Save the Children

FINAL REPORT: ANCP ASIA INNOVATION AWARDS PROCESS EVALUATION

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We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the Country upon which we have conducted this review. We recognise their continuing connection to the land and waters, and thank them for protecting this country and its ecosystems since time immemorial. And we acknowledge the Elders – past, present and emerging of all the land we work and live on and their Ancestral Spirits with gratitude and respect.

Artwork: Elizabeth Yanyi Close, for Save the Children 2021

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the insights, findings and future-looking recommendations of a process evaluation of Save the Children Australia's (SCA) ANCP Asia Innovation Awards (Innovation Awards) conducted independently by Day Four Projects.

The Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) is the longest running NGO funding initiative of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). SCA decided to use the ANCP as an opportunity to explicitly support Asian country office (CO) teams to identify, design, implement and learn from innovation. The Innovation Awards' focus aligns with SCA's strategic focus on innovation and role in creating better outcomes for children.

This first round of Innovation Awards supported four CO teams to design and implement innovations focused on: reducing male violence against women and children in **Cambodia**; increasing child immunisation rates in the **Philippines**; improving online safety of young people in refugee and migrant communities on the **Thai-Myanmar border**; and increasing access to learning technologies for students in **Viet Nam**.

Several key insights emerged in this evaluation from document review, stakeholder interviews, and workshops which informed country case studies and cross-case analyses, including that:

- All teams focused on **complex innovations**, implemented in complex settings, which stretched the capacity of teams and budgets

- Despite stated interests in scaling up, **few studies included a focus on the scalability** of an innovation, or the pathways to scale an innovation

- In contrast, all teams focused on t**he effectiveness of innovations,** with some choosing sophisticated study designs to test innovations that were difficult to implement within available time and resources

- All projects involved a diversity of stakeholders, from across sectors, settings and countries, which required **skilled partnering and coordination** for success

- All teams benefited from new incubation processes, facilitated knowledge sharing, and engagement of **technical experts** - and all worked extremely hard to deliver a **complex and sophisticated set of innovation projects**.

As SCA looks to the Innovation Awards' future, it is recommended that several areas be explored:

1. **Set clear and shared definitions and expectations for what counts as an innovation,** and what is meant by scaling up and sustainability

2. **Make time and resources available for complex innovation:** match the resources required to the size, complexity and stage of evolution of the innovation being implemented

3. **Explore questions (through suitable study designs) that are appropriate to an innovation's stage of development,** which includes effectiveness, as well as questions of an innovation's scalability, acceptability, safety, and accessibility

4. **Strengthen the partnership capacities** of all involved and dedicate space, time and processes to select the right partners for the innovation and its contexts early on in the process

5. **Clarify roles and responsibilities** throughout so that all individuals and teams are clear about their contribution to innovation

6. **Continue to support knowledge sharing and building a culture of inquiry** that fosters openness, honesty and continuous improvement

The results of this process evaluation reflect the stage of evolution of the Innovation Awards at SCA. As the Innovation Awards grow and evolve, new and exciting directions will emerge. We encourage SCA to continue to capture and share this learning, and to position the Innovation Awards as a valuable learning opportunity in the field of innovation for international development.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT FOR THE WORK

This section describes key elements of the Innovation Awards, and important contextual details regarding the design and early implementation of the Awards based on initial documentation review and preliminary consultations with key staff.

These insights are arranged by:

1. The genesis of the Innovation Awards
2. What are the Innovation Awards?
3. Purpose of the Innovation Awards
4. How is innovation conceived in the Innovation Awards?

The genesis of the Innovation Awards

SCA started the Innovation Awards in the current DFAT ANCP four-year cycle. The decision to focus the awards on innovation was noted by some as a response to DFAT's desire for increased impact and efficiency from its aid funding. Others highlighted alignment with SCA's strategic objective to "accelerate impact by leveraging innovations in digital technologies and data to enhance quality and reach of programs, improve efficiency … and address inequalities in access to digital technology".[1] Save the Children International's (SCI) strategic focus also encompasses a strong interests in "innovation incubators" and scaling all viable innovation pilots[2].

What are the Innovation Awards?

The Innovation Awards provided two years' funding and support to four CO-led projects:

RECOVER

Cambodia's RECOVER project aimed at reducing male violence against women and children, which is unacceptably high, via positive parenting groups, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) sessions for couples to reduce alcohol consumption of male partners, and male-led advocacy and campaign actions, among other activities.

IMPACT

The Philippine's IMPACT project aimed at increasing child immunisation rates via social behaviour change communications to increase vaccine uptake among pregnant women, parents/caregivers, and other eligible groups as well as aa digital information system for service providers, and child-centred social accountability interventions.

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Viet Nam's 'Bridging the Digital Divide for Ethnic Minority Children' project aimed at increasing access to learning technology to improve educational continuity, via using an interactive children's reading app 'Elevate', training teachers to help students learn on apps, and helping families support children's reading.

ROAR

Thailand's ROAR project aimed at improving online safety of young people in refugee and migrant communities on the Thai Myanmar border who are at risk of cyberbullying, online predators and privacy breaches via recruiting and training youth leaders to undertake participatory action research on online safety, co-creating and leading digital and offline solutions, and local campaigns and national and regional advocacy strategies.

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1 SCA24 Strategic Plan (per Terms of Reference)
2 SCI Asia Pacific Strategy 2022-24 (per Terms of Reference)

Purpose of the Innovation Awards

The Innovation Awards are designed to "foster stronger collaboration, experimentation, and informed risk-taking, focusing on developing new models that benefit children"[3] through funding projects across the Asia program portfolio encompassing COs in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Viet Nam. These awards are part of a broader landscape of innovation in development, which recognises the role of innovation in addressing "urgent developmental challenges such as providing access to drinking water, eradicating neglected diseases or reducing hunger."[4]

SCA have used the Innovation Awards, as evidenced in grant selection criteria, to both[5]:

- meet DFAT's funding aims (i.e., a strong focus on developing new business models that benefit children, and deliver services across health security, stability, economic recovery and protecting the most vulnerable per DFAT's Partnerships for Recovery);

- achieve a range of broader but linked aims, such as how to:

  - *deliver quality services for children and households in deprived/ultra-poor contexts;*

  - *use new methodologies/approaches (including partnerships) to sustainably transform discriminatory social norms, harmful or violent practices against children and young people in both physical and digital communities;*

  - *use technological solutions to improve or transform program, advocacy or operational processes and deliver better outcomes for children;*

  - *better build children and families' resilience to shocks and stressors to reduce negative coping mechanisms and improve children's wellbeing;*

  - *incorporate alternative models/approaches through Social Enterprise partnerships (including Library For All, Inclusiv Education, Centre for Evidence and Implementation, Center for Utilizing Behavioral Insights for Children (CUBIC)) to sustainably address child rights issues;*

  - *make this change achieve scale and become sustainable (exemplified by linking to an existing national system or strategy that can leverage ongoing resources).*

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3 Terms of Reference
4 OECD. Innovation for Development (available at https://www.oecd.org/innovation/inno/50586251.pdf)
5 Extract from Bright Idea Platform- ANCP 2021-20 (Nb. G15 in provided documents)

How is innovation conceived in the Innovation Awards?

There are multiple ways in which innovation is conceived and understood within SCA and SCI as described below. Across these conceptualisations there appears to be a common interest in newness, improving results (i.e., outcomes, performance, and impact), and generating evidence.

- SCA's 2022-24 Strategy[6] innovation-focused driver, states that it will use digital and data to improve program outcomes and cost effectiveness (including leveraging social enterprises, partnerships and innovative funding models), strengthen evidence of what works and use data analytics to respond to needs, capture program outcomes, drive pilot programs showcasing solutions to highlight the impact of the digital divide on children, ensure best practice approaches are applied consistently (reducing risk and increasing efficiency and quality), and amplify children's voices through accessible technology.

- SCI and its LiftLab[7] define innovation as "disruptive new ideas that improve performance" and reference "failing to innovate at scale due to [internal] innovation barriers", including fragmented approaches, capability gap, lack of funding for scaling, and cultural resistance.

- At the implementation level, Awardees in the COs describe their innovations as new approaches, pilots, and transformations, and propose how their idea might be sustainable (at local, state, country, and/or international levels) and scale beyond the pilot.

- Innovation Awards Training[8] describes innovation as "driven by human needs, technology progressions, and organisational capabilities", as "a process of intentional change made to create value by meeting opportunity and seeking advantage", that can be incremental, evolutionary, or revolutionary. The training clarifies misconceptions about innovation (e.g., it is about creating exciting new products, requires 'crazy' creativity, and metrics can assure the right innovation and technology choices). It also proposes two ways to improve effectiveness of the existing SDG spend, namely improving the efficiency and effectiveness of new programs or investing in disruptive ideas that are at least two times more effective than existing solutions.

- DFAT's ANCP program guidance addresses innovation, stating that funding can be applied to pilot or trial innovative technologies or approaches, such as to aid delivery, different partnerships and collaboration, or applying innovative processes[9]. DFAT recognises that most innovation is based on incremental improvements to policy, programs and systems based on trialling, learning from failure, and progressively adapting to improve outcomes

These different orientations influence which innovations were selected - and likely proposed - through the Innovation Awards, as well as the expectations of different stakeholders on what these innovations could deliver (the Cross Case Analysis provides further discussion around the challenges of designing and implementing complex innovations in the constraints of a two-year funding program).

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6 "Save the Children Strategy 2024: Fearless for Children" (2022-24 SCA Strategy-External-FINAL).
7 LIFT Labs Overview - Adapting for Children (Innovation Presentation Region Intro).
8 Short Training Series - (8) ANCIP Teams - in 2022 (NB reference in shared documents)
9 Australian NGO Cooperation Program Manual; https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/australian-ngo-cooperation-program-manual. Accessed February 2023.

PURPOSE OF THIS PROCESS EVALUATION AND APPROACH

As a process evaluation, this project focused on what happened during the design and implementation (rather than the outcomes) of the Innovation Awards.

The approach recognised the exploratory nature of this project, and the value in building a shared understanding of innovation pathways within and across the Innovation Awards and opportunity to learn from the broader innovation ecosystem. It was designed to respond to the stated Objectives and KEQs detailed below and was grounded in existing frameworks on scaling-up innovations, adopting a Multiple Case Study approach to compare context-sensitive experiences of scaling-up through the Innovation Awards. The evaluation was conducted from March – June 2023 and involved review of available documentation, key stakeholder interviews with, and workshops with CO Teams and others. A detailed description of methods is at Appendix 1.

Objectives of the evaluation

The following objectives were designed in consultation with Innovation Award stakeholders.

1. Consolidate and document how SCA/SCI operationalised the Innovation Awards across an innovation conceptual framework and engaged the wider innovation ecosystem.
2. Identify the Innovation Awards planning, design and delivery components that influenced effectiveness.
3. Provide 'innovation', 'scale', and 'scaling' operational lessons for SCA/SCI and implementing partners.
4. Identify opportunities for the Innovation Awards portfolio to 'scale' and/or 'sustainably scale'.

Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs)

Targeted consultations and document review identified core activities in three phases of the innovation journey: (1) design and planning, (2) implementation and experimentation and (3) scaling-up - that informed the below KEQs (accompanied by probes/prompts for further inquiry).

Design and Planning Phase

1. What steps were taken to design the overall initiative, and the innovations within it? (e.g., who was involved, how were they involved, when were they involved across the innovation ecosystem)
   - *What are partners' roles and responsibilities across SCI, SCA, including Innovation partners, and what is the approach to partnership agreements in innovation?*

   - *How is the overall innovation managed?*
   - *How are child protection considerations and factors to address inequality and promote inclusion incorporated?*
   - *How is scaling considered at this stage?*
2. What factors led to these design decisions?
3. What were the successes and challenges of these design processes? (e.g., for individuals and teams (including COs, SCA), for partners, for funders, for the innovation itself, for timelines and efficiencies, etc.)

Implementation and Experimentation Phase

4. What steps were taken to implement the overall initiative, and the innovations within it? (e.g., what partnerships were formed, what supports were provided, what learning and feedback systems were put in place, what adaptations were made etc.)
5. What factors influenced these implementation approaches?
6. What successes and challenges were encountered during the implementation of the overall initiative and innovations?

Scaling Up Phase (which conceivably extends beyond the Innovation Awards timeframe)

7. How is scale-up defined in the context of the initiative and innovations?
8. What steps have been taken to support innovations to scale-up?
9. To what extent are these steps facilitating or hindering innovations to successfully scale-up?

WITHIN CASE ANALYSIS

Below is a summary of country-level case study findings conducted with the four Innovation Awardee COs: Viet Nam, Philippines, Thailand and Cambodia. Detailed case studies are at Appendix 2.

VIET NAM: Bridging the Digital Divide for Ethnic Minority Children

Bridging the Digital Divide for Ethnic Minority Children (EMC) aimed to increase access to learning technology, especially in EMC, to improve educational continuity during school disruptions such as during the pandemic. The project involved developing an interactive children's reading app 'Elevate' and assisting families to support children's reading through tools and supports for caregivers and teachers. Design took approximately five months, with the rest of the time spent in implementation.

The CO team partnered with Libraries for All (LfA), an Australian-based social enterprise, and adapted LfA's existing Elevate app to the Vietnamese context given the time and costs involved in developing an app from start to finish. This was the first time a reading app had been developed in Vietnamese language and was seen as having significant potential to contribute to active learning, especially during disruptions to routine learning.

The CO sought an app that was age appropriate, appropriate for children with disabilities (CWDs), interactive and downloadable, included textbook-based curriculum, and suitable for ethnic language(s) and Vietnamese, among other features.

The CO team and LfA experienced major challenges in their relationship, particularly in remote working during design. The CO team did not feel that they were sufficiently informed about the Elevate app's limited ability to adapt to the Vietnamese context, including its limited interactivity and appropriateness for CWD. This led to the CO team questioning the degree of value and priority alignment with LfA. Technical advisors also reported challenges in being brought into design after ideas were developed pre-incubation. This created difficulties in retrofitting issues of gender and disability inclusion into the design of the innovation.

During implementation, it became clear to the CO team that the content and quality of the app was misaligned with their expectations. They could not digitise textbook content, but rather provided an ePub.[10] There were language errors despite the CO offering to find people to assist in translation. No Mother Tongue-Based Multi-Lingual Education (MTBMLE) approach was taken. Devices had to be purchased with pre-uploaded content, rather than allowing for app download by parents/caregivers. Delays in shipment of devices resulted in less time to implement the innovation's study design.

Despite this, this project provided an opportunity for the CO team to be involved in a new process for designing, piloting and iterating ideas. The Elevate app, and associated ePub, while differing from CO expectations, have been implemented in three settings in Viet Nam and well received by teachers and students. Participants' knowledge and capacity in digital and technology-based solutions has increased, as has the knowledge and capacity of the CO team in developing app-based solutions. A variety of perspectives have been engaged in project activity and implementation, and all confirm that the tools developed via this project have helped to increase children's excitement to learn.

The CO team is working on the next iteration of the app with a local developer and exploring avenues to implement the app in other locations across Viet Nam. The team are also exploring opportunities to mobilise other non-ANCP funding sources, including private sector and government funding.

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10 In this context, an ePub refers to a digital document, but which does not have interactive functionalities.

PHILIPPINES: Improved Immunization Coverage with People's Acceptance through Communications and Technology (IMPACT)

IMPACT aimed to address declining routine immunization coverage in children and pregnant women and assist in COVID-19 immunization uptake via (1) social behaviour change communications (SBCC), (2) a digital information system to reliably target and profile beneficiaries, and (3) child-centred social accountability (CCSAc) to connect locally-led immunization insights with government plans and action.

Design took place over five months. During incubation, the CO team engaged in a Human Centered Design (HCD) process and were connected with CUBIC to further develop and refine the innovation. Multiple information sources informed innovation development, including key stakeholder consultations (e.g., with immunization system end users), a literature review and a qualitative study on barriers and enablers to vaccine uptake.

Various strengths emerged in design. The CO team engaged with HCD approaches, and with CUBIC's support, was able to focus and simplify the original innovation idea. In engaging with end user experiences, the team generated a more tailored set of interventions to respond to their needs, rather than a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. This innovation built on the CO team's established experiences, knowledge and relationships, which allowed the project to progress.

Equally, challenges were experienced in design. The CO team needed more time to engage in the design process, and in designing an RCT (selected as one study design to test elements of the innovation). Technical advisors found it difficult to engage in the process and reported being brought in quite late into the innovation development. At times, these advisors found it difficult to determine who was coordinating the project and processes. Similarly, the CO team found it difficult to coordinate the variety of project advisers and consultants involved.

IMPACT was implemented by a core project team, as well as the RITM, CUBIC, Wireless Access for Health, Life Haven Center for Independent Living, AdGender PH, in addition to the Chief of Programs and the Director for Thematic Programs in the Philippines and SCA Technical advisers. Good working relationships were thus critical to IMPACT's progress - and while often present, it was noted that MoUs and other agreements among different partners posed some challenges.

The most significant challenge for the IMPACT team was aligning the project ambitions with available time and funding. Review and approvals from ethics committees took time, as did adapting the RCT to recruit additional participants for an adequately powered study. Building and negotiating relationships among the diversity of partners also required significant time and energy. As a result, the IMPACT team sought project extensions and additional funding to complete the project. The CO team acknowledged that IMPACT would benefit from further simplification.

There is a now desire among the CO team to learn more about effective approaches to scale-up. The team reported that scale-up was difficult to achieve within the two-year funding of the Innovation Awards. From a sustainability lens, DFAT has agreed to support multiple components of IMPACT going forward, and the CCSAc element is being used by the CO for other project work, as are behavioural insights.

THAILAND: Respect Ourselves, Accentuate Resilience (ROAR)

ROAR - a child-led initiative - aimed to improve the online safety of young people on the Thai Myanmar border at risk of cyberbullying, online predators, and privacy breaches via: (1) a participatory action research (PAR) initiative with 50 youth leaders; (2) co-creating digital and offline youth safety and resilience solutions (using the SHIFT model); and (3) children developing and implementing local campaigns and strategies.

Design took approximately three months, including a two-week incubation. The CO team approached SHIFT, which had experience in working in Asia using the SHIFT model to shift power to children. The CO team engaged with young people and others from across relevant departments and sectors in consultations, and worked with the Asia Regional Office SHIFT team.

Specifically, the SHIFT team spent a week in Mae Sot with the CO and youth partners, conducted a model simulation so that all parties could understand it, and invited the CO to SHIFT's 'Fun Adult Training' in Bangkok in 2022 to further enhance their understanding of the model. The CO selected two partners for implementation - Help Without Frontiers' Rays of Youth (ROY) and the Karen Student Networking Group (KSNG) - and Levante International Development LTD to support PAR.

The HCD process was seen by the CO team as a significant strength of the design phase. While the team recognised that PAR was an ambitious and difficult initiative, they felt motivated and supported to undertake the work. This in part reflected the team's experience in this domain, and existing relationships with relevant stakeholders. The CO team and technical advisors felt that it would have been helpful for specialist knowledge on gender and inclusion to have been brought in earlier in the design, and to better understand how these perspectives were being coordinated across the project.

The pandemic posed particular challenges for ROAR, including restrictions on travel and which refugee camps could be covered by ROAR. Other challenges were encountered in working with refugee camps, such as violence, political unrest and language barriers.

ROAR implementation was enabled through strong working relationships with ROY and KSNG – who brought passion, creativity and knowledge to the project. Children and youth-led campaign activities and peer-to-peer online safety knowledge were delivered to communities; teachers were motivated to learn about online safety and participate in online safety projects; and the CO joined the Thailand Safe Internet Coalition to coordinate efforts to create a safer digital environment for children in Thailand.

However, the CO team reported that the SHIFT model was challenging to work with, primarily due to language and capacity limitations. The team also acknowledged the challenges associated with working with migrant and refugee children from Myanmar who bring different cultural, language and experiential backgrounds. The CO team had to provide significant amounts of support to KSNG and this impacted the project timelines. Overall, the team believed that the innovation's complexity could be simplified in the future.

The CO team has secured funding from Westpac to expand ROAR to two new geographic areas and is considering how to best contextualise SHIFT and simplify incubation. Westpac's support will also provide a bridge to sustainability for the youths from the existing ROAR project. Further, the CO is engaging with others in migrant communities with ROY and working with KSNG in refugee camps to seek to continue work on child online protection, and is working on an exit plan with partners to share with government. As at March 2023, the CO team noted it would draft a sustainability plan before the project closes with partners.

CAMBODIA: RECOVER

RECOVER aimed to reduce psychological and physical male violence against Cambodian women and children by piloting new ways to engage men and boys to explore their ideas about fatherhood and respectful relationships via: (1) monthly Positive Parenting Groups provided by Village Volunteers; (2) testing, prototyping and refining an approach to deliver Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) for couples to reduce male partners' alcohol consumption; and (3) generating evidence to support national policies and local plans, inform advocacy actions and provide critical evidence to SCI Common Approaches on violence against children and male engagement.

Design and refinement of RECOVER took approximately 5 months, but actual intervention design took 12 months. CBT was viewed as a completely new initiative in Cambodia and as a 'risky' experiment by some. The work built on the CO team's experiences, knowledge and relationships, and engaged CUBIC as behavioural insights specialists.

Those involved encountered multiple challenges, including:

- changes in intervention design partway through the project (e.g., changing from local provincial residents as delivery agents to student volunteers from the Royal University of Phnom Penh and changing from 1 student volunteer to two for safety reasons),
- challenges in recruiting people to participate in the study's various components, and then retaining participants in the study's various components,
- challenges in participant randomisation,
- challenges in starting to implement the study despite lacking SCI institutional ethics approval,
- engaging technical advisors late in innovation design, and
- running out of funding before the project was complete.

Overall, the study attempted to design and implement two RCTs, alongside the innovation itself. This was seen by those involved as too ambitious within the available time and funding.

Despite these challenges, several successes were noted including:

- a strong partnership established with student volunteers that led to increased knowledge and experience among the students,
- increased confidence and skills of village volunteers,
- increased CO capacity, including in designing for innovation, good collaboration, and in conducting sophisticated research studies.

The CO team reported that the project has provided an opportunity to explore, test, fail and learn about innovation – and to look for opportunities to adapt when unforeseen circumstances arise.

The CO team reflected that more time is required to focus on scaling up or sustaining RECOVER – and that more time is needed to reflect on the intervention itself, and what worked/what did not work, before scaling up. At the time of writing, the results of RECOVER are unknown – therefore the CO team stated that it is unclear if the CBT intervention has 'worked'. These data are seen as critical by the study team for the study to inform any future policy and advocacy work. There is some evidence that the government has made commitments to continue some activities (particularly related to Positive Parenting), but it is unclear if or how the RECOVER study has influenced this result.

The CO team have developed a sustainability plan, inclusive of: capacity building among key stakeholders, partner organisations and Village Volunteers etc.; improving tools and materials to deliver Positive Parenting and broader training in safeguarding, gender equality and disability inclusion; and advocating for increased resources to prevent violence against children and women. Village Volunteers have also committed to continue to raise awareness among their respective groups, including to connect and make people aware of the child protection system.

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

This cross-case analysis compares the insights and experiences from across Innovation Awards to inform future program considerations and involved observing and synthesising country-level experiences in three core phases: (1) design and planning, (2) implementation and experimentation, and (3) scaling-up. The following sections summarise core themes and important considerations across country experiences within the three phases and provide illustrative examples as appropriate.

Design and Planning

A new and different process

Across all cases, the introduction of HCD[11] approaches prompted all CO teams to arrive at new and different solutions. HCD provided an opportunity to involve a wide variety of voices and ideas, including those who would ultimately be affected by each innovation, such as children and youth, parents and care givers, teachers, educators, and healthcare workers. This was recognised by all involved as a critical success of the ANCP Innovation Awards process.

The incubation phase built on the knowledge, experiences, expertise, partnerships and resources that each team brought. This included past efforts in each content domain pursued by each team and teams' existing relationships. The result was innovations that were sufficiently new and different for CO teams, but still within their knowledge and experience and that addressed known gaps.

Good design takes time and resources

The benefit and value of the incubation phase required significant time and energy investment from all involved. For some, this related to foundational steps to design the innovation itself, such as gathering evidence, analysing data, and engaging community members. For others, time was required to upskill CO teams to participate in design processes. For some teams, this meant design subsumed up to half of the Innovation Award period, which impacted funding and time for implementation.

When and how to involve key voices

All CO teams reported significant value from working with SCA Technical Specialists – and would have benefited from earlier engagement of those with specialist knowledge in gender, disability and inclusion, and child protection and safeguarding. This was echoed by Technical Specialists, who also acknowledged the value of early engagement as teams are conceptualising, designing and exploring innovations. This input was provided to CO teams at later stages. It made "retrofitting" considerations challenging and meant interventions did not necessarily optimally address these considerations.

Designing with, for and in, complexity

In this round of Innovation Awards, the orientation of CO teams toward new, different and transformational innovations, led to the design of interventions that were complex, delivered within the boundaries of sophisticated research studies, and implemented in complex contexts:

- **Complex innovations**: the four innovations were all multi-component interventions, implemented through a complex set of partners and relationships, with multiple targets. For example, Cambodia's RECOVER project involved CBT sessions, Positive Parenting groups, and a male-led advocacy campaign. RECOVER involved the coordinated participation of several teams, including CUBIC, Gender and Development for Cambodia, and the Cambodia Disability Persons Organization. RECOVER targeted men and women living in rural villages, and decision-makers responsible for local and national policy. This innovation required ongoing and significant adaptation during implementation that was difficult to undertake within the confines of a traditional research design (see further Implementation and Experimentation below).

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11 Mani-Kandt R, Robinson J, Human centered design in international development: a review of what works and what doesn't (2021). Itad. https://www.itad.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Human-Centered-Design-Paper_Exec-Sum.pdf

- **Research studies:** pilot studies were designed as 'research studies' and were largely intended to explore questions of effectiveness and efficacy. At the same time, teams were encouraged (sometimes through established research partners) to generate very high levels of evidence. This led some teams to design sophisticated and resource intensive studies (e.g., RCTs in Cambodia and the Philippines), that were challenging to implement within time and budgetary constraints.

- **Contexts:** the design (and implementation) contexts for all projects were complex, characterised by a range of interacting factors, including a global pandemic, violence and conflict, population dynamics, and political priorities. These contexts, along with the broader localisation movement within international development, make designing for innovation challenging.

Overall, the complexity of innovations being explored by Awardees, often exceeded the capacities of what could be achieved within the two-year funding program.

Good communication is critical

The large number of actors involved in the Innovation Awards necessitates good collaborative practice – that includes transparent and effective communication among all involved. Where good communication existed, teams progressed through innovation pilots with fewer challenges versus the alternative where significant challenges arose. For example, in Viet Nam, different understandings of project requirements between the CO team and the Social Enterprise resulted in an expectation mismatch that significantly impacted overall innovation design and implementation.

Implementation and Experimentation

There were complexities associated with the implementation of each CO team's innovation through pilot studies that resulted in a significant workload for COs in particular. Despite this, four innovations were designed and implemented: an achievement that should be celebrated by COs and all involved.

Partnerships and the power of good collaboration

For each innovation, a key implementation activity was building and maintaining relationships with multiple stakeholders. This involved establishing ways of working (e.g., meeting cadence, determining communication preferences, working together to develop plans and processes), governance structures (e.g., establishing MoUs and other partnership agreements between research partners and other implementing partners), and formal procurement processes to bring on-board partners.

This relational work resulted in challenges, including meeting partner institutional requirements (e.g., internal partner approval processes), changes in structural agreements among partners (e.g., renegotiating MoUs among partners), and ongoing capacity building with partners by CO teams required to implement innovations. Meeting these requirements required time and attention and resulted in implementation delays. It appears that these challenges (or their potential to arise) were not adequately surfaced during design.

At the same time, many partners have gained valuable resources (e.g., new skills and capacities) from their interactions that have laid foundations for future work, with evidence that some partners intend to continue to work together on new and/or related initiatives. This includes relationships between funders (e.g., DFAT) and CO teams to continue to support innovations piloted through these Awards.

Learning from evidence to support adaptation

All innovation projects focussed on effectiveness and efficacy: i.e., does the innovation generate the desired outcome/s? CO teams selected this focus to provide evidence of effectiveness – seen as critical to secure interest, enthusiasm and ultimately funding for innovations beyond pilot studies.

In the context of innovation, such approaches presented two challenges: (1) selected study designs were not necessarily sufficient to adapt and change as required (e.g., when changing the CBT delivery team from one to two students); and (2) in answering questions of effectiveness and efficacy, the study designs did not provide information about if, how, or in what ways an innovation needed to adapt or change to implement it in context - just that it was effective or not. These notions of change and adaptation are central to innovation, and difficult to accommodate in traditional effectiveness or efficacy studies.

Despite the natural limitations that come with effectiveness and efficacy studies, there is evidence that all teams engaged in learning to support innovation implementation and adaptation. All teams valued participating in ongoing, SCA-led knowledge sharing sessions and involving other CO teams during their projects. While attendance and participation in these sessions was variable, they provided an important feedback opportunity for learning and adaptation, and were recognised as critical for innovation practice. Some teams (e.g., the Philippines' IMPACT team) were able to implement additional feedback processes that allowed more rapid innovation adaptation as required.

Continual capacity building requirements

The Innovation Awards brought together a variety of partners with diverse skills, resources and experiences: sharing these supported mutual or two-way capacity building. While there were instances of this working well (e.g., working with local partners with valuable skills and relationships), at other times this was more difficult. For example, the Thai ROAR team reported a lack of confidence in working with the SHIFT model that impacted on the ease, efficiency and use of the model. The Viet Nam CO team reported limited knowledge and awareness of app development processes at the start of the project. However, through the project, the team's understanding and confidence in working with app developers increased significantly, including in understanding key features of a developer to identify early on (e.g., those who are aligned on objectives, aims, values and ambitions).

Not all capacity building activities were directed toward CO teams – many CO teams found themselves in capacity building roles: working with partners to strengthen their skills and confidence for implementing each project. In Thailand, the CO team identified an important need to work with partner organizations to ensure they were confident and compliant with relevant child participation, disability and inclusion, gender quality and gender sensitive approaches for PAR. Similarly, the Philippines' IMPACT team delivered training on Inclusive and Non-Discriminatory Healthcare for healthcare workers, with emerging evidence that those trained are now sharing insights and lessons learned with others.

These examples illustrate the necessity of capacity strengthening efforts for innovation, the reciprocal nature of this capacity strengthening work, and the time it requires to do this work well.

Implementing locally built innovations vs adapting existing innovations

Some teams adapted an existing innovation from one context to another. In Viet Nam this involved adapting an existing reading app (Elevate) to suit the Vietnamese context. In Cambodia, this involved adapting CBT to suit a rural village context with men at risk of committing gender-based violence. In the Philippines, the team adapted elements of the "Little Jab Book" previously developed by CUBIC in Africa, for some elements of their innovation.

Processes to adapt existing initiatives to different contexts can be useful (e.g., they can be more time and cost effective), but also challenging (e.g., they can result in initiatives that don't fully 'fit' the new context into which they are being placed). What is critical is that these contextual factors are recognised and planned for early in innovation processes, and based on this analysis, resources are allocated to appropriately contextualise and initiative.

In Thailand, Viet Nam and Cambodia, teams reported challenges in model adaptation when working with SHIFT, Libraries for All, and CBT initiatives respectively. These challenges related to 'fit', and difficulties in adapting approaches to suit local conditions. Some of these were technical – including differences in language, culture, and accessibility requirements, which were experienced by refugee and migrant people engaged in the ROAR project. Others reflect deeper differences in values and beliefs, such as those reported by the Viet Nam CO team and Libraries for All. Understanding these potential sources of incongruence early on, and throughout, and solving for them, would support better adaptation for innovation.

Scaling-Up

All teams focussed on effectiveness and demonstrating that the innovations generated the intended outcomes. CO teams believed that demonstrating an innovation's effectiveness was important to secure future resources for implementation and potential replication across more settings. Such ambitions find support from the experiences of teams in the Philippines, Viet Nam and Cambodia, which all spoke of the need to provide high-quality evidence of effectiveness.

This meant that pilot studies rarely examined other aspects of scaling-up, or the effectiveness of what teams were doing to support scaling-up. These questions could have included: What aspects of the innovation was scalable? What scaling-up strategies and tactics were found to be valuable? What resources were required? What contextual factors helped or hindered scaling up actions? What aspects of this innovation or its context may pose challenges for scaling-up? This is despite some teams undertaking scaling-up work, such as engaging government representatives in knowledge sharing activities, aligning intervention content with existing materials used by other SCI teams, or partnering with agencies to increase an innovation's visibility to specific stakeholders.

As a result, there is emerging evidence that some innovations are creating the conditions to sustain innovations (and potentially scale, including tailoring innovations to new contexts). Multiple teams have secured ongoing resources including from government and donors. CO teams have acknowledged their new skills and capacities and are using these to support new work, with others leveraging new or stronger relationships to expand projects to new places and communities.

Further effort to better understand teams' scaling-up actions and their different effects and outcomes, will be valuable for ongoing learning and improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are six evidence-informed recommendations for SCA and others to improve the Innovation Awards in the future, based on this process evaluation's findings that highlighted opportunities to continue to strengthen the Awards.

1. Set clear, shared definitions and expectations for innovation, scaling-up and sustainability

There is not a clear or shared understanding of what is meant by innovation, scaling-up or sustainability, or what is achievable within the parameters of a two-year funding program exists at SCA or SCI. Setting shared, clear definitions and expectations at the start of the process, including of what is feasible and expected with Innovation Award time and budget constraints, will support identification of innovations and innovation projects that are achievable.

These decisions are critical to inform the scope of all innovation work across all phases of development. Be clear about what – and/or what elements – the program can support, i.e., for early-stage innovations, the Award could cover the incubation phase and feasibility testing. For later stage innovations, the Award could cover efficacy or effectiveness studies.

2. Make time and resources available for complex innovation

Innovation requires time and money that is suitable in size and scope for the innovation being explored, and the processes through which they are explored. All CO teams required more time and money to implement the studies that were designed. As the Innovation Awards move forward, match resources available to the size and complexity of innovations being implemented and their learning agendas (see recommendation 3).

3. Explore questions that are appropriate to an innovation's stage of development

For advanced innovations that have gone through testing, adaptation and improvement cycles, studying efficacy and effectiveness is an important step to generate evidence to inform future decision making. For more nascent innovations, other questions are important to explore within a learning agenda, e.g., Is this innovation acceptable to people? Is it safe to deliver in this context? Is it accessible for the target audience? Is it scalable across settings, or for different population groups? And if it does not meet these requirements, what adaptations can be made to ensure it does?

Identify these learning and evidence needs early on, and match appropriate study designs to these. RCTs will not be suitable for every question.

In the same spirit, if scaling-up is an intention for an innovation, reflect this in a learning and evaluation plan that captures valuable information for scaling-up decisions and actions. This may include capturing what scaling-up actions have been implemented, in what contextual conditions, and what was generated through actions (i.e., outcomes and outputs from scaling-up). This focus on scaling-up may also be reflected in innovation design phases, that could include developing a scaling-up strategy.

4. Strengthen partnership capacity of all involved and dedicate space, time and processes to select the right partner for the innovation and its context

Working across diverse stakeholders in innovation work is challenging: it requires a continual commitment to good partnership practice, including attending to openness, courage, transparency, mutual benefits, and mutual accountability. It can also require significant time investment by program teams, which needs to be considered in the design and planning process. All stakeholders involved in the Innovation Awards would benefit from foundational knowledge and skills in good partnership brokering or development. This could involve a variety of upskilling initiatives at the design and planning, implementation and scaling-up phases, such as training courses, mentoring, coaching, brokering, and reflection and learning.

In the context of partnerships, we note the potential value in more structured flexibility around partnership selection and choice. Dedicated space during design for teams to be supported to think creatively about whose perspective is important, and what resources are needed, would help build a rich potential partnership map. The best partners could then be sought at an appropriate time, including an element of due diligence partner assessment, to engage those with the needed skills and resources, and those with aligned values, beliefs and world views for a particular innovation and its context.

Good collaboration requires attention in both the purpose and process of working together. Processes that are recommended to focus on include governance arrangements, ways of working, and communication preferences. Cultural differences need not be accounted for, but rather, embraced as an opportunity to devise collaborative ways of working to improve coordination.

5. Clarify roles and responsibilities throughout

Technical specialist skills and knowledge, including in domains relevant to CO teams' areas of innovation (e.g., childhood immunisation, online child safety, gender-based family violence) need to be brought in early in design, as do specialist skills around gender, disability and inclusion, health, child protection and child safeguarding. Rigorously articulate roles and responsibilities held by different individuals and teams in ways that are transparent to all. This could be achieved through ongoing knowledge sharing opportunities (as above), and design and planning processes that specify roles and responsibilities.

6. Continue to support knowledge sharing and building a culture of inquiry

Continue to invest in knowledge sharing mechanisms that encourage a culture of openness, honesty and improvement. Good foundations are present within SCA and SCI innovation ecosystems to encourage all involved to share insights as they are captured and codified. Provide regular, improvement focused, and appreciative knowledge exchange opportunities to support CO teams to identify opportunities to strengthen design and implementation. Consider all methods and tools available, including virtual discussions, in-person sessions, and sharing written/visual products. Commit to each other and the learning process.

CONCLUSIONS

As a process evaluation, this project focused on the steps taken by those involved in the Innovation Awards to design, implement and learn from innovations that improve the lives of children and those around them.

The four projects that have formed the foundations of this review were ambitious – they were new and complex interventions, involving many partner organisations, and implemented in challenging contexts. Stakeholders were uncertain if and how these innovations might fit in these contexts, and for some, significant adaptations were required in implementation. At the same time, these projects were implemented within relatively rigid research parameters. All focussed on answering questions of effectiveness, and some through highly sophisticated RCTs. This creates a tension between the flexibility needed for innovators to learn, adapt, and course correct, and the fidelity needed to adhere to a pre-determined study design. It also assumes that effectiveness is the most appropriate element of an innovation to explore.

As the Innovation Awards evolve, there is opportunity to consider how to adapt processes to help embed an innovation culture at SCA and beyond across the movement. It is critical that all involved have a shared understanding of what innovation, scaling up and sustainability means. Making time and resources available that match ambition and encouraging CO teams to consider fundamental questions (of scalability, safety, accessibility and acceptability) will support them to build knowledge and confidence as innovation practitioners. Ensuring all involved have the skills and confidence to partner with diverse actors, and that roles and responsibilities of diverse stakeholders is well understood by all, will contribute to a strong and vibrant innovation ecosystem.

The first round of Innovation Awards has yielded important learning opportunities: continuing to share these insights widely, along with lessons learned by all involved, will help advance SCA's and SCI's innovation efforts, and support individuals and teams establish a culture of learning, inquiry and curiosity within the movement.