

Co-Creation Sessions: Learnings & Implications

What we did

Co-Creation Sessions are a core component of the User-Centred Community Engagement methodology. In Co-Creation Sessions, field staff and crisis-affected people explore problems identified in the Interactive Digital Surveys and their root causes to understand how these problems can be best resolved. Co-Creation Sessions also create the space for members of the crisis-affected community to suggest solutions to these problems that are relevant and important to them.

During the Peru pilot, Plan International Peru held four Co-Creation Sessions over the course of two days, engaging over 80 community members (Approximately 50% caregivers, 50% children. Gender breakdown was not captured). Sessions were divided between the following groups:

- Children aged 6-12 (duration: 3 hours)
- Caregivers of children aged 6-12 (duration: 3 hours)
- Children aged 13-18 (duration: 2 hours)
- Caregivers of children aged 13-18 (duration: 2 hours)

It was decided to not divide Co-Creation Session participants by gender as was done in the past pilots as the themes discussed in the sessions were not sensitive. We are however aware that gender based power dynamics can impact negatively on some groups to contribute to group conversations - however we did not witness such issues during this pilot. It is however an issue that practitioners should be aware of in future pilots.

Each session was facilitated by two Data Collectors. Other project staff were present during the sessions - their role and involvement are discussed in detail in the **What we learned** section below.

It was initially planned to have 8 Co-Creation Sessions with 80 participants in total. However, the team faced a number of challenges with organising the sessions and recruiting participants from the target population. These are discussed in detail in the **What we learned** section below. In the end, four sessions were held but a high turnout meant that the planned number of participants was reached.

The main activity used in the Co-Creation Sessions to explore root causes and suggest ideas for solutions was The Problem Tree. Participants in each session worked in small groups to explore main problems within a given problem area. The problem areas discussed included:

- Key offerings of the Aprendiendo Unidos programme
- Enrolment in the programme (caregivers only)
- Project-based learning approach
- Programme locations
- Classroom environment (children only)

Ideas from each small group were shared with all session participants and voting took place for the most popular ideas. Ideas from the Co-Creation Sessions were then taken into the Decision-Making Session by the project team.

The Co-Creation Session guides can be found here:

- Co-Creation Sessions Project Manager guidance: [English](#) | [Spanish](#)
- Children Co-Creation Facilitation guidance: [English](#) | [Spanish](#)
- Caregivers Co-Creation Facilitation guidance: [English](#) | [Spanish](#)

What we learned

Lack of shared understanding of Co-Creation Sessions activities among the field team led to inconsistent quality of implementation

Despite the Co-Creation Sessions training going well, in the sessions it became apparent that it was challenging for the field team to apply the activities and steps consistently - as much of this was new to the field teams and they needed to remember much of the process. As a result, the quality of facilitation varied not only between different facilitators but even for the same facilitators on different days. This led to inconsistent levels and varying quality of engagement and participation of community members in the Co-Creation Sessions and directly impacted participants' experience of the sessions. It also resulted in confusion and lack of understanding between facilitators, undermining their ability to work as a team and their effectiveness as facilitators. In some cases, eg., when it came to the final activity of the session which involves facilitators recording community's ideas in Ideas Lists, facilitators had to be guided by Eclipse researchers and reminded to take action.

Urban context was a major factor that influenced Co-Creation Sessions implementation

Co-Creation Sessions in an urban context require additional preparation and planning than in a camp setting. The main concern that the field team had was related to getting enough participants to attend the Co-Creation Sessions. There were also a number of emergent factors, such as safety, location availability and suitable timing that influenced when and where the sessions could be held. While initially the sessions were planned to take place during the morning and afternoon on two weekdays, they were moved to weekends shortly before the start of the pilot. After the pilot started, it was decided to hold two sessions on Friday evening, four on Saturday evening, and potentially two more on Sunday or Monday evening. This decision was based on the Project Lead's previous experiences for training or information provision with community members (it being hard to engage with migrants and refugee adults in weekdays and mornings and afternoons as they work) and the decision to make use of existing venues where the program takes place were used (as these were known by participants but only available at certain times).

Field team also had to get creative about recruiting participants for the sessions and there was considerable discussion about if and how to best incentivise their participation. To recruit participants, Data Collectors gave out information about Co-Creation Sessions to caregivers at the end of each survey and collected their WhatsApp numbers to send out reminders through a WhatsApp group. To incentivise participation, the team decided to provide free dinner to all participants and also agreed to pay for their travel expenses.

This strategy worked better than anticipated. Both on Friday and Saturday double the numbers of people that were expected came to the sessions, bringing the number of Co-Creation Session participants to over 20 people per session (over 80 in total). The team initially planned for about 10 participants per session (sessions can work with more participants but require greater numbers of facilitators and considerations of venue space so different sub-groups can work together uninterrupted). While it was great to have such high attendance, it also had adverse effects on Co-Creation Sessions implementation due to limited capacity of the facilitators, as discussed in more detail below. The team decided that this level of representation was sufficient and did not hold any additional Co-Creation Sessions on Sunday or Monday.

Co-Creation Sessions were well-suited for caregivers but some topics required better framing

Participants appeared highly engaged during the Co-Creation Session with caregivers of children aged 13-18 year old. Caregivers were eager to share their opinions and suggest ideas. There was a good atmosphere in the session, with many discussions, friendly debates

and laughter. Caregivers filled out the Problem Tree posters themselves, often with little guidance from the facilitators, and eagerly voted for their favourite ideas. At the end of the session, the caregivers took time to express how much they appreciated being invited to give their opinion and to be listened to by Plan International and their appreciation of the process itself.

In the session with caregivers of children aged 6-12 years old, the engagement was lower. Only some participants were energetic and eagerly taking part in the discussions during the session. Others looked bored and disengaged. This was likely due to lack of clear guidance and support from facilitators and their intermittent absence during the session, as discussed in details below.

One challenge with the Problem Tree activity in sessions with caregivers stemmed from the inadequate framing of a problem related to enrolment into the Aprendiendo Unidos programme. With the facilitators absent and no explanation given regarding the link between survey findings, problems in the poster, causes and ideas, some groups initially thought that the problem related to formal education enrolment. It wasn't until an intervention from facilitators some time later that the groups understood what they were supposed to be discussing and moved to discussing enrolment in the Aprendiendo Unidos programme.

The physical environment where Co-Creation Sessions were held played a big role in the sessions' dynamics

The first two sessions were held in a school, in two separate classrooms, which worked well. Classrooms provided a manageable environment, with everyone having a seat across several tables. Facilitators could control the room and make sure they were heard and listened to, including by closing the classroom door when necessary.

Sessions on the second day were held in one big hall, which had to be separated by a standing whiteboard to indicate a separation between the two groups: children and caregivers. This arrangement did not become apparent until the field staff arrived at the venue that they booked for the evening. There were not enough suitable tables at the venue and more tables had to be set up as more people arrived after the start of the session. This proved to be distracting to both the participants and the facilitators. It was also harder for facilitators to keep participants, especially younger children, focused on the activities, as the participants in the two groups could see each other. The acoustics in the hall amplified noise from each group, made it difficult for facilitators and participants to hear each other and generally added to the level of distraction.

Lack of clarity about field team roles during the Co-Creation Sessions resulted in facilitators abandoning their groups during the sessions to attend to other tasks

During both days of Co-Creation Sessions we observed facilitators abandoned their groups at times, especially in the caregivers' sessions, and leaving them to work through activities themselves while attending to other tasks or sometimes disappearing from the room for long periods of time to attend to administrative tasks such as headcounting for the food order and distributing craft materials. In one session, one of the facilitators ended up managing the order of food that was meant as an incentive for participation. These tasks would normally be handled by the project managers but because there was a lack of clarity about team roles and because the team were overwhelmed by high turnout, they fell to the facilitators.

Facilitators' absence had a direct impact on groups' dynamics and their ability to work through the Problem Tree activity. Some groups were left without a facilitator for up to 10 minutes at a time - as facilitators became involved in other activities such as food ordering. As a result, discussions of causes got side-tracked in some groups while others struggled to brainstorm ideas without proper guidance and support from facilitators.

Facilitators' absence and some situations in which project managers and technical staff become involved in other administrative activities (such as food ordering) also meant that some groups were left unsupervised. In all sessions we observed participants who spoke more and others who spoke less or not at all and more could have been done by facilitators to actively manage the group's s that all participants were actively encouraged to be involved in the discussions.

Facilitators in children's groups were more present during the sessions but still struggled with managing dynamics within their groups, largely because of the high turnout of participants. This was particularly visible in the session with younger children. For example, some of the younger children looked bored and tired during the session, posing a challenge for facilitators to engage them because their attention was drawn to other children.

Intended use of the Co-Creation Session guidance was not clearly communicated to the field team

Co-Creation Session guidance is meant to be an aid that facilitators use throughout the sessions, not just preliminary reading material. Indeed, in one session - with caregivers of children aged 13 to 18 - the facilitators did rely a lot on following the guidance and the session went relatively smoothly and ended on time. In other sessions, facilitators did not

use the guidance, which meant they had to rely on remembering different steps and activities. These sessions did not go as smoothly and ran overtime as a result.

Lack of a contingency plan for a large turnout put undue pressure on facilitators

The participation incentives and recruitment approach used by the field team worked well. As discussed earlier, the turnout in four Co-Creation Sessions that took place was much higher than expected. This made facilitators' job much more difficult, particularly in sessions with children and adolescents. There was no contingency plan in place for managing such an influx of participants and facilitators had to improvise quickly. In some cases, facilitators responded to the growing number of participants by creating a third subgroup but this was hard to do and manage due to limited space, time and materials. In other cases, facilitators retained two large subgroups, which made facilitation and management of group dynamics all the more difficult.

Problem Tree activity was not suitably adapted for children and adolescents

The Problem Tree activity was not well-adapted to the needs of children aged 6-12. Lack of visual stimuli in the Problem Tree activity made the activity not very engaging and difficult to follow for some children, especially the younger ones who didn't know how to read. This was exacerbated by some of the concepts discussed in the Problem Tree activity being too abstract for children in that age group. This made the Co-Creation Session less engaging, productive and fun than in the previous pilots. As discussed this could be addressed by technical staff being more involved in the problems that are selected in Co-Creation Session planning

Facilitation of Co-Creation Sessions with children of all ages was made more difficult by the fact that the facilitators in both sessions were not sufficiently prepared to explain the link between the problems discussed by the groups, the surveys carried out earlier that week and the Aprendiendo Unidos programme in general. This led to some causes and ideas suggested by children being focused on themselves (e.g., what they could do differently to address a given problem) rather than on the programme (e.g., what Aprendiendo Unidos staff could do differently to address this problem).

Lastly, the number of participants who came to the Co-Creation Sessions with children and adolescents was overwhelming for the facilitators. The Problem Tree activity in both sessions was planned for approximately 10 children, with each of the two facilitators managing 5 children in small breakout groups during the Problem Tree activity (ideally having between 5 and 7 participants per facilitator). In reality, in the session with children aged 6-12, each facilitator ended up managing at least 10 children in the breakout groups. In

the session with adolescents, a third group was formed and facilitated by a project manager but the number of children present was still too large to effectively manage.

It is important to clearly communicate the connection between different UCCE components to the participants

As mentioned previously, the facilitators had not prepared in advance to offer a clear explanation of the link between surveys and Co-Creation Sessions, or between the Aprendiendo Unidos programme, problems, causes and ideas to Co-Creation Session participants. While this had not been noted as an issue in previous pilots, the relationship between the different components of UCCE could have been further re-enforced in this pilot, helping reassure participants how the problems were generated from the Interactive Digital Survey and how the output of the Co-Creation Sessions would itself be used.

What this means for UCCE development

Revise Co-Creation Sessions facilitation guidance

The facilitation guidance for the Co-Creation Session should be revised to include the following:

- More detailed guidance on how to open the Co-Creation Sessions by clearly communicating to the participants (1) session objectives, (2) how problems relate to survey findings, (3) how the outputs of the Co-Creation Sessions will be used and (4) how all this fits together both into the UCCE process and the wider programme;
- More detailed guidance and tips on how to manage the discussion in small groups and steer it towards ideas that relate to what the humanitarian agency or the community as a whole (rather than individuals on a personal level) can do about a given problem;
- Stronger focus on the importance of team debriefs after each Co-Creation Session
- More detailed description of role, e.g., who keeps the time, what technical staff do, what the project manager is responsible for, etc.
- Emphasis on using the guidance during the sessions as a tool to avoid mistakes or missed steps.

Revise Co-Creation Sessions project manager guidance

The project manager guidance for the Co-Creation Sessions should be revised to include the following:

- Advice on choosing the best facilitator to participants ratio for the sessions. The ratio should be no more than 1:5 in sessions with younger children and no more than 1:7 in sessions with adolescents and adults;

- Update guidance around the choice of time and location of Co-Creation Sessions based on learnings from this pilot;
- Develop specific guidance for management of groups with younger children to keep them engaged and to ensure all participants are encouraged to contribute;
- Develop guidance to help ensure that all participants engage in the discussions, including awareness of gender dynamics in situation where mixed groups are chosen;
- Build out guidance on contingency planning for a large number of participants.

Explore piloting Co-Creation Sessions before full roll-out

As with Interactive Digital Surveys, it may be beneficial to explore ways in which a ‘mock’ or pilot Co-Creation Session can be run as part of UCCE training. To ensure that this can be done in an ethical way, it is important to consider how Co-Creation Sessions can be piloted in a way that allows for the ideas generated during the pilot to be taken into account alongside the ideas from regular Co-Creation Sessions and how this is explained to those taking part.

Adapt the main Co-Creation Sessions activity to younger participants

Explore other activities that can replace the Problem Tree activity in sessions with younger children. These should be interactive and engaging for younger audiences (ages 6-10) but should also maintain the link between surveys and Co-Creation Sessions and enable children to generate meaningful ideas about how different problems can be solved. Another way to approach adapting the Co-Creation Sessions content for younger participants would be to consider how more visual stimuli and games can be used during and alongside the Problem Tree activity. In addition, advice should be generated around selecting facilitators who have past experience facilitating sessions with younger participants, and where this is not the case, to make sure those with less previous experience are well supported in the sessions by those with greater experience.