



SCI AF Strategic Evaluation

GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS REPORT

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SCIAF'S COMMITMENT

Inspired by the gospel call to build a just world, SCIAF challenges injustice by strengthening poor and oppressed people and by stimulating the Scottish public to share in our common struggle for human dignity.

SCIAF's approach to delivering support both in emergencies and long-term development involves working with a range of organisations in-country that are best placed to assess people's needs, deliver aid and support, and build local capacity for the future. This report focuses on SCIAF's partnerships with these organisations in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

SCIAF believe that real and lasting change to the lives of poor, marginalised and vulnerable people can only be achieved by empowering individuals and communities to be authors of their own development. SCIAF accompanies partner organisations according to local needs and priorities, adapting support to meet evolving needs and co-creating relevant, effective and sustainable projects and programmes.

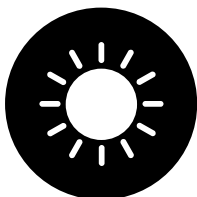
The SCIAF Partnership Strategy lays out the organisational commitments, informed by the Caritas Internationalist Guiding Principles Handbook. Authentic partnership, according to the CI Partnership principles and handbook, means a long-term commitment to agreed objectives based on shared values, strategies and information.

Authentic partnership is characterised by honest feedback, joint planning, accompaniment, transparency and accountability on both sides, and genuine openness and sensitivity to the other's needs, feelings, expertise, experience and wisdom. Authentic partnership is based on mutual respect, trust and goodwill and builds solidarity.

Over the past five-year strategic period, SCIAF has deepened its commitment to empowerment and capacity-building in partner relations and relationships, responding to internally recognised partners needs and capacities, and simultaneously reflecting broader global shifts and opportunities. SCIAF staff describe, "more intentional partnerships", "increased awareness of power dynamics" and, "more investment in partners, which is more responsive to partner needs".

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aim: Evaluate the quality and outcomes of our partnerships with overseas partners



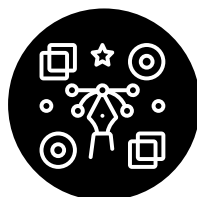
1. EMPOWERMENT

In what ways has the SCIAF approach to partnership amplified and empowered the experience and expertise of partner organisations?



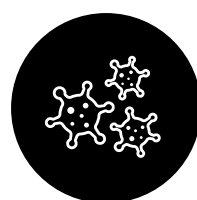
2. PROFESSIONALISM

How has SCIAF supported the professionalization and capacity building of partners, both operationally and strategically?



3. ADAPTABILITY

How agile, adaptable and responsive has SCIAF been to partner priorities and changing circumstances in their target communities and contexts?



4. COVID 19

To what extent has SCIAF empowered partners to serve their target communities and groups in the context of Covid-19?



5. OUTCOMES

To what extent has SCIAF empowered partners to better serve their target communities and groups?

METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, this report draws on insights gathered from an independent partner survey and structured partner interviews, augmented by document review and data analysis, interviews with SCIAF staff, and participatory reflection sessions facilitated in-house by the SCIAF team.

SCIAF partners were invited to share their experiences and insights through participating in an independent partner survey and were given the opportunity to follow up with a one-to-one interview on request. To reduce the burden and prevent duplication, exit countries were not invited to participate in this survey, and these partnerships are assessed through a separate review process informing the handover and tailored exit strategies.

The partner survey was designed to evaluate the quality and outcomes of the partnerships. Key topics included capacity building and support with strategy, procedures, professionalization; mutuality, empowerment and decolonisation; outcomes and achievements; innovation, agility and adaptability.

The survey was designed to be light-touch and minimise the burden on respondents while also gathering meaningful and relevant insights to inform this report. It was shared in a simple email format to increase engagement and minimise survey fatigue and potential conflict with internal SCIAF surveys, and responses were treated anonymously. Twenty-five partners responded to the survey, providing detailed responses of between two and ten pages. One partner requested a remote interview via Zoom.

Survey data was augmented by a thorough review of relevant documents, reports, strategies, procedures and data and semi-structured interviews with selected members of SCIAF staff and participatory group reflection sessions.



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EMPOWERMENT

In what ways has SCIAF's approach to partnership amplified and empowered the experience and expertise of partner organisations?

Partners unanimously reported positive relationships with SCIAF, variously characterising them as “effective”, “rewarding”, “empowering” and “holistic”. For many partners, the relationship with SCIAF is particularly powerful due to the alignment of underpinning values and priorities. This underlying foundation of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) facilitates a united vision and motivating ethic to promote social justice, anchored in shared faith.

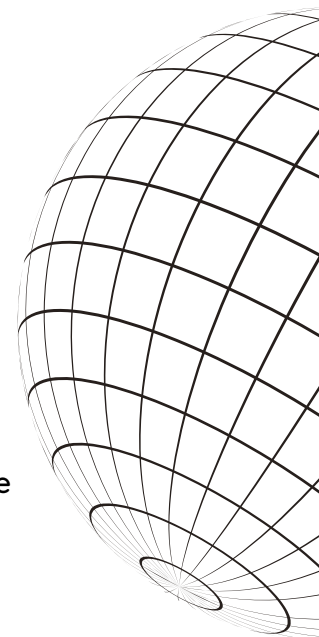
The organization's relationship with SCIAF over the years has developed more than the Donor- Implementing partner relationship. This is due to the fact that the organizations and SCIAF's goals and core values do align with each other. Hence, the collaboration has enabled us to better serve the target communities and groups.."

SCIAF empowers partners to serve communities both through the intentionally and sensitively co-developed projects and programmes, and through the extensive and tailored capacity-building support provided to enhance and professionalise partner organisations. The long-term nature of these relationships is reported to have facilitated sustainable strategic and operational development of partner organisations. This has cascaded down to national and local organisations, facilitated effective advocacy actions and technical support to national government and regional bodies, and catalysed sustainable and transformative impacts in the target communities and beyond. The only challenges raised by partners concern the short-term nature of the project funding and the need for further financial support to build on project sustainability.

Several partners described serving as “role models” or “mentors” for other NGOs and even for the national government in particular specialist technical areas, such as social integration, resilience, women's empowerment and environmental protection.

"SCIAF approach to partnership is very unique as they respect the partner's goals and priorities. They give us a hand up and learn by doing, developing the capacity of our leadership and management staff and all of our organization.."

At the heart of these outcomes lies the unique relationship between SCIAF and partners. This relationship is grounded in a firm foundation of mutual respect and autonomy, enabling partners to effectively and sensitively design, implement, monitor and adapt their actions to the needs and priorities of local communities, confident in SCIAF's commitment to supporting them while empowering their ownership and decision-making.



PROFESSIONALISM

How have SCIAF supported the professionalization and capacity building of partners, both operationally and strategically?

The increasing focus on supporting partners to formalise processes and policies has been significant over the past five-year period. This includes **safeguarding**, **recruitment**, **risk assessment** and **risk management**, **fraud and financial compliance** and other policies required to meet **due diligence** criteria of major donors. This has been a major investment of staff and partner time and energy and is highly valued by partners. Partners report improved capacity, increased opportunities to access funding independently and with other national NGOs, and enhanced accountability to, and protection of, their communities.

"So very few NGOs in this country have safeguarding policies and most donors require them. SCIAF's support has given us access to so many opportunities."

SCIAF recently deployed a partner survey to better understand existing practices among partners across the seven countries selected for 2021-2025. 70% of partners have effective feedback and complaints handling mechanisms (FCHM) in place, with three quarters developed through participatory processes. Although only 61% of partners are aware of SCIAF's complaint handling system, 94% of partners report that they feel able to give feedback or make complaints to SCIAF without fear of negative consequences for their organisation. The partner feedback throughout this review corroborated these findings, frequently highlighting the open and effective communication channels, committed staff and supportive, needs-based capacity building. SCIAF continues to support partners to professionalise and build their internal systems to enhance accountability. Partners appreciate SCIAF's support in assessing and reviewing internal policies and procedures focusing on protection, quality assurance, data protection, fraud prevention, safeguarding, monitoring and evaluation, needs and capacities assessment, financial management, project formulation and planning, advocacy, networking and more.

"SCIAF provided us with training sessions on different tools in Finance and M&E. Furthermore, SCIAF carries out an annual audit before renewing or accepting a new phase/project. This audit helps us strengthen our ways of managing finances, human resources and other assets. In addition, SCIAF has given us a format for different reporting and some of these formats are used in other projects..."

Partner organisations value and appreciate the organisational support provided during the last strategic period, and attest that this has enabled them to better serve and support their target communities and advocate for their rights and interests nationally and internationally. Two partners also requested further support, specifying financial reporting and staff professional development. SCIAF's ongoing commitment to capacity building empowers partners to achieve more with their available resources, with these benefits further diffusing both within and beyond partner organisations.



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ADAPTABILITY

How agile, adaptable and responsive has SCIAF been to partner priorities and changing circumstances in their target communities and contexts?

"SCIAF's response to requests for changes and adjustments is efficient, facilitating the adaptability of projects. In addition, in emergency projects its response is immediate, which allows us to quickly grant humanitarian aid in a timely manner, as well as protection accompaniment.."

Partners unanimously described their appreciation for SCIAF's adaptability to challenging or changing circumstances in their organisations and target communities, and to external conditions such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

"We experience a very high level of communication, collaboration, consideration and flexibility on the part of SCIAF. They take into account our suggestions, recommendations and experience, and together we seek solutions to any programmatic challenges..."

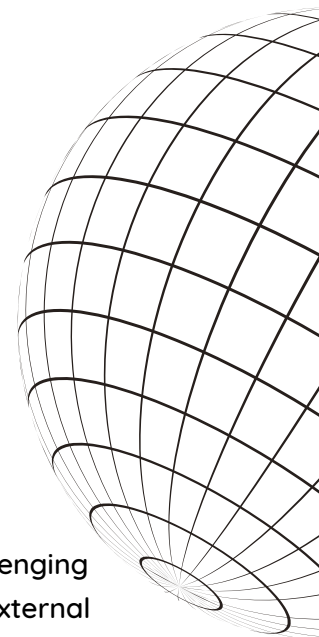
Partners attributed this flexibility to close, effective and timely communications and mutual respect and trusted relationships developed over time. Several reported that this gives them "peace of mind" to communicate openly and directly, and enhances their reputation with national and local agencies as well as with the communities they serve, as they are able to respond rapidly and effectively to emerging crises and threats.

"the flexibility to adapt to changes in the environment has been an important aspect of our relationship, this keeps our organisation relevant and allows us to respond appropriately to the needs of the communities we serve.."

For some partners, this adaptability is particularly critical in the context of dynamic socio-political conditions and emerging security threats. Partners also acknowledged the "tireless support and commitment" of the SCIAF team to listening and responding to emerging partner and community needs, and several commented that the SCIAF team "go above and beyond", "even work public holidays and weekends", and "do not shy away from difficulties and challenges".

Partners noted that SCIAF's priorities are fixed in alignment with their strategic objectives, and at times their own thematic priorities and those of their target groups extend beyond these areas. Youth empowerment and livelihoods were the most commonly cited example of this.

Overall, partners regard SCIAF as a uniquely adaptable and responsive organisation with a committed and dynamic team who respect and empower their ability to support communities and respond effectively and efficiently to emerging challenges and opportunities.



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COVID 19

How agile, adaptable and responsive has SCIAF been to partners in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?

"The biggest challenge is lack of correct information on the COVID 19 pandemic... This has resulted in non-adherence to COVID 19 preventive and control measures, and refusing to be vaccinated. SCIAF has provided funds ... to conduct awareness campaigns and procure and distribute PPEs. There is need for more awareness activities to change the mindset on COVID 19 pandemic."

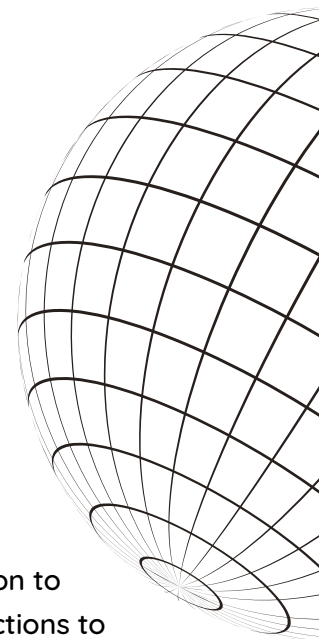
SCIAF's response to the Covid-19 pandemic is reported by partners to have been exemplary, but many challenges remain. For many, SCIAF were the first organisation to respond to the emerging crisis and support them to adapt and take appropriate actions to protect staff and communities from the virus.

The main challenges described by partners are;

- False information, scepticism and refusal to accept the existence of the virus,
- Reluctance to accept the vaccine, where available,
- Poor adherence to preventive measures and practices,
- Low literacy levels restricting information dissemination,
- Limited availability of masks, soap, sanitiser, etc.
- Logistical challenges and restrictions on travel
- Increased rates of GBV, unplanned pregnancies and household conflict,
- Increased rates of unemployment and reduced income from subsistence activity,
- Prices increases and resource scarcity,
- Demand for support exceeds resources and capacities.

Partners have ambitions to support communities to respond appropriately to the pandemic, promoting good hygiene, educating and sensitizing the population to contagion mechanisms, providing accurate information to enable communities to take appropriate actions to minimise the transmission. In some contexts, partners have been able to adapt and continue to implement projects with appropriate measures in place. Others have been forced to adapt activities and projects and restructure internal processes, with a shift to online and home-based working arrangements and smaller group activities in the communities. For others, they identified an urgent need to "step up the actions" and develop specific Covid-19 projects to support affected communities.

Partners are also horizon scanning and identifying future shifts and impacts of the virus, from changes in their own working practices and "adaptation to virtual models", to impacts on the economy, healthcare system, and agricultural sector with significant implications for lives and livelihoods. Partners also predict negative outcomes for funding opportunities, with increased competition and reduced opportunities; and for ongoing projects, where increased vulnerability due to the virus and national responses are likely to mitigate some project gains.



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OUTCOMES

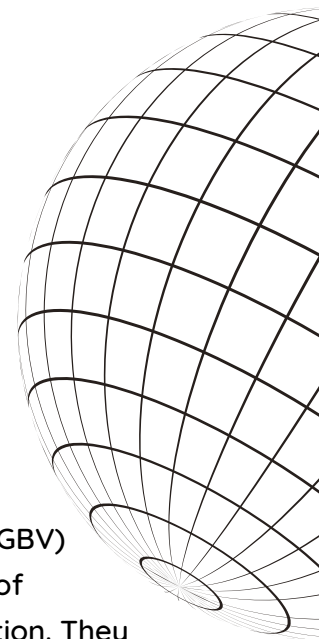
What have been the most significant outcomes and achievements of SCIAF partnerships over the period of the strategic plan?

SCIAF's partners described powerful outcomes in each of the aligned priority intervention areas, from enhancing lives and livelihoods through sustainable agriculture and agribusiness, reductions in sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and community violence, women's empowerment and inclusion, the protection of marginalised groups, and environmental protection and climate change prevention. They also indicated spillover benefits as a result of enhanced capacities resulting in positive outcomes in their other priority areas including youth empowerment and skills development, monitoring extractive industries, participatory and inclusive governance and electoral education, disability rights, women's leadership, education, health, water and sanitation, HIV prevention, and migration and humanitarian support.

Recognising the existing incorporation of advocacy elements into programmes (raising awareness of rights, and hold duty-bearers accountable to the people they are elected to serve) as well as the unequal distribution of power residing in institutions in the global north, during the 2016-2020 period SCIAF made a strategic decision to increase support for partners to effect change in their own countries through building their capacity to integrate advocacy elements into their programmes. SCIAF has sought to understand partner advocacy needs and capacities, to link local advocacy initiatives to national and international initiatives, and to explore how SCIAF can best support partners to enhance their own advocacy capacities and strategies.

SCIAF and partners have worked with communities on the Atrato River since 2006. As a result of tireless advocacy, in 2016 the constitutional court of Colombia granted legal status to the Atrato River and its communities (Ruling T622): obliging the State to Restore, Protect, and Conserve the river and its communities. This was internationally ground-breaking, becoming only the 3rd river in the world to achieve this status. The court ruling called for a body of River Guardians (from the Environment Ministry and the local communities) to act as the voice of the river. SCIAF and partners continue to work with the River Guardians, with support from the Universities of Glasgow, Nottingham, and Portsmouth.

Enhancing partners' professionalism increases the quality of their work and the credibility of their voice. Couple with strategically enhanced partner advocacy, SCIAF continue to amplify the voice of partners to raise challenges and opportunities on behalf of the communities they serve, both in national and international areas.



RECOMMENDATIONS

SCIAF's partnership principles have supported authentic, effective and highly valued global partnerships, supporting locally-led, sustainable development across target communities.

- SCIAF's support for partner capacity building and professionalization has been highly valued and cascaded benefits, as partners disseminate learning and technical assistance across civil society and local government. It is therefore advisable to continue this support and intentionally and strategically empower partners to be role models of professionalism, and to support them to build national civil society and governance networks.
- Partner advocacy is a long-term investment, empowering and amplifying local voices. SCIAF's Manual for Global Advocacy Practitioners should be widely disseminated across networks to support capacities for southern-based advocacy.
- Supporting partners to build their MEL capacity and toolkits is likely to enhance the evidence-base for both direct project and programme outcomes, and for systems-level shifts in target countries. The internal restructuring of IHDD enhances SCIAF's capacity and focus on MEAL across the organisation, providing a timely opportunity to provide further MEAL capacity-building support to partners.
- Horizontal partner networks are effective mechanisms to intentionally and organically percolate ideas, cascade learning and share tools and toolkits between partners, countries and regions.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has catalyzed opportunities for increased virtual collaboration, engagement and online advocacy. SCIAF has effectively leveraged these opportunities to amplify partner voices, both in Scotland and internationally. It is advisable to build on this strong foundation to ensure that partner voices continue to be heard.
- SCIAF has supported partners to adapt and respond to the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic. Looking to the future, continued and increased support will be needed to ensure that partners are equipped and empowered to support their communities to respond to the pandemic as the virus, national and international response measures, and community attitudes continue to evolve.
- The Country Strategy process provides a timely opportunity to identify opportunities and strategies to advance these recommendations over the next strategic period.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Heartfelt thanks to the SCIAF staff and partners for their dedicated support and timely engagement throughout this strategic evaluation process.

Special thanks to Mark Adams and the Working Group – Rhiannon Campbell, Anne Karlin and Michelle Nixon – for the efficient and proactive coordination and communication throughout this process. Thanks also to the Reference Group for providing meaningful and thought-provoking strategic oversight and direction.

This evaluation would not have been possible without the support of the partners who gave their time and insights to inform this analysis.

Living the commitment to a just and peaceful world