

# WHITE PAPER- STRATEGIC ROUNDTABLES

## *Innovation*

# OVERVIEW

## *Innovation*

This paper is a product of a roundtable discussion that took place at WHF New York on the 22nd and 23rd September 2020. In this paper, we introduce the issues discussed during the session, analysed the main statements from speakers and more importantly, how to overcome the major challenges faced in the sector.

We are now in the decade of action to achieve all of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (herewithin referred to as SDGs). While the COVID-19 pandemic has hindered progress on the goals, oftentimes highlighting existing inequalities globally. In the words of Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed who addressed the forum, **“The crisis has exposed the flaws in many of our capacity approaches and assumptions. As we respond to a different more complex set of challenges, it underscores the need for better social protection, economic transactions, universal health access, effective governance and strong institutions.”**

In order to achieve the SDGs we must innovate, change attitudes and partner with varying actors from the private sector and NGOs to civil society actors.

We must recognise that while we must analyse, bring new ideas and plan effective strategies with international actors, for policies to be successful they must reflect realities on the ground while supporting the most vulnerable globally.

This paper considers the outcomes, discussions and calls for action in the roundtable on **“Innovation”**.

In the meantime, we would like to thank you for your interest in the World Humanitarian Forum.

### *Important information about this White Paper*

- This White Paper was authored by the World Humanitarian Forum, specifically aimed at participants, members and stakeholders.
- The issues discussed in this White Paper will be further discussed during WHF London, Davos and Digital Series.
- This White Paper is **not a consensus** of views from delegates of WHF New York
- This White Paper is **not an endorsement** of any position maintained by a speaker or delegate

# STRATEGIC ROUNDTABLE

## *Innovation*

### Introduction

This roundtable organised with key innovation actors in the sector aimed to analyse the primary challenges faced in innovation, specifically focusing on the localisation agenda along with the need to leave no one behind and issues caused by COVID-19. Similarly, humanitarian actors need to find new ways to support innovators, whether this be through incentivising innovations through challenge prizes or keeping in mind the need to maintain flexibility for potential solutions. Collaborations with governments, NGOs and the private sector can also enable new innovations, enabling each innovation actor to provide their skills and expertise while acting for a social good.

### Key Points

**Localisation of humanitarian aid and innovation.** Innovation can be thought of as having three distinct functions, it can enhance the effectiveness of new interventions through new technologies, it can be also thought of as bringing new ways of doing business, by looking at Netflix for example and how they scaled their output. Innovation teams need to also think about the underlying paradigms that affect their work, for example, economic models which are over a hundred years old are still being utilised, models which are not as relevant as they used to be. New macro-economic paradigms which also consider biodiversity loss and climate change need to be utilised.



**Moderator**  
**Ms Dianne Dain**  
Lead, UN Reboot Accelerator



**Speakers**  
**Ms Constance Agyeman**  
Head of International Development, Nesta Challenges



**Mr Benjamin Kumpf**  
Head of Innovation, FCDO



**Ms Therese Marie Uppstom Pankratov**  
Head of Humanitarian Innovation Challenge Programme, Innovation Norway

The localisation agenda is particularly important. One of the big challenges is in getting large aid actors and local partners to adopt the innovation, which can take a substantial amount of time, it requires skill building and access to new technologies. The barrier is about being able to change their system, supply chain systems within humanitarian agencies can be very large, meaning that bringing change can be very difficult. Another challenge is to do with the specificity of humanitarian innovation funds, this specificity can potentially limit the participation of local organisations.

*“Working in international development, I still work under the paradigms of economics, as they have been formulated about 100 years ago by white economists predominantly from the UK, which are, I would argue, not fit for the 21st century with existential crisis by climate change and biodiversity.”*

**Mr Benjamin Kumpf, Head of Innovation, FCDO**



**Speakers**

**Mr Andrew Lamb**

Innovation Lead, Field Ready



**Ms Kate Hart**

Director of Programmes, elrha



**Mr Omar Al-Qadhi**

Regional Operations Manager, IRC Regional Hub



**Ms Safia Verjee**

Innovations Manager, Kenyan Red Cross



*“One of the big challenges that we have in terms of scaling the impact of our innovation, is trying to help other agencies, other aid actors, local organisations, local businesses to adopt the innovation. This can take time, it requires building skills, it requires opening up access to new technologies.”*

**Mr Andrew Lamb, Innovation Lead, Field Ready**

**Research and innovation are a vital element of humanitarian responses.** Research and innovation need to be a part of humanitarian response for it to be truly effective. Regarding the challenges, elrha highlighted that innovations tend not to be focused on the most pressing humanitarian needs, there is also insufficient evidence to support what does work. Too few solutions have been provided to address the most pressing issues. Humanitarian funders and policy-makers tend to not have access to information on what does work. The lack of national voice and investment into the **“Global South”** is a massive challenge.

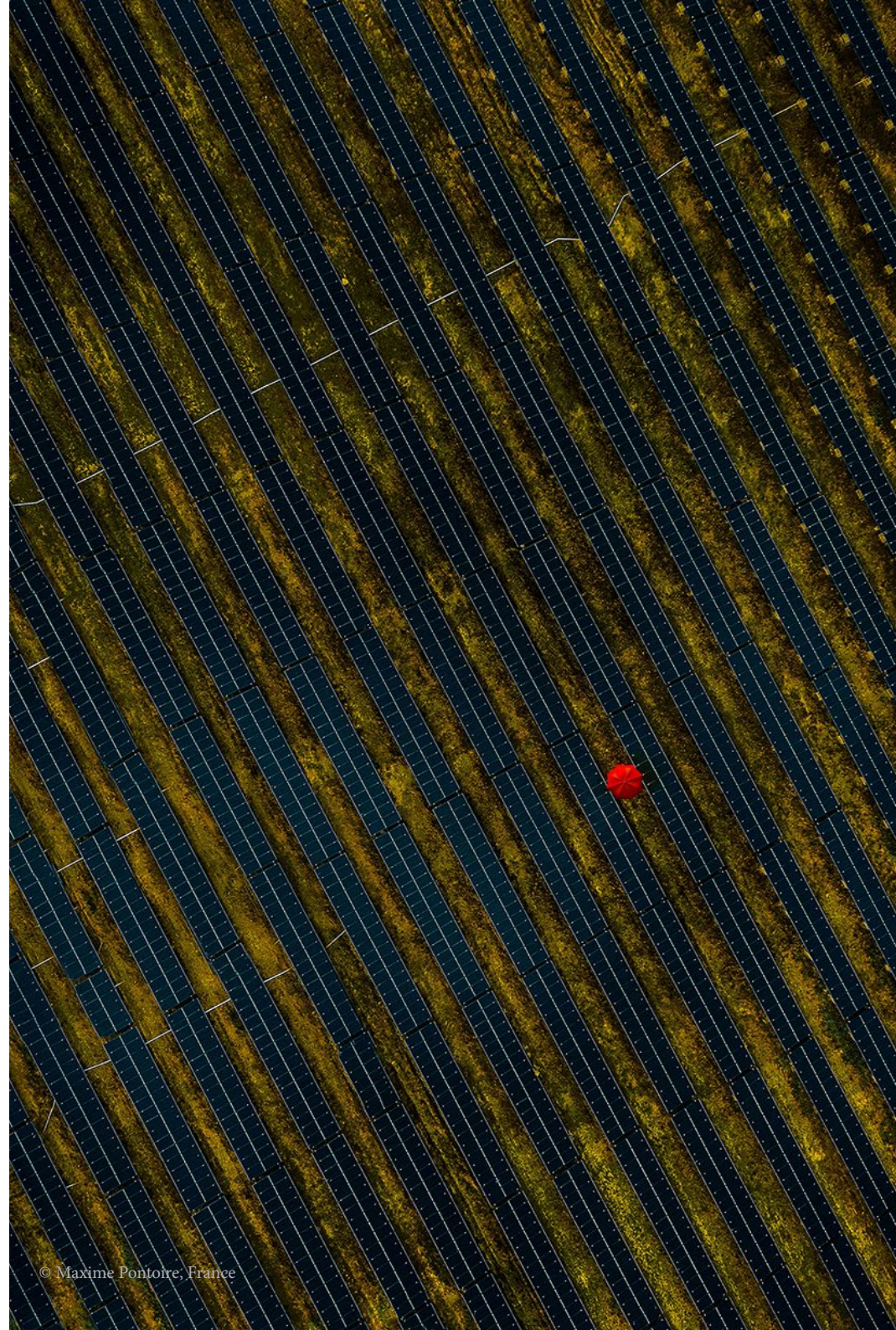




*“I foresee the driving change is taking the innovations that work to the right place, the right people at the right time to try and leverage and get uptake in both humanitarian policy and response.”*

**Ms Kate Hart, Director of Programmes, Elrha**

Creative modes of innovation need to be supported. Innovation is often viewed as the new technology and how it can be implemented. However, the complexity of humanitarian aid and development means that a single-sided approach will not work, various programmes can be singular in approach, for example, grant systems or finite investment. We need to challenge ourselves to create more creative models which tie in differing types of partnerships (for example with the private sector) which can support innovators along different pathways.





*“A number of programmes are very limited in the type of financial instruments that they make available for these solutions, to go into communities, and are very singular in their approach. So they might be growing systems, or they might be some form of investment that is very finite and only leads the solutions a certain way. And I think we have to challenge ourselves to think about more creative investment models and funding models that tie in a range of different types of partnerships.”*

**Ms Constance Agyeman, Head of International Development,  
Nesta Challenges**

To achieve the SDGs, we need to bring and harness local partners and specifically blended models. We need to speak to people who are living the experience that can give real insight, knowledge and ideas. Scaling is also another issue, which requires innovators to look at different areas from the views of local stakeholders to more blended models. By looking at humanitarian issues in silos, this is where innovation can fail as these are all interconnected problems.

The innovation process needs to be based on a need while maintaining flexibility on potential solutions. One of the organisations that applied for support was the Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), a de-mining organisation that applied to find a solution to locate and eliminate improvised explosive devices. Innovation process needs to be based on a need. NPA found that there was a need not only to eliminate the IED itself, but primarily the trigger mechanism that sets off the explosive, when hidden it is near impossible to see. They subsequently opened the conversation to the private sector; thus they did not jump to what they thought would be the solution, but remained open and explored the available possibilities. Partnerships are necessary as organisations are stretched and cannot cover all aspects of humanitarian assistance.





While partnerships can be difficult to forge, if successful between private, government and non-governmental organisations, can provide a far more successful outcome which is more likely to be sustainable. In this process, NPA described the requirements, but left it to the private sector to use their technical expertise to find a solution. Focusing on performance enables technical experts to propose inputs which will result in successful outcomes.

**Improving service delivery through new partnerships.** End-users need to be a part of the solutions, primarily aiming to reduce the quantities of products used from the west, aiming to use more local providers. The biggest project to date for the Kenyan Red Cross has been the setup of a fabrication lab in a region of Kenya that has a tradition of producing items by hand. The principal idea is how to bring a community in a creative space, productively engage them and teach them new skills whilst linking them to the modern world so that their skills are competitive at a global scale.

*“By designing innovation processes around a partnership consortium of humanitarian organisations affected people, governments, academia and private sector expertise, were more likely to land on state of the art solutions that can be taken up by the sector. These partnerships can be hard to forge, but the outcome is more likely to hit the mark that is meet the need and be sustainable.”*

**Ms Therese Marie Uppstom Pankratov, Head of Humanitarian Innovation Challenge Programme, Innovation Norway**

*“As an innovation unit, we’re also looking at how we can use technologies to improve our preparedness and response to disasters. We have set up an in house team to use drones and satellite imagery to provide information to help with decision making. And also, from a preparedness perspective, as well as from a response perspective. Providing almost real-time, data and information to local stakeholders to response agencies to be able for us to make proper decisions, informed decisions.”*

**Ms Safia Verjee, Innovations Manager, Kenyan Red Cross**





**Streamlining innovations for improved implementation of innovation.** The enabling environment within the non-profit sector and humanitarian sector for innovation, the operational and managerial point of view is going to be considered. Innovation is vastly different when considering financing and supply chain management. They are trying to create new work approaches to streamline innovations, while creating a suitable innovation environment.

One of the emerging challenges is to do with new kinds of emergencies that affect the world. For example, COVID has made agencies unable to respond to crises, this is also due to the circumstances of such crises, which stop them from helping affected communities. Daily, normal programming has been affected as they are unable to travel to the field and to meet local people. This crisis has brought valuable opportunities, which can be exploited. Technologies have enabled agencies to get into contact with people who they may have not been able to contact previously due to accessibility issues such as security and distance.

Therefore, work approaches need to be transformed to digital approaches, however, bureaucracy is one of the largest challenging factors which has slowed down innovations.

***“We are trying to work day and night with our colleagues from the operation department to create new work approaches in order to streamline innovation and create a suitable enabling environment for an innovation project to be successfully implemented within the humanitarian sector.”***

**Mr Omar Al-Qadhi, Regional Operations Manager,  
IRC Regional Hub**







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### Conclusion

While innovation can regularly be seen as the implementation of a new piece of technology, in reality, innovation can cover many forms, from effective research to finding new ways to fund projects and programmes. As covered throughout this discussion, the localisation agenda is particularly important, especially given the current contexts of COVID in which humanitarian workers cannot travel into the field. We also must consider the current economic paradigms that we work under and recognise the importance to update these to the 21st century to analyse the impact of climate change on the world. Aiming to build capacity in a country is vitally important so that all countries can rely less on imported goods and services.

### 2020 New York Outcomes

#### **Outcome 1 - Innovation Fund**

The WHF Innovation Fund is being set up to fund promoting and engaging innovators globally. The judging panel will be responsible for selecting 30 innovators and the innovators will be welcomed in WHF London where they will present their innovations. The committee will select 3 winners of the Innovation Fund who will be provided funding alongside the mentorship from our expert committee. More information can be found on our website: [\*\*www.whf.london\*\*](http://www.whf.london)