elrha

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

Scaling Series

CONTENTS

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.

Click to see endnote reference (1)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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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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Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands

UKaid from the British people

GLOSSARY

GLOSSARY

Adoption: When an innovation is accepted and used by a relevant person or entity. "Uptake" is also used in this paper, synonymously.

Constraints: The barriers to or challenges/issues with adopting innovations.

Diffusion of innovations: A theory that seeks to explain how, why and at what rate new ideas and technologies spread. The theory was popularised by academic Everett Rogers, who is cited throughout this paper.

Diffuse/spread: To make known to or cause to be used by large numbers of people.

Enablers: The reasons/incentives/motivations for adopting innovations.

Evidence: This paper broadly defines evidence as "information that helps to substantiate or prove/disprove the truth of a specific proposition."[2] Specific types of evidence mentioned in this paper include:

- **Decision-relevant evidence**: Information that is targeted to fill specific gaps in understanding needed to inform key decisions or practices related to scaling or adoption.
- **Impact evidence**: Estimates the effect of an innovation using certain methodologies that establish the effect is caused by the innovation. In this sense, impact evidence is distinct from other measures of effectiveness.
- **Rigorous evidence**: Allows a high degree of confidence that the resulting estimations or explanations are as close as possible to the truth. Rigour is improved by having an appropriate research design for what you want to know, high-quality data, and a sound theoretical framework and analysis.
- **Scaling evidence**: Goes beyond proof of concept to address key scaling and implementation considerations, including the conditions in which the innovation is expected to work, the sustainability of the delivery, business and scaling approach, etc.
- **Qualitative evidence**: Evidence generated through qualitative research to understand a social phenomenon.

Innovators: Refers to the humanitarian innovators, teams and individuals who are seeking to have their innovation adopted.

Perceived attributes of innovation: From Rogers' diffusion theory of innovations, the extent to which an innovation is perceived to have certain attributes (eg, relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, observability) that determine the rate of adoption of an innovation.

Qualitative research: Explores and tries to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviour and interactions. It generates non-numerical data, which can be gathered through a variety of means eg, in-depth interviews, focus groups, documentary analysis and participant observation.[3]

Click to see endnote references (2) (3)

GLOSSARY

Scaling: The process of increasing the impact of an innovation to better match the size of the social problem it seeks to address.

Stakeholders: The actors with a relevant part to play in the adoption and spread of an innovation. This paper refers to the following stakeholder groups, noting that each group is not mutually exclusive:

- **Target impact groups**: Those who benefit most from an innovation.
- **Users**: Those who interface with the innovation (sometimes also the target impact group, but sometimes a separate actor or entity).
- **Intermediaries**: Organisations that work with humanitarian innovators and institutional donors. They may have grant-making power and/or coaching/support roles; eg, the Humanitarian Innovation Fund, Grand Challenges Canada, Innovation Norway and the Dutch Coalition for Humanitarian Innovation.
- **Decision makers**: Those who can make authoritative decisions regarding adoption. This can be positive; eg, funding a project or encouraging or mandating the use of it. It can also be negative; eg, blocking adoption for legal or regulatory reasons, opting to use a different product or process, or to maintain the existing approach.

Uptake: Used synonymously with 'adoption': when an innovation is accepted and used by a relevant person or entity.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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.

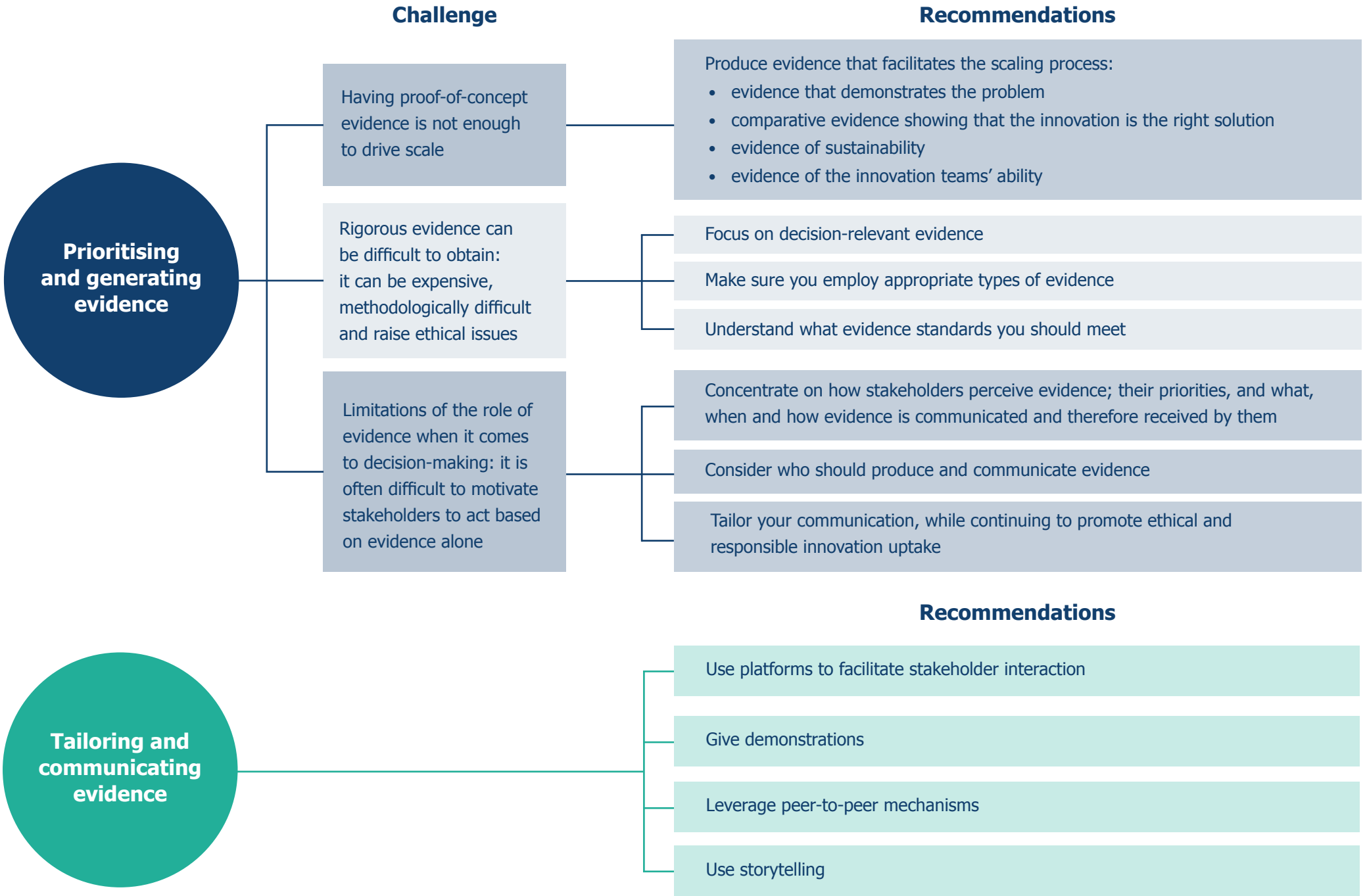
Once innovators have generated appropriate evidence and identified the relevant stakeholders, the innovators should tailor and communicate that evidence effectively to ensure it is compelling from each stakeholder's perspective. Innovators can motivate adoption using communication methods, such as storytelling 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.

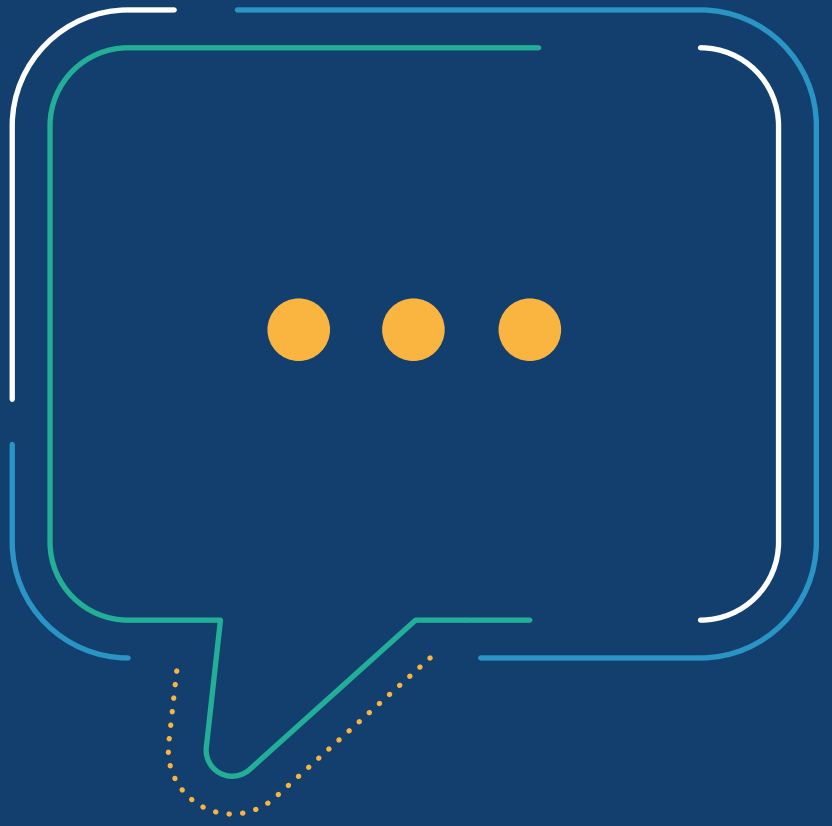
The process of gathering evidence, targeting stakeholders and tailoring the communication of evidence to those stakeholders is closely interlinked. Innovators are often instructed to produce rigorous evidence, to network their way to success and to make a strong pitch, without a common thread being drawn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


Challenge
Recommendations
Prioritising and generating evidence
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
Recommendations
Tailoring and communicating evidence
Use platforms to facilitate stakeholder interaction
Give demonstrations
Leverage peer-to-peer mechanisms
Use storytelling

INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

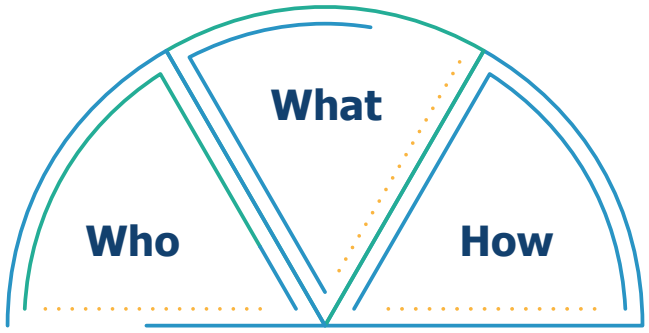
Innovation literature and practice show time and time again that it is difficult to scale innovations. Even when an innovation is demonstrably impactful, better than the existing solution and good value for money (VfM), it does not automatically get adopted or spread. Why do evidence-based innovations face resistance and how can innovators best position their innovation to scale?

This learning paper is for innovators who want to effectively use evidence to support and enable their journey to scale. It explores the underlying social, organisational and behavioural factors that stifle uptake of innovations. It also provides guidance on how to use, prioritise and communicate evidence to overcome these barriers. This will help innovators generate and present their evidence in more tailored and nuanced ways to improve adoption and scaling of their innovations.

This learning paper draws on a literature review, interviews and case studies, and examines how to prioritise the right types of evidence, for the right people, in the right way. It addresses the 'who', 'what' and 'how' of evidence for adoption and scaling.

Many technologists believe that advantageous innovations will sell themselves, that the obvious benefits of a new idea will be widely realised by potential adopters, and that the innovation will diffuse rapidly. Seldom is this the case.

Everett Rogers
Diffusion of Innovations



'Who' considers who will be receiving and perceiving this evidence, and how they process and act on it.

'What' defines what types of evidence encourage uptake and scaling.

'How' provides advice for tailoring and communicating evidence effectively.

This learning paper addresses the existing challenges innovators face when it comes to evidence for adoption and scale, and it provides solutions and recommendations for overcoming them.

There are many other challenges related to scaling innovations, including systemic barriers such as the project-based funding nature of the humanitarian sector, risk aversion, incentives structures, disruption caused by COVID-19 and more. These challenges, although important, are beyond the scope of this learning paper. The paper focuses on short-term actions that individual innovators can take to improve their chances of scaling through evidence.

The role of evidence in adoption and scaling of innovations

In this learning paper, evidence is interpreted broadly as "information that helps to substantiate or prove/disprove the truth of a specific proposition".[4] Decision making in the humanitarian sector may draw on research and evaluations, as well as other 'ways of knowing', such as expert opinion, stakeholder preferences and the broader operating context.[5] Humanitarian decisions may draw from analytical, procedural or intuitive (naturalistic or sensemaking) assessments of the available evidence.[6] The quality of evidence – both the data itself and the analysis of that data – is described by ALNAP using the following characteristics:[7]

- **Accuracy**: The evidence is a true record of what is being measured.
- **Representativeness**: The evidence accurately represents a group of interest.
- **Relevance**: The information is important to the 'proposition it intends to prove or disprove'.
- **Generalisability**: The conclusions can be taken from one situation and used in other contexts.
- **Attribution**: The analysis shows a clear causal linkage between two conditions or events.
- **Clarity of context and methods**: The research details how, why, and for whom evidence has been collected.

To appreciate how evidence can be used effectively to enable and drive adoption, innovators should first understand how innovations diffuse. There are four key elements for diffusion: the qualities of the innovation itself, communication channels, the social system the innovation would operate in and time (see figure 2).[8]

> "The spread of an innovation is determined not just by the quality and effectiveness of the innovation, but also the context within which diffusion takes place.[9]"

Click to see endnote references (4-9)

The most important factor contributing to the adoption rate of an innovation is the perceived attributes of that innovation: the relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability and observability of the innovation (see Figure 3 and Table 1).

Innovators should therefore aim for their evidence to address these attributes, tailoring and communicating the evidence in a way that creates a compelling narrative from the perspective and priorities of the target adopter.[10]

Figure 2: Rogers' 4 key elements of diffusion of innovations

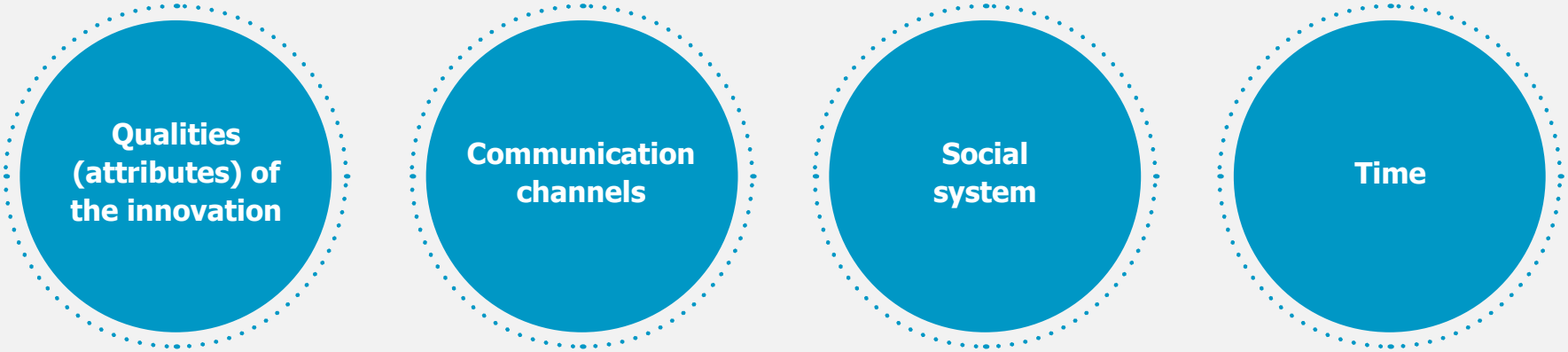
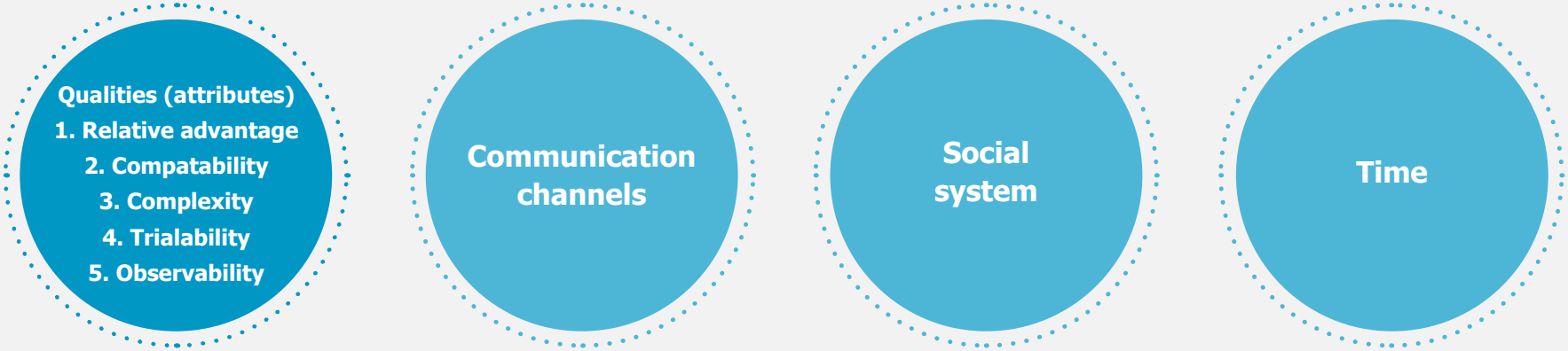


Figure 3: Rogers' 4 key elements of innovation diffusion, with a focus on qualities (attributes) of innovations



Click to see endnote reference (10)

Table 1: Rogers' perceived attributes of innovations

Attribute	Description
Relative advantage	The degree to which a new innovation improves or is better than a previous idea. Common measurements include economic profitability or social prestige. It is one of the strongest predictors of an innovation's rate of adoption. Note that it is harder to prove the relative advantage of preventative innovations (an innovation adopted now to prevent a future unwanted event; eg, seatbelts).
Compatibility	The degree to which an innovation is perceived as consistent with existing values, past experiences and needs of potential adopters. Compatibility helps adopters give meaning to the new idea. It can be compatible or incompatible with: (1) sociocultural values and beliefs; (2) previously introduced ideas; and/or (3) client needs for the innovation.
Complexity	The degree to which an innovation is perceived as difficult to understand and use.
Trialability	The degree to which an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis. This enables adopters to test and play with an innovation.
Observability	The degree to which the results of an innovation are visible and clear to others.

While these perceived attributes are persuasive in leading to adoption – and therefore evidence should be produced to address them – they are just one piece of the puzzle. **The process of adoption involves a whole system where the interplay between innovator, adopter and the wider environment is relevant**. Innovators should understand who the relevant individuals are (the stakeholders), what the stakeholders' enablers and constraints are; and how innovators can strategically use evidence to target these individuals to encourage adoption and spread. Thus, when it comes to evidence for scaling, it is critical to have (1) the right evidence, (2) communicated to the right people, (3) in the right way and at the right time.

How to read this learning paper

The remainder of this learning paper is divided into three parts:

1 **Part 1**: Identifying and understanding stakeholders.

2 **Part 2**: Prioritising and generating evidence.

3 **Part 3**: Tailoring and communicating evidence.

In each part, the paper describes the main challenges that humanitarian innovations face and recommends how to overcome them. The parts are broken down into 'challenges' and 'recommendations' subheadings. Each section is followed by 'practical pointers', which are concise bullet points summarising the challenges and recommendations, and advising innovators what actions to take.

A visual figure of the challenges and recommendations included in this paper is laid out in the executive summary. At the end of the paper, there is a checklist containing all the practical pointers for generating and communicating evidence for scale, which innovators can use to best position their innovations.

> "The process of adoption involves a whole system where the interplay between innovator, adopter and the wider environment is relevant."

Methodology

A literature review was undertaken by researchers to understand the theory and practice of evidence generation and the journey of innovations to scale. Resources from the humanitarian innovation sector were reviewed, including on the topics of evidence and scaling. However, to look beyond what the sector is already well versed in, other topics were also explored including diffusion theory, systems thinking and behavioural science. This literature review helped generate a framework for understanding: how innovations spread; the role of evidence in this (including types and quality); relevant stakeholders, their enablers and constraints; and practical pointers for presenting and communicating evidence.

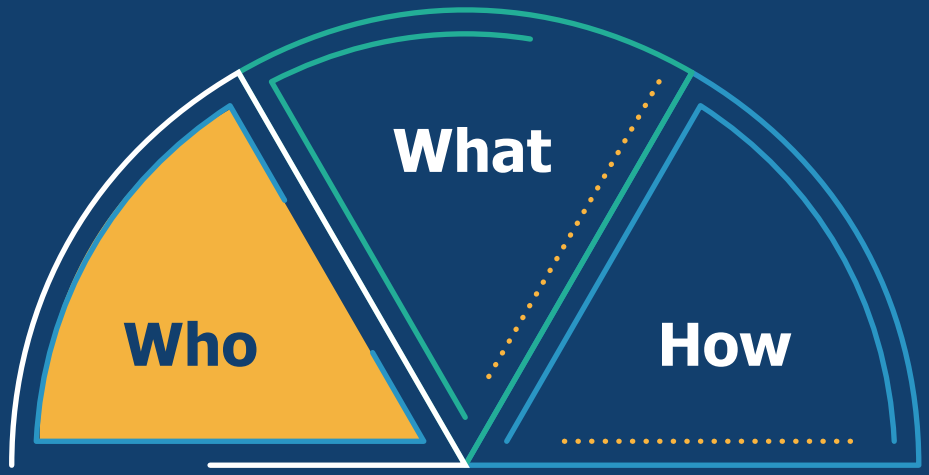
To substantiate the literature review, and to see how the theories work in practice, key informant interviews and case study reviews were conducted. Key informants included humanitarian innovation specialists,[11] innovators from the UK's National Health Service (NHS),[12] and humanitarian or donor staff who have decision-making or gatekeeping roles regarding the uptake of innovations within their organisations.[13] Humanitarian and health innovators were asked about the role of evidence in scaling and case studies that exemplify successful or failed scaling journeys. Decision makers were asked to share their decision-making processes and criteria for adopting innovations.

Ten case studies and key informants were selected for interviews. It was important to include a diverse selection to understand how different characteristics or attributes of an innovation can affect the evidence required and its relevance to different stakeholders. The majority of the interviewees in February 2021 attended a virtual workshop to challenge, review and refine the contents of the draft version of this learning paper. The outputs from the workshop activities and plenary discussion were integrated into the final version of this paper.

The selected case studies varied across sectors, types of organisations, types of innovations and points in the scaling journeys. Table 2 introduces the case studies and their characteristics.

Click to see endnote references (11-13)

IDENTIFYING AND UNDERSTANDING STAKEHOLDERS



IDENTIFYING AND UNDERSTANDING STAKEHOLDERS

To have impact, evidence must be communicated to and received by stakeholders. Individuals or groups who choose whether to take up an innovation are 'adopters' and their characteristics shape the diffusion of innovation.[14] These adoption stakeholders have unique motivations and priorities, environments and constraints. Unfortunately, the more people involved in making an innovation decision, the slower the rate of adoption:[15] **the humanitarian sector often entails a complex multi-step and multi-stakeholder scaling process**. This multi-step process underlines the importance of identifying and working with early adopters and opinion leaders who can help mobilise the majority.

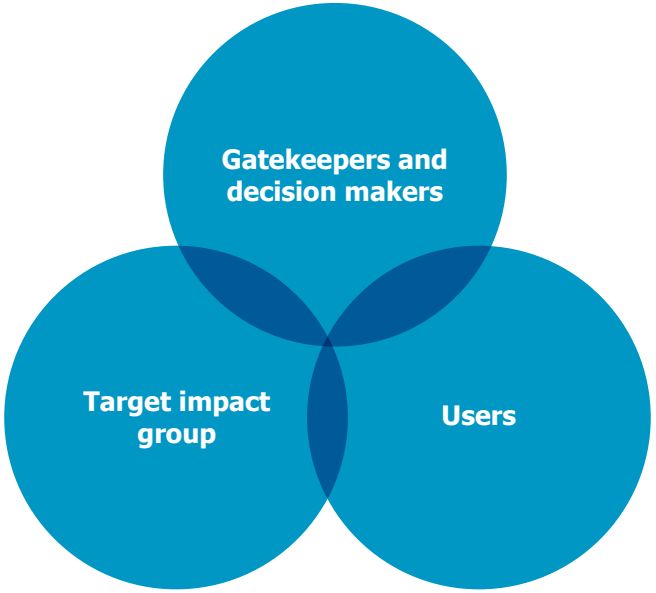
This section highlights the challenges innovators face when presenting evidence to stakeholders. It then provides guidance and recommendations, including case study examples, for how to overcome them.

Challenge 1: The complexity of identifying relevant stakeholders

There are many levels of relevant adoption stakeholders, including the target impact group (those who get the most benefit from the innovation), users (those who interface with the innovation and whose behaviour must change for it to succeed) and decision makers (people with influence over the behaviours of the target impact group and users and their decision-making power). Beyond these adoption stakeholders, there are also other types of stakeholders who can be indirectly relevant to adoption decisions; for example, government, regulators, suppliers and researchers. Understanding who stakeholders are in this complex chain of adoption decisions has proved critical for scaling innovation.[16]

When innovations require organisational buy-in, organisational structures can be hard to navigate and make it difficult to determine who the relevant actors are. Several individuals in an organisation are likely have a role in adoption decisions. Each of these actors has different enablers and constraints when it comes to adopting innovations. It is important to identify them first, and then begin the process of selecting and communicating the most relevant evidence from the actors' perspective. Innovators interviewed for this learning paper said this process was often 'learning-by-doing'. However, there are better ways for innovators to position themselves.

Figure 4: Visual mapping of different types of stakeholders



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★ Recommendation: Map stakeholders and determine their roles

Innovators should identify relevant stakeholders and their roles as early as possible in the innovation journey. This will help innovators to immediately start generating and tailoring evidence to suit the stakeholders. Innovators should map who their target impact group, users and decision makers are. An innovation's business model and scaling plan can help reveal the stakeholders who are critical to scaling. Innovators can use their business model and scaling plan to begin the mapping process, and doing this in a visual way may also be helpful[17].

Consider the following three examples:

1. A data analysis tool that makes an NGO's human resources more efficient and streamlined.
2. A temporary shelter that is wheelchair accessible.
3. An app for digitally registering beneficiaries in displacement settings

Tables 3 to 5 shows the variation that exists among stakeholder roles and business models. (Note that the tables are not comprehensive and are used simply to illustrate potential variation.)

Table 3: Mapping stakeholder example - for data analysis tool

Example 1: data analysis tool	
Business model: Business model Business to business (B2B); eg, a tech company selling software to an NGO	**Target impact group:** The NGO's staff will benefit from the software as they will get more detailed pay slips and quicker payments
Users: The NGO's human resources (HR) team will be using the software	**Decision makers:** • The humanitarian organisation's HR team • Possibly IT, procurement and finance teams

Table 4: Mapping stakeholder example - wheelchair-accessible shelters

Example 2: wheelchair-accessible shelters	
Business model: Proxy buyer; eg, a humanitarian organisation is buying the shelters from a company on behalf of refugees who will be using them	**Target impact group:** Wheelchair users in refugee camps
Users: Wheelchair users in refugee camps	**Decision makers:** • Multiple staff within the humanitarian organisation (buyers and implementers of shelters) • Note that different organisations will have different structures – the value here is identifying which actors are the relevant decision makers

Table 5: Mapping stakeholder example - registration app for displacement settings

Example 3: registration app for displacement settings	
Business model: Scaling within a host humanitarian organisation; eg, an internal data/innovation team creates an open source platform	**Target impact group:** Internally displaced people (IDPs) having their details recorded, which enables them to access aid
Users: Humanitarian field staff who use the tool to record beneficiary information	**Decision makers:** • Multiple staff within the humanitarian organisation • Host government (potential gatekeeper)

Click to see endnote reference (17)

These three examples show the possible variation in stakeholders and their roles. In the first example, all the stakeholders are from the same humanitarian organisation. The second example shows that some stakeholders can have several roles (eg, target impact group as well as users). The third shows complete variation in the stakeholders and their roles. The business model also helps indicate who the relevant stakeholders will be. For example, business to business (B2B) suggests that the stakeholders will all be within organisations/companies, as seen in the example of the data analysis tool. However, a business model with proxy buyers suggests that target impact groups will be external and separate to the buying organisation. Innovators can use this simple table method to get a clearer idea of who their stakeholders are and what their roles might be.

Innovators should tap into their networks to help with stakeholder mapping. Humanitarian innovation intermediaries may be able to help innovators navigate the stakeholder landscape and make relevant introductions. However, stakeholder mapping is a difficult task, especially when it comes to 'decision-making' or 'gatekeeping' power as there is no cohesive or identifiable group. Individuals who can make the decision to take up an innovation are often scattered throughout organisations and their roles and positions will vary between them. Therefore, while intermediaries can help with mapping, they cannot be expected to have all the answers. Also, innovators should be aware that stakeholder maps are dynamic and change over time – who is important or critical to adoption one day may not be on another day as organisational structures, roles and power balances shift and change. Therefore, innovators need to take an iterative approach to stakeholder mapping.

★ Recommendation: Focus on the most critical stakeholders

There is no standard rule about, or hierarchy of, who the most relevant stakeholders are. It will differ between innovations depending on their stakeholders (and organisational structures), the business model, the sector and the type of innovation. However, there are some techniques to help determine the most relevant stakeholders.

> "There is no standard rule about, or hierarchy of, who is important or critical to adoption one day may not be on another day."

Firstly, an 'insider's' knowledge of these stakeholder groups is helpful to further define who the relevant actors are. For example, an innovation that requires communities (the 'target impact group') to adopt a certain product or service should use the local knowledge and connections of field staff or work with community based organisations, as they are better positioned to understand which people within the target impact group are essential for adoption. For example, religious or community leaders may be a gateway to wider community buy-in.

Likewise, an insider's understanding of the humanitarian sector (where the decision makers are most often situated) enables innovators to understand an organisation's decision-making structures and processes, and therefore which actors they must speak to.[18] For example, the Responsive Learning Project at Oxfam found that, despite solid buy-in from HQ, it was ultimately up to individual country directors and senior leaders to adopt and implement the project's digital feedback mechanism. While it was relatively easy to get country monitoring and evaluation (M&E) staff on board, they did not always have the authority to make decisions; it was up to the country directors. However, at CBM Global, the decision-making power sits with technical directors, rather than country directors.

Determining who has the decision-making power requires understanding the organisation's structure (partnership, confederacy, etc) and probably a bit of digging and exploring. Innovators should consider this when approaching adopting organisations such as NGOs or UN agencies: they may have more opportunity with local-level or country office actors, who are more flexible and (often) less bureaucratic than levels higher up, such as at HQ. This could create momentum for adoption of an innovation.

Click to see endnote reference (18)

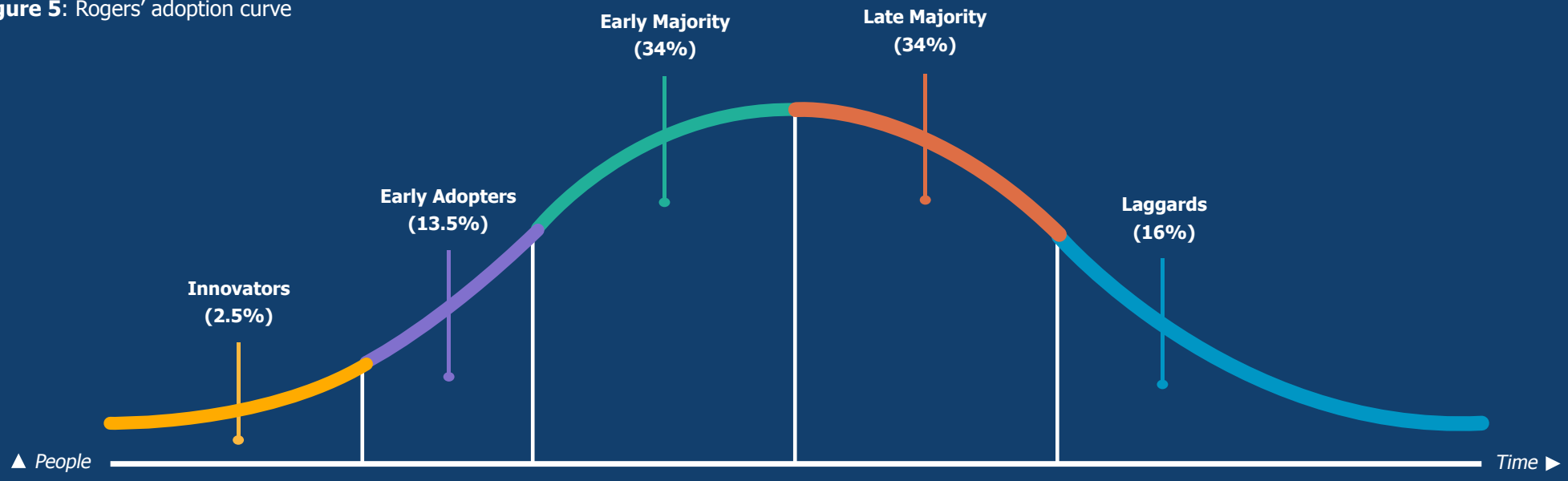
Innovators should also consider the sector and business unit their innovation sits in. For example, a financial innovation such as Disberse needed the approval and interest of the humanitarian organisation's finance team. A technology solution such as a database would be likely to need the IT team on board. While these actors are relevant and may have decision-making power, other actors will also be relevant, such as legal and procurement teams.

Each of these actors speaks a different 'evidence language': evidence will need to be presented to them in different ways, requiring innovators to be versatile communicators.

It is also helpful for innovators to understand Rogers' Adoption Curve (Figure 5).[19] The curve highlights the acceptance of new ideas (innovations) by society through five stages: innovators[20]; early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards. Each group has different characteristics and rates of adoption.

Innovators should try to identify who among their target audience are likely to be early adopters – those who are more enthusiastic about new innovations and less risk averse, as getting these stakeholders on side will accelerate adoption.

Figure 5: Rogers' adoption curve



Innovators are risk takers who have the resources and desire to try new things even if they fail.

Early Adopters are selective about which technologies they start using. They are consider the "one to check in with" for new information and reduce other' uncertainty about a new technology by adopting it.

Early Majority take their time before adopting a new idea. They are willing to embrace a new technology as long as they understand how it fits with their lives.

Late Majority adopt in reaction to peer pressure, emerging norms, or economic necessity. Most of the uncertainty around an idea must be resolved before they adopt.

Laggards are traditional and make decisions based on past experience. They are often economically unable to take risks on new ideas.

Source: Ryan & Gross (1943)

Click to see endnote references (19) (20)

Practical pointers

- **Undertake stakeholder mapping: identify the target impact group, users and decision makers.[21]**
  - Consider other indirect stakeholders, who could include regulators, government, suppliers and researchers.
  - Use your business model to help determine who your stakeholders are.
  - Use your network, including intermediary organisations in the humanitarian innovation sector, to help with your mapping.
- **Engage with people who have insider knowledge.**
  - This could be a variety of people, including field staff who know local communities; and humanitarians with extensive sector knowledge who understand organisations' structures, priorities and decision-making processes.
- **Attend meetings and conferences: network to learn how stakeholder organisations are structured and operate.**
- **If the stakeholder is an organisation (eg, an NGO or UN agency), consider approaching local-level actors, such as country offices, first.**
  - Higher levels (including HQ) are likely to be less flexible and more bureaucratic.
- **Consider the sector you are operating in to determine which humanitarian organisation actors are most relevant.**

Click to see endnote reference (21)

Challenge 2: Stakeholders operate under different and competing enablers and constraints

Having identified stakeholders, innovators then need to use evidence to create buy-in. The key to doing this successfully is understanding how stakeholders might respond to an innovation. Regardless of how the adoption decision is made, buy-in from all types of stakeholders is crucial for the institutionalisation and sustainability of an innovation. Even if a change is imposed by an authority, it cannot be sustained if users and target impact groups oppose it.[22] Innovators should understand stakeholder enablers and constraints – that is, the factors that would make them more likely to adopt or use an innovation, or the factors that could prevent adoption. By understanding these, innovators can build support across key groups, tailoring how they communicate evidence to address enablers and constraints as directly as possible.

The spotlights in this section give some best practice examples of engagement with target impact groups, users and decision-makers.

★ Recommendation: Understand common stakeholder enablers and constraints

All stakeholders want to know that an innovation works and does no harm, so evidence needs to meet their wants and needs. An ethnographic-style approach – a qualitative method where researchers observe and/or interact with a study's participants in their real-life environment – will help innovators recognise stakeholders' fears, anxieties, resistance and culture, and understand what makes them tick.

Trying to create behaviour change is extremely difficult, even if you show evidence of a new procedure's effectiveness.[23] It is generally not a technical issue but a question of feelings and habits. Speaking with stakeholders can uncover this. There are common enablers and constraints among stakeholder groups that innovators should be aware of. Those that came up during this research for target impact groups, users and decision makers are summarised in figures 6, 7 and 8 in the annex.

Spotlight on effective engagement with a user group:
Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team and Simprints

For Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team (HOT), an innovative organisation that is shifting the paradigm in the sector towards open data and mapping for improved development and humanitarian outcomes, its stakeholder engagement strategy was highly user centred. The services HOT developed were inherently user based because they met demand among technologically minded humanitarian staff who needed geo-referenced data for their decision-making and programming. HOT's engagement over time meant that these lower-level management or data-inclined technical staff grew into leadership positions and became more influential in promoting this new paradigm in the sector.

Simprints identified barriers to building support for the innovation among potential users. Simprints needed health workers to deliver its innovation to the target impact group. However, the health workers were overburdened, often working on an (unpaid) voluntary basis, and had to attend weeks of training every year. With the introduction of new products or processes, they were expected to learn increasingly complex workflows. Simprints recognised that the users (health workers) needed to be incentivised to do this essential work and advocated for them to receive pay.

Click to see endnote references (22) (23)

Target impact group

Those who benefit most from an innovation (eg, women in East African refugee camps).

In many instances, the target impact group will be people affected by crises. It should be noted that, unfortunately, in reality people affected by crises are often excluded from decision-making. While it is practically and ethically prudent for people affected by crises to participate in design, adoption and implementation decisions, ultimately other actors might make the final decision.

It is therefore the responsibility of decision makers to make sure any new interventions or solutions ultimately respond to the needs and preferences of people affected by crises. Although those people may not be directly involved in decision-making, the evidentiary requirements decision makers place on innovators should include a robust understanding of people's needs and preferences.

This learning paper supports efforts to make the humanitarian system more responsive and accountable. It encourages innovators to produce evidence of participation in decision-making by people affected by crises, and evidence of their support for innovations.

Figure 6, in the appendix, has a summary of the constraints and enablers that may apply to target impact groups.

Users

The people who interface with the innovation (eg, field staff recording beneficiary registration in a displacement setting).

Although there are many occasions when users are also the target impact group (eg, in the case of Supertowel on page 28), at other times they are separate groups. For example, the target impact group of an innovation may be displaced persons in an IDP camp, but the users of the innovation are the field staff who use a digital tool to register people and record their information. Figure 7, in the appendix, applies to the latter situation.

Decision makers

People with influence on the target impact group and users and have adoption decision-making power: they may be internal (eg, a country director or procurement team at a humanitarian organisation) or external (eg, a donor or regulator).

As Figure 8, in the appendix, shows, **there are more constraints than enablers when it comes to adoption decision-making**. Without creating and increasing enablers and incentives for innovation adoption, innovators will continue to face an uphill battle and the humanitarian sector will miss out on opportunities. The sector – particularly donors and intermediaries – should therefore prioritise creating incentives and enabling circumstances for decision makers to adopt innovations.

★ Recommendation: Use a tool to visualise stakeholders' enablers and constraints

Once they are familiar with common stakeholder enablers and constraints, innovators should home in on their specific project's stakeholders. **The Force Field Analysis[39] tool is useful for analysing pressures for and against change**. Using this tool allows innovators to see what forces are affecting a stakeholder's adoption decision. With this knowledge, they can work on reducing resistant forces and increasing forces for change.

Click to see endnote reference (39)

Spotlight on effective engagement with a target impact group:

Real Relief's Supertowel – field study with Action Against Hunger (ACF) in Nigeria

Real Relief's Supertowel is a reusable towel that includes a permanently bonded anti-microbial layer that washes hands without water. For the Supertowel to succeed, it was imperative that the target impact group – people affected by a humanitarian emergency who do not have access to normal sanitation infrastructure – wanted to use it and understood its benefits.

However, using a towel to wash one's hands (rather than using soap and water) requires behaviour change in the target impact group. Real Relief therefore developed a communication package that would enable hygiene promoters in a humanitarian setting to tell potential users about the product and how to use it, along with raising awareness about hygiene and why it matters.

In this field study, the information leaflet was translated into two local languages. Also, Real Relief recommended activities and exercises for sessions where hygiene promoters introduced the products. One was a demonstration where the hygiene promoter took a piece of white bread and wiped it with unwashed hands. They did the same with hands that had been washed with a Supertowel. After 48 hours, the bread that had been wiped with unwashed hands turned dirty and green, while the other piece stayed white.

This process of sensitisation and demonstration through in-person engagement led to good support of the Supertowel among the target impact group.

Spotlight on effective engagement with a decision maker:

UNICEF and the Response Innovation Lab – targeting organisational goals and priorities

UNICEF's senior innovation adviser explained that an innovation must address something that UNICEF is already trying to solve – not just at the level of the organisation's goals, but specifically related to its innovation mandate.

An education innovation in Somalia that the Response Innovation Lab supports was able to gain buy-in from Somalia's Ministry of Education by showing officials a dashboard with school attendance statistics. The ministry officials were impressed. They were already collecting this data, but it was only updated once a year: the dashboard showed statistics being updated in real time.

Practical pointers

- **Familiarise yourself with common stakeholder enablers and constraints.**
  - Speak with your project's stakeholders to see whether their enablers and constraints are unique.
- **Use a tool such as Force Field Analysis to visualise stakeholders' enablers and constraints.**

Challenge 3: Getting stakeholder buy-in

Based on the above-mentioned constraints, it is clear there are obstacles to stakeholder buy-in. Sometimes, presented with numerous new ideas and projects, stakeholders do not necessarily have the interest or capacity to review or consider them all.

★ Recommendation: Stakeholder participation

Involving stakeholders in the innovation process encourages buy-in from the very beginning, which in turn promotes investment further down the track. Mobilising and giving stakeholders agency to help solve problems – regardless of whether they are from the target impact group, users or decision makers – gives them a stake in the innovation. This will not only improve the chances that they will adopt an innovation, but that they will become supporters and champions of it. This reduces the evidentiary burden of having to 'convince' them to adopt the innovation and strengthens further communication about it.

Levels of participation can vary: from simply keeping stakeholders informed, enabling stakeholders to be kept in the loop; to stakeholder consultation on innovation design; or more equal engagement and co-design of the innovation with some stakeholders from an earlier stage.

Even mature innovations can still invite stakeholders to participate in their development. For example, they can seek feedback, allowing people to interrogate the innovation, and to ask questions and make suggestions. Enabling and inviting active participation, rather than simply one-way communication and dissemination, is more likely to win hearts and minds. Getting stakeholders' feedback, and incentivising and supporting them to use an innovation, will improve its chances of adoption. The constraints that keep many people from being convinced that an innovation will work can often be fixed with interaction. Key informants interviewed for case studies for this learning paper emphasised that this kind of collaborative interaction is more important in engaging stakeholders than producing materials such as newsletters or reports.

Spotlight on stakeholder buy in:

510 – the power of demonstrating the innovation

People are convinced by their experiences. Immersive demonstrations give adopters experience of innovations, which allows for iterative improvements. This was a useful approach for 510 – an innovative data and digital team hosted by the Netherlands Red Cross – which multiple Red Cross organisations in the innovation process, sending data teams to their offices and investing in training to encourage people to embrace a new way of working.

Practical pointers

- **Invite stakeholders to participate in designing, implementing and evaluating the innovation from as early as possible.**
  - This includes potential target impact groups, users and decision makers (donors, intermediaries and humanitarian organisations).
  - Seek stakeholders' feedback on the innovation: let them interrogate it and set up a forum for questions and answers.
  - When seeking buy-in from stakeholders, focus on the organisation (or team) rather than individuals: this will mitigate the impact of people changing positions or leaving.

Challenge 4: Stakeholders reject or sideline innovations because they do not fit with organisational strategies or priorities

Related to the decision makers' enablers and constraints mentioned above, a frequent concern of innovators is that decision makers will reject or sideline their innovations as they do not fit the adopting **organisations' priorities. Regardless of impact and effectiveness, innovations may not be considered if they do not fit in with an organisation's funding and planning cycles and priorities.**

This is particularly detrimental for innovations, as in a bureaucratic setting the money has often been spent and staff have left by the time the pilot is over and the innovation is ready to scale.

★ Recommendation: Align innovations with stakeholders' priorities

Although innovators are highly unlikely to be able to change the priorities of stakeholder organisations, they can adapt and present their evidence to show how their innovation fits the organisation's priorities.

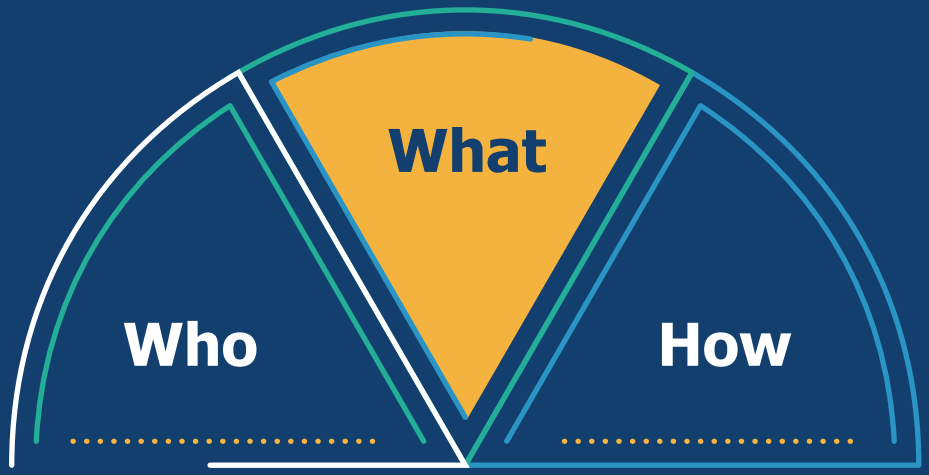
It is crucial to understand stakeholders' policy agendas so that the innovation targets a problem they already want to address and feel is important, rather than trying to sell a solution.

An example is Oxfam's Responsive Listening Project, which is an accountability tool that found internal scaling success due to Oxfam's recent focus on, and prioritisation of, accountability. It is important for the pitch to explain the value an innovation will add and to emphasise how the innovation meets the adopter's strategic goals. It is also useful to consider who is the most credible voice to communicate evidence.

Practical pointers

- **Find out stakeholders' priorities or policy agendas and try and align your innovation with them**
  - Use evidence to show how they are connected.
  - If your innovation does not fit existing priorities or policy agendas, consider advocating for it to be included in the future.

PRIORITISING AND GENERATING EVIDENCE



PRIORITISING AND GENERATING EVIDENCE

When it comes to scale, evidence is important to ensure an innovation is effective and that promoting its uptake is safe, ethical and responsible. **Diffusion and scale also introduce the role of evidence in explaining the innovation to potential adopters and informing their decisions about whether (and how) to adopt it.** There are different types of evidence for scaling (see Box 1), and ways in which this evidence can be deployed to facilitate the scaling process (see Box 2 for examples of the role of evidence in scaling). **Unfortunately, there is little consensus on what evidence adopting stakeholders prefer and requirements often vary.** Also, diversity in user and delivery models for scaling means that evidence needs vary across innovations. This section defines different evidence types and how innovators can use them to generate stakeholder buy-in.

Box 1: Types of evidence

Types of evidence and related research questions could include, but are not limited to:

- **Efficacy**: Does the innovation work as intended in highly controlled circumstances?
- **Effectiveness**: Does the innovation lead to a measurable improvement in relevant humanitarian outcomes?
- **Sustainability**: Does the innovation maintain measurable changes in behaviour, health or the environment over time? Does the innovation remain functional over time? What are the maintenance, repair, training or other long-term costs and requirements?
- **Feasibility and fidelity**: Was the innovation delivered as intended? Are there elements that are not possible to conduct in different contexts? Why? What components must be in place for the innovation to have an effect?
- **Usability and acceptability**: Is the innovation being used as intended? Do users like the innovation and why? Is the innovation inclusive?
- **Efficiency and cost**: How much does it cost to use the innovation? If relevant, does the innovation offer savings compared to alternative options? (Consider not just direct costs, but other costs such as staff or user time or other resources.) How does the cost compare to outcomes (eg, in terms of health, environment or behaviour)?[40]

Click to see endnote reference (40)

Challenge 1: Having proof-of-concept evidence is not enough to drive scale

Innovators bear the burden of making the case for why potential adopters should accept and use their solution. Therefore, it is appropriate to focus on evidence that an innovation works and has the intended effect. There should be confidence, amongst all stakeholders, that an innovation can help improve humanitarian outcomes by saving lives, reducing suffering, helping maintain dignity or improving health outcomes in humanitarian settings.

Impact evidence, which uses certain methodologies to estimate an effect with confidence that the effect is caused by the innovation, is the most sought-after form of evidence in the humanitarian sector as it provides assurance that a programme has the intended effect and does no harm.[41] Showing the effectiveness of a solution is an essential component of responsible innovation: innovators have an ethical commitment to evidence-based innovation. **However, while it is essential to establish that an innovation can solve a problem, it is a leap to assume that the innovation will then succeed at scale**. In other words, this evidence is suitable as a proof of concept, but this is just the starting point for scaling.

An evaluation that looks at whether something works but not why and in what circumstances leaves key questions unanswered. Evidence of impact or effectiveness is critical, but it needs to be used purposefully (ie, communicated effectively), and be substantiated and supported by other types of evidence to drive and enable the adoption of innovations. Figure 9 shows how all types of evidence are important, but certain types lend themselves more to showing proof-of-concept or scaling feasibility.

Figure 9: Types of evidence for different stages of the innovation journey – proof of concept vs scaling

Click to see endnote reference (41)

★ Recommendation: Produce evidence that facilitates the scaling process

Innovations for Poverty Action distinguishes 'innovation research' (proof of concept) from 'path-to-scale research', which addresses the broad set of additional research needed to bring adopters onboard. This pursuit involves looking at robustness of findings; when, where and why the innovation is expected to work; and implementation considerations.[42] The Response Innovation Lab (RIL) finds that evidence that can be used to support scaling is made up of more than just impact evidence. To produce evidence for scaling, innovators should:

1. Show the impact of their innovation.
2. Establish that the problem the innovation solves is important (ie, there is a demand for the innovation).
3. Cover sustainability and implementation considerations.[43]

Table 6 expands on these points.

Table 6: Response Innovation Lab – Building evidence for scale

Evidence of...	Considerations
Impact	• Evidence of change at multiple levels with impact tied to the innovation
An important solution	• Shared understanding of the problem and agreement that the solution is important • End-user value is critical to being ethical and sustainable • Replicability of the solution is important to prove that the innovation can work in different contexts
Implementation and sustainability structures in place	• Ethical concerns must be addressed, including environmental factors, gender, human rights and inclusion • To increase uptake, the business model, funding strategy and scaling plan must show evidence of sustainability Evidence of a well-managed and highly skilled team, external connections and partnerships is necessary to build credibility • Reflections and learning should be shared to inform the wider sector

Click to see endnote references (42) (43)

Evidence that the innovation improves humanitarian outcomes is necessary, but factors beyond the innovation's desirability and impact can make or break the scaling process. Therefore, 'scaling evidence', should consider the range of additional evidence that will facilitate adoption. **Scaling evidence often begins to take into consideration a more complex range of factors as the innovation begins to be pressure-tested under 'real-world' conditions.** Types of scaling evidence that innovators should produce include the examples listed below.

Evidence that demonstrates the problem

Build demand for the innovation by convincing target stakeholders that the innovation addresses an important problem. This task requires baseline data and, ideally, a well-established body of research that explains the extent of the problem and the consequences of not addressing it.[44] It is particularly important to amplify the problem to the adopting individual or organisation if they have not already recognised or prioritised it. Establishing the importance of the problem is rooted in understanding its causes and the complexities of the humanitarian context, as well as the experiences, needs and priorities of people affected by crises.

Donors and intermediaries have an important role in defining important issue areas. Innovators can seek out individuals who advocate solving the relevant problem for support and mentorship in generating buy-in and shared understanding of the problem. Peer-led debates or forums to discuss the problem can help engage stakeholders on the issue.[45] Qualitative evidence or stories from people affected by crises people can create a compelling case for change or a call to action.[46] An example is Oxfam's Responsive Learning Project, which uses digital feedback to improve programming. Oxfam attributes a large part of the project's success to the fact that accountability was a recognised and prioritised problem in the sector.

> "Evidence that the innovation improves humanitarian outcomes is necessary, but factors beyond the innovation's desirability and impact can make or break the scaling process."

Comparative evidence that the innovation is the right solution to the problem

Even if there is agreement about a problem, innovators must also convince stakeholders that their innovation is the right solution to it. This relates to impact, but also to the 'relative advantage' of the innovation. This is difficult in cases where there is no baseline data, which is common for innovations that solve a problem in a new area. If data is available, it is useful to indicate how the innovation performs relative to alternatives, which means both competitive solutions in the marketplace and also the existing status quo solution. To make the case that their solution is the right one, innovators may also need to provide costing data that shows that the innovation delivers VfM. VfM can be defined as the optimal use of resources (ie, the best balance of cost and quality) to achieve intended outcomes.[47] Showing comparative advantage and VfM are especially important to donors who are careful with how they invest public funds and want to know that the innovation works better than other options.

An example of an innovation showing comparative advantage is REFUNITE's micro-tasking platform, LevelApp. LevelApp provides users (Ugandan refugees) with a small income for each verified task they complete. While popular among users, potential customers of the platform such as H&M and Facebook are presented with many similar micro-tasking platforms offering the same service. Therefore, to demonstrate their advantage over the competition, REFUNITE has to emphasise the platform's social impact to show that it is the preferable solution.

Innovators will need to show demand for the innovation among the target impact group and users through surveys, case studies or other qualitative feedback. Metrics for success can be determined by members of the affected population.[48] Innovators can also show evidence that they have co-created the innovation with decision makers, users and target impact group, documenting improvements that were made during this development process.

Click to see endnote references (44-48)

For stakeholders who adopt on behalf of their organisation or community, providing evidence that the innovation aligns with their values and ways of working is part of affirming that the innovation is compatible. Further, evidence of how the innovation makes the adopter's life easier (eg making their work more efficient) is compelling and motivates adoption.

Evidence of sustainability

In addition to showing evidence of the problem and the appropriateness of the solution, innovators must also create confidence in the feasibility of delivering at scale. A well-thought-through scaling strategy should include detailed delivery and business models, including financial figures and planned partnerships.[49] Evidence of a viable revenue and delivery model should show the value proposition, market, income stream and implementation approach.[50] If an innovator wishes to reduce reliance on donor funding or innovation grants, both financial viability and political influence in the humanitarian market are important.[51] Funders and adopters report that they look for proof of innovative and viable business or financing models that will work in the long term.

Innovators often struggle to consider key questions around implementation, adaptation and rollout. Given the difficulties of transferring tacit knowledge – knowledge that has not been taught, but gained from personal experience – innovators should seek to codify their innovation, including how to implement and adapt the solution for different settings, as far as possible.

They can then provide guides to support adoption and implementation. Evidence of a workable scaling strategy entails clear qualitative or process data to justify implementation approaches.[52] Innovators may also need to demonstrate that their innovation can be adapted to the relevant context.[53] The founder of an innovative music therapy programme, Make Music Matter, believes that the most important evidence they produced for scaling was a manual codifying their operating procedures (in three different languages), which continues to be integrated and updated. This implementation guide ensured quality control when their approach was replicated and overcame the difficulty of relaying tacit knowledge and convincing adopters the innovation could work in their context.

Evidence of the ability of the innovating team

Beyond the scaling strategy, it is important to show evidence of the credibility of the innovating organisation, particularly as they begin to build a reputation among networks of stakeholders who have influence over adoption.[54] Stakeholders should be confident in the innovating team's staffing, management capacity, organisational culture, structure and legal organisation, and trust their scaling approach.[55] Donors must be convinced of the innovating organisation's ability to effectively manage funding awards and their requirements. External connections and partnerships also boost the innovating organisation.

Showing evidence of this proves that an innovator has allies in the sector, access to mentoring and support, a trusted reputation and a range of potential funding sources.[56]

"Given the difficulties of transferring tacit knowledge... innovators should seek to codify their innovation, including how to implement and adapt the solution for different settings, as far as possible."

Click to see endnote references (49-56)

Practical pointers

- **Be aware that proof-of-concept evidence needs to be substantiated and supplemented by other types of scaling evidence.**
  - Different types of evidence become more or less relevant depending on what stage of the innovation journey the innovation is at.
- **Produce scaling evidence, including:**
  - Proof-of-concept evidence.
    - ◇ Evidence that the innovation works, is effective and improves lives.
  - Evidence that demonstrates the problem.
    - ◇ Draw on existing or new research to show why it should be a priority (eg, provide metrics on what happens if the problem is not addressed).
  - Evidence that the innovation is the right solution to the problem.
    - ◇ Show compatibility with target impact group and user needs, and with adopters' values and ways of working.
    - ◇ Show there is a demand for the innovation.
    - ◇ Show how the innovation compares to competition (in the marketplace and against the existing solution).
    - ◇ Show value for money (VfM) analysis.
    - ◇ Show how the innovation improves adopters' lives.
  - Evidence of a detailed scaling strategy that is feasible and sustainable.
    - ◇ Show an understanding of how the innovation performs in context, building process-related data that can trace the potential impact and feasibility of the innovation in different settings.
    - ◇ Systematically gather evidence that justifies or pressure-tests the scaling approach, delivery and business models: this includes detailed financials, plans for rollout and risk assessments.
    - ◇ Document decisions that were made throughout the scaling process and why, and build towards detailed implementation or quality control guidelines.
  - Evidence of the innovating team's capability.
    - ◇ Build confidence in the innovator's capacity to manage the scaling process by showing evidence of a well-managed team and partnerships.

Box 2: Examples of the role of evidence in scaling

- **Bring credibility to the innovation**: One role of evidence, particularly published research, is to bring credibility to an innovation. Being able to share this evidence with the sector has increased the success of some innovations, partly due to the credibility of having peer-reviewed research, and partly because of the powerful metrics that can be conveyed to stakeholders. An example of this is Simprints, a biometrics solution for the humanitarian and development sectors that uses identification tools and data analytics. Simprints noted that conducting a longitudinal study allowed it to cite a 34% increase in health visits as a result of its biometric data and this data was successful at bringing in money from donors.
- **Rally support for the innovation**: Some innovators note how qualitative evidence such as case studies or testimonials that show a positive effect on target impact groups are powerful for motivating stakeholders to believe in an innovation. This is particularly true if the innovation is a paradigm change or a 'movement,' such as Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team (HOT). HOT supports humanitarian action and community development through open mapping and relies on volunteers to do the mapping, validation and other key tasks. To inspire volunteers to join, HOT uses stories and examples of impact, and volunteers see their involvement as contributing to this impact.
- **Help innovators and adopters make key decisions**: When it comes to scaling, innovators and adopters can use evidence to inform and develop plans for implementation and contextualisation. For example, RIL Somalia worked with World Vision to develop an app to track school attendance in Somalia based on a similar tool used in Kenya. During a feasibility study, the team uncovered key updates needed for use in a new context, including translating the app into Somali and adapting attendance notes from alphabetical order to the Somali system. This research helped ensure a successful pilot by informing contextualisation decisions.
- **Demonstrate feasibility of the scaling model**: One innovator specifically mentioned using evidence to prove the feasibility of their business model/scaling plan to a decision maker. The literature emphasised using evidence for this purpose, but it was not common among our case studies.
- **Fulfil decision makers' requirements**: Decision makers often require or prefer certain evidence thresholds or look for evidence of specific criteria. Innovation Norway provides grant funds for early-stage and ready-to-scale innovations. For these grant applications, Innovation Norway looks for innovative financing models, involvement of target impact groups and users, institutional support from the innovating organisation's leadership, evidence of partnerships and high potential for impact. An innovator's grant application must contain convincing evidence on each of these points to receive a grant award.

Challenge 2: Rigorous evidence can be difficult to obtain

The rigour of evidence relates to its quality or how confident we can be that the resulting estimations or explanations are as close as possible to the truth. Rigour is improved by having an appropriate research design for what you want to know, high-quality data, and a sound theoretical framework and analysis.

> "In a humanitarian context, rigorous evidence can be expensive, complex and time-consuming to gather."

Timelines for evaluation are often such that evidence arrives long after decisions need to be made. Additionally, humanitarian innovations often encounter a lack of baseline information that makes the burden of data to be collected extremely high as innovators face a need to collect both data about their innovation as well as baseline data.

When gathering evidence on their Supertowel – a reusable antimicrobial towel that cleans hands without soap and water – Real Relief noted a circular dilemma: evidence is crucial for scaling, yet gathering that evidence requires a degree of funding, field distribution and having partners on board.

In other words, you need to have already taken major scaling steps to carry out a rigorous study that is often key to scaling.

It can also be methodologically difficult to isolate the impact of an innovation. For example, experimental research designs can raise ethical concerns, as they deny a control group immediate access to a potentially life-saving innovation. B2B technology innovations such as Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team, 510 or Disberse provide support to other humanitarian organisations, so impacts on saving lives or reducing suffering are not always directly measurable. Another problem is that experimental studies have strong internal validity but low external validity, so potential adopters may require innovators to evaluate each possible scaling context. This can put strain on resources. (See Box 3 for monitoring and evaluation terms).

> "Evidence is crucial for scaling, yet gathering that evidence requires a degree of funding, field distribution and having partners on board."

A few key informants and innovators noted that the sector's emphasis on academic research – in particular, randomised controlled trials (RCTs) – as the optimum type of evidence is not always appropriate. While particularly relevant for some innovations (ie, health or WASH innovations), RCTs are often not the best way to investigate the effectiveness of innovations are focused on improving processes and information flows, for example, or which work at system level. **Additionally, while experimental research makes sense for innovations that are on a trajectory towards scale, early-stage innovations cannot reasonably be expected to produce rigorous or experimental evidence.**

However, this is sometimes in direct tension with institutional donors' definition of 'good enough' evidence and their desire to have compelling, exhaustive and conclusive evidence of impact before deeming it ethical and appropriate to scale an innovation. For example, a donor interviewee stressed that humanitarian innovators should show evidence of impact through peer-reviewed research, particularly studies using experimental methods. **However, innovators interviewed called for a more nuanced, case-by-case approach to deciding what types of evidence are necessary, ethical, relevant and cost effective.**

It is worth noting that innovators often view institutional donors, such as the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), USAID, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and others as critical decision makers when it comes to the adoption of innovations.

While these donors have significant influence in the sector, they are rarely directly involved in making decisions about funding or adopting specific innovations. Depending on the stage of innovation, funding decisions are devolved to initiatives such as Creating Hope in Conflict: A Humanitarian Grand Challenge and Elrha's Humanitarian Innovation Fund (referred to here as intermediary funders), and adoption decision-making to country offices and humanitarian agencies.

One innovator noted that these intermediary funders are rigid in their evidence requirements, making it difficult to fund flexibly or support less well-resourced innovations that are nonetheless urgently needed. Local innovators, who work within communities affected by crisis, may face particular barriers in generating and funding research, and sometimes lack the tools or capacity to gather evidence beyond basic M&E. When decision makers uphold high expectations in terms of evidence required, they may underestimate the difficulty of conducting experimental research in many humanitarian contexts or discount other types of quality evidence. **This bias towards experimental methods can be prohibitive for some innovators and may discount other types of robust evidence that are important for decision-making**.[57]

Box 3: Monitoring and evaluation terms

- **Impact**: The measured effect of an innovation that is shown to be caused by the innovation. This is generally found by isolating the effect using experimental (or quasi-experimental) methods. In this sense, impact evidence is distinct from other measures of effectiveness.
- **Experimental research**: Experimental studies use research designs in which researchers assign participants into groups, those who receive the intervention (treatment group) and those who do not (control group). Comparing treatment and control groups allows the researchers to isolate the treatment effect or the impact.
- **Randomised controlled trial**: A randomised controlled trial (RCT) is a type of experimental design where the treatment is allocated randomly. This is considered the 'gold standard' for evaluating impact because random assignment ensures that the treatment and control groups are directly comparable.
- **Control group**: In an experimental study, the control group contains the subjects who did not receive the intervention and who serve as a comparison to the treatment group.
- **Internal validity**: The extent to which the treatment effect of an intervention estimated by a study is close to the true impact of that intervention. Experimental studies have low external validity because they use an empirical approach to test a treatment effect in a specific setting.
- **External validity**: The extent to which the findings of a study can be applied to other contexts. For example, studies based on a theoretical model or a framework that has been applied to multiple contexts before are likely to have external validity.
- **Theory of change**: A theory of change is a framework that outlines the logic for how an intervention is expected to bring about an intended impact by tracing the expected causal pathways between the intervention ('input') and its initial, intermediate and longer-term effects (often referred to as outputs, outcomes and impacts). This framework can thus guide a predetermined plan for generating evidence at each stage to show whether the theorised causal mechanisms play out.

Click to see endnote reference (57)

★ Recommendation: Focus on decision-relevant evidence

Evidence is a key input in the decision-making process. It is important to ensure that the evidence being presented is the right evidence at the right time. Innovators should continually aim for the highest level of rigour possible. This is likely to build over time, as the innovation is tested in more settings and as the team secures funding to invest in research.

Decision-relevant evidence is information that is targeted to fill specific gaps in understanding that are needed to inform key scaling or adoption decisions and practices. How relevant research is to decision-making does not determine its rigour; however, the level of rigour influences how well informed a decision is. Innovators should always strive for the best possible quality of research. Ultimately, because constraints prevent innovators from gathering unlimited evidence, the value of information is often a function of how it will be used. Approaches for gathering, analysing and communicating evidence should consider its potential to be taken up and used for decision-making.

A founder of Disberse —an innovative financial institution for aid, that used blockchain technology— noted that more robust evidence does not necessarily mean that the evidence is more decision relevant, which should be the main priority when gathering scaling evidence. The costs of generating evidence must be carefully balanced against the returns: if there is a future with a client based on the research, it may be worth it; but **there are diminishing returns from continuing to conduct small-scale pilots that do not provide new insights**. The COO of Simprints discussed how data points can comprise vanity metrics ("1 million individuals fingerprinted") or 'clarity metrics', which account for the nuances of meaningful change and scaling goals ("How many individuals did we aim to fingerprint?").

> "Vanity metrics can help with storytelling or generating buy-in; clarity metrics are necessary for decision-making and steering an innovation towards the intended impact."

One example of decision-focused evidence involves an innovator supported by RIL Uganda who developed a bracelet for reporting assault using an SMS alert feature. When pitching the bracelet to potential adopters, the innovator was constantly asked why it did not have an alarm. Formative research with users had previously uncovered that women were concerned about the safety of an alarm on the bracelet, worried that a perpetrator might try to rip the bracelet off, which informed a pivot toward SMS alerts. Documenting that these decisions were based on evidence was important when explaining the innovation to stakeholders.

★ Recommendation: Make sure to use an appropriate type of evidence

As explained in the previous section, **the value of evidence does not lie in the methodology alone, but also in what you want to know and how the evidence will be used.**[58] Sometimes, a problem with evidence is that it is not appropriate for the audience or not the right evidence for the stage of scaling; for example, you may have output-level evidence but need outcome- or impact-level evidence.

Nutley et al. consider several methodologies and their appropriateness for different research questions, as shown in Table 7.[59]

Table 7: What counts as good evidence?

Research question	Qualitive research	Survey	Case-controlled studies	Cohort studies	RCTs	Quasi-experimental studies	Non-experimental studies	System reviews
Does doing this work better than doing that?				+	++	+		+++
How does it work?	++	+					+	+++
Does it matter?	++	++						+++
Will it do more good than harm?	+		+	+	++	+	+	+++
Will service users be willing or want to take up the innovation offered?	++	+			+	+	+	+++
Is it worth buying the innovation?					++			+++
Is it the right solution for these people?	++	++						++
Are users, providers, and other stakeholders satisfied with the innovation?	++	++	+	+				+

Note: the number of **+** marks indicates how appropriate that design is for the research question, where **+++** indicates the most appropriate method(s).

Click to see endnote reference (58) (59)

Innovators should consider what type of evidence is appropriate for their research question. For example, "How does it work?" may require more systematic and qualitative evidence, whereas "does it do more good than harm?" may be better suited to experimental methods.[60] Having a strong theory of change[61] as a theoretical basis for understanding an innovation is also important to guide research designs and evidence should be presented in the framework of this theory.[62]

The type of evidence also depends on the target audience and the evidence language they speak. Disberse's experience with evidence for scale was that **the type of evidence needed to inform a business model was very different from evidence that would persuade a client**. For example, financial teams within NGOs and donors wanted to see that Disberse was a legitimate, regulated financial institution; whereas data experts wanted evidence of how the platform was built with hybrid architecture and proof of data security. An innovation expert from UNICEF noted that decision makers may need to be primed to receive types of evidence that they are not accustomed to interpreting; for example, if a stakeholder is quantitatively driven or prefers RCTs, they will need additional support from the communicator to derive meaning from other types of evidence or evidence generated through other methods and approaches.

Spotlight on qualitative evidence:

Community-based management of acute malnutrition programming and Humanitarian OpenStreetMap.

A major evidence gap exists when it comes to user experience and understanding whether target impact groups are satisfied with an innovation. Gathering this feedback should use ethnographic or in-depth qualitative approaches to understand reactions to the innovation in context. Qualitative research explores and tries to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviour and interactions. It generates non-numerical data, which can be gathered through, for example, in-depth interviews, focus groups, documentary analysis and participant observation.[63]

Qualitative interviews, case studies and testimonials may be undervalued in the humanitarian sector. Many innovations across sectors have non-impact evidence or qualitative intermediate results that suggest a high potential for positive impact.[64] **Even with rigorous impact evidence, qualitative evidence is often instrumental in tracing causal mechanisms or processes.** For example, CMAM Report, a technology-based innovation designed to facilitate more reliable reporting of data on community-based management of acute malnutrition (CMAM) programming, found that case study-type evidence was essential to trace the trade-off of the impact of malnutrition rates against other priorities of heads of households.

Qualitative evidence can be better suited to building a narrative around an innovation's vision and potential impact. Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team (HOT) discussed the importance of rallying support for its innovation and motivating volunteers by showing them that they are involved in a 'movement' that can have positive impacts on people affected by crises. HOT's approach to evidence, acknowledging that it is difficult to isolate the effect of its work on people affected by crises, involves collecting data on outputs, getting partners to contribute impact evaluations or qualitative data HOT has collected related to mapping, and packaging this with HOT's own case studies and testimonials. This approach involves triangulating HOT's impact story with various sources of suggestive evidence and telling a story around the team's vision for, and likely impact of, the innovation.

Click to see endnote references (60-64)

★ Recommendation: Understand what evidence standard you should meet

Nesta notes that evidence will be limited in the early stages of innovation. But as scale progresses, having stronger evidence will increase confidence that the innovation has impact, and can lead to stakeholders supporting and investing in an innovation, and ultimately adopting it. Nesta's standards of evidence in progressive stages is summarised in Table 8.

Ultimately, rigorous experimental studies are valuable to be confident that an innovation has the intended impact before taking it to scale. Given their reliance on public funds and working in a humanitarian context, decision makers in the humanitarian sector are unlikely to lower their evidence needs, because they have a higher ethical burden of proof than private sector actors. However, funders are largely aware of the time and cost barriers to undertaking experimental research and some in the sector delineate funds specifically for research. For example, grantees of GSMA's 'Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation' Fund are offered specific additional funding and support for research and evaluation. Further advocacy in the sector for research funding could help to close this gap.

Table 8: Nesta Standards of evidence[65]

Level	Standard
1	You can describe what you do and why it matters, logically, coherently and convincingly – suitable for early-stage innovations and can draw on existing data and a strong theory of change to show why the innovation could have impact and why that would be an improvement
2	You have data showing a positive change but cannot confirm that your innovation caused the change
3	You can demonstrate causality with reference to a control group or comparison group
4	You have one or more independent evaluations that confirm your conclusions
5	You have manuals, systems and procedures to support and ensure replication of your innovation

Source: Modified from Nesta (2013) Standards of Evidence

Click to see endnote reference (65)

In cases where experimental research is not feasible, innovators have found creative ways of using theoretical evidence to suggest high potential for impact.

Disberse worked with various NGOs on small-scale pilots that suggested scaling would be possible. However, it needed evidence of what impacts at scale there might be in terms of cutting costs, improving transparency and reducing banking time, and how Disberse compared to alternative financial institutions. Disberse undertook a simulation exercise that used historical transactions over US$140 million to simulate how its platform would compare against existing channels for disbursing aid. The exercise was necessary for large institutions such as UN agencies and the Department for International Development (DFID – now FCDO) as they needed an 'extra step' in terms of evidence before they would commit to a real-time pilot. **The simulation was effective at engaging these stakeholders because it used available data convincingly to answer their key questions about what scale would look like.** Grantmakers that support early-stage innovations report that they understand evidence challenges and have indicated that theoretical evidence or qualitative evidence thoughtfully conducted to show potential for impact meets their standards. However, as an innovation progresses, their expectation of more robust methodologies increases.

Practical pointers

- **Prioritise evidence that will go to the heart of decision-making: what is the question the decision maker wants answered?**
  - Distinguish vanity metrics, which may look good in a newsletter or on a website, from clarity metrics, which are likely to be used by a decision maker.
- **Consider your research questions and determine what types of evidence are most suitable to answer them (see Table 7).**
- **Understand what standard of evidence you are likely to be required to meet depending on where you are on your innovation journey: if necessary, seek funding and partnerships to undertake research.**
  - If at an early stage and experimental evidence is not feasible, produce compelling theoretical evidence that shows your real potential for impact.

Challenge 3: Limitations of the role of evidence when it comes to decision-making

Though innovators we interviewed acknowledged the role of high-quality evidence in persuading key stakeholders to adopt new solutions – including the ethical obligation to do so – several noted that it is not always the most important factor in decision-making. In fact, several innovators noted that rigorous evidence is not always required for them to move forward in the scaling process. For example, Disberse found that while its small pilots provided suggestive evidence that its innovation could work, it were ultimately driving forward without a very strong evidentiary case. Despite this, most clients that Disberse pitched to were compelled by the potential impact and stakeholders were often wholeheartedly on board.

Oxfam's Responsive Listening Project has evaluation (impact) evidence, but does not rely on it when convincing country teams to adopt. This is because there is a foundation of trust between the innovator and stakeholders. Country teams have confidence that a project would not be shared with them if it did not have adequate evidence to support it and can therefore focus their decision-making on evidence of how it will improve their everyday operations and activities. The dynamic here is likely to be different if the innovator is external to the adopting organisation or does not have significant organisational backing.

Innovation experts have noted that individuals rarely move based on evidence alone. Even adopters who are persuaded by evidence still need other motivators for them to really mobilise. **And there is the challenge that even with perfect evidence, innovators may still face scepticism that the innovation is too difficult, comes at the wrong time, or "won't work in this context"**. For example, 510 initially faced scepticism from within the Red Cross, not due to concerns about the work of the 510 team, but rather because its business model relied on volunteers in a way that was unfamiliar to the Red Cross. A few innovators, such as Real Relief (Supertowel), described having strong user feedback and even expressions of interest from decision makers, but could not motivate stakeholders to actually buy the product.

★ Recommendation: Focus on how stakeholders perceive evidence (ie, what their preferences are), what, when and how evidence is communicated, and therefore how they receive it

The perception of evidence affects whether a stakeholder will trust and take on board that information. This point is a core component of diffusion theory, which finds that we are more likely to trust and value the opinions and recommendations of people similar to us — something Rogers refers to as 'homophily'.[66] **Using opinion leaders or champions who have influence and homophily with stakeholders can be critical in translating between potential adopters and innovators**. Finding a credible 'co-evangelist' to present evidence is an effective way to get stakeholders to pay attention and understand key messages. Sharing evidence updates in real time and being candid about what has not worked can also build trust among stakeholders who appreciate transparency. Focus on how stakeholders perceive evidence (ie, what their preferences are), what, when and how evidence is communicated, and therefore how they receive it.

A few innovators pointed out that decision makers often do not go into evidence in depth. Instead, they base decisions on its perceived credibility: whether it has been peer-reviewed, comes from a credible source or speaks their evidence language. For example, Faircap – a microbiological filtration system for water bottles – uses technology with a body of evidence to support the effectiveness of its filters. However, when convincing users to adopt the innovation, it was a question of whether they decided to trust that the filters worked. For users, it often came down to in-person practical demonstrations; for NGOs, conducting their own lab tests.

★ Recommendation: Consider who should produce and communicate evidence

Innovators are not necessarily experts on evidence, and deciding who produces and communicates evidence to stakeholders is important.

Click to see endnote reference (66)

Additionally, generating evidence internally may have a bias towards supportive evidence: having external evaluations from a third party allows decision-making based on objective and quality research. **Research firms, academic institutions or organisations can be important partners in decision-making and conveying evidence effectively to stakeholders.**

Smaller or local research partners often have a comparative advantage in carrying out qualitative or small-scale field research to test an innovation in an operating context, or to gather user or beneficiary feedback. Larger, more reputable (and expensive) organisations can bring credibility and visibility to research and are often appropriate for undertaking more methodologically complex studies. Potential adopters pay attention to the names of organisations that participate in the research. When first starting out, conducting a study with a small but respected NGO can help innovators make their way onto the radar of larger organisations. **Research partnerships with governments, universities, humanitarian organisations or research firms are a great way to 'move up the ladder'.**

Several innovators found it useful to leverage associations with partners – or to downplay those associations – to add credibility to their evidence. For example, depending on their audience, 510 drew on its association with the Red Cross as one of the most respected humanitarian organisations to build trust in the quality of 510's work, or alternatively underscored its flexibility and cutting-edge character as a separate start-up. If a well-respected organisation is a partner involved in generating evidence, the association can be emphasised to improve trust in and attention to the evidence.

★ Recommendation: Tailor your communication, while continuing to promote ethical and responsible innovation uptake

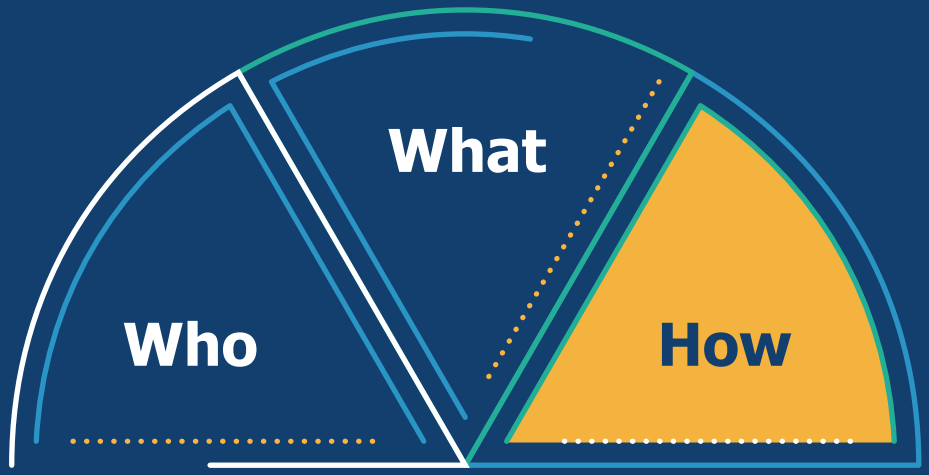
A successful innovator is a versatile storyteller who uses evidence adaptively to suit different audiences. To use evidence well, the innovator must understand the context in which adopters and decision makers operate, and strategically deploy evidence to respond to individuals' needs and motivations.[67] Innovators should communicate evidence in ways that stakeholders are accustomed to and respond to their priorities using smart communication. A compelling story around an innovation must go hand in hand with evidence if an innovator wishes to evoke action and support for their innovation. For example, Make Music Matter, through media attention and an emotive vision for empowering survivors of sexual assault, had already brought stakeholders on board by the time it had rigorous studies that proved its innovation was effective at reducing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety. Part 3 of this paper has more comprehensive advice on tailoring communication.

Practical pointers

- **Improve perceptions of your evidence by:**
  - Using expert opinion to improve credibility.
  - Communicating evidence frequently and transparently.
- **Find the right research partner who can provide support in undertaking and communicating research and conveying the credibility of evidence.**
- **Highlight (or downplay) your strategic relationships when conveying evidence, to ensure that it is perceived as reliable and important.**
- **Tailor communication of evidence to the particular audience and their priorities**
  - Use their evidence language.

Click to see endnote reference (67)

TAILORING AND COMMUNICATING EVIDENCE



TAILORING AND COMMUNICATING EVIDENCE

So far this paper has covered the evidence needed for scaling (the what) and the stakeholders who will receive and act upon this evidence (the who). Now we turn to practical ways in which the evidence can be communicated to best facilitate adoption (the how). The communication of evidence should consider that innovators are trying to alter how stakeholders perceive the importance of the proposed solution; how willing stakeholders are to devote resources to the innovation; and how they project themselves into a future where they have adopted the innovation.[68]

Abstract and inaccessible modes of communication can alienate certain groups. Formative research should inform a communication strategy that is tailored to different intended audiences.[69] This section provides practical guidance on how to target evidence to the psychology of stakeholders and use smart communication that motivates change.

Tailoring communication of evidence to stakeholders

To use evidence well, innovators must understand the context in which adopters and decision makers operate, and strategically deploy evidence to respond to individuals' needs and motivations.[70]

In other words, innovators should be versatile storytellers who can read their audience effectively and adapt their messaging accordingly. Whether a stakeholder is a decision maker, user or target impact group, it is useful to consider:

- seniority level and preferred formality of communication
- level of rapport and confidence with the innovating team
- level of engagement and interest
- preference for rigorous evidence vs storytelling
- preferred medium of information
- size of the group of stakeholders
- any structural constraints on their communication[71]
- policy priorities and political considerations (especially for decision makers)[72]
- organisational culture and ways of working[73]
- cultural or socioeconomic background[74]
- familiarity/preference for or against innovation or sector jargon.

Communication that distils the core features and objectives of an innovation in a way that resonates with the stakeholder's needs, or demonstrates the effectiveness of the innovation in an operating context, is convincing. Leveraging adopters' status as members of a community or organisation is a key strategy. It may involve interactive debates about the problem at hand and discussions about data, or getting senior or opinion leaders (who people tend to believe) to deliver the message.[75]

> "The communication of evidence should consider that innovators are trying to alter how stakeholders perceive the importance of the proposed solution."

Click to see endnote references (68-75)

Framing the innovation to leverage peer pressure, normative reasons to adopt and reputational incentives (associating adoption with status in the adopting community) can also motivate adopters.[76] This may include recognising situations in which labelling something as an 'innovation' may be enabling for certain stakeholders but could create a barrier for others.

How the meaning of an innovation is conveyed and even the timing of its introduction depend on the wider political and social context and its relationship with the policy priorities of the adopter.[77] Innovators can leverage policy priorities if they can show how their innovation supports the policy. **Innovation experts note the importance of presenting an innovation as manageable, able to be embedded in institutional structures and in line with a group's values and ways of working**. What may seem like basic or technical details, such as intellectual property and licensing, should also be included.

Following the guidance in part 1 of this paper, innovators should map key actors and build a communication strategy accordingly. Formative assessments of the adopting group and stakeholders can help innovators shape communication of evidence around these issues.[78] **Several innovators noted that understanding stakeholders is a learning-by-doing process, and targeting their incentives can be "a full-time job"**. Some experts recommended designating an individual or team to drive uptake, as good innovators are not always the best people to communicate their innovation. Innovators who did not have prior knowledge of the humanitarian sector noted that this was a major barrier. Having someone who can translate between different stakeholders and manage communications can be helpful with mapping and targeting.

Having mapped the stakeholders, innovators can use several strategies to help adopters extract meaning and salience from evidence. Innovators should identify which channels are available and use them to encourage stakeholders towards adoption.

> "Labelling something as an 'innovation' may be enabling for certain stakeholders but could create a barrier for others."

Creating better direct interactions with stakeholders through platforms

Innovators and experts said that getting stakeholders together is an important strategy to create consensus around the problems an innovation solves and to build a shared understanding of the innovation and its value. Creating a space – in person or virtually – for debates and interrogation ensures that stakeholders feel their voice matters and they can have input into the innovation. One innovator mentioned that presenting research at conferences was the most effective mode of communicating evidence because it leads to face-to-face discussions, which build ties with decision makers.

Several innovators noted that face-to-face communication was the best way to make key messages understood, finalise important decisions or simply develop closer relationships with stakeholders. In-person interaction builds empathy and emotional engagement with an innovation.

Convening stakeholders in a forum from the early stages was also a way that innovators generated buy-in and rapport. **Persistence and maintaining regular communication over time ensures that these individuals will stay engaged and lays the groundwork for any eventual asks. An innovation manager with RIL Somalia described the importance of including everyone in this process.**

For example, RIL Somalia invited Somali government officials, who were potential future decision makers, to workshops, trainings and other events, to keep them informed and involved or even just as a courtesy.

Using open source technology and crowdsourcing are other ways that innovators can interact with stakeholders.

Click to see endnote references (76-78)

People are given the opportunity to review and discuss an innovation or its components. Innovators can use this information to improve their innovation and stakeholder engagement. It also increases trust and transparency around the innovation.

Storytelling

The experience of scaling innovations within the NHS revealed that qualitative evidence and storytelling provided the most compelling motivation for adoption by drawing on adopters' empathy and technical understanding.[79] Stories from target impact groups, testimonials of converted sceptics, and anecdotes about the determination of the innovation team are powerful and resonate with target audiences. By capturing interest and 'winning hearts as well as minds,' storytelling can increase stakeholder engagement, enthusiasm and support for an innovation.[80] Note that in the IT sector, innovators tend to find that the innovation should speak for itself or be demand driven, and they do not always have the ability to measure impact through emotive measurements such as lives impacted or affected. The UN Innovation Network notes that storytelling should focus on impact, draw on the audience's emotions, and focus on what is unique about the particular innovation and scaling journey in question, while still being backed up by quantitative and qualitative evidence.

An innovator may want to draw on themes around challenging the status quo or jumping ahead of competitors to emphasise uniqueness and value add.[81] It can be useful to portray the innovation in terms of certain clichés: serendipity (identifying an opportunity at the right moment), perseverance (making clever pivots), trend-mindedness (seeing a convergence of trends leading towards the innovation) and being an underdog (winning people over with a strong vision).[82] Other strategies include highlighting partnership success, creating impact vignettes, spotlighting risks taken and demonstrating leadership.[83]

> "Qualitative evidence and storytelling provided the most compelling motivation for adoption by drawing on adopters' empathy and technical understanding."

Spotlight on communications:

Humanitarian Open StreetMap Team – engagement through storytelling

Storytelling was important in engaging volunteers who were excited to get involved because of the impact they might make. HOT would arrange for volunteers to hear from an organisation that had benefited from HOT's services – such as MSF or another humanitarian organisation – who would tell the volunteers how important the innovation was for their decision-making. This provided a compelling reason for volunteers to get involved.

For other purposes, such as attracting partners and donors, HOT use a combination of quantitative data (achieving targets, outputs, key metrics), along with collecting any evaluations partners have done on programmes that use the innovation, and qualitative stories and testimonials, to create a full package telling the innovation's story.

Click to see endnote references (79-83)

People respond well to, retain and retell an emotional story that conveys the journey and not just the end product. This can include stories of when and where the innovation did not work, and required pivots and changes. This honesty builds trust with stakeholders, and also shows how innovators have tested different scenarios and responded to them effectively.

Effective storytelling should still be evidence based. One innovator emphasised using a compelling framework to convey evidence with a strong narrative. This can help potential adopters make sense of micro-evidence that does not speak for itself, or better understand a solution they have never seen before. Another innovation manager noted that innovators are constantly told to make a convincing pitch, but grounding that story in evidence is a more nuanced – and sometimes difficult – approach.

Demonstrations

A particularly effective method of communicating evidence is through demonstration. Experiential evidence and practical demonstrations of an innovation can influence early adopters if they can see the benefits of the innovation in a context similar to their own.[84] As a reminder, 'observability' of the innovation is one of Rogers' five attributes of innovations that contribute most to the rate of adoption of an innovation (see Table 1).

Visual evidence is often more compelling than written words. This is because it is sometimes hard to describe verbally what your innovation does: diagrams, pictures or video demonstrations allow visualisation and conceptualisation. In other words, **demonstrations connect the dots so that people 'get it' and can begin to imagine themselves adopting an innovation**.

Data visualisations are also very useful, especially for data-related innovations. Many stakeholders may not be accustomed to interpreting data in its raw form, so seeing it in a chart or graphic form shows what an innovation can do. Oxfam's Responsive Listening Project found that sharing its data dashboard with stakeholders led to wider acceptance and adoption of the innovation, even among non-data and non-technical people.

Peer-to-peer mechanisms

When diffusion takes place between two individuals, their differences – gaps in culture or differences in ways of communicating – can get in the way; for example, innovators often have technical know-how, but technical language can alienate a non-technical audience. This difference in background is referred to by Rogers as 'heterophily'.[85] To get around this difficulty, innovators should capitalise on the interpersonal nature of adoption decisions and use peer-to-peer communication to convey evidence.[86] Innovations need a voice to communicate this evidence to stakeholders.

Spotlight on communications:

Faircap – engagement through demonstrations

Faircap is a water filter suited to emergency contexts, backed by peer-reviewed evidence that it is effective. However, getting users on board is most effectively done through a demonstration of it working. Faircap staff show users first-hand, filtering water and drinking it themselves to instil confidence in the filter among users.

In some contexts, the water is visibly filthy, so users are pleased to see clear water emerge. However, in other situations (such as in a refugee camp in Lebanon), users are accustomed to getting water delivered by truck and concern about its condition is not as great. Therefore, seeing a demonstration of the Faircap team drinking the filtered water promotes trust and value in the product.

Click to see endnote reference (84-86)

Various stakeholders act as intermediaries between innovators and adopters, who can help support and communicate innovations effectively. They include change agents, opinion leaders and champions. **The interpersonal nature of adoption decisions means that peer-led communication is often the best way to motivate adopters.**[87] Evidence backing your innovation can carry more authority and persuasiveness when coming from such intermediaries. However, evidence is also needed to persuade intermediaries to get on board.

Opinion leaders are individuals who have social influence over attitudes or behaviour for – or against – an innovation, so can influence adoption decisions. Their voice holds credibility and authority by virtue of their position. Similarly, champions are charismatic individuals within a community or organisation who give their support to an innovation and help overcome resistance or indifference to it.[88] Anyone can be a champion, but they are ideally connected with others in the organisation and have good 'people skills', to influence adoption.[89] **A senior-level champion can help an innovator navigate bureaucracy, build a scaling strategy, capture attention of leadership and gain wider visibility.**[90] Opinion leaders and champions have an important role in translating or fitting the innovation to its operating context at scale.[91]

Spotlight on communications:

Make Music Matters, Using evidence to get an opinion leader on board

Darcy Ataman, the founder of innovative music therapy initiative Make Music Matter, visited Panzi hospital in the Democratic Republic of Congo and watched as patients and hospital staff took part in morning prayers.

In the prayer session, they sang and Darcy realised that this was a place where music therapy could have a huge impact. Nobel Laureate Dr Denis Mukwege is a gynaecologist and human rights activist at Panzi hospital. Darcy realised that having Dr Mukwege's support could drive scale enormously. However, his support was hard-won. Darcy spent three years based near the hospital, persistently showing up and building relationships, which created trust with staff and local partners and eventually secured him a meeting with Dr Mukwege.

While Darcy had pilots, baselines and needs assessments, Dr Mukwege pushed for medical evidence. It was absolutely necessary ethically to have this impact evidence. But it was also doing the work of building rapport and trust with stakeholders, in particular Dr Mukwege as a champion, that drove scaling forward. The Dr Denis Mukwege Foundation is now a major implementing partner of Make Music Matter.

Click to see endnote references (87-91)

Spotlight on communication:

510 Red Cross and Oxfam's Responsive Listening Project

510 is an in-house tech start-up within the Netherlands Red Cross. It started in 2016 and has scaled to 100 people: 23 full-time staff in the Netherlands, 20 local staff in 9 data teams in different countries, and 65 professional volunteers. With its innovative new way of working, 510 needed to persuade other Red Cross teams to consider how data could be used in their work. From day one, 510 had the CEO of the Netherlands Red Cross as its supporter and champion. The CEO was from the private sector and valued the work that 510 was proposing. Having senior leadership on board meant that 510 had space within the organisation to grow and access to resources. It eventually got data and digital work embedded in the Netherlands Red Cross 10-year strategy, which is compelling evidence to support further establishing and scaling 510's work.

Oxfam's Responsive Listening Project found that country directors and senior leadership are essential decision makers when it comes to the adoption and spread of their innovation. Despite having senior HQ leadership on board, Oxfam has found that this top-down approach, with HQ telling country directors to use the system, is not effective. However, country teams sharing and promoting the system to other country programmes is effective. Oxfam is looking to implement a 'buddy system', which facilitates such sharing and support among countries.

Innovators can activate networks of stakeholders and practitioners to build influence and credibility, create a community of individuals who believe in an innovation, and set up forums for discussion and to get involved.[92] CBM Global described the importance of bringing together humanitarian decision makers with academia and communities of practice to create forums where innovations can be discussed and interrogated. Examples of this include: the Cash Learning Partnership, a collaborative global network that engages in evidence and policy debates around cash transfer programming; the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, a humanitarian coordination forum of the UN system; or think tanks such as the ODI's Humanitarian Practice Network.

Training and embedding a representative of an innovation within the adopting organisation has also been an effective peer mechanism for transmitting the behaviour change needed to use the innovation or to incorporate it into standard organisational practices. This approach of leveraging peer interactions to modify perceptions of evidence and accelerate adoption has been effective in the private sector. For example, Toyota used 'guest engineers' to persuade suppliers to adopt novel manufacturing practices and improve performance across the supply chain. These engineers functioned as coaches working alongside supplier staff for extended periods to transfer tacit knowledge and adapt the novel manufacturing approaches to the working context.[93] In the humanitarian sector, 510 has had success using a cycle of regular training to diffuse its innovations to other teams within the Red Cross federation, and often brings adopting teams to the Netherlands for training and to demonstrate first-hand how to integrate innovations into team management.

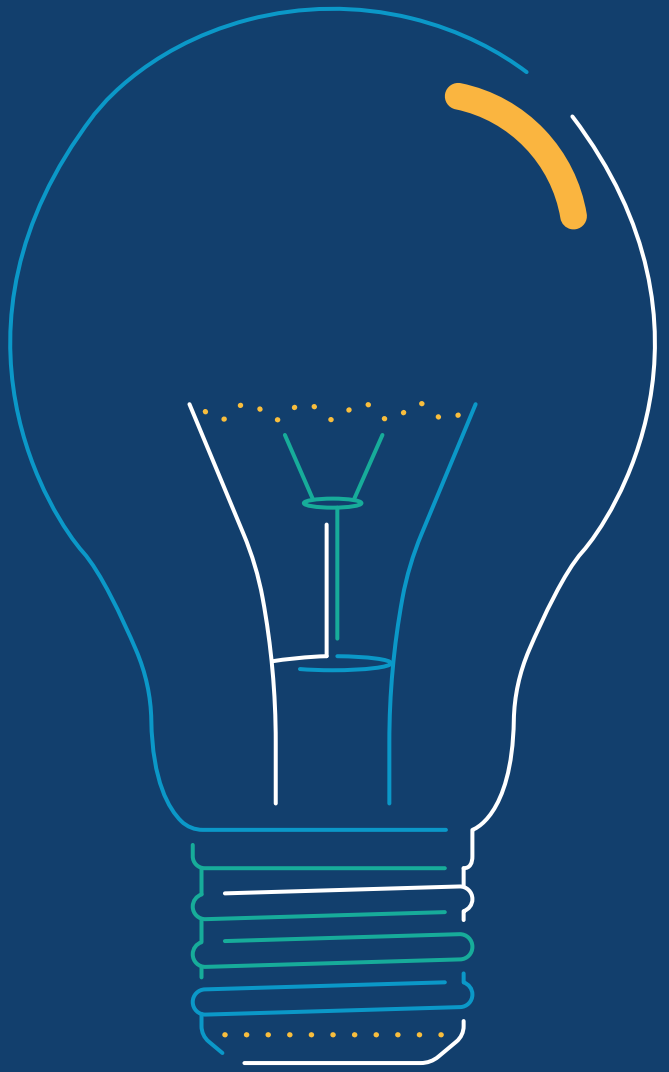
Ultimately, peer-to-peer channels can help modify perceptions of the evidence about an innovation to spur the necessary behaviour change, configure the innovation to local circumstances and negotiate a shared understanding of the innovation for adoption.

Click to see endnote references (92) (93)

Practical pointers

- **Use formative research to create a communication strategy that is tailored to different audiences (stakeholders).**
  - Do not use abstract or inaccessible modes of communication.
- **If capacity allows, consider hiring someone or delegating a team member to work full-time on diffusion activities.**
- **Use platforms to facilitate stakeholder interaction.**
  - Aim for face-to-face interaction with stakeholders.
  - Present at or attend relevant conferences.
- **Be persistent and maintain regular communication to ensure stakeholder engagement.**
- **Invite stakeholders to events around your innovation, such as workshops and trainings, even if just as a courtesy.**
- **Consider if open-sourcing part or all of your innovation would be suitable for engaging with stakeholders.**
- **Use storytelling.**
  - Consider whether emotive storytelling to 'win hearts and minds' is suitable for your innovation.
- **If using storytelling:**
  - Gather stories from target impact groups and users, testimonials of former sceptics and anecdotes about the determination of the innovation team.
  - Focus on impact, draw on emotions of your stakeholders and highlight the uniqueness of your innovation and scaling journey.
  - Consider portraying the innovation using clichés such as 'the underdog', and 'being in the right place at the right time'.
  - Be honest and include stories of where things have gone wrong and the innovation has had to pivot.
- **Perform demonstrations.**
  - If possible, demonstrate your solution in action.
  - Consider using visual evidence such as diagrams, pictures, videos and data visualisations.
- **Leverage peer-to-peer mechanisms.**
  - Use evidence to get intermediaries such as opinion leaders, change agents and champions on your side.
  - Leverage intermediaries to help give your evidence a stronger voice.
  - Create or participate in forums that are relevant to your topic to get stakeholders such as academia and humanitarian organisations on your side.
  - Consider training and embedding a representative of your innovation within a stakeholder group (eg, within a target humanitarian organisation).

CONCLUSION



CONCLUSION

This learning paper has explored how evidence can be used effectively to enable and drive innovation adoption. Evidence is essential to prove a solution works and does no harm, showing why stakeholders should care, and disentangling the complexities of the scaling process. Yet the existence of evidence alone cannot drive an innovation through all of the challenges that it will face on the journey to scale.

Research into the diffusion of innovations shows that diffusion is a social process, where evidence supporting an innovation cannot be separated from the individuals who perceive and assign meaning to it. This makes it crucial to understand who the stakeholders are that will be receiving and perceiving evidence, and what their enablers and constraints are. Innovators must be adaptive and versatile, reading their audience and understanding their motivations, to frame and present evidence in a compelling way.

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

> Many barriers to scaling are simply out of innovators' control. But what innovators can control is how they strategically shape perceptions of their solution to encourage stakeholders towards adoption.

PRACTICAL POINTERS CHECKLIST

PRACTICAL POINTERS CHECKLIST

Get the right evidence, to the right stakeholders, in the right way

Identifying and understanding stakeholders

Check	Practical pointers
☐	• **Undertake stakeholder mapping: identify the target impact group, users and decision makers.**[94] - Consider other indirect stakeholders, who could include regulators, government, suppliers and researchers. - Use your business model to help determine who your stakeholders are. - Use your network, including intermediary organisations in the humanitarian innovation sector, to help with your mapping.
☐	• **Engage with people who have insider knowledge.** - This could be a variety of people, including field staff who know local communities; and humanitarians with extensive sector knowledge who understand organisations' structures, priorities and decision-making processes
☐	• **Attend meetings and conferences: network to try to learn how stakeholder organisations are structured and operate.**
☐	• **If the stakeholder is an organisation (eg, an NGO or UN agency), consider approaching local-level actors such as country offices, first.** - Higher levels (including HQ) are likely to be less flexible and more bureaucratic.
☐	• **Consider the sector you are operating in to determine which humanitarian organisation actors are most relevant.**
☐	• U**nderstand common stakeholder enablers and constraints.** - Speak with your project's stakeholders to see whether their enablers and constraints are unique.

Click to see endnote reference (94)

Identifying and understanding stakeholders

Check	Practical pointers
☐	• **Use tools such as Force Field Analysis to visualise stakeholders' enablers and constraints.**
☐	• **Invite stakeholders to participate in designing, implementing and evaluating the innovation from as early as possible.** - This includes potential target impact groups, users and decision makers (donors, intermediaries and humanitarian organisations). - Seek stakeholders' feedback on the innovation: let them interrogate it and set up a forum for questions and answers. - When seeking buy-in from stakeholders, focus on the organisation (or team) rather than individuals: this will mitigate the impact of people changing positions or leaving.
☐	• **Find out the potential adopters priorities and policy agendas and try and align your innovation with them.** - Use evidence to show how they are connected. - If your innovation does not fit existing priorities or policy agendas, consider advocacy for it to be included in future programming.

Prioritising and generating evidence

Check	Practical pointers
☐	• **Be aware that proof-of-concept evidence needs to be substantiated and supplemented by other types of scaling evidence.** - Different types of evidence become more or less relevant depending on what stage of the innovation journey the innovation is at.
☐	• **Produce scaling evidence, including:** - Proof-of-concept evidence. ◇ Evidence that the innovation works, is effective and improves lives. - Evidence that demonstrates the problem. ◇ Draw on existing or new research to show why it should be a priority (eg, provide metrics on what happens if the problem is not addressed). - Evidence that the innovation is the right solution to the problem. ◇ Show compatibility with target impact group and user needs, and with adopters' values and ways of working. ◇ Show there is a demand for the innovation. ◇ Show how the innovation compares to competition (in the marketplace and against the existing solution). ◇ Show value for money (VfM) analysis. ◇ Show how the innovation improves adopters' lives. - Evidence of a detailed scaling strategy that is feasible and sustainable. ◇ Show an understanding of how the innovation performs in context, building process-related data that can trace the potential impact and feasibility of the innovation in different settings. ◇ Systematically gather evidence that justifies or pressure-tests the scaling approach, delivery and business models: this includes detailed financials, plans for rollout and risk assessments. ◇ Document decisions that were made throughout the scaling process and why,and build towards detailed implementation or quality control guidelines. - Evidence of the innovation team's ability. ◇ Build confidence in the innovator's capacity to manage the scaling process by showing evidence of a well-managed team and partnerships.

Prioritising and generating evidence

Check	Practical pointers
☐	• **Prioritise evidence that will go to the heart of the decision-making: what is the question the decision maker wants answered?** - Distinguish vanity metrics, which may look good in a newsletter or on a website, from decision-relevant clarity metrics, which are likely to be used by a decision maker.
☐	• **Consider your research questions and determine what types of evidence are most suitable to answer them (see Table 7).**
☐	• **Understand what standard of evidence you are likely to be required to meet depending where you are on your innovation journey: if necessary, seek funding and partnerships to undertake research.** - If at an early stage and experimental evidence is not feasible, produce compelling theoretical evidence that shows your real potential for impact.
☐	• **Improve how stakeholders perceive your evidence by:** - Using expert opinions to improve credibility. - Communicating evidence frequently and transparently.
☐	• **Find the right research partner who can provide support in undertaking and communicating research and conveying the credibility of the evidence.** - Highlight (or downplay) your strategic relationships when conveying evidence, to ensure that it is perceived as reliable and important.
☐	• **Tailor communication of evidence to the particular audience and their priorities.** - Use their evidence language.

Tailoring and communicating evidence

Check	Practical pointers
☐	• **Use platforms to facilitate stakeholder interaction.** - Aim for face-to-face interaction with stakeholders. - Present at or attend relevant conferences. • Be persistent and maintain regular communication to ensure stakeholder engagement. • Invite stakeholders to events around your innovation, such as workshops and trainings, even if just as a courtesy. • Consider if open-sourcing part or all of your innovation will be suitable for engaging with stakeholders.
☐	• **Use storytelling.** - Consider whether emotive storytelling to 'win hearts and minds' is suitable for your innovation; for example, some tech innovations may consider this unnecessary as tech can often speak for itself. - If using storytelling: ◇ Gather stories from target impact groups and users, testimonials of former sceptics and anecdotes about the determination of the innovation team. ◇ Focus on impact, draw on emotions of your stakeholders and highlight the uniqueness of your innovation and scaling journey. ◇ Consider portraying the innovation using clichés such as 'the underdog', and 'being in the right place at the right time'. ◇ Be honest and include stories of where things have gone wrong and the innovation has had to pivot.
☐	• **Give demonstrations:** - If possible, demonstrate your solution in action. - Consider using visual evidence such as diagrams, pictures, videos and data visualisations.
☐	• **Leverage peer-to-peer mechanisms:** - Use evidence to get intermediaries such as opinion leaders, change agents and champions on your side. - Leverage intermediaries to help give your evidence a stronger voice. ◇ Create or participate in forums that are relevant to your topic to get stakeholders such as academia and humanitarian organisations on your side. ◇ Consider training and embedding a representative of your innovation within a stakeholder group (eg, within a target humanitarian organisation).

ANNEX 1

Table 2: Case studies included in the primary research

Organisation	Organisation type	Sector	Type of innovation	Scaling status
Disberse	Start-up	Tech	Process/paradigm	Shut down Nov. 2020
Simprints	Non-profit tech company	Tech	Product	Successfully scaling
510	Red Cross initiative	Tech	Product/paradigm	Successfully scaling
Faircap	Start-up	WASH	Product	Development/early scaling
Real Relief	Private company	WASH	Product	Piloting/early scaling
Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team (HOT)	NGO	Tech	Product/paradigm	Successfully scaling
REFUNITE (LevelApp)	Start-up	Tech	Process	Piloting/early scaling
Response Innovation Lab (RIL) Somalia	Innovation lab	Multiple	Process	Range of scaling points
Make Music Matter	NGO	Gender	Process	Successfully scaling
Response Innovation Lab (RIL) Uganda	Innovation lab	Multiple	Process	Range of scaling points
Responsive Listening Project (Oxfam)	International NGO	Tech	Product/process	Successfully scaling

Note: WASH = water, sanitation and hygiene

Figure 6: Examples of target impact groups' constraints and enablers

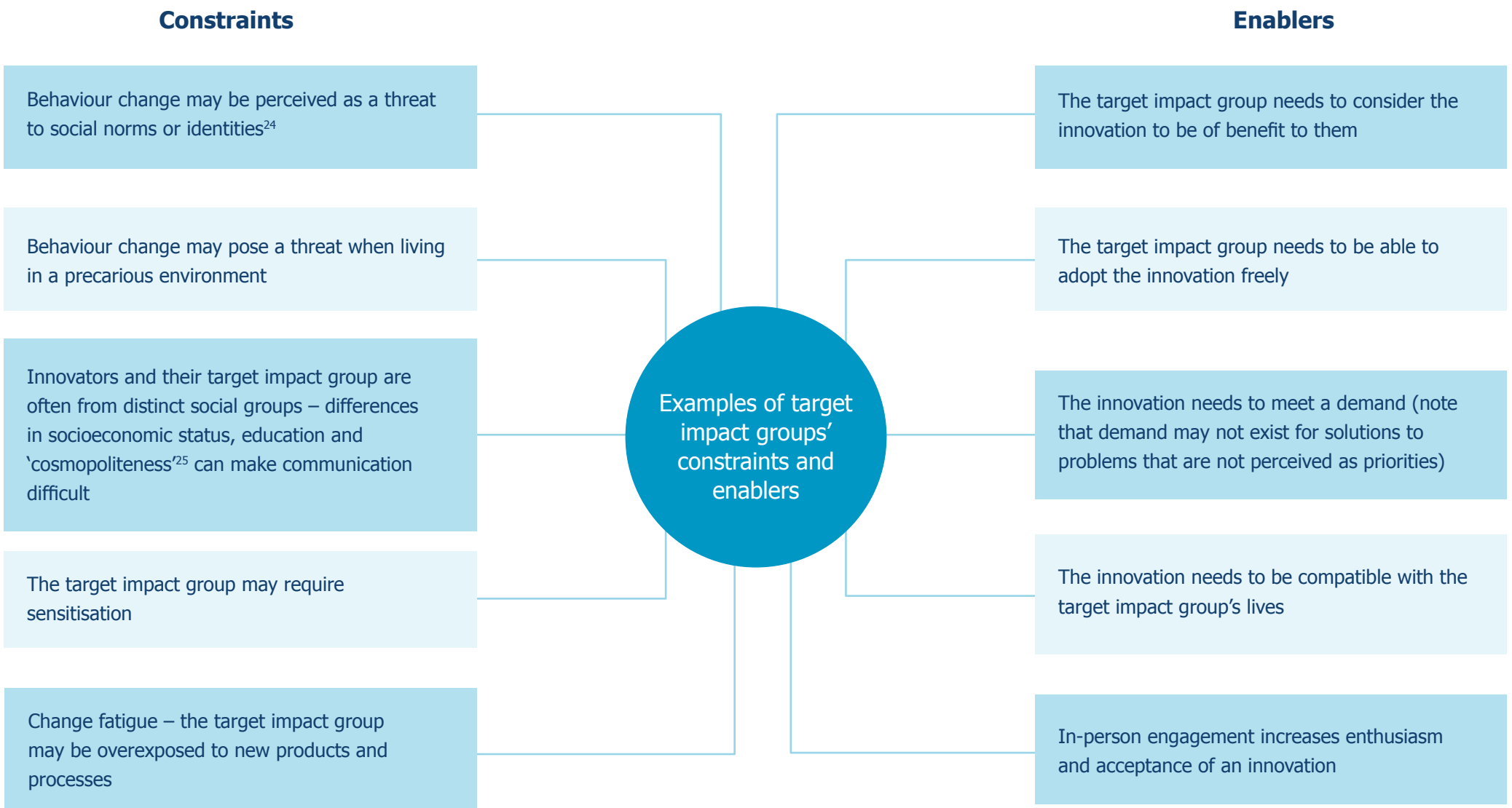


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Figure 7: Examples of users' constraints and enablers

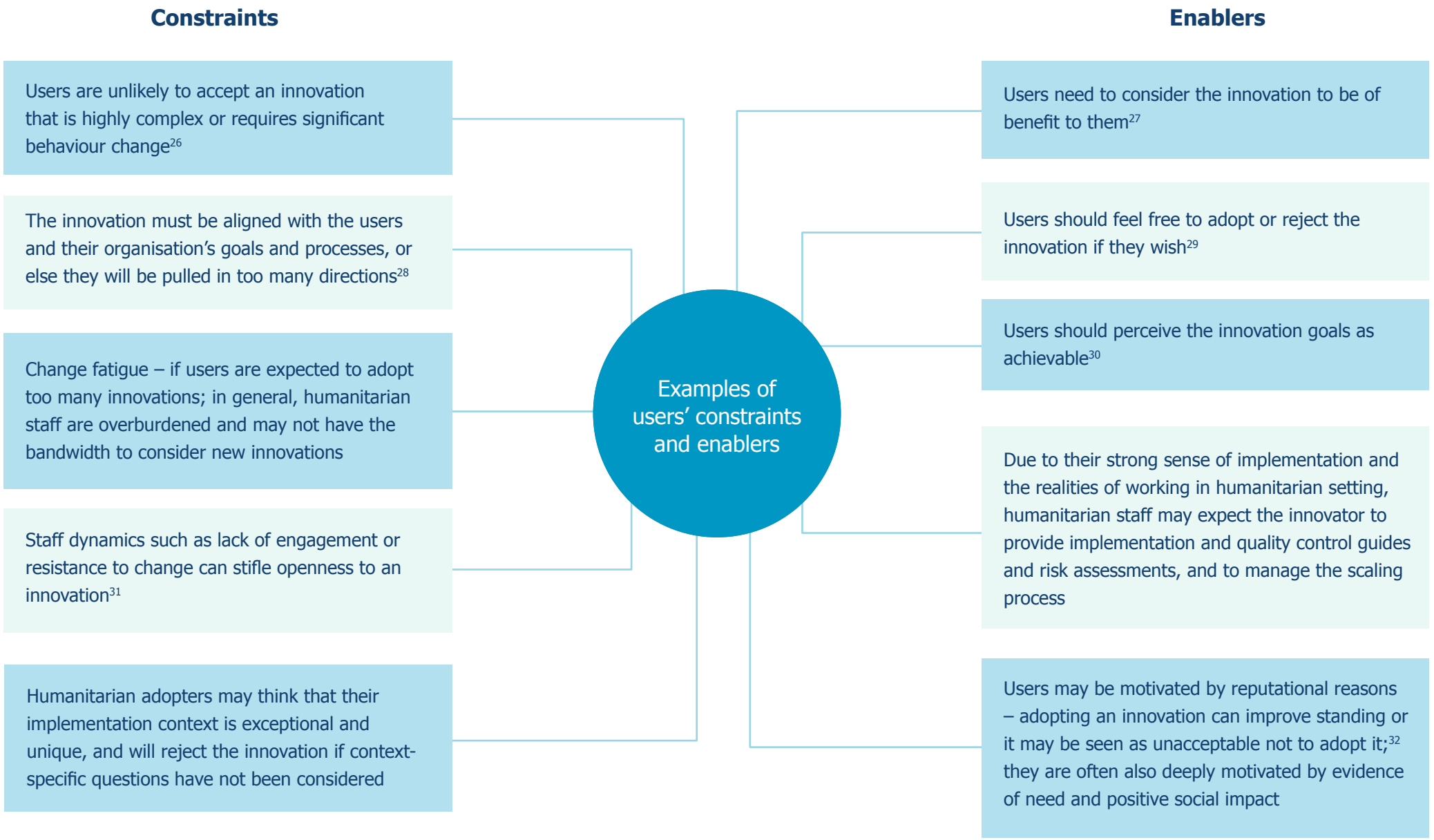

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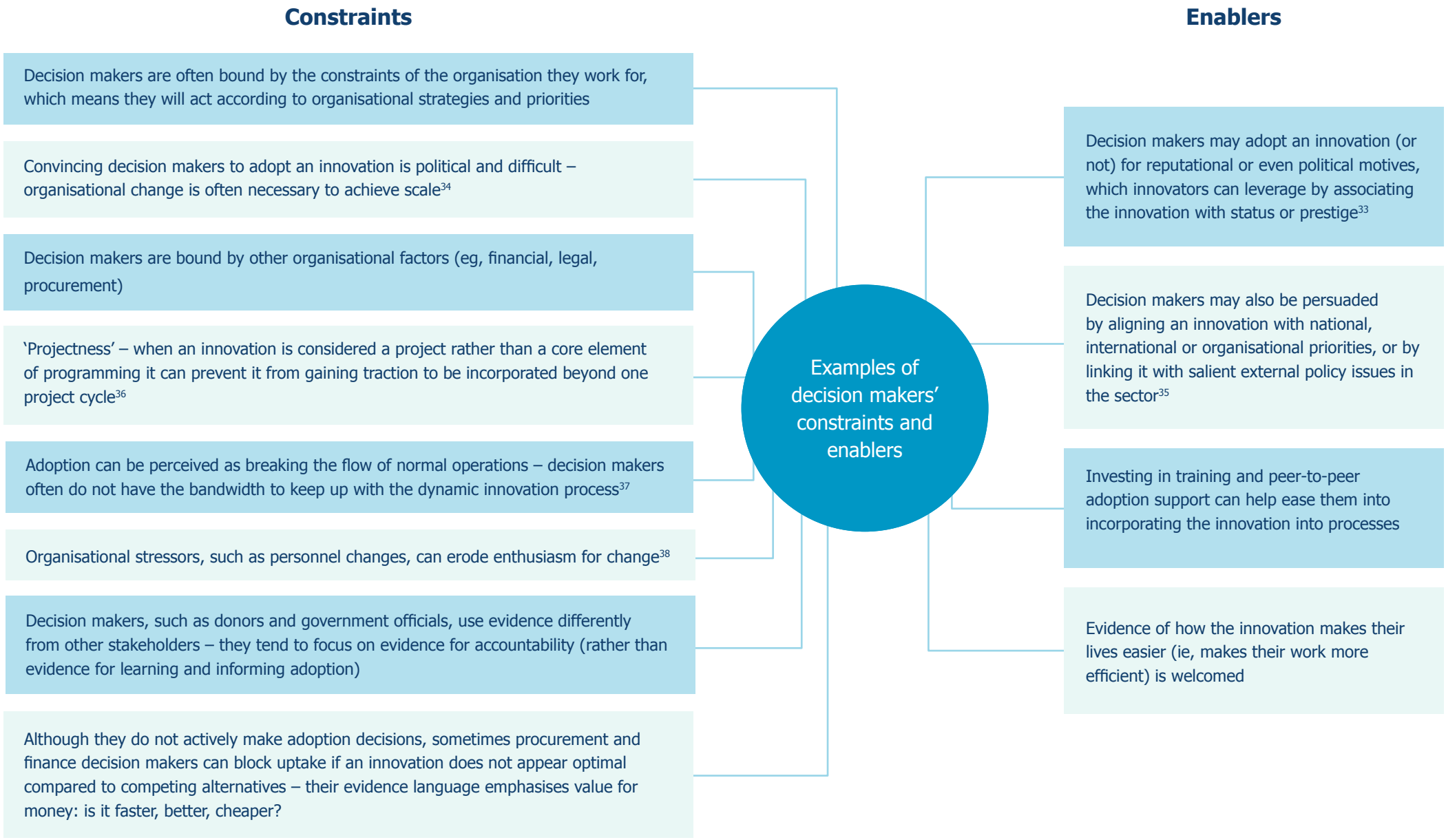
Figure 8: Examples of decision makers' constraints and enablers



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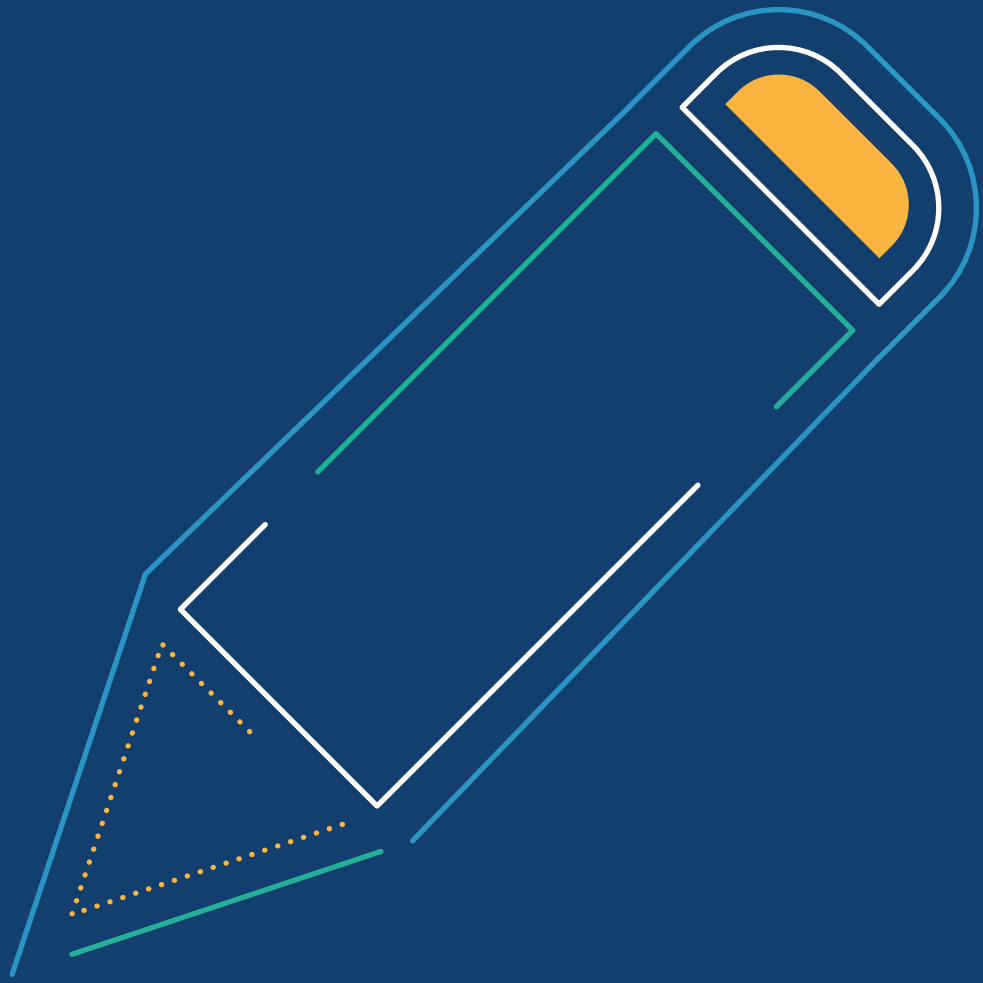

ENDNOTES

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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11. Humanitarian innovation specialists from Gray Dot Catalyst, Innovation Norway, the Dutch Coalition for Humanitarian Innovation, UNICEF and Response Innovation Lab.
12. Innovation experts from the NHS provided insights from outside of the humanitarian sector, where innovation has been a priority for longer and there are more cases of fully scaled innovation. Like the humanitarian sector, the health sector involves a complex system in which multiple layers of stakeholders can facilitate or block the uptake of new technologies and processes. The NHS has similar concerns regarding scaling innovations and has been exploring a variety of approaches to tackle them.
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18. For innovators new to the humanitarian sector, *the Humanitarian Innovation Guide* has a useful summary of humanitarian parameters.

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20. Note that in Rogers' adoption curve terminology 'innovators' does not refer to the person/people with the new idea. Rather, it is the category of people who are most-open minded and accepting of new ideas. A clearer way to describe them is to substitute Rogers' innovators with 'frontier adopters'.

21. Tools to help with this include the Humanitarian Innovation Guide stakeholder analysis tools.

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23. Pickering et al. (2017) *Applying Behavioural Science to the Queensland Sugar Cane Industry and its Relationship to the Great Barrier Reef*. Rural Extension & Innovation Systems Journal, 13(2).

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25. In Rogers' *Diffusion of Innovations*, cosmopolitan actors are more likely to be early adopters and function as opinion leaders for an innovation.

26. Obrecht and Warner (2016) *More than Just Luck*. HIF/ALNAP Study; Rogers, EM (2010) *Diffusion of Innovations*. Simon and Schuster.

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30. Dixon-Woods, M (2012) *Evidence: Overcoming Challenges to Improving Quality: Lessons from the Health Foundation's Improvement Programme Evaluations and Relevant Literature*. The Health Foundation.

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58. Ibid.

59. Table adapted from Nutley, S, Powell, A and Davies, H (2013) *What counts as good evidence*? Research Unit for Research Utilisation, School of Management, University of St Andrews, p.16: Box 4 (adapted from the original).

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61. See Box 3 for a definition.

62. Dixon-Woods, M (2012) *Evidence: Overcoming Challenges to Improving Quality: Lessons from the Health Foundation's Improvement Programme Evaluations and Relevant Literature*. The Health Foundation.

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94. Tools to help with this include the Humanitarian Innovation Guide stakeholder analysis tools.

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