

## SACE Co-Creation and Inception Process



This document is part of a series exploring the USAID Strengthening Advocacy and Civic Engagement Program's systems approach to achieving sustainable improvements in accountability and governance. See companion documents at <http://chemonics.com/sacelearning>.

# SACE Co-Creation and Inception Process

Implemented by Chemonics, USAID's five-year Strengthening Advocacy and Civic Engagement (SACE) Program in Nigeria took a different approach than most civil society organization (CSO) capacity development and governance projects to enhance capacity development and strengthen government accountability. Rather than using the traditional approach of grant funding to support selected CSOs to implement a linear project strategy focused on management-centered capacity development approaches, SACE adopted a systems approach based on the principles of accountability ecosystems and collective impact to improve accountability and governance. SACE's strategy was anchored in traditional, organizational capacity building skills (referred to as Capacity 1.0), but emphasized the principles of Capacity 2.0, supported through a collective impact approach (see box, p. 4). This brief provides an overview of SACE's inception phase and step-by-step co-creation process (see box, right) that was critical to the project's success.

## SACE Steps for Co-Creation

- Contextual analysis/PEA
- Stakeholder consultations
- Stakeholder dialogues
- Phased RFA process
- CSO ecosystem mapping
- Design Lab
- Final grant

## Analysis, Consultations, and Dialogue

The SACE program design included a four-to-six-month inception during which the team undertook an extensive range of contextual and political economy analyses of the Nigerian governance landscape. The program also conducted key informant interviews and focus group discussions with 87 people from CSOs, the government, the private sector, and donors throughout Nigeria. This culminated in two stakeholder dialogues, one held nationally in Abuja and the other held in Port Harcourt for the Niger Delta activities. Approximately 400 participants determined final policy areas that would resonate within the current accountability climate in Nigeria.

## Phased Grants and Mapping

The consultations and dialogue served as the basis for a phased request for application (RFA) process, the first part of which required prospective anchor CSOs to submit a concept note and use the STARNET online platform to map their institutional relationships and organizational strengths relative to others working in the same ecosystem and use the analysis to select cluster members with complementary expertise best suited to contribute to the common goal. After a preliminary selection, SACE staff members held in-person interviews and then short-listed anchor CSOs that participated in a pre-award responsibility determination to ensure they could meet basic grants requirements. Finally, successful anchor and cluster member CSOs and the SACE team undertook a co-creation Design Lab and Write Shop (see below) to help each anchor and cluster member develop and submit its final, full grant application.

## Design Lab and Write Shop

The main objective of the three-day intensive Design Lab and Write Shop was to ensure that applicants understood that SACE was not a typical development project and therefore a new approach to doing business

was expected from anchor organizations and cluster members. Eight organizations participated. The specific objectives were to: 1) provide feedback about what was compelling and what was lacking on the first phase cluster CSO concept, 2) share innovative design ideas for effective voice and accountability programming, 3) introduce design thinking approaches, and 4) produce a strong technical proposal aligned with SACE principles of collective impact.

During the Design Lab, SACE staff focused on helping anchors and clusters move from an “organizational mindset” to a “network mindset” based on collective impact principles (see box, p. 4); and create a collaborative learning community. The event served as an opportunity for finalists to refine their proposals through a fast-paced immersive experience. Each finalist was introduced to the tenets of design thinking, innovative methodologies for advocacy, rapid prototyping, and more. Each had an opportunity to pitch its ideas to an external panel of experts who were not involved in making the final selection but who volunteered their time to help each candidate-cluster do the best possible job on its proposal. Several weeks after the lab finished, the cluster CSOs submitted their final, significantly enriched, proposals, which were evaluated and funded based on transparent criteria (list of CSO cluster projects follows). In total, 156 CSOs served as cluster members across Nigeria with about nine CSOs on average per cluster.

## Anchor/Cluster Model

The “anchor” (SACE-funded CSO) gathered other CSOs with similar goals to form a “cluster.” Each then collectively created and managed their own advocacy efforts with the anchor’s mentorship. Clusters received intensive, ongoing training in collective impact principles and strategies, and consistent reviews and coaching sessions helped them develop common agendas, strategies, and tactics to solve social issues.

## SACE CSO Clusters

Accountability in Northeast Education	Led by the <b>Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD)</b> , the Accountability in Northeast Education Cluster focused on northeast Nigeria and sought to strengthen civil society engagement for enhanced regional governance of the education sector. CITAD built the capacity of its cluster members in budget tracking and project monitoring, and with its cluster members, advocated for increased funding for education in the region.
Public Financial Management in MNCH	Led by the <b>Centre for Social Justice (CENSOJ)</b> , the Public Financial Management in Maternal, Newborn, and Child Healthcare (MNCH) cluster collaborated with HERFON (see below), strengthened civil society capacity, and increased engagement between the demand and supply side MNCH actors. CENSOJ focused on engaging fiscal governance issues around the financing of health and MNCH.
Accountability in Extractives	Led by the <b>Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Center (CISLAC)</b> , the Accountability in Extractives Cluster worked to increase transparency and accountability in managing revenue in the extractives sector, with a primary focus on oil and gas. Through advocacy work, strengthening capacity, increasing knowledge of relevant issues, and creating linkages, CISLAC and the cluster members increased citizen engagement in the sector.
Access to Health for Women with Disabilities	Led by the <b>Disability Rights Advocacy Center (DRAC)</b> , the Access to Health for Women with Disabilities Cluster worked on social inclusion issues, with a focus on disability mainstreaming and health education for persons with disabilities (PWD). DRAC focused on facilitating the inclusion of PWD issues into the development agenda, and increased awareness about women with disabilities in Nigeria.
Quality of MNCH Services	Led by the <b>Health Reform Foundation of Nigeria (HERFON)</b> , the Quality of Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health Services Cluster, in coordination with CENSOJ, carried out advocacy for better health outcomes and supported evidence generation to inform MNCH policy development, planning, and implementation.
Accountability in Education	Led by the <b>Human Development Initiative (HDI)</b> , the Accountability in Education Cluster worked to strengthen CSO capacity to engage on governance and accountability issues surrounding basic

	education. The cluster advocated for budget transparency in education funding and increased quality and accessibility for primary and secondary education.
Social Inclusion in Basic Education	Led by the <b>Joint National Association of People with Disabilities (JONAPWD)</b> , the Social Inclusion in Basic Education Cluster aimed to address the accountability and transparency gaps in mainstreaming inclusive practices in universal basic education implementation.
Women Lead Agriculture	Led by the <b>Women Advocates Research and Documentation Center (WARDC)</b> , the Women Lead Agriculture Cluster supported women smallholder farmers' associations to effectively organize and influence policy in the agriculture sector, through capacity building to engage with the government and key political actors.

## Niger Delta Partners

Accountability and Transparency of NDIs	Led by the <b>Africa Network for Environment and Economic Justice (ANEEJ)</b> , the Accountability and Transparency of Niger Delta Institutions (NDIs) Cluster, in collaboration with LITE-Africa, monitored and reported on the budget and activities of NDIs with the aim of decreasing the mismanagement of resources.
Open Budget in Health and Education	Led by the <b>Citizens Centre for Integrated Development and Social Rights (CCIDESOR)</b> , the Open Budget in Health and Education Cluster aimed to use citizen's budget monitoring and advocacy to improve state and local governments' accountability in Imo State.
Effective Agriculture Policy	Led by the <b>Edo State Cooperative Farmers Agency Limited (ESCFAL)</b> , the Effective Agriculture Policy Cluster worked to strengthen the capacity of fellow business management organizations to advocate for inclusive budgetary processes and policy reforms in the agriculture sector to promote economic growth and prosperity in Edo State.
Accountability in Resource Management of NDIs	Led by the <b>Leadership Initiative for Transformation and Empowerment (LITE-Africa)</b> in cooperation with ANEEJ, the Accountability in Resource Management of Niger Delta Institutions (NDIs) Cluster supported strengthening transparency and accountability mechanisms of the NDIs to improve their effectiveness to deliver their mandate to Niger Delta communities.
Inclusive Agriculture Governance	Led by the <b>Life and Peace Development Organization (LAPDO)</b> , the Inclusive Agriculture Governance Cluster supported citizens and cluster member organizations to better engage Ondo state institutions on the state agricultural budget. LAPDO created platforms for these actors to engage relevant government stakeholders to help facilitate policies that are favorable to smallholder women farmers.
Women in Business	Led by the <b>Network of Entrepreneurial Women (NNEW)</b> of the Nigeria Employer's Consultative Association (NECA), the Women in Business Cluster advocated for favorable policies to create a conducive business environment for small businesswomen in the informal sector, and enable an inclusive economy for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, including women and youths. NNEW pushed for more transparent engagement regarding local taxation for informal women traders.
Peace Advocacy	Led by the <b>Nembe City Development Foundation (NCDF)</b> , the Peace Advocacy Cluster promoted participatory partnership for sustainable peace and community development in Bayelsa State. NCDF and the cluster member organizations strengthened the capacity of local committees in the areas of conflict prevention, partnership, and peace building techniques to enable them to provide a coordinated early warning mechanism on potential issues.
Open Budget	Led by the <b>Social Development Integrated Centre (SDIC)</b> , the Open Budget Cluster supported citizens and citizen organizations to better engage with NDIs toward improved use of transparency and accountability tools in service delivery. SDIC increased capacity and synergy within an existing network of transparency actors and built capacity towards greater participation in the fiscal governance processes.

Effective Agriculture Policy	Led by the <b>Ugboro Progressive Fish Farmers Associate (UPFFA)</b> , the Effective Agriculture Policy Cluster supported the capacity building of cluster members to improve organizational capacity and advocacy skills to engage with government agencies and stakeholders to improve agriculture policy in Delta State with a focus on aquaculture policy and funding.
Youth Advocacy	Led by the <b>Youth Alive Foundation (YAF)</b> , the Youth Advocacy Cluster worked to address the challenges associated with youth unemployment and advocated for the enactment of a bill for 10 percent of oil revenue to be allocated to youth empowerment.

## Co-Creation Impact and Best Practices

SACE worked with 18 clusters across Nigeria on 137 diverse policy issues, impacting 62 recorded policy changes as well as transforming and catalyzing new collaborative, co-created, and learning approaches to influence policy by civic organizations. Many of the practices are mainstream among the participating organizations. Co-creating during the inception period was critical to SACE’s success – from defining the specific issues and geographic areas through an extensive initial consultation and dialogue process – to a phased RFA process and intense co-creation design lab. This period afforded SACE the following best practices and lessons:

1. **Establishing an iterative pathway** to develop grant objectives, activities, and prospective policy results based on the collective input of the group. The process required anchors and cluster members to analyze the different expertise and contacts each member brought to the cluster, assess how they could each contribute to the goal of their work at the national and subnational level, and how they could strengthen horizontal integration across Nigeria’s states and vertical linkages between national-level networks and local partners.
2. **Building a ‘collective impact’ model** and aligning the CSO anchor and cluster members to their common agenda, goals, and individual responsibilities to achieve the grant objectives (see box, below).
3. **Setting the stage for adaptive management**, infusing clusters with the understanding that the initial design and activity work plan was a ‘living document’ that would be revisited at set intervals to adapt tactics, bring in new CSOs or drop others, and identify new opportunities based on contextual dynamics.
4. **Building SACE team’s capacity first and quickly** by creating a safe space for experimentation and failure to learn; developing a mindset of consistent adaptation, motivating staff who embraced this mindset; building agile and responsive systems for staff to support anchors and clusters; and valuing clear, disciplined documentation of processes and impact for a virtuous learning feedback loop.
5. **Deliberately finding space to co-create adaptive tools.** The model of SACE implied that many ‘business-as-usual’ tools were ill-equipped to manage the adaptive and organic nature of change. Important tools such as the policy tracker, Strategy Matrix and Outcome Harvester, and the cluster review process (discussed

### SACE and Collective Impact

- **Common Agenda:** Anchors and clusters developed a shared vision for change through the RFA process, Design Lab, and consistent cluster reviews, coaching sessions with SACE facilitation, and hands-on training.
- **Shared Measurement:** Anchors and clusters jointly collected data, reported on shared indicators, and engaged in after-action reviews, outcome harvesting, and other measures of impact.
- **Mutually Reinforcing Activities:** Initial co-creation resulted in joint action planning and the anchor was able to coordinate and help adapt activities across the cluster, based on outcomes and regular context analysis.
- **Continuous Communication:** Frequent and structured open communication was nurtured within and across clusters through cluster reviews, regular monitoring, and social media.
- **Backbone Support:** The anchor CSO provided ongoing, dedicated support and technical and political advice to its various cluster members so that all initiatives were fed into long-term goals.

elsewhere) emerged and were refined through dialogue and practice over the life of SACE. Many are now used by clusters and individual organizations after the project closeout.

6. **Harnessing donor buy-in and support.** USAID supported and enabled an adaptive mindset and approach throughout the project. Implemented from the onset in this manner through the inception activities, USAID supported catalytic change and enabled the activity to take risks, and learn and adapt over its lifecycle, delivering impact.
7. **A cluster model enables collective impact.** By adopting a focused issue-cluster model, aligned to collective impact principles (see box, below), SACE was able to operationalize, adapt, and iterate to achieve collective impact and sustainable outcomes.