elrha

Impact Evidence and Beyond: Using Evidence to Drive Adoption of Humanitarian Innovations

Executive Summary

Scaling Series

ABOUT ELRHA

We are Elrha. A global charity that finds solutions to complex humanitarian problems through research and innovation. We are an established actor in the humanitarian community, working in partnership with humanitarian organisations, researchers, innovators, and the private sector to tackle some of the most difficult challenges facing people all over the world.

We equip humanitarian responders with knowledge of what works, so that people affected by crises get the right help when they need it most. We have supported more than 200 world-class research studies and innovation projects, championing new ideas and different approaches to evidence what works in humanitarian response.

Elrha has two successful humanitarian programmes: Research for Health in Humanitarian Crises (R2HC) and the Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF). The HIF programme improves outcomes for people affected by humanitarian crises by identifying, nurturing and sharing more effective, scalable solutions.

The HIF is a globally recognised programme leading on the development and testing of innovation in the humanitarian system. Established in 2011, it was the first of its kind: an independent, grant-making programme open to the entire humanitarian community. It now leads the way in funding, supporting, and managing innovation at every stage of the process.

"We equip humanitarian responders with knowledge of what works, so that people affected by crises get the right help when they need it most."

FOREWORD

By Abi Taylor and Ruth Salmon, HIF WASH and Scale Innovation Managers

Robust evidence underpins the strongest humanitarian innovations. It is only by using evidence that we can know how effective an innovation is: that it works as intended, can be used ethically and that it improves outcomes for people affected by crisis. This is why the HIF, as funders of humanitarian innovation, emphasise the need for evidence at all stages of the innovation journey.

However, after a decade of supporting more than 200 innovation projects and conducting research on scaling we have seen that impact evidence alone is not enough to drive the uptake and adoption of innovations.

One reason for this is that, while the importance of evidence for innovation is recognised, there are different views on what types of evidence are most important and the quality of evidence required. There is no agreement on what is 'enough' evidence, i.e. the 'evidence thresholds' beyond which organisations are prepared to do things differently.

Our research also highlights that not enough attention is paid to how evidence is tailored to the needs of key stakeholders involved in the process of adopting an innovation. This final step of communicating evidence well ensures it can be used in decision making.

Several organisations have published guidance and toolkits to help humanitarian innovators select appropriate evaluation methods to generate evidence throughout the innovation process.[1]

These resources provide a helpful starting point for considering evidence and innovation but are focused on understanding the effectiveness of interventions and (to a lesser extent) on using evaluations for internal learning within teams. The Response Innovation Lab's Innovation Evidence Toolkit goes further, identifying tools for generating evidence according to different innovation stages and, critically, by purpose.

In this way, of the scope of existing resources is limited by an assumption that once an innovation has been proven to be effective, potential users will be motivated to adopt the innovation.

However, a range of complex factors impact how evidence is interpreted and acted upon, including social, organisational and behavioural ones. These factors have not yet been sufficiently explored or understood.

With this paper - as part of a series of learning papers on scale - we seek to better understand the factors that influence uptake and the role evidence can play in responding to them, with the ultimate aim of strengthening the pathways to impact for promising humanitarian innovations.

In addition the HIF's sister programme, R2HC, has produced a connected learning paper, which is focused on the current landscape of research evidence use in humanitarian action, the barriers to its use, and the approaches and pathways that support its promotion and use. It looks specifically at humanitarian health research evidence beyond the innovation space.
Our hope is that these two papers make meaningful contributions to a wider field of work, exploring and promoting better use of evidence to improve humanitarian response.

1. This includes: the HIF-ALNAP Working Paper Evaluating Humanitarian Innovation (2017); Nesta's Standards of Evidence model (2018); and our own Humanitarian Innovation Guide. ALNAP's Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Guide (2016) provides a comprehensive guide to evaluating humanitarian interventions.

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The findings and recommendations within the report are those of the authors and may not necessarily reflect the position of Elrha.

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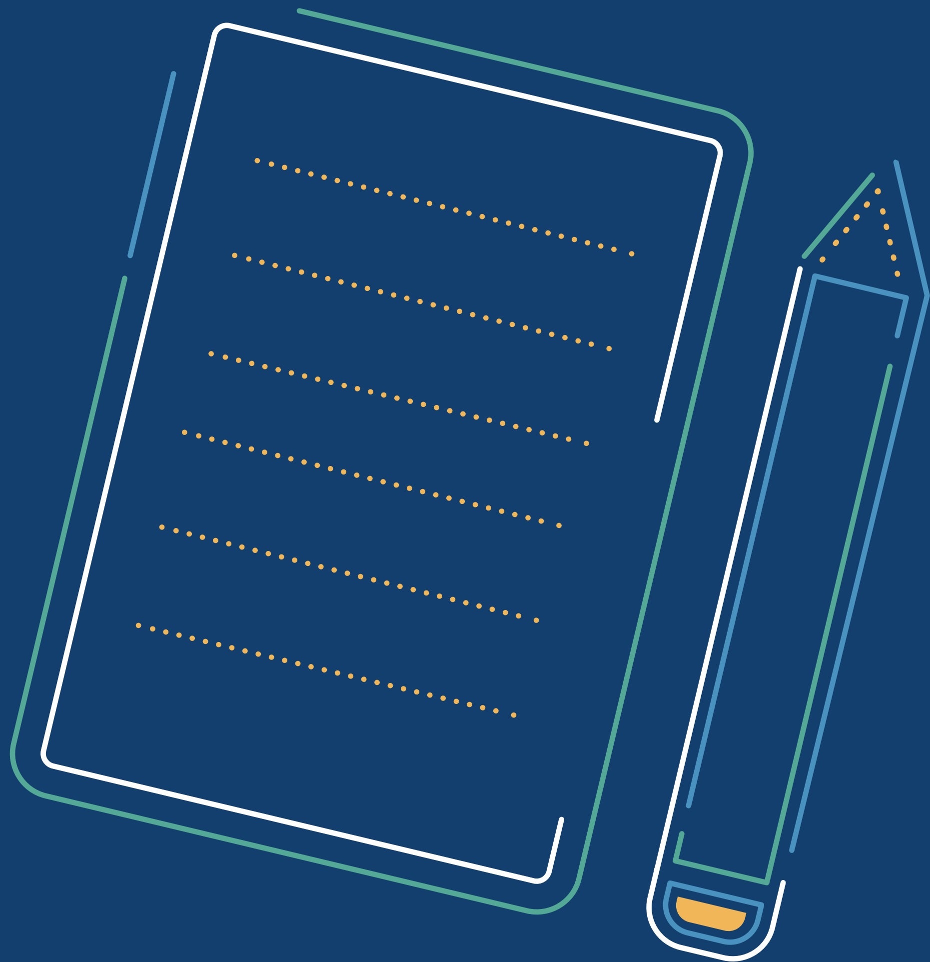


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This learning paper provides guidance to humanitarian innovators on how to use evidence to enable and drive adoption of innovation.

Diffusion is a social process whereby an innovation spreads as a result of many individual adoption decisions. In this process, evidence serves to shape perceptions of the innovation, and so influences whether stakeholders wish to support or take up the innovation. Using evidence to promote adoption requires generating the right types of evidence, directing it to the right stakeholders, and communicating it in the right way at the right time, ultimately leading to diffusion.

In the humanitarian sector, there is a focus on the type of evidence that shows an innovation works and has the intended impact. However, impact evidence alone does not guarantee adoption or successful scaling of innovations. A broader range of evidence to support scaling is needed to show that the problem is important and well understood, that there is demand for the innovation and that the innovation can scale sustainably. Furthermore, the type of evidence produced and methodology employed should be adapted to the audience and the research question.

When considering how evidence can drive scale and uptake, innovators need to understand the landscape of potential adopters, including their environment, motivations and barriers to uptake. There are often multiple levels of stakeholders involved in the adoption process, including those that are impacted by the innovation, those who will interface with it, and those who have decision-making and gatekeeping roles regarding it. These stakeholders all have different enablers and constraints that will determine how they perceive and act on evidence presented to them. Innovators need to map relevant stakeholders, understand their enablers and constraints, and engage with them accordingly.

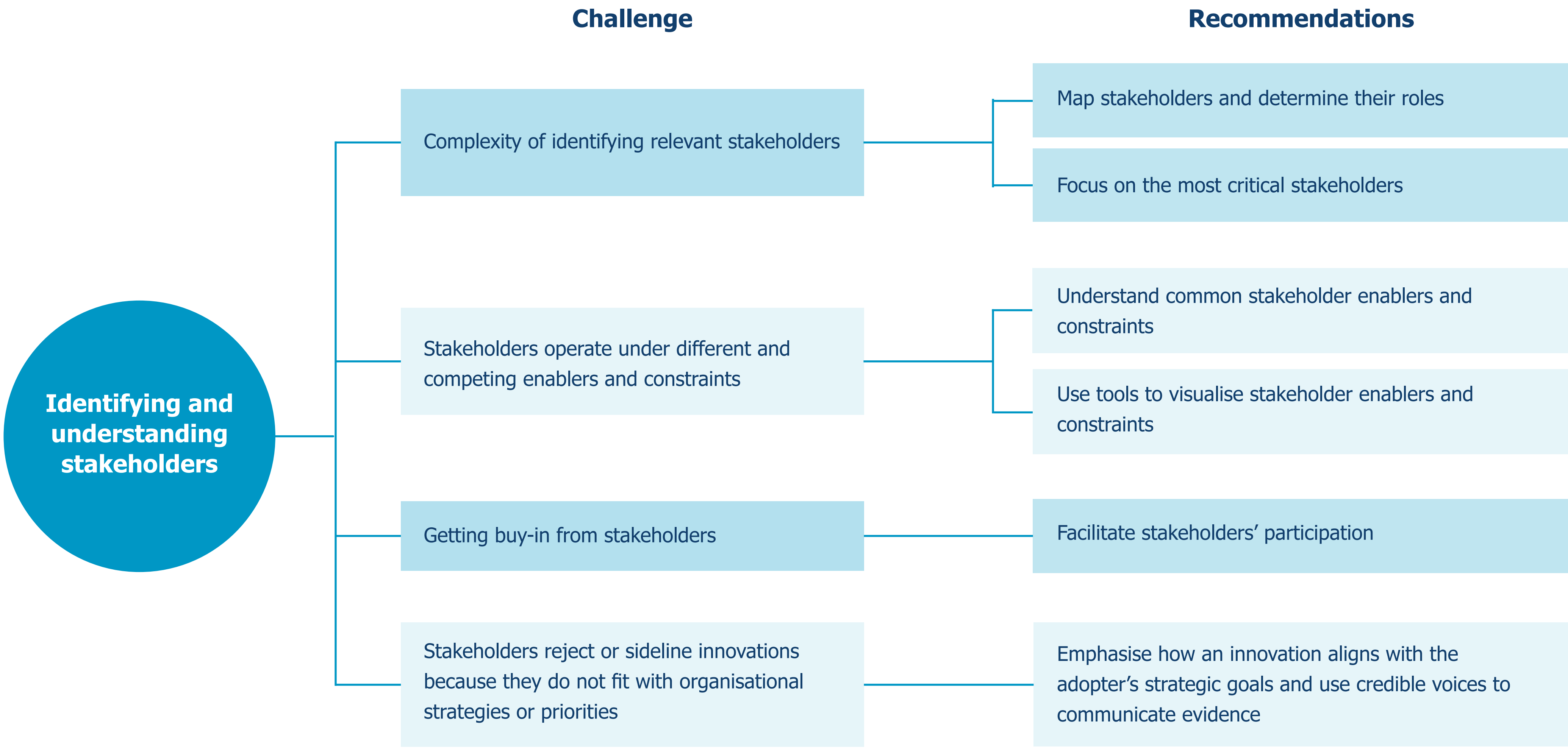
Once innovators have generated appropriate evidence and identified the relevant stakeholders, the innovators should tailor and communicate that evidence effectively to ensure it is compelling from each stakeholder's perspective. Innovators can motivate adoption using communication methods, such as storytelling and demonstrations; and platforms for stakeholder interaction, such as in-person or virtual meet-ups and open-source platforms that allow innovators to engage stakeholders effectively. Peer-to-peer mechanisms draw on credible voices and networks of practice to improve how evidence is perceived and to spread adopting behaviours.

Harnessing evidence to facilitate the journey to scale relies on innovators knowing how to communicate: (1) the right evidence, (2) to the right people, (3) in the right way at the right time. This framework is informed by a review of the literature on the diffusion of innovations, as well as practical advice from and experiences of informants such as innovators and humanitarian innovation specialists; innovators from the UK's National Health Service (NHS); and humanitarian or donor staff who have decision-making roles regarding the uptake of innovations within their organisations. Their insights on the challenges innovators face related to using evidence for scaling and recommendations for overcoming them are summarised in Figure 1 and explored in detail throughout this paper.

The process of gathering evidence, targeting stakeholders and tailoring the communication of evidence to those stakeholders is closely interlinked. Innovators are often instructed to produce rigorous evidence, to network their way to success and to make a strong pitch, without a common thread being drawn between these steps. This learning paper aims to do that.

The three main parts of this paper ('Identifying and understanding stakeholders', 'Prioritising and generating evidence', and 'Tailoring and communicating evidence'.) describe in detail the main related challenges that humanitarian innovations face and recommends how to overcome them. The following figures summarises the challenges and practical recommendations identified in each part for innovators to navigate those challenges.

Figure 1. Summary of challenges and recommendations for innovators



Prioritising and generating evidence

Challenge	Recommendations
Having proof-of-concept evidence is not enough to drive scale	Produce evidence that facilitates the scaling process: • evidence that demonstrates the problem • comparative evidence showing that the innovation is the right solution • evidence of sustainability • evidence of the innovation teams' ability
Rigorous evidence can be difficult to obtain: it can be expensive, methodologically difficult and raise ethical issues	Focus on decision-relevant evidence Make sure you employ appropriate types of evidence Understand what evidence standards you should meet
Limitations of the role of evidence when it comes to decision-making: it is often difficult to motivate stakeholders to act based on evidence alone	Concentrate on how stakeholders perceive evidence; their priorities, and what, when and how evidence is communicated and therefore received by them Consider who should produce and communicate evidence Tailor your communication, while continuing to promote ethical and responsible innovation uptake

Tailoring and communicating evidence

Recommendations

- Use platforms to facilitate stakeholder interaction
- Give demonstrations
- Leverage peer-to-peer mechanisms
- Use storytelling

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