepal with WRC and FPAN (Copyright: FPAN)

A number of visits and meetings with stakeholders took place in Nepal between December 2019 and March 2020 (ACCESS programme lead, WRC, LSHTM, FPAN) with a main objective to develop a better understanding of the country context, including mapping of SRHR landscape with focus on key marginalized population; identify key stakeholders engaged in SRHR preparedness and response, explore the existing's capacities and gaps of government and non-governmental organization in effective SRHR preparedness and response, to examine existing policies that respond to SRHR needs during epidemic/pandemic but also to understand the health sector structure, the existing response mechanisms and challenges at local level in addressing SRHR among communities in disaster prone areas. The outbreak of COVID19 and reports in Nepal but also globally that were emphasising its immediate impact on women (e.g. lack of access to health services, reports of maternal mortality, increased burden of care, increased risk of gender-based violence and unplanned pregnancies), pointed to the need to strengthen work on preparedness and response. This led to the decision to work on the development of an additional half-day module on preparedness for epidemics and pandemics. This component was going to become part of the pre-existing WRC & UNFPA Facilitator's Kit: Community-Based Preparedness for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Gender.

To achieve this, between May and June 2020, a series of four 1.5 hour long on-line workshops were held between ACCESS partners WRC, IPPF, OU and the Family Planning Association of Nepal (FPAN). The purpose of the workshops was to review a draft outline of the module that had been commissioned by WRC and then 'co-create' a final version , including considerations on how SRH and gender inequalities are likely to be affected by pandemics and epidemics, on ways to improve access to SRH services by challenging stigma and discriminations that arise due to epidemics / pandemics and creating specific community-level action plans with accountability mechanisms to improve the preparedness of the community level to respond to gender SRH. This process was guided by the framework of co-creation of learning (Fig. 2), but the full co-creation cycle could not be followed because of the existing draft outline of the module and of the new materials developed through this process having to fit within the pre-existing curriculum. As a result, the process predominately focused on 'Phase 1 co-collation of knowledge on topic' and to a lesser extent 'Phase 2 co-design learning' (see Fig. 2). The adapted version of the module is available on the WRC website[28].

continued

> **"**
>
> **Trying to co-create and develop from an existing resource is challenging to do when you don't have the same level of familiarity with a 300-page curriculum as the other group on the table [….] That familiarity imbalance impacted the co-creation process [….] In some ways to achieve the full cycle of co-creation was a bit cut-off, we were not starting from the same starting point together. We were working with an existing tool, a tool that WRC had developed and this did put us in different places and it also pushed us to […] operate within the confines that were already set out by the curriculum.**
>
> **Lily Jacobi**
> Womens Refugee Commission - ACCESS Learning event, July 2021 **"**

28 https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Disaster-Preparedness-Reproductive-Health-Facilitators-Kit.pdf

An informal evaluation that followed the online workshops, including interviews with the key participants, showed that the various stakeholders felt that they were overall able to 'work together' and that the involvement of local stakeholders as well as drawing on the 'real time' expertise of local service providers in this area, particularly during COVID19, was invaluable in the module development and made a difference to the final output. The 'homework' piece – alternative channels for people to contribute ideas - supported all participants to contribute and informed the discussions held during online sessions. Considerations of time differences, provision in advance of translated materials and clarity in the purpose of the co-design process were noted as areas of improvement. At times the process also required participants to work through a large volume of materials but different levels of familiarity with the area of interest and the original module made this challenging.

The stakeholders commented that virtual encounters did not allow for the intensive co-working and affective bonding normally associated with face-to-face work, which can impact the ability to build strong long-term networks. Partners found the requirement to work in a co-creative manner challenging because it necessitated a change from taken-for-granted ways of relating and working and 'surfaced' some implicit power dynamics that underpin these relationships. However, the local partner FPAN also reported that their voices and input were prioritised through the process and they thought this may lead to better outcomes as the whole process had prepared them well for 'taking ownership' of the materials as well as for the future delivery and use of the materials in their context.

Figure 4 Meeting in Nepal as part of the ACCESS programme (Copyright: FPAN)

> **We felt that the ACCESS principles of co-creation and participation added to this work by ensuring that the planning for the module development was participatory and really robust. It provided opportunities for FPAN to provide meaningful input into the module, tools and agendas and it also gave us [WRC] an opportunity to […] unlike other visits to dig into the information that we collected over the course of the scoping visit which has informed subsequent planning of the project and has been incorporated into the planning activities that have been underway to implement the work that WRC and FPAN are planning together…**
>
> **Lily Jacobi**
> Womens Refugee Commission - ACCESS Learning event, July 2021

2.3 Case 2
Co-creation of the *Take your Training Online* course

The Open University, Frontline Aids and International Planned Parenthood Federation

Take Your Training Online (TYTO) is a short online course aiming to help trainers in the voluntary and NGO sectors to develop or improve their capacity of designing and delivering training online. It was developed by The Open University (OU), with input from other consortium members and representatives from the target groups. This case provides an example where all activities were initiated and delivered remotely / online. It has been chosen as it illustrates a co-created learning resource that provided a response to needs identified among consortium partners and affiliated organisations following the outbreak of covid19 pandemic. As a result, the necessity to follow a rapid co-creation cycle shaped this case. TYTO illustrates the fourth rung in the ladder of co-creation (Figure 1), where stakeholders were granted wide choice from a range of pre-determined choices.

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4. Stakeholders granted wide choice from a range of pre-determined choices

Course

Take your training online
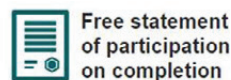
Free statement of participation on completion

Figure 5
Take your training online course on OpenLearn

29 https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/view.php?id=6962

The need for a course to support individuals and organisations in the voluntary and NGO sectors to develop or improve their capacity of designing and delivering training online was identified by the OU team after discussion with consortium members about the challenges they were facing in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A key decision made in early stages of this work was to reuse and repurpose an existing resource (see Figure 2, Phase 2) developed by the OU, Take Your Teaching Online, which had been designed for people working in universities in the UK An initial review of this resource indicated that the content provided was appropriate and could be adapted to serve our own objectives. However, Take Your Teaching Online was 24 hours of asynchronous independent study over a notional 8-week period. We started by removing 4 weeks' worth of work partly because the content of these weeks seemed less relevant to our target group and partly because we thought 24 hours of study on this topic was unrealistic for people working in the voluntary sector, especially during the early stages of COVID19 pandemic.

To ensure that the process was informed and driven by the needs of our target group, another key decision made was to recruit a first cohort of voluntary sector trainers and managers from both Global North and Global South organisations (approx. eight) to work with us on the review of the existing materials. The recruitment process was supported by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and Frontline Aids. The 'course reviewers' worked through the remaining materials of the original four weeks independently. Each week we hosted an online tutorial where everyone was invited and encouraged to discuss any questions about the content and also to give feedback on the materials. We also solicited feedback through a course forum and structured feedback forms, which the reviewers were prompted to return via email after completing each week's work and upon completing the review of the whole course. At the end of the review process, we held a further online meeting where based on an initial analysis of their written feedback, we facilitated a discussion and jointly identified the most important issues to address in the new course that we were to develop.

The changes we made in response to the feedback received included:

- Rewriting parts of the content substantially to reduce the number of words overall and to use a less academic voice;

- Including more 'Activities' where learners are encouraged do something practical rather than just reading or watching materials;

- Including cases from the voluntary sector and tying theoretical points very clearly to those case examples;

- Commissioning some new video clips where trainers talked about their experiences of taking their training online;

- Introducing new pedagogic ideas (i.e. different types of activity for learning) which were more relevant to the voluntary sector context;

- Reducing the total study hours to 6-8 hours, and making each section independent so that learners could just study one or two units that were especially relevant to them.

We estimate that about 40% of the TYTO course comes from the original materials and 60% was newly written in the light of the feedback received.

Once the new course was designed but before it was launched a second cohort of practitioner reviewers worked through the new materials and gave us structured feedback on further changes, through feedback forms and online discussions. They also contributed model answers to activities throughout the course which were incorporated into the final version.

*Take your training online* is free and available on the OpenLearnCreate platform at
https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/TYTO

2.4 Case 3
Co-creation of Network Mapping approach
The Open University

Making the co-creation table bigger:
Access to Justice online mapping work

Led by the Open University, *Access to Justice* was a constituent project of the ACCESS programme. Access to Justice aimed to build capacity amongst SRHR rights actors working with/for marginalised and under-served communities in Uganda with interventions to be co-created with rights actors themselves.

This case study describes very early work to enable a wide variety of stakeholders to take their place at the co-creation table. Because this work would precede the exploration of problems or need, the establishing of aims and objectives and the specification of interventions, all of which would take place with this wide range of stakeholders around the table, we place this on the fifth rung of the latter because (a) the stakeholders would be in control, (b) it would be a community-led intervention and (c) there would be no pre-defined programme or activities.

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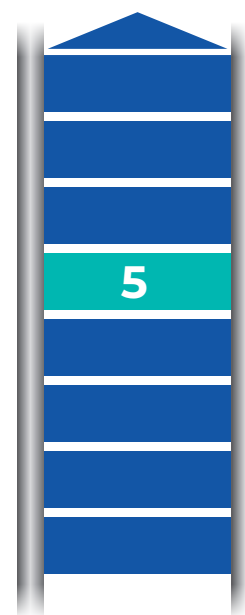
5. Stakeholders in control of specific pre-determined areas

A key insight that emerged during scoping work with Ugandan rights actors as well as during separate work on decolonisation[30] was that global north institutions are constrained to work with a narrow sub-section of global south civil society actors. Procedural, legal, and political factors limit opportunities for co-creation. For example. In 2019, the Ugandan government stripped 1,200 Ugandan organisations of NGO status, including SRHR rights actors critical of the government, precluding them from partnering with global north organisations Uganda outlaws thousands of NGOs running 'unscrupulous operations'[31]. 'Due diligence' and 'probity' requirements of funders similarly restricts who can be worked with to those who pass stringent legal and administrative checks. In addition, the rights field is a politically contested one with constant debate about approaches and priorities. These debates and tensions are part and parcel of emerging responses. So, our key challenge was:

How do we develop an approach to beginning co-creation that takes account of this diversity and dissent?

Rather than thinking in terms of an 'in-country partner/s' who would represent the interests and priorities of marginalised communities, we began to explore 'rights networks' or 'rights eco-systems'. This entails identifying a wide range of rights actors, considering how they represent rights and interact with each other.

Pandemic-related restrictions on travel and communications forced us to recognise the extent to which much rights work and debate in Uganda occurs online. We therefore engaged in an ad hoc online network mapping of rights actors in Uganda taking a visual ethnographic approach to explore political and cultural alliances and dissonances between different agencies/actors.

continued

30 Keogh, P. (2021). Colonial Conundrums: What happens when a global north-based Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) consortium attempts to adopt a decolonising approach? Blog post 20.12.2021. Available at: https://wels.open.ac.uk/research/access/blogs-and-resources/colonial-conundrums-what-happens-when-global-north-based-sexual (accessed 20.12.2021).

31 https://www.rfi.fr/en/international/20191115-uganda-outlaws-thousands-ngos-operating-country

Online searches through Google, Facebook, and Twitter identified 43 agencies/actors with potential relevance for SRH rights-based work. Our recordings of visual representations of news, events, gatherings and working practices gave us a vivid idea about how actors/agencies worked, interacted, and represented their values. We identified large and well-established agencies, small grassroots organisations, and individual actors (advocates and activists). By examining which organisations worked with which, we built a picture of networks and sub-networks. We deployed network analysis techniques to identify actors positioned 'centrally' within the network as well as those who worked alone or within smaller networks. We then benchmarked our list and our insights with partner agencies (a global NGO and a major rights organisation in Uganda). This overall process allowed us to identify a diverse shortlist of actors/agencies to approach for follow-up co-creation work.

Our next step would have been to make contact with these actors and agencies to explore how we can engage in co-creation of capacity-building interventions. This would have included considering with them how best to identify needs and priorities and identifying the approaches these interventions would support. However, at this point the ACCESS programme was abruptly discontinued by the funder (FCDO) in connection with overarching UK government aid cuts.

We acknowledge limitations to this approach. First it risks both bias and reinforcing inequalities given uneven digital access and rights. Second, as it was carried out in the UK, it represents a global north construction of global south realities. Notwithstanding these limitations, we did note a 'democratising' effect of online representation. That is, we found that the smallest grassroots agencies had a relatively high-profile presence and social media use that stand beside larger organisations. We also think that a network approach has the potential to 'make the co-creation table bigger' at the outset: that is ensuring a larger and more diverse representation around the co-creation table and valuing both diversity and dissonance in approaches. We will explore the network approach further in future work.

Figure 6 Uganda IPPF executive (Copyright: IPPF/Will Boase/Uganda)

2.5 Case 4
Co-creation of work on Safe Abortion Care and Medical Abortion in Nepal

International Planned Parenthood Federation, Family Planning Association of Nepal, The Open University

The final case study from the ACCESS programme draws on work implemented in Nepal in the area of Safe Abortion Care and Medical Abortion. This case provides an example where researchers worked with local leaders and political stakeholders to identify and build on local priorities, which in this case was advocacy work around the introduction of legislation on abortion in Nepal. Similar to the previous cases, this is also an example where many of the activities were initiated and delivered remotely / online, though some face-to-face meetings were organised among local stakeholders in Nepal. This case has been chosen as it demonstrates the beginning of alignment of project work with local developments and priorities of those in power (i.e. politicians) and involving local gatekeepers as project team members. We also included community-based advocacy organisations in our co-collation process and were in the early stages of explring ways in which we could include women who had experienced medical abortion in co-creation going forward. It is a case that we would have placed in the top rungs of the ladder of co-creation, namely "programmes negotiated and co-created" - had the project continued[31].
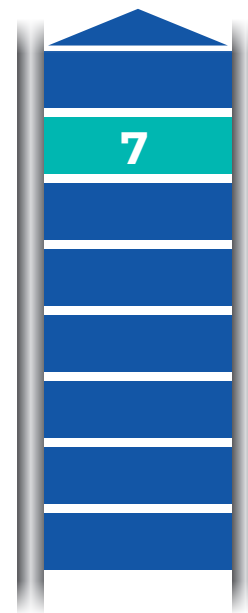
7. Programmes negotiated and co-created. Sharing power and responsibility

In the beginning of 2021, The Open University (OU) and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) held a series of initial meetings with key stakeholders working in the area of Safe Abortion Care and Medical Abortion (MA). These meetings were facilitated through Family Planning Association of Nepal (FPAN), the IPPF Member Association in Nepal.

Nepal was viewed as a strategically important country for work in this area. An initial literature review conducted by ACCESS consortium members (Phase 1, Figure 2) showed that there are high rates of illegal abortion in a context in which abortion has been legalised alongside persistent negative attitudes towards women seeking abortion care due to socio-cultural norms, values and stigmas, as well as because during COVID19 interim guidelines were introduced in the country to allow telemedicine medical abortion (this move has only been made in around 12 countries worldwide). Therefore, not only was the issue of unsafe abortion particularly acute but the potential to work towards improving abortion access was significant. The latter was in line with wider programmatic objectives of the ACCESS project, especially around the availability, accessibility and responsiveness of quality SRH services for communities in complex and challenging environments.

continued

Adjacent page: Figure 7 Copyright: Ipas

> **We had a range of stakeholders where we conducted meetings […] advocates, human rights activists, women's rights activists and service providers and hearing the perspectives of all the multiple stakeholders brought some insight into the type of work that we wanted to do on self- abortion and advocacy around supported self-care. It definitely helped us in building networks and sharing of ideas.**

Mala Chalise
FPAN - ACCESS Learning Event July 2021

This set of initial meetings served to bring together local stakeholders and helped collate further knowledge from other sources beyond consortium members (Phase 1 in Figure 2) and potentially formulate a project design for work on supported self-care of medical abortion. Part of the meetings focused on stakeholders describing: the current work they are doing on home-based delivery of medical abortion using the interim guidelines and any training and research that they were undertaking. In these meetings we also asked partners to describe where the ACCESS consortium could add value in the areas of research and training to support the advancement of the home-based delivery of medical abortion services in Nepal.

As a result, and through these meetings, further understanding was gained about the context of medical abortion in Nepal, including forms of evidence available, the role of pharmacists in medical abortion, the ways in which the Interim Guidelines for Medical Abortion were interpreted and put in practice in this context, any related research in this area and associated evidence gaps as well as extensive information about the stakeholders' ongoing activity in these areas, including training currently provided (e.g. to nurses, midwives, pharmacists, service providers and so on). Initial consultation meetings had pointed to other key stakeholders that were working in the same area and led to the identification and distribution across stakeholders of key documents relating to developments around medical abortion in Nepal, and further meetings. This process continued until we felt that all relevant stakeholders had been identified and included.

The conversations we had in the beginning around what is abortion self-care and I think that the timing of this project was really critical […] it came at the time when the interim guidelines were released, there was Covid, there was a lot of need for looking into abortion self-care […]. But we [IPPF] [….] didn't have a clear definition and understanding at IPPF but conversely the conversations that we had in this ACCESS group for this project helped feed into IPPF's development of that programme and we now have a lot more resources understanding and guidance about how we define abortion self-care and how member associations can implement self-care interventions or adapt their programmes to support women in medical abortion self-care

Rebecca Wilkins
IPPF (Technical lead on abortion) ACCESS Learning Event July 2021

These meetings also highlighted potential areas of interest for ACCESS (Phase 1, Fig. 2) around research and training and potential outputs that collaborative work could lead to, such as (among others):

- Contribute to a national (and global) evidence base to inform advocacy work around self-managed medical abortion;

- Formative research to explore different channels of medical abortion with questions such as: What service delivery models are acceptable to women? Why do some women go to unregistered services?

- A potential piece of work on lower cadre/volunteers with a recognition that women find volunteers/ lower cadre workers an acceptable source of support/information for medical abortion.

- The development of (distance/online) learning (training) materials targeting primarily 'provincial health training centres' but with the scope to have wider reach and thus contributing to a 'whole system strengthening' agenda.

- The need to develop a strategy around advocating for distance-learning/mixed mode which could lead to increase registered providers through improved accessibility.

The approach followed in these initial consultation meetings, including facilitated dialogue between diverse stakeholders to enable them to articulate, communicate and share knowledge on SRH challenges or issues, leading to the generation of new, co-created understandings, was adopted throughout the follow-up meetings and workshops organized during the year. Local stakeholders became part of the team to drive the project forward and became increasingly in control of specific areas of work that were not pre-determined but emerged through such discussions. This laid the basis for strong co-development in Phase 2, had the project been continued.

Task 2.1

Reflecting on the cases

Individually or as a team

Time needed: 1 hour

Read through the four cases that were presented in Tool 2. If you are working as a team you may want to split your team in four small groups and each group to have one case assigned to them.

For each case, consider the following questions:

1. What were the key decisions made by teams in each case?

2. What type of opportunities did the process of co-creation created in each case?

3. What were the challenges faced by the teams during co-creation in each case?

4. What were the limitations around co-creation in each case?

5. Was there anything in particular that was put in place in each case to help the teams carry out this work?

6. Which areas of the cycle of co-creation (see Fig. 2) featured more prominently in each case?

7. If the full cycle of co-creation were to be followed (Figure 2), how differently co-creation in each case would look like?

How is your understanding of co-creation affected by the four cases presented?

Task 2.2

Planning your future co-created work

Individually or as a team

Time needed: 1 hour

Consider a piece of work that you are planning in the future. It might be a piece of work that you already used or referred to in Tasks 1.2 and 1.3.

On a flipchart paper draw the three phases of co-creation as shown in Figure 2.

Consider different aspects of your future work and make notes in the paper as a response to the questions included against each phase.

As a team discuss specific areas that co-creation appears to offer opportunities to enhance your project. Discuss any areas of this work that you think will be challenged by the co-creation cycle.

- Are there any ways to overcome some of these challenges?

- Which methods could you draw on to put co-creation in practice?

- Who else should be involved in these initial discussions?

- What roles and responsibilities do you see needed and how do you see other people's role within a team working on co-creation project?

Are these considerations about the co-creation cycle encouraging you to do anything different than your usual practice?

How does the prospects of being involved in a 'full' co-creation cycle makes you feel?

Such discussions can never be completed in a single meeting. While developing your work further and thinking of future activities and stakeholders to involve, you may want to revisit the questions in Figure 2 and also review your notes in the flipcharts.

You may want to repeat this process regularly, independently or as a team, as this will offer an opportunity to reflect on designs made, intended plans, any changes made, opportunities, challenges and limitations around co-creation. This will provide a record of decisions made in the process that will eventually feed and become integral parts of the next cycle of co-creation that you may be involved.

Tool 3

Top tips for co-creating learning

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Tool 3: Top tips for co-creating learning

By the time you have worked through this section, you will have:

✔ An appreciation of tips to draw on in planning and implementing co-creation, face-to-face and remotely.

✔ A consideration of tips that you and your team have and could be shared more widely based on your experience of co-creation.

3.1 Introduction

We know that engaging in co-creation of learning can be challenging for you and that's on top of the difficulties you already face when developing programmatic work and interventions in complex and challenging environments. Yet many of you create your own pathways in co-created work and find great satisfaction in doing such type of work, which enables you to develop relevant and appropriate solutions and materials, learn from collaboration with others, share responsibility and decision making power with partners and contribute to pressing societal challenges.

ACCESS partners have drawn upon their experience of using co-creation in complex and challenging environments to provide their top practical tips that offer our distilled wisdom on key tasks, such as planning and designing co-creation, putting co-creation in practice and co-creating work online. These are offered in the sections that follow. They have emerged from reflection on practice, team discussions, discussions within the consortium and a broad range of influences we had as a team at the Open University in our work within the ACCESS project.

We encourage you to add your own suggestions to our top tips and share these in a discussion with your team (see Task 3.1).

**Figure 8
Copyright:
IPPF/
Will Boase/
Uganda**

3.2 Top tips for planning and designing co-creation

1. Engage with individuals / stakeholders' own experiences at the earliest possible stage in the co-creation process. Involvement at a later stage can create/reinforce power imbalances. Consider methods that will allow early involvement of stakeholders and communities.

2. Invest time to get to know the co-creation stakeholders, their ways of working and any assumptions and expectations they may have from the process, as well as their previous (limited / extensive) experiences of co-creation and try to learn from those experiences.

3. Co-creation takes time. Allow enough time to go through activities preparing and leading to co-creation phase(s) and spread the co-creation activities over time. Establish in advance with partners how far apart sessions or meetings should optimally be held.

4. Ensure that all stakeholders involved have a shared understanding of what co-creation is and what it involves and plan and clearly communicate an end-goal together.

5. Recognise and try to mitigate power inequalities within the group (e.g. donor/recipient, gender, seniority within organisations) in order to enable collaborative working. Acknowledge that existing structures, finances, time are all important in decision making powers and developing equitable relationships.

6. Provide clarity about roles and responsibilities during co-creation process, establish clear parameters on what is expected and what partners can bring to the table during co-creation.

7. Think critically about who benefits from co-creation and whose knowledge counts in the work you are planning.

8. Be mindful that it is not in everyone's interest to be involved in the co-creation cycle (e.g. some participants might not want to co-author academic outputs).

9. Provide translation / Interpretation as it is essential. It may be better to plan activities in local languages and have the content translated to English, rather than vice versa.

10. Acknowledge that components of the planned work may lead to different types and levels of co-creation. Use the resources in this guide to help you 'label' your work and be transparent and self-reflective on own practice around co-creation.

3.3 Top tips for putting co-creating in practice

1. Be mindful of dynamics of inter-professional work and assumptions and expectations that individuals and their respective organisations have and will bring in the process.

2. Acknowledge that co-creation is not a linear process. Recognise that a range of (real-life) factors (e.g. funding, resources, time, access to stakeholders, work environments) will affect and shape how co-creation will be 'translated' in practice. Ensure that time and resources are allocated for stakeholders to be involved not only in workshops but also in commenting on documents, attending meetings etc. as these may become less priority in busy day-to-day situations.

3. Recognise that there are domains and forms of knowledge beyond your own discipline. Be respectful and prepared to switch between being an 'expert' and a 'novice' at different times in the co-creation process. Make people aware of each-others expertise and help them understand their own role within the team.

4. Listen to ideas being proposed and establish inclusive mechanisms to gather, discuss and review ideas among co-creation partners by considering what are the preferred methods for stakeholders to contribute in the process.

5. Be aware and acknowledge power dynamics. Complexities of power, flows of power, and power imbalances make it difficult to manage the co-creation process.

6. Regularly pause and reflect during co-creation process. Make time and space with stakeholders to talk, reflect, revisit ideas, look at changes in the direction of the project and examine how it has changed over time.

7. Ensure that all stakeholders involved have a shared understanding of what co-creation is and what it involves, the underpinning principles and framework you are using, and clearly communicate what is the end-goal.

8. Avoid over-crowded agendas and focus on the key issues giving participants / stakeholders time to cover them in depth and also opportunities to raise issues they consider important.

9. When working with existing resources, it can be more helpful to have a 'neutral' facilitator than a representative from an organisation that had originally created the materials.

10. Provide alternative channels and ask participants to prepare contributions that speak to their expertise and knowledge before any workshops are held. This will support contributions on an equal basis (as possible). However, do not assume that preparatory work (reading etc) has been done.

3.3 Top tips for online co-creation

1. Be aware that co-creation online requires more time, especially around building relationships. Acknowledge how different this may feel compared to face-to-face workshops, even if the activities and purpose are very similar. Make allowance for this in the activities of the online sessions.

2. Recognise that technological tools you are using during co-creation matter and shape the activities you could be organising and facilitating. Select appropriate tools that fit your needs and objectives of co-creation (e.g. virtual whiteboards, group discussions, sharing resources, annotate docs, collaborate, express views).

3. Offer multiple channels where people feel comfortable to express views or share resources. Wherever possible, use tools that people are already using.

4. Allow time for people to become familiar with any new technology, especially in the first session or for new people joining the group. Support stakeholders to know how to use these tools, perhaps by offering some troubleshooting drop-in sessions prior to running any 'formal' sessions.

5. Be mindful of barriers to access and participation due to lack of access to devices, data limits and privacy issues.

6. Take time differences into account and establish in advance with partners what time of day is best, particularly allowing for caring responsibilities of participants and access to the internet. Be respectful of people's other commitments.

7. Think about relative numbers of facilitators and participants – do not have more facilitators than participants but do consider having more than one facilitator.

8. Keep online sessions short but if this is not possible schedule in break times for long online sessions.

9. When working online in an additional language, it is important to speak clearly, simply and slowly because participants have less access to non-verbal clues or help from other participants than they do in face-to-face workshops.

10. Ensure that you are capturing the key points raised in the online discussion (e.g. in virtual whiteboards), include written summaries of tasks and activities and keep a record of other co-created artefacts. Save these in a shared (online) space and share with everyone as this can help with tracing how ideas have evolved or troubleshooting in later stages of co-creation.

> " I think that we'll never do things the way we've done them before, just sit down and do it, ever. And that's what we did before, you know; we just said, *"Okay, we'll revise the curriculum. We'll hire a consultant and that's what we'll do"*
>
> **Interview with ACCESS consortium member from the Women's Refugee Commission**

Task 3.1

Planning your future co-created work

Individually or as a team

Time needed: 1 hour

Consider what other tips do you have to share from your experience in co-creation.

Add these to the top tips included above.

Share your top tips with your partners / stakeholders while planning your future activity on co-creation.

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Approaches in complex & challenging environments for sustainable SRHR

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