HUMANITARIAN INNOVATION FUND
STRATEGIC APPROACH 2018–2020
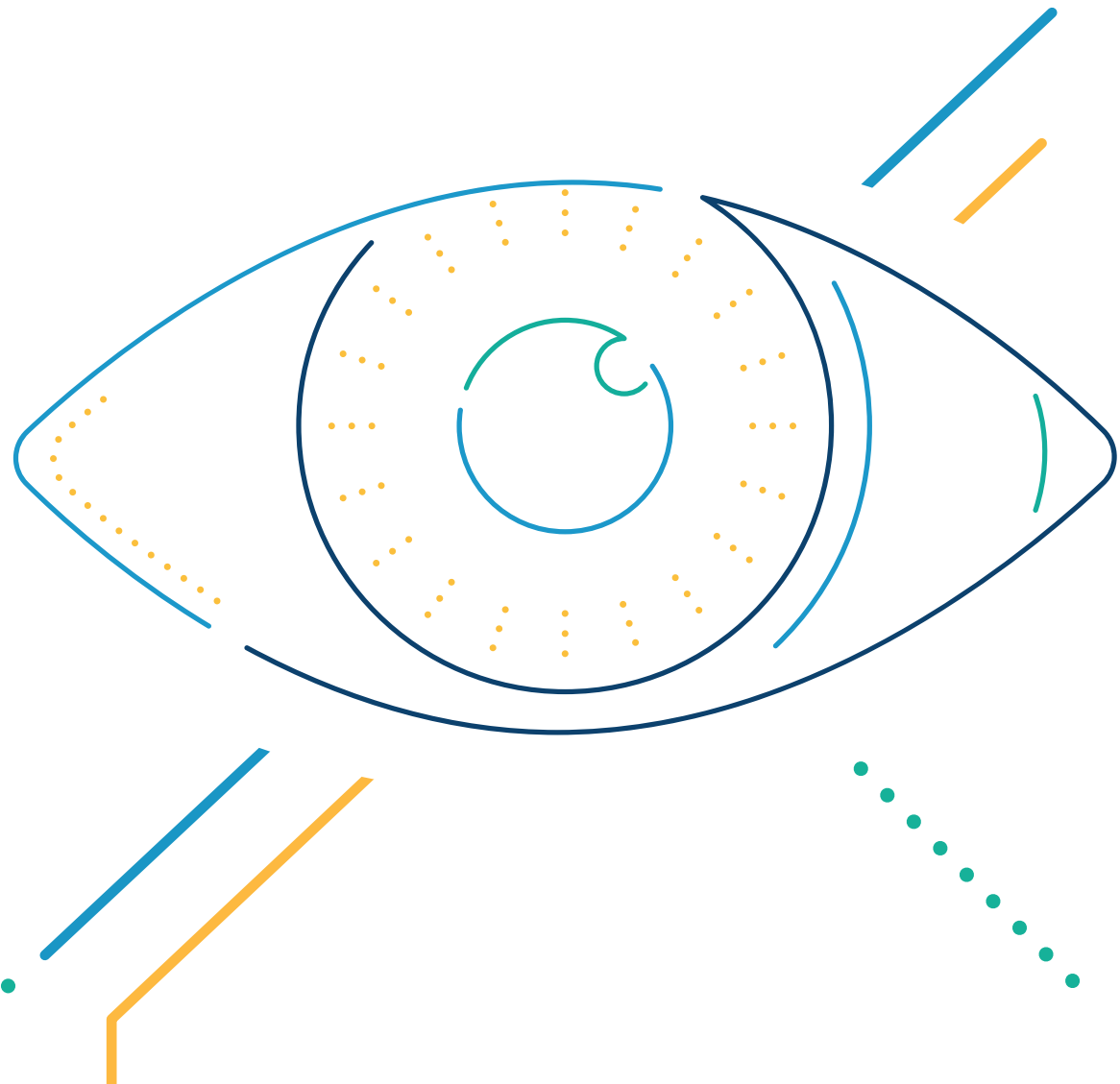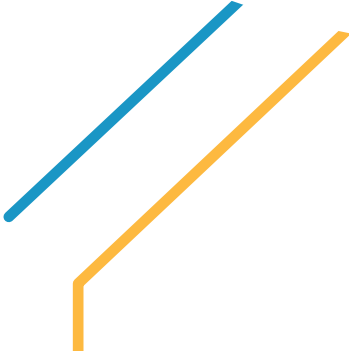
A RESPONSIBLE AMBITION

INTRODUCTION

Elrha's vision is of a world equipped to mitigate the negative impacts of humanitarian crises. Our Mission is to improve humanitarian outcomes through partnership, research and innovation. Elrha's Strategy 2016–2020 sets out how we work to achieve this and the Core Values that guide our approach.

The Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF) is a central pillar of Elrha's strategy to deliver against our Vision. The HIF supports organisations and individuals to identify, nurture and share innovative and scalable solutions to the challenges facing effective humanitarian assistance. As a programme within Elrha, the HIF is aligned and committed to Elrha's Vision, Mission and Values.

This document sets out a new strategic direction and priorities for the HIF for 2018–2020. It is informed by an independent Evaluation of the HIF's performance to date and a review of the humanitarian innovation landscape. It is aligned to the strategic evolution of Elrha as an organisation.

This is a 'responsible ambition', one that is creative and dynamic whilst also focused on accountability and sensitivity to the humanitarian ecosystem of which we are a part. We will work collaboratively with partners and stakeholders to collectively drive forward innovation for a more effective humanitarian response.

BACKGROUND

Since its launch in 2010, the HIF has been a leading actor in the development and testing of approaches to innovation in the humanitarian system. As one of the first independent grant-making organisations focused on humanitarian innovation – uniquely open to the full diversity of actors working in the humanitarian system – the HIF has led the way in funding, supporting and managing innovation at different stages of the innovation process.

Through its portfolio of funded projects, the HIF has generated a strong evidence base for the factors that make for successful innovation. It has made these insights available to others, and has led the global conversation on effective humanitarian innovation. Through research, gap analyses and 'deep dive' explorations, the HIF has contributed to a more detailed understanding of the unique dimensions of the problems innovation can address.

In addition to a core grant programme, the HIF has established three substantial, thematic funding initiatives on innovation in humanitarian Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Gender-based Violence (GBV) and Accelerating the Journey to Scale. We have developed strong, cross-cutting work strands on Effective Partnerships and Outreach and Engagement.
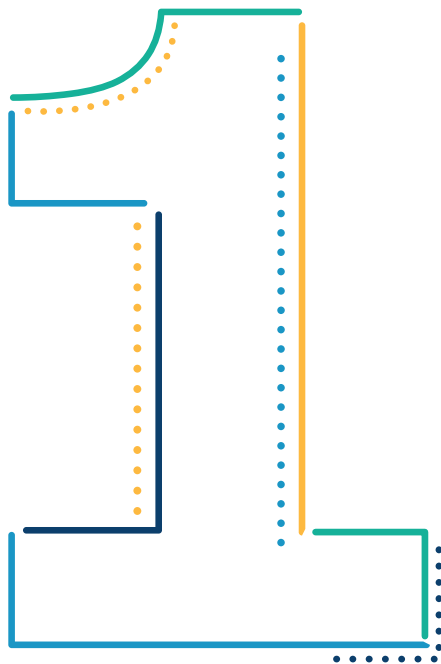
The HIF will capitalise on this extensive track record and broad evidence base to increasingly tackle more complex innovation problems, innovate across broad thematic domains and enable innovation at scale.

> *The HIF [has] made substantial contributions to humanitarian innovation from its launch...when innovation was considered insufficient. Starting from zero in 2010 and working as a lean start up with few resources, the HIF selected, funded and supported a mixed portfolio of innovation grants; developed an effective and well-respected process for grant making and fund management; fostered a new body of learning about innovation management; and acted as an influential voice in the growing field of humanitarian innovation.*
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> *[HIF Evaluation, Triple Line]*

MAXIMISING IMPACT

In 2018-2020, the HIF will work to increase the impact of innovation in the humanitarian sector by addressing the next generation of innovation challenges.

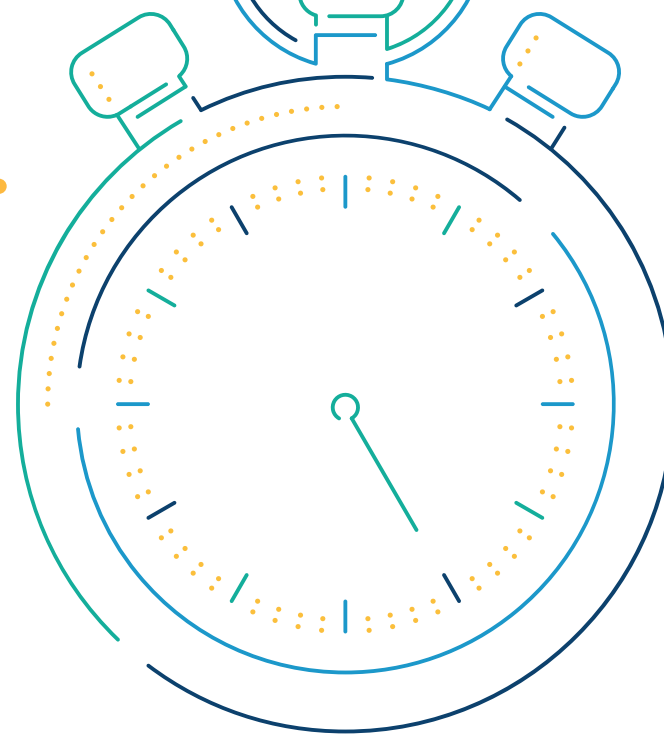We will work across the following Strategic Priorities:

1
END TO END SOLUTIONS

The HIF will support the entire lifecycle of innovation with funding, knowledge and evidence

Many innovation funds and grant programmes focus on early-stage innovation, ideation and pilots. Far less attention is given to the more complicated aspects of problem assessment, uptake and scaling. The HIF will further develop the capability to support humanitarian innovation across the entire lifecycle: from framing the problem, exploring and developing solutions and enabling adoption and scale.

Whilst maintaining a mixed portfolio, the HIF will purposefully calibrate its grant-making and programme activity to address these more complex, under-explored stages of the innovation lifecycle. Elrha's expertise in conducting, supporting and disseminating high quality research will enable a robust focus on problem exploration. We will coordinate with global coordination mechanisms in humanitarian GBV and WASH to align our approaches to tackling systemic problems. We will drive through dissemination and uptake of our WASH innovation portfolio for maximum impact, addressing any systemic barriers identified, such as access for new or non-traditional actors. We will build our programme on Accelerating the Journey to Scale to further develop and share learning, expertise and tools for scaling in a humanitarian setting.

The HIF will work to expand its impact by doing less alone and developing new types of collaboration and partnership

Elrha's global mapping activity has identified an ever-increasing number of actors working on innovation in the humanitarian system. Collaboration, however, remains relatively weak limiting the sophistication, scale and impact of innovation. Elrha's track record and expertise in building effective partnerships leaves us well-placed to foster such collaboration. The HIF will reach out to new partners and develop synergies to increase the impact of our work on defined challenges. We will also use our learning and expertise to support the work of other innovation actors in the system.

We will work with global, regional and national humanitarian networks and coordination mechanisms and convene high impact partnerships with a range of actors. We will build on our strategic regional partnership with the Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network (ADRRN) to work more closely with local and national NGOs; share learning and coordinate with other actors taking humanitarian innovation to scale, and collaborate with key partners to maximise dissemination and uptake of our new humanitarian innovation guide.
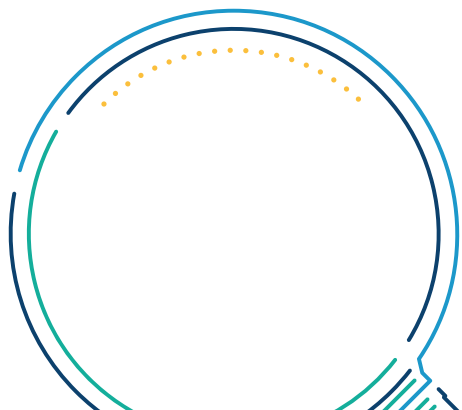
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NEW
PARTNERSHIPS

The emergence of the Global Alliance for Humanitarian Innovation (GAHI) hosted by Elrha, will foster broad coherence and coordination in the sector. The HIF will engage with the GAHI via Elrha's membership and through adopting and addressing challenges fit for our remit and expertise.
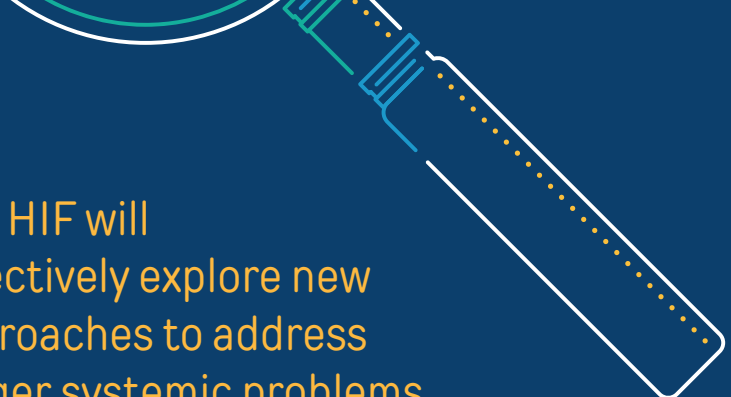
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LOCAL ENGAGEMENT

The HIF will intentionally design its programmes to focus on operational and local engagement

Like many other activities in the humanitarian sector, decisions on, and funding for, innovation are often concentrated in the Global North. The HIF will intentionally build partnerships, engage operational and local actors and make changes to 'open the doors' to local participation.

We will explore a context-based approach to innovation, grounding problem recognition and ideation at a more local level, and engaging with those familiar with, and active in, these settings, for example through the cluster system. We will engage with practitioners operational at field level, for example through local networks or innovation labs, to field-test and inform the relevance of our new humanitarian innovation guide. We will explore approaches for greater collaboration with local and national actors on humanitarian innovation, building on the learning from our strategic partnership with ADRRN, its innovation hub, forum and network of members.

Credit: mVAM, World Food Programme

The HIF will selectively explore new approaches to address bigger systemic problems

Much of humanitarian innovation has focused to date on 'product' innovation, solutions that solve specific, well-defined problems. The big, high impact challenges are often far more complex, ranging from the multiple factors driving Gender-based Violence to the combinations of elements needed to take innovation to scale.
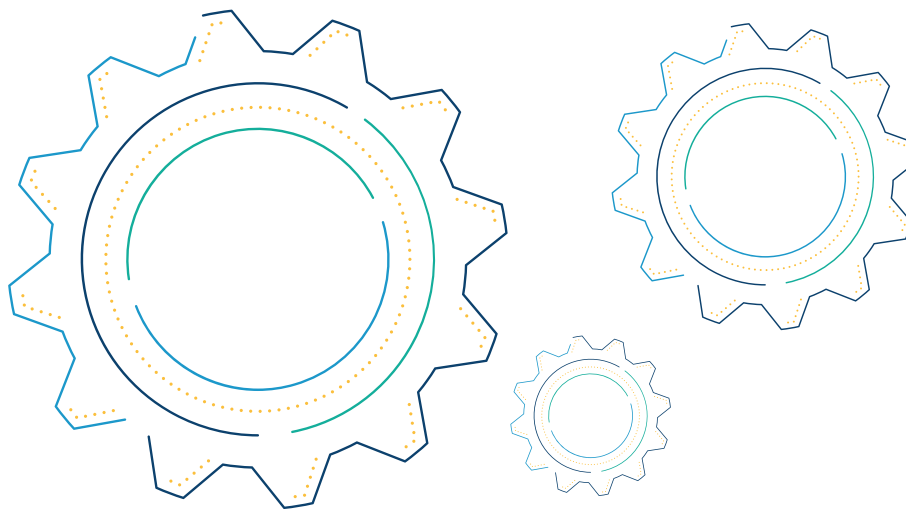
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BIGGER PROBLEMS

The HIF will continue to address the complex challenge facing humanitarian GBV and connected to innovation at scale. Elrha's Global Prioritisation Exercise (GPE) will identify the pressing gaps and challenging problems for innovation across different humanitarian sectors and domains. We will take a systems-based approach, with multiple actors and 'points of entry', based on recognition that isolated interventions are not sufficient to address root causes and complex, protracted problems. We will look for the 'acceleration points' at different levels where the contribution of innovation can help to collectively shift existing humanitarian agendas – road maps, calls to action, cluster priorities - forward.

5

INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM CHANGE

The HIF will actively and productively bring together humanitarian and innovation agendas to drive positive change for a more effective humanitarian innovation ecosystem

Current and potential actors in the humanitarian innovation ecosystem need to understand and apply humanitarian principles and standards and take an evidence-based, ethical approach to serve the sector well.

We will establish a new, strengthened MEAL framework to continue to evidence our own performance and build a stronger evidence base for effective humanitarian innovation. We will build further evidence of 'what works' in humanitarian innovation as well as advocate for an appropriate ethical framework for the system. We will work with others to support and mobilise a growing community of humanitarian innovation actors.

We will use our learning to further highlight systemic challenges facing humanitarian innovation and work through our networks to drive advocacy and policy change to bring about a more effective ecosystem as a result.

The HIF will develop new tools, share knowledge and practice that enables others to be successful innovators in a humanitarian setting

Innovation is not magic. Tools, knowledge and guidance are needed that can be used to 'do innovation better', particularly in the very complex humanitarian sector. The HIF is uniquely positioned to develop and share practices and create new capabilities. The HIF extracts learning and insights from its hands-on work to create tools and knowledge that can be leveraged by others to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their innovation efforts. Our new humanitarian innovation guide will be a strong example of this approach.

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CREATING TOOLS

We will share the new tools and frameworks developed and lessons learned through our programme on Scale, making a clear contribution to this 'big question' of how to scale within a humanitarian context. We will go on to evolve our humanitarian innovation guide to address complex problems and collective impact approaches as we develop these in our own work.

FRAMING FOR IMPACT

Effective delivery against these Strategic Priorities requires a tailored and targeted approach. We will maximise our impact through appropriately 'framing' our programmatic activity to address challenges by sector and/or by context/place. This means that we will strategically identify specific humanitarian sectors and emergency settings to focus our activity on to achieve maximum learning and positive change.

We will aim to deliver ground-breaking solutions through our existing thematic initiatives to some of the enduring problems in WASH and GBV and, through our established networks and partnerships will continue to push through change in these sectors at global level. By 2019 the results of the Global Prioritisation Exercise (GPE) will identify other pressing thematic needs and problems for humanitarian innovation to address. We will work as part of Elrha's response to the GPE to deeply investigate these challenges from an innovation perspective.

We will focus our activity on achieving measurable impact in selected emergency contexts or settings, working within a crisis or place-based framework on innovation.

Across all our work we will configure our tools, expertise and resources around the specific needs of each challenge we work on, enabling us the flexibility to continuously tailor and adapt our programmes and activities towards delivering impact.

Credit: Field Ready

A RESPONSIBLE AMBITION

We are serious about a substantial and responsible form of innovation in the humanitarian system, one of significant quality and depth. Delivering positive outcomes for emergency affected populations is at the heart of our work, as well as a strong commitment to the generation and use of evidence and working in accordance with a robust ethical framework. Such an approach is essential for an innovation agenda appropriate for the humanitarian context.

NEXT STEPS

This document has set out the strategic direction for the HIF for 2018–20. It sets out our broad strategic framework and priorities and allows for flexibility and growth. A transition period during 2017/2018 will be key to ensure that we build on our work to date. Over the remainder of 2017 we will develop our operational plan, setting out SMART objectives initially for 2018. This will provide more detail on how we will deliver against our new framework and priorities. We look forward to working with our committed and skilled governance, advisory and technical working groups as well as a range of other stakeholders to make this strategic direction a reality.

Credit: ShadowView

![HIF Humanitarian innovation fund | elrha]

The HIF is currently funded by the UK Government, the European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO), the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

The Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF) is a core programme of Elrha, whose mission is to improve humanitarian outcomes through partnership, research and innovation.

Partnership . Research . Innovation .

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