

# Co-Creation Sessions

## 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 Ethiopia Pilot, the project team held six Co-Creation Sessions over the course of two days, engaging a total of 90 community members (30 caregivers and 60 children). Two sessions were held with caregivers, divided by gender. The objective of caregiver sessions was to better understand - from the perspective of adult caregivers - how their children use sanitation facilities, what problems they face and why, and how these problems can be resolved. Four sessions were held with children, divided by gender and age. The objective of Co-Creation Sessions with children was to better understand how children use sanitation facilities, what problems they face and why, and how these problems can be resolved, from the perspective of children themselves. On average, each session lasted about 1.5 hours. Each session was facilitated by three data collectors trained by the Eclipse team. Female data collectors facilitated the female sessions and male data collectors facilitated the sessions with boys and men. SCI WASH staff were present during all Co-Creation Sessions.

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 three problems within three focus areas: Outside the latrines, Inside the latrines and Handwashing facilities. Ideas from each small group were then reported to 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: [Caregivers' Sessions](#) and [Children's Sessions](#).

## What we learned

### General insights

#### Managing the inclusion and exclusion of community members in Co-Creation Sessions was challenging

Co-Creation Sessions were held in an open space in the village, which resulted in several cases of children and adults who did not fit the target population of the project to initially join their respective sessions. This led to facilitators having to ask these adults and children to leave once the sessions began, which some were reluctant to do. Inclusion and exclusion of people during activities such as Co-Creation Sessions is a sensitive issue in humanitarian contexts, as exclusion can lead to tension within the community.

#### Small groups were formed in an ad hoc manner

The Co-Creation Sessions guidance suggested breaking up session participants into small working groups (3 groups of 5 people) by counting off to three after the introduction and icebreaker activities. Facilitators did not follow this guidance and instead let participants split into small groups randomly in all sessions. In sessions with women and girls, facilitators also formed the small groups at the start, before the introduction and the icebreaker activity. This worked well, as it helped facilitators to manage the participants. However, the unstructured approach to forming small groups was a concern in the sessions with children, as this approach does not account for peer pressure that children could feel when put in groups with their friends.

#### Facilitators found managing group dynamics difficult

Small groups of five participants seemed to be the right size for the Problem Tree activity: this number of people is easy to manage yet there are enough people to have a meaningful discussion. In some cases, however, facilitators found it difficult to manage group dynamics and different personalities of participants during this activity. Some participants were more shy while others dominated the discussions. Facilitators dealt with this by listening to the more dominant characters and prompting the quieter ones to contribute but were not always successful at encouraging equal contribution among all participants.

#### Expectation management during Co-Creation Sessions was hard to achieve

WASH staff participate in Co-Creation Sessions to manage community members' expectations about what is and isn't possible to achieve within the scope of a given project. During the Ethiopia pilots, WASH staff intervened when facilitators and participants had

questions but the quality of interventions was unclear. In some cases, Eclipse researchers observed the WASH manager played a role of a session supervisor as well as of a WASH specialist in the room. Eclipse researchers also had to intervene to remind the project team to explain to session participants how their ideas will be reviewed and prioritised and how design decisions will be made.

## Insights from Co-Creation Sessions with caregivers

### Ice breaker activity was well understood and received by adults

In sessions with caregivers, the project team used 'My Neighbour' ice breaker. Each person had to find out the name and some facts about the person next to them and then introduce their neighbour to other participants. This ice breaker activity was well understood and received by all caregivers. Participants' energy levels were visibly increased during the activity and there was a lot of laughter as people shared interesting facts about their neighbours with other participants. Facilitators were successful in ensuring that every participant contributed, made jokes to lighten the mood and the groups listened intently to each participant. Even though the community members likely knew each other beforehand, this activity went very well.

### Participants were very engaged during the sessions

Participants generally understood and found the structure of the Co-Creation Sessions easy to follow. They paid close attention when someone spoke and followed all facilitators' instructions. The facilitators did a good job at managing the group throughout the session but especially during the Report Back and Voting activities, which were challenging. However, during the session with female caregivers, some participants did not like that they were discussing what they perceived as the "wrong" problem, i.e., latrines, not water. In this case, the WASH staff present in the session had to step in and reiterate the focus of the project to the participants.

### Root causes could be further explored

During the Problem Tree activity, discussions about the root causes progressed quickly and many causes were added to the posters in a short period of time. As per the session guidance, the facilitators successfully prompted the participants for other problems they wanted to discuss (many indicated 'water shortages', as expected). However, not all facilitators seemed to ask multiple 'why' questions to explore the problem causes in more depth and detail.

## Insights from Co-Creation Sessions with children

### The presence of other children was a distraction

Children's sessions were held in vacant classrooms at the village school but this did not help to prevent distraction from other children from the community who were interested in the sessions and at first were able to just walk into the classrooms. At one point nine non-participant children were gathered around one Problem Tree group and were following the session. In some cases children tried to give participants answers to the questions and had to be asked to be quiet by the facilitators.

### Icebreaker activity worked well to engage all children

An icebreaker activity called 'Bean bag throw' was used in Co-Creation Sessions with children, although the bean bags were substituted by a locally available alternative - soft balls. Children visibly enjoyed the icebreaker activity, although some were at times shy to say their name out loud after catching the ball. Children got excited when they were able to throw and catch successfully, and laughed and cheered when the ball dropped. All children spoke at least once during the activity and it visibly lightened the atmosphere at the start of the session.

The icebreaker activity was further amended in the two sessions with boys. Initially the activity was envisioned to incorporate multiple balls to introduce an element of confusion and fun as the activity progressed. In the session with boys aged 5 - 8 years, facilitators only used one ball as only one was available. This worked well as all children paid attention throughout the activity and the boys still visibly enjoyed the game. When a second ball was introduced in the session with boys aged 9 - 12 years, the facilitators and children still threw only one ball at a time. Facilitators in these sessions also did a good job at paying attention to every child and ensuring that all children got to catch the ball and introduce themselves to the group. In one session, the lead facilitator first threw the ball back and forth with each child before allowing them to throw freely, which worked especially well with the younger children present.

### Agreeing on session rules with the children worked well

At the start of both boys' sessions, the lead facilitator agreed on a set of 'rules' with the children. As a group, they agreed to applaud when someone contributes to the discussion and to playfully shout at participants that broke the rules (e.g., by trying to vote more times than they were allowed for ideas they liked). During the follow up interview, the facilitator explained that he chose to set the rules with the children to make them feel more involved and appreciated. This approach worked really well as it kept the children engaged and made the sessions more fun for them.

## Facilitators found children's sessions more challenging to manage than sessions with caregivers

Generally, facilitators found it easier to manage caregivers than children, and older children were easier to manage than younger children. This was expected, and the facilitators performed this task to the best of their abilities. Some of the challenges related to keeping children's attention on task. For example, some children kept trying to see what other Problem Tree groups were discussing. In follow up interviews, one facilitator suggested incorporating more play-based and storytelling components in the Co-Creation Sessions to keep children more engaged.

Other challenges related to the content discussed in sessions. For example, some children found it difficult to understand some technical elements of sanitation facilities. In these cases facilitators had to explain The Problem Tree activity and the technical elements it focused on in more detail for children to understand it, which led to the activity taking a longer time in children's sessions than in caregivers' sessions. In follow up interviews, facilitators linked this challenge to the novelty of existing latrines in the community and the difficulty that some children had with distinguishing between the technical elements of the latrines (e.g, inside vs outside of the latrine, elements of design such slab, lock, door, etc). Although the original Co-Creation Session guidance suggested printing out illustrations of each area of the facilities and using these during the Problem Tree activity as visual prompts for discussion, this suggestion was not used during the pilot.

## Session break was more disruptive than useful

A 15 minute break was included in all Co-Creation sessions with children to let them rest and enjoy some snacks and drinks after completing the Problem Tree activity. This appeared unnecessary and quite disruptive to the children's attention. During the break it was difficult to keep children in the room and to prevent other children joining them and mixing up the participants' pool. In one instance, the project team began giving out snacks before all small groups finished their Problem Tree posters, which proved disrupting and resulted in two out of three groups quickly wrapping up the activity.

## The Report Back activity took too much time

During Report Back ideas generated by participants in small groups were shared with all participants in the session. Children generally listened intently during report back and contributed further ideas when prompted. The facilitators from each small group took lead on sharing the ideas their group came up with, which worked well as it contributed to the collaborative nature of the activity.

In the boys' sessions, the report back took a very long time, with children losing interest and needing to be reminded to pay attention. Facilitators were not able to make it more

interesting, and the long presentation of all ideas felt monotonous and disengaging. In one of the girls' sessions, the facilitator skipped report back and went straight to voting. As the children did not know all the ideas for the Problem Tree, this may have affected votes distribution in that session.

### **The Voting activity was adapted to context and ran smoothly**

Voting on the ideas was done by raising hands rather than using stickers as originally suggested in the Co-Creation Session guides because it was difficult to find the appropriate stationary locally. Participants had two votes per Problem Tree and were generally disciplined in adhering to this rule. Children who tried to vote more than twice were called out by the group in a playful manner. In the girls' sessions, facilitators moved all tables to a "classroom layout" facing the front of the room. This worked well for the voting activity as all children were facing the Problem Trees presented. In the session with older boys (9-12), the voting activity didn't seem fun enough for the children and took a long time as all ideas had to be read out again. While the Voting activity itself ran smoothly, the process of reporting back and then voting took a long time as each group first had to present all their ideas during the Report Back activity and then repeat each idea during Voting.

### **Quality of facilitation differed significantly between facilitators**

There was significant variability in the quality of facilitation between different data collectors, which became especially apparent during the Co-Creation Sessions with children. For example, some facilitators ensured that all children participated and were successfully engaging in their small groups. Others, however, were not able to or didn't attempt to help quieter children to speak up. Not all facilitators remembered to ask for additional problems and ideas in their groups and some struggled to deal with out-of-ordinary inputs from children (for example, when children in one small group said they didn't recognise a problem identified through the surveys or when children in another group framed the problem as their legs being too short to reach the door handle).

## **What this means for UCCE development**

### **Define guidance for inviting participants to the Co-Creation Sessions**

It is important to invite members of the target population to Co-Creation Sessions in advance, so that this process is that of inclusion (inviting people in) rather than of exclusion (asking people to leave on the day of the session). The importance of a secluded location to hold the sessions and facilitate a more positive inclusion dynamic also needs to be stressed in the guidance.

## Revise and combine the Report Back and Voting activities

Combine the Report Back and Voting activities into a single activity to speed up the session. Once all groups complete the Problem Tree activity, one facilitator should share the ideas from their group with other participants in the session, prompt them for more ideas and then ask everyone to vote for their favourite ideas by raising their hands. Once these steps are completed for ideas for one Problem Tree, they should be repeated for the next Problem Tree. This approach will make this component of the session more engaging and dynamic. Snacks and water for children can be given out during this activity but this needs to be accompanied by clear instructions for children to continue participating while snacking. Give out snacks and water for the children to have during report back and voting. Include clear rules agreed with children to participate while snacking.

## Include 'setting the rules' activity in children's Co-Creation Sessions

Setting the rules of engagement for the sessions worked extremely well in the Ethiopia pilot. This activity should be added to training and guidance for children's Co-Creation Sessions.

## Review Co-Creation Sessions structure, guidance and training with child participation specialists

- Explore alternative icebreaker activities, other fun ways to split children into small groups in a structured manner and fun alternatives to voting by hand raising during the Co-Creation Sessions.
- Review the appropriateness of timings in the session guidance and consider how this should differ from timings in Co-Creation Sessions with caregivers.
- Explore adding a module on child participation in the UCCE training
- Explore how 2-votes-only rule affects participants' decision-making and the implications of allowing each person to have more or less votes.

## Develop separate Co-Creation Sessions guidance for WASH staff

Guidance for WASH specialists participating in Co-Creation Sessions should be separated from the guidance for session facilitators to clarify responsibilities and prevent information overload. Guidance for WASH specialists should also include clearer instructions on expectation management in the sessions.

## Update Co-Creation Sessions guidance for facilitators with learnings from the pilot

- Review granularity of instructions in guidance: consider which instructions need more details and which instructions can be more high-level, leaving more room for improvisation.
- Clarify and train facilitators on when to stop asking 'why' questions to identify root causes at an appropriate level.
- Clarify instructions on how to deal with out-of-scope issues that come up during the sessions and advise to follow common practice within the field team.