

# SHAPING THE FUTURE



2023–2040  
STRATEGY

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Elrha has been at the  
forefront of humanitarian  
research and innovation  
for more than a decade.



An ALIMA/BEFEN nurse examines a child sitting on his mother's lap.

*Elrha-funded research study: Simplified and optimised  
management of acute malnutrition in children aged 6 to 59  
months. Photograph by Alexandre Bonneau, AFROTO / ALIMA.*

# FOREWORD

## Research and innovation: bringing change to the humanitarian system

**When Elrha was established in 2009 there were very few actors dedicated to supporting humanitarian action through research and innovation. We have come a long way since those early years.**

As an organisation we have matured and grown, and so has the sector we work in. There are now thousands of humanitarian research and innovation projects across the world. This expansion is welcome, but with it comes the responsibility to demonstrate impact. As a sector we must be able to show that investment in humanitarian research and innovation delivers real improvements in the lives of people affected by crises.

Year-on-year we see humanitarian needs rise, while resources fail to keep up. Multiple, complex and protracted crises are driving unmet needs into the hundreds of millions, while climate breakdown and a turbulent geopolitical outlook cause even the most optimistic of us to feel concern for the future.

The humanitarian system finds itself responding to the challenges of today with the tools of yesterday. The pace of change is too slow. The ability of the system to adapt and respond to opportunities and incorporate new approaches and technologies is under-realised.

It is inconceivable that the change that's needed can be delivered without a wholehearted alliance between the humanitarian community and scientists, researchers and innovators. Yet research and innovation continue to be on the periphery of humanitarian practice. Investments are small-scale, fragmented, short-term and lacking in ambition.

What's more, deep inequities in power and funding characterise our community as much as they do the wider humanitarian system we work within.

We must do better.

**The time is now to prove our relevance. It's time to radically focus our vision and raise our ambition for the role of research and innovation in the humanitarian system. It's time for real change.**

This can't happen overnight. It needs sustained collective action. And that's why we're launching our Strategy, which defines our work until 2040. It's why we are committed to working collaboratively with humanitarian actors, governments, and the research and innovation communities, alongside people affected by crises, to support the emergence of a collective vision for humanitarian research and innovation.

Elrha has been at the forefront of humanitarian research and innovation for more than a decade. We have pioneered new approaches in the sector that have enabled research and innovation to deliver meaningful impact on humanitarian challenges. We have built extensive global networks and championed responsible and ethical approaches that have produced research of the highest quality in some of the most challenging contexts in the world. And we have led the way in funding innovation that goes beyond the application of new technologies, demonstrating that innovative thinking and approaches can address the socially complex lived challenges that people face during crisis.

Under our Strategy we will continue our work as a responsible funder of research and innovation in the humanitarian system. And we'll use our funding and expertise to take on more ambitious work, utilising our unique networks to create long-term research and innovation collaborations that bring about lasting solutions to critical humanitarian challenges.

But we don't only want to increase the role of research and innovation in humanitarian action. In everything we do, we want to contribute to a more equitable system. Because we know that research and innovation that responds to and is driven by the needs and priorities of those directly affected by crises will deliver more meaningful and sustainable impact.

As a member of the international humanitarian community, we recognise the legacy of our sector and that, as an influential, UK-based organisation, we hold a position of power and privilege that others do not. We hold ourselves accountable to be part of the change that must come and to live up to our responsibilities to those affected by crises.

So, we're making three, long-term commitments:

- ..... **Become an anti-racist organisation**
- ..... **Be climate responsible**
- ..... **Shift the power**

These commitments formalise the things we believe in and the direction we're taking. They'll continue to shape our development as people and as an organisation. And they'll help us take even greater strides towards building a better humanitarian community.

Humanity is capable of the most astonishing feats when there's a supportive environment for transformational ideas. There can be no more urgent priority for humanity than addressing humanitarian need. We hope that, with committed collective action, we can overcome the seemingly intractable challenges that create and perpetuate humanitarian crises.

# That's the story of change that motivates us. And this Strategy sets out how we'll play our part.

**Jessica Camburn**, Chief Executive Officer, Elrha.



**A REACH enumerator conducts data collection in Cox's Bazar for the 2017 Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment in Bangladesh.**  
*Elrha-funded research study: Evaluating the impact of COVID-19 on multi-sectoral humanitarian needs. Photograph by IMPACT Initiatives.*

# WHO WE ARE

## Our purpose

We work in partnership with a global community of humanitarian actors, researchers and innovators to improve the quality of humanitarian action and deliver better outcomes for people affected by crises.

## Our role

We are a leading actor in humanitarian research and innovation. We bring people together to tackle some of the most complex problems and strengthen the humanitarian system. And we support and champion robust research and proven innovations to improve humanitarian response.

## Our scope

We want to see the positive impact of our research and innovation in acute phases of emergencies and in complex and protracted conflict settings where it's most needed, including work with IDP, refugee and host community populations.

We are an organisation that finds solutions to complex humanitarian problems through research and innovation.



Image from a field visit conducted by Elrha staff in Karachi, Pakistan. Elrha-funded research study: HEAT (Heat Emergency Awareness and Treatment bundle) Trial. Photograph by Elrha.

# OUR VALUES

We live by a clear set of values. They're seen in our work within the humanitarian system and in how we operate and hold ourselves accountable as individuals and as an organisation and employer.



A community health worker provides care to an elderly person in Southeastern Myanmar. *Elrha-funded research study: Implementation of a community-led strategy to reduce cardiovascular disease risk among conflict-affected populations in eastern Myanmar. Photograph by Htoo Tay Zar/Community Partners International*



## Putting people at the centre

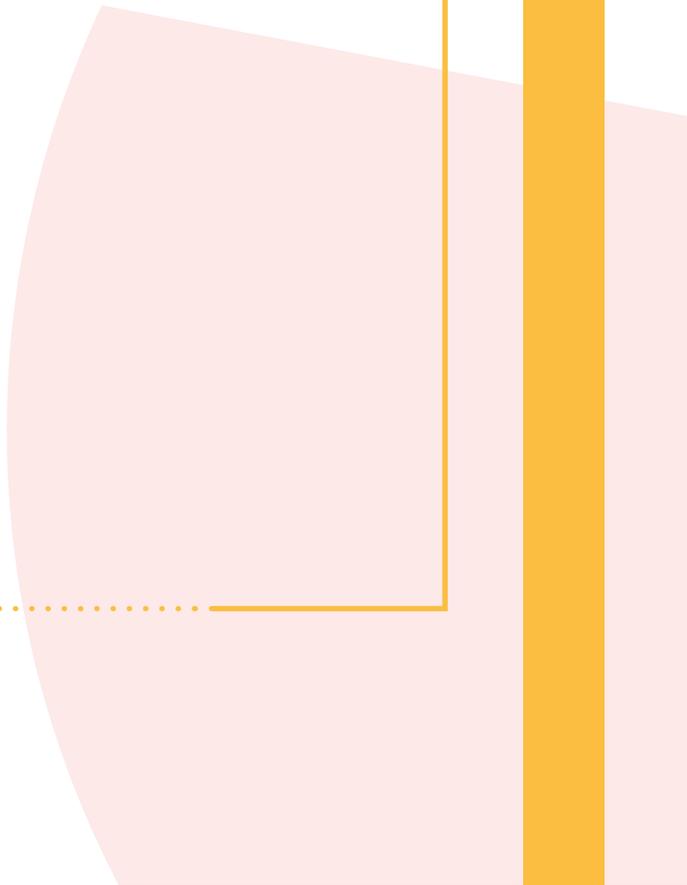
We are committed to being a truly inclusive and empathetic organisation that supports, encourages and recognises its people. We seek out and value diverse knowledge, experience and perspectives, listening to understand before we act. We believe people and communities affected by crises should be deeply involved in research and innovation processes, driving the changes they want to see.

## Working with others

We collaborate to bring about positive change. We build meaningful partnerships, investing in and nurturing our networks and creating space for open and honest dialogue. We understand the part we play in improving humanitarian response and we invite people to join our efforts, supporting others to lead where they are better placed to do so.

## Acting responsibly

We're a responsible and principled organisation to our core. We champion ethical approaches in humanitarian research and innovation, calling out practices that fall short and partnering only with organisations that share our commitment. We make decisions based on the best available evidence. We listen to and act on feedback, and we take accountability for our actions.

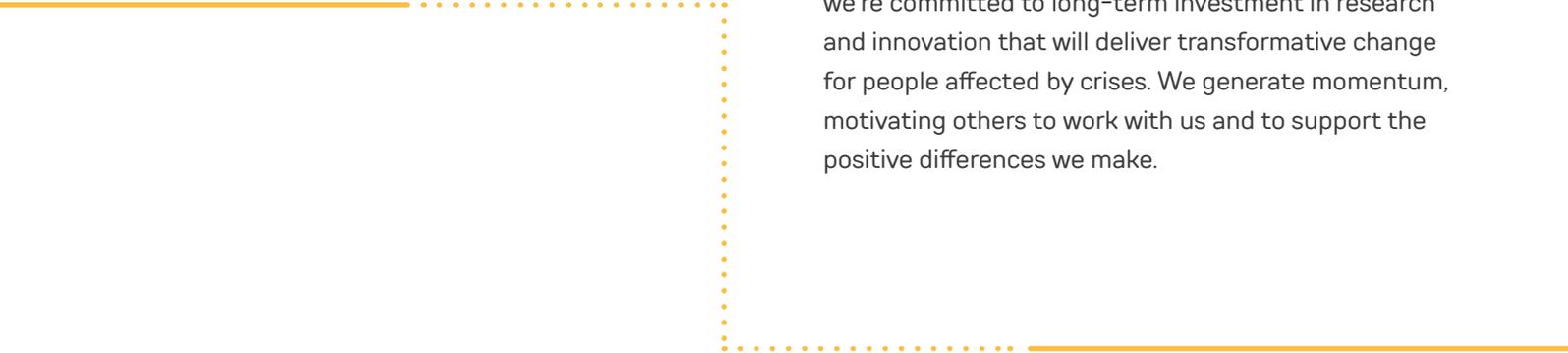


## Committed to learning

We're always looking to develop ourselves and our work; it makes us better at what we do and more effective in what we achieve. We are evidence-led in our decisions and actions. We take on board different views and ideas that will help shape the future of humanitarian response. This appetite for learning and for discussion, reflection and recognition of achievement is engrained in our culture and our practices.

## Inspiring change

We're ambitious in our vision for the future of humanitarian action. Positive, energetic, undaunted, we're committed to long-term investment in research and innovation that will deliver transformative change for people affected by crises. We generate momentum, motivating others to work with us and to support the positive differences we make.



# OUR COMMUNITY

We bring people together from humanitarian, research and innovation backgrounds to deliver change in the humanitarian system. We unite around a shared goal: finding solutions to complex humanitarian challenges.

This community is made up of:

## Researchers and innovators

Together we: develop new approaches to big humanitarian challenges.

.....

## Investors in research and innovation including governments, donors and private sector actors

Together we: support strategic and coordinated investment approaches.

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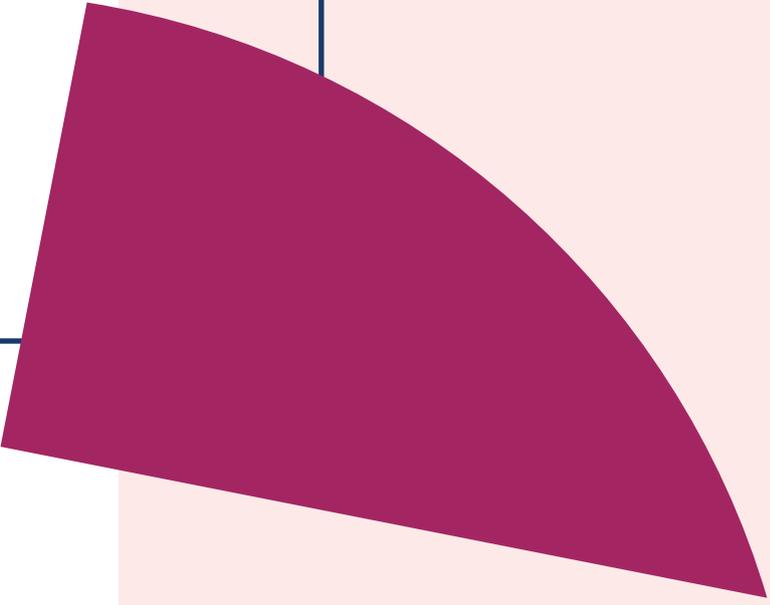
## Peers in the humanitarian research and innovation community

Together we: share learning, address collective problems, improve research and innovation practices, and build effective collaborative approaches to the most urgent humanitarian challenges.

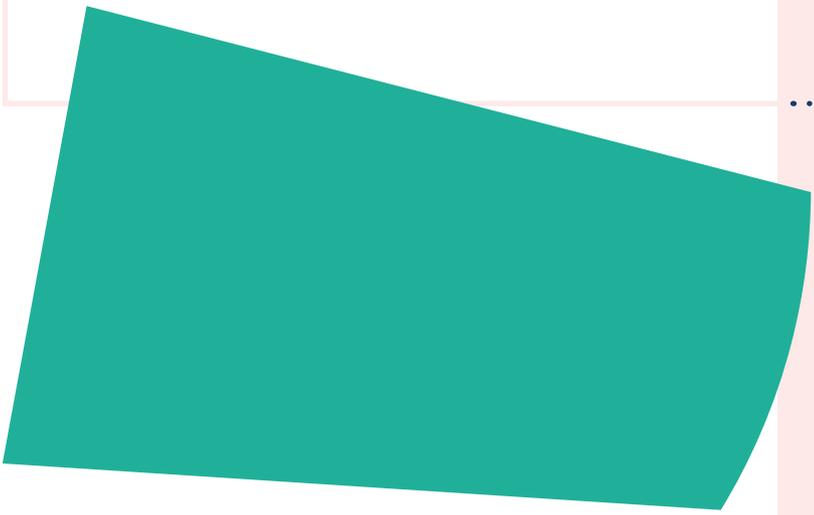
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## Humanitarian actors at global, regional and national levels

Together we: understand priorities and needs and build partnerships for research and innovation programmes, focusing on the adoption and scaling of evidence and innovative solutions.



There have long been imbalances in power and privilege that have hindered a truly inclusive and equitable community. We and others must do more to recognise and address this. We must work together to bring about a truly diverse, equitable and effective system of research and innovation for the benefit of people affected by crises.



We unite around a shared goal: finding solutions to complex humanitarian challenges.

# WHAT WE'LL DO AND HOW WE'LL DO IT

We're committing to this Strategy, because we're ambitious for a future that looks different. It's a long-term strategy, because sustained change takes time.

This Strategy is fundamental to our aim of improving outcomes for people affected by crises. It has been designed to help develop a cohesive global system; one that routinely identifies and addresses critical humanitarian problems through research and innovation. A system in which policy and practice continuously improve through the sustainable and strategic resourcing and adoption of new evidence and innovative solutions.

If we're to achieve this, the humanitarian community must focus on building a much stronger relationship between research, innovation and practice. Just as this connection defines most professional sectors, it must come to define us. Research and innovation give practitioner communities unique tools to advance knowledge, investigate and understand problems, and evaluate effective responses. And they help anticipate future needs and challenges, enabling and developing transformative new thinking and solutions.

We need deep engagement with research and innovation to support the steady improvement and validation of our practice. And we urgently need the new thinking and the breakthrough potential that these disciplines offer, because that's how we'll deliver better outcomes for people affected by crises.

Building a global research and innovation system that is relevant, responsive to need, and able to effect transformative solutions requires the collaborative efforts of multiple actors. It requires long-term vision and commitment. Our Strategy works towards 2040 as a critical juncture, by which time humanitarian practice will be transformed through a deep and wide-reaching relationship with research and innovation.

We know we can't always predict the challenges of the future. So, while our long-term vision provides us with a clear and focused direction of travel, our deep commitment to learning will allow us to adapt and evolve our approaches to the changing landscape around us.

The humanitarian community must focus on building a much stronger relationship between research, innovation and practice.

Building a global research and innovation system that is relevant, responsive to need, and able to effect transformative solutions requires the collaborative efforts of multiple actors.

Mother and child learning how to wash hands with Supertowel™.  
*Elrha-funded innovation: Supertowel™, a reusable and highly durable towel.*



# ACHIEVING GLOBAL IMPACT

## ADDRESSING THE CRITICAL CHALLENGES

Our vision: By 2040, critical humanitarian problems are effectively addressed through long-term, focused and collective research and innovation efforts that are well-resourced, coordinated and equitable.

The space and demand for research and innovation within the humanitarian system has been growing. But there remain deep structural barriers that are limiting the impact of our work.

Research and innovation investment is heavily fragmented. There are broken pathways to uptake, and duplication in investments. And serious inequality in funding flows means that funding and decision-making power remains in the hands of actors from high-income countries, far from where humanitarian crises are experienced.

Short-term funding cycles remain dominant in our funding culture. Over the years this has led to a plethora of projects at the early stage of innovation processes and research projects that produce results that are specific and difficult to replicate.

For research and innovation to deliver greater impact, there needs to be predictable and reliable funding that supports long-term collaborative partnerships. Because these are the partnerships that can find, test and run with ideas, taking them from early concept through to widespread adoption. They're partnerships that allow for greater ambition in the scope of research and innovation. They build shared ownership of problems and generate appetite for the development and uptake of new evidence and solutions.

There is urgent need to build better research and innovation funding pathways and programmes – ones that support locally-led action and that invest in sustainable research and innovation capacity in regions vulnerable to crisis. Alongside this we must develop new knowledge and skills to support responsible practice. Many of the research and innovation approaches used in the humanitarian system are adapted from the private and public sectors and are not always a good fit for the unique challenges and vulnerabilities that humanitarian crises create. For our practice to evolve, we need to develop approaches and knowledge that have been designed and tested for our unique contexts and communities.

# WHAT WE WILL DO:

## **We will**

use our research and innovation funding to deliver robust solutions to priority needs, working hard to ensure that positive differences are made for people affected by crises.

- • • use our unique position as a funder of research and innovation to put their combined creative potential to best use in the challenges we work on.
- • • work with our funding partners to create research and innovation programmes that respond to the priorities and needs of people affected by crises, and of the humanitarian response community.
- • • invest in robust problem exploration, using rigorous and participatory approaches to ensure we address challenges appropriately and ethically, informed by the experiences of those they affect.
- • • carry out systematic reviews of the evidence and practice landscape to ensure we are addressing weaknesses and gaps in the evidence base.
- • • champion inclusive and collaborative research and innovation, mainstreaming effective approaches across our grant portfolio and sharing our learning and tested approaches with others.

## **We will**

support 'end-to-end' research and innovation pathways.

- • • address the partial and fragmented pathways from early development into sustainable adoption, so that our research and innovation programmes have greater opportunity to deliver impact.
- • • foster dynamic and equitable collaborations, using our funding to bring together expertise from across our networks to develop new evidence and progress ideas.
- • • work with humanitarian actors and the funding community to strengthen uptake pathways and improve the funding pipelines needed to support the later stages of implementation and adoption at scale.
- • • continue to care about the long-term impact of our grants after our funding relationship has ended, providing after-grant support and, where possible, tracking results over time.

## **We will**

work with humanitarian actors to improve the incorporation of evidence and solutions into standards, policies and humanitarian practice at national and global levels.

- • • build relationships with key quality assurance mechanisms in humanitarian practice to encourage the inclusion of new evidence in routine standard-setting processes.
- • • make evidence needs and gaps more visible, so that research and innovation communities can better target their efforts.
- • • work to increase access to available evidence to support robust decision-making by humanitarian donors and actors.
- • • continue to develop our own communications, improving the way we package and present evidence to meet the needs of policy-making and practitioner communities.

## **We will**

invest in the development of knowledge, skills and practices, to help our sector evolve.

- • • invest in new research and partnerships to support the development of research and innovation knowledge and skills within the humanitarian system, with a particular focus on ethical, equitable and inclusive practice.
- • • ensure all our grantees receive a tailored support package that helps them in their work on high-quality and impactful projects.
- • • share evidence and learning from our funded programmes on relevant, accessible platforms, making sure we reach beyond the traditional channels to increase engagement throughout our community.
- • • be open and honest about our successes and our failures, and share our learning as we progress.

For research and innovation to deliver greater impact, there needs to be predictable and reliable funding that supports long-term collaborative partnerships.



Mothers in the village receiving support from Health Extension Workers who provide preventive and curative health services to the community from the health post and door-to-door. *Elrha-funded research study: Integrating care for sexual and gender-based violence survivors in newly-restored sexual and reproductive health facilities in Amhara, Ethiopia. Photograph by UNICEF Ethiopia/2014.*

## STRENGTHENING AND CHALLENGING THE SYSTEM

Our vision: By 2040, long-term funding commitments and a globally recognised coordination system for humanitarian research and innovation are in place that are equitable and effective at delivering improvements in humanitarian response to acute and complex crises.

We believe that research and innovation must deliver more effective impact in acute and complex crises where humanitarian needs are greatest. These contexts demand the highest standards of care and responsibility; research and innovation must be ethical, appropriate and responsive to needs. To successfully address the most challenging humanitarian problems, there needs to be deep commitment from research and innovation actors and funders to listen to and coordinate with communities affected by crises and with humanitarian actors.

The humanitarian system has all the necessary components to drive a responsive and coordinated approach to research and innovation, but hasn't yet joined them up. As a community, we're falling short of our potential because:

- **we don't have effective ways to arrange and facilitate coordination between the users, producers and funders of research and innovation.**
- **there is no consensus on the most critical areas of humanitarian response that need the attention of research and innovation partnerships.**
- **the priorities of people affected by crises are too often marginal to the decisions that determine research and innovation investments.**
- **short-term funding models dominate research and innovation investments, which results in programmes that are fragmented and that struggle to become widely adopted.**
- **systems to support the adoption of new evidence and solutions into practice are weak.**
- **it is difficult to demonstrate the collective impact that research and innovation investments make.**

There is strong demand for improved coordination on research and innovation .....  
at every level of the humanitarian system.

But there is every reason to be positive. Our research shows there is strong demand for improved coordination on research and innovation at every level of the humanitarian system. If we achieve this – and we are confident that we can – our efforts as a community will have far greater impact.

We'll achieve more with the resources we have. Our open, inclusive and cohesive system will allow actors from outside the traditional humanitarian community to more effectively participate, bringing their expertise and capabilities to bear on the issues we care about.

Ultimately, our efforts will demonstrate that research and innovation can improve humanitarian action, helping save more lives, reduce suffering, and support the dignified recovery of people affected by crises.

This Strategy will help us get there, by strengthening the systems that support research and innovation within humanitarian practice and identifying and challenging inequities of power that hold back our sector's potential.



A doctor answers questions from a Studio Yafa journalist during recording of a programme in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. *Elrha-funded research study: Internally Displaced Persons, radio and COVID-related misinformation in Burkina Faso. Photograph by Fondation Hironnelle.*

## WHAT WE WILL DO:

### **We will**

work to bring actors together from across the system to co-develop mechanisms that support us all to be more strategic and impactful.

- • • facilitate a community of actors that are committed to the development of an effective and equitable coordination framework for research and innovation in the humanitarian system.
- • • work with governments and the wider funding community to support their work on humanitarian research and innovation. We'll do this by generating new data and research, tailored to their decision-making needs, and convening meetings to facilitate collective action, share learning and pilot new approaches.
- • • provide relevant information, and convene opportunities that enable new actors from across research communities and the private sector to work in meaningful partnership with humanitarian actors.

### **We will**

generate new data to track the performance of humanitarian research and innovation and inform effective priority setting.

- • • continue to monitor and map research and innovation activity across the humanitarian system.
- • • support the development of equitable priority setting processes, documenting priority needs for communities affected by crises and for humanitarian response actors.
- • • improve systems to track investments in humanitarian research and innovation and we'll monitor the way in which funds are used to respond to recognised priorities.

## We will

work to create greater equity throughout the system by building stronger relationships with regional and national coordination bodies and actors in low- and middle-income countries.

- • • champion leadership from crises-affected regions in priority setting and decision-making processes.
- • • facilitate dialogue and partnership with key regional research and innovation communities and coordination bodies. We'll work with them to achieve greater recognition and alignment of humanitarian research and innovation priorities within regional and national frameworks and strategies.
- • • advocate for equitable funding and partnerships for research and innovation actors from low- and middle-income countries, highlighting good practices within the system.



Retailers doing flip-learning on the relationship between usage of the ECOCA and solar energy. HIF-funded innovation: ECOCA, the first sustainable off-grid e-cooking business in East Africa. Photograph by Cerlina Glud, Pesitha.

# OUR FOCUS ON PUBLIC HEALTH IN HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS

Since the early years of Elrha, we have kept a specific focus on the role of research and innovation in addressing priority public health needs.

We know public health challenges in humanitarian contexts will continue to be a priority concern, not only for the humanitarian community but for the whole world. Failing to address the needs of the most vulnerable, including refugees and internally displaced persons, has implications for the health of us all. And we firmly believe that everyone, whatever their circumstances, should have access to health services that are informed by robust evidence.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a catastrophic impact on the health and wellbeing of millions worldwide. It highlighted the interconnection between globalisation, health equity, economic security and environmental justice. It also showed us that international research and innovation partnerships have immense potential to address these challenges, particularly when local experts are empowered.

Our funding programmes have engaged and developed unique communities of practice. They have significantly increased the evidence base for health interventions in humanitarian crises, and informed multiple global policies and guidelines. And they've brought people together to address key humanitarian public health areas relevant to many targets under Sustainable Development Goal 3, including mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), gender-based violence (GBV), sexual and reproductive health (SRH), and malnutrition and food insecurity.

We have also pioneered responsive research capabilities that can respond to unanticipated infectious disease outbreaks, such as Ebola and COVID-19. As an extension of this we've encouraged grantees to focus on health system strengthening and economic evaluation - critical enablers of an effective public health response.

This work will continue under our Strategy, allowing us to build even stronger research and innovation collaborations for humanitarian public health that leaves no one behind. We will work with our partners and networks on priority setting processes that will help research teams target the most pressing health needs. And we will maintain our focus on improving the evidence base, and translating and sharing evidence to support public health interventions and the adoption of responsible innovation.

Everyone, whatever their circumstances, should have access to health services that are informed by robust evidence.



Health staff at Beit Hanoun Health Centre in Gaza wearing full personal protective equipment to protect themselves and others from the transmission of COVID-19 virus.

*Elrha-funded research study: Health system and community responses to COVID-19 among Palestine refugees in Gaza and Lebanon. Photograph by Dr Nisreen Halabi, UNRWA.*

# HOW WE WILL MEASURE OUR IMPACT AND LEARN

A strong system of monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) is central to Elrha's mission to improve humanitarian response through research and innovation.

We want to be able to:

## Monitor

Continuously monitor the difference we make through our grants and wider work, identifying and addressing problems, and seizing opportunities.

## Evaluation

Use evaluation to periodically reflect on our overall direction of travel, re-assessing our assumptions and asking ourselves difficult – even uncomfortable – questions.

## Accountability

Distil robust data to demonstrate our accountability towards the communities we serve, our partners, and our funders.

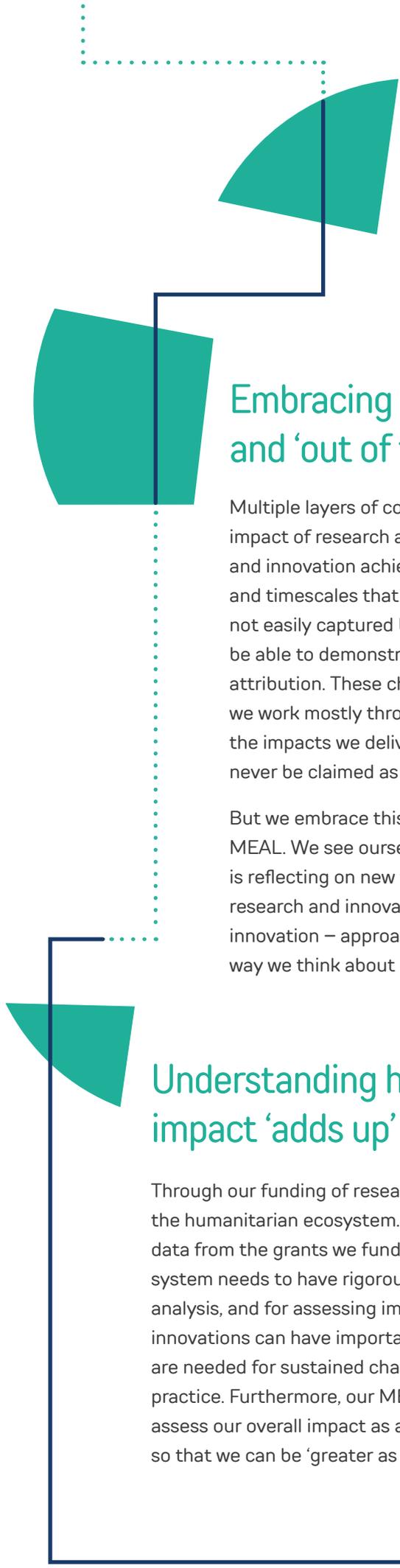
## Learning

Systematically generate learning that will inform our own work, as well as ongoing reflection and debates in humanitarian practice.

Image from the Cyclone Eloise relief effort in Buzi, Mozambique. Elrha-funded innovation: Data that matters. Photograph by Light for the World.



As a leading funder of research and innovation for the humanitarian community, we are committed to ‘walk the talk’ to ensure that our own MEAL system, processes and tools are fit for purpose to achieve and demonstrate impact.

The page features several teal-colored decorative elements: a large curved shape at the top left, a smaller curved shape below it, and a third curved shape at the bottom left. These shapes are connected by a dark blue line that forms a path through the text. Dotted teal lines also extend from the top and bottom of the page towards the center.

The following key principles underpin our approach to MEAL:

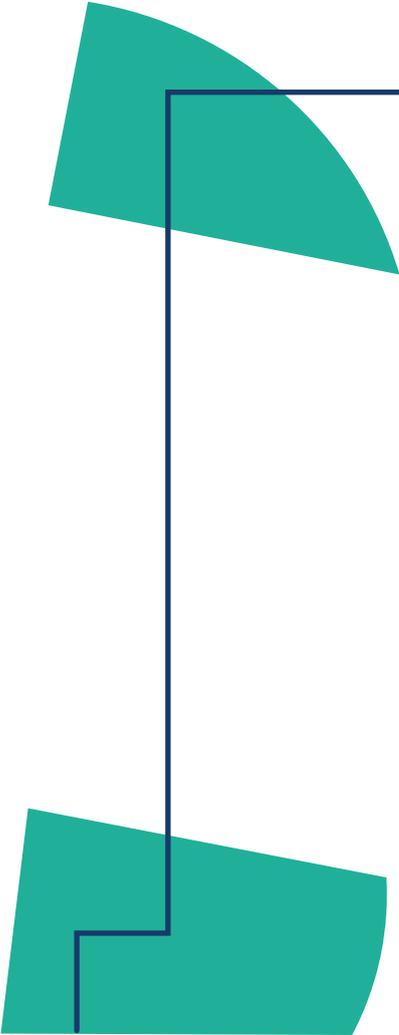
## Embracing complexity and 'out of the box' thinking

Multiple layers of complexity come into play when we try to assess the impact of research and innovation on humanitarian practice. Research and innovation achieve impact through non-linear and iterative pathways and timescales that are typically longer than any one intervention and are not easily captured by quantitative indicators. In most cases, we will only be able to demonstrate contribution to impact, rather than straightforward attribution. These challenges are compounded by the fact that, as a funder, we work mostly through our grantees rather than directly. This means that the impacts we deliver will always be the result of collective effort and can never be claimed as ours alone.

But we embrace this complexity as an integral aspect of our approach to MEAL. We see ourselves as part of an extended community of practice that is reflecting on new ways to understand, define and measure the impact of research and innovation. We are invested in ensuring that creativity and innovation – approaches at the very core of Elrha – are reflected in the way we think about impact and in the methods we use to assess it.

## Understanding how impact 'adds up'

Through our funding of research and innovation, we are well-placed to influence the humanitarian ecosystem. But having consistent, reliable and good quality data from the grants we fund is only the first step in the process. Our MEAL system needs to have rigorous methods for data aggregation, synthesis and analysis, and for assessing impact at the macro level. Because, while individual innovations can have important local-level impact, wider and longer-term efforts are needed for sustained change and a shift in the paradigms of humanitarian practice. Furthermore, our MEAL system must enable us to understand and assess our overall impact as an organisation, across research and innovation, so that we can be 'greater as a whole than the sum of our (programme) parts'.

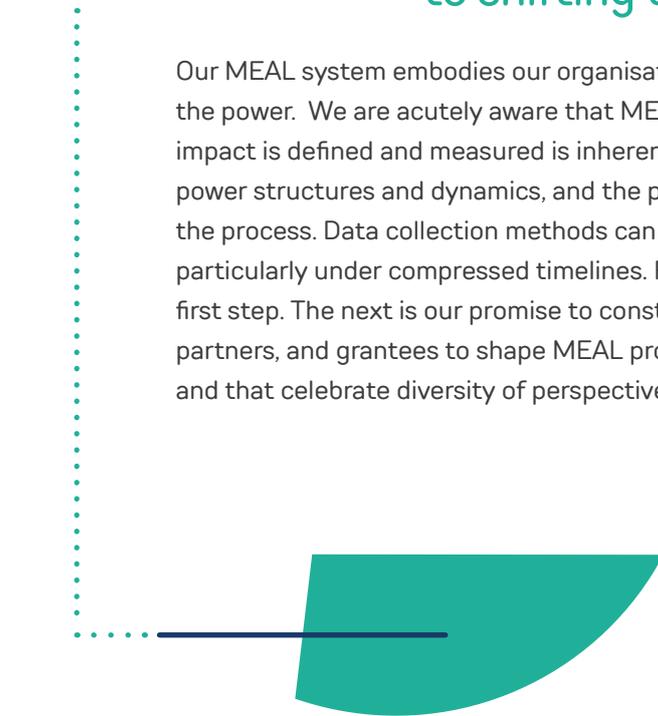


## Being context-aware

We fund research and innovation in a wide range of crisis contexts, including some of the most acute, protracted and complex emergencies worldwide. MEAL in these contexts poses enormous conceptual, practical and ethical challenges, ranging from the limited availability of good quality data, to safety and safeguarding considerations. We give our grantees the guidance and space they need to design and implement MEAL processes that are ethical, proportionate, and context-appropriate. This won't always be straightforward - we recognise that in any given context/setting, specific, appropriate approaches may mean other elements of MEAL are compromised, particularly in terms of the feasibility of data aggregation and reporting. But we are committed to being open and upfront with our funders and partners in navigating these inevitable tensions.

## Diversity, inclusion, and a commitment to shifting the power

Our MEAL system embodies our organisational commitment to shifting the power. We are acutely aware that MEAL is not neutral. The way in which impact is defined and measured is inherently and inevitably political, reflecting power structures and dynamics, and the positionality of those involved in the process. Data collection methods can often be top-down and extractive, particularly under compressed timelines. Recognising these issues is the first step. The next is our promise to constructively engage with our funders, partners, and grantees to shape MEAL processes that are truly inclusive and that celebrate diversity of perspectives and 'ways of knowing'.



## Becoming a learning organisation

We are committed to never being 'too busy to learn'. We encourage open feedback from our partners and grantees, and we make time and space for internal reflection at critical times. Our systems will actively capture learning and use it to continuously improve our own practice.

# OUR LONG-TERM COMMITMENTS



Children playing at a World Vision-run Child Friendly Space in Bidibidi settlement, West Nile Region, Uganda. Elrha-funded research study: An RCT of enhanced child friendly space interventions for children affected by conflict and displacement. Photo by Derrick Kyatuka.

# BUILDING A BETTER HUMANITARIAN COMMUNITY

As a member of the international humanitarian community, we recognise the legacy of our sector and that, as an influential, UK-based organisation, we hold a position of power and privilege that others do not. We hold ourselves accountable to be part of the change that must come and to live up to our responsibilities to those affected by crises.

So, we're making three, long-term commitments:

- **Become an anti-racist organisation**
- **Be climate responsible**
- **Shift the power**

These commitments formalise the things we believe in and the direction we're taking. They'll continue to shape our development as people and as an organisation. And they'll help us take even greater strides towards building a better humanitarian community.

# COMMITMENT TO ANTI-RACISM



Racism has no place in  
the international aid and  
humanitarian system, in  
work, in the world.

**We are committed to being an anti-racist organisation. Racism has no place in the international aid and humanitarian system, in work, in the world.**

Deep-rooted inequalities in the global aid system are replicated in humanitarian research and innovation practices. As part of that system, we could be part of the problem. We know that conscious and unconscious racism can be present in every aspect of our work, from the expertise we choose to engage with or the way we review funding applications, to our recruitment and recognition of our staff and governing bodies.

That's why, as part of this Strategy, we are making a long-term commitment to consciously and continuously consider how racism may affect our culture, working practices and decision-making, and to learn from others about how we can proactively address this.

This isn't a new direction for us. We began our journey towards becoming an anti-racist organisation in 2020, by setting out six, core commitments.

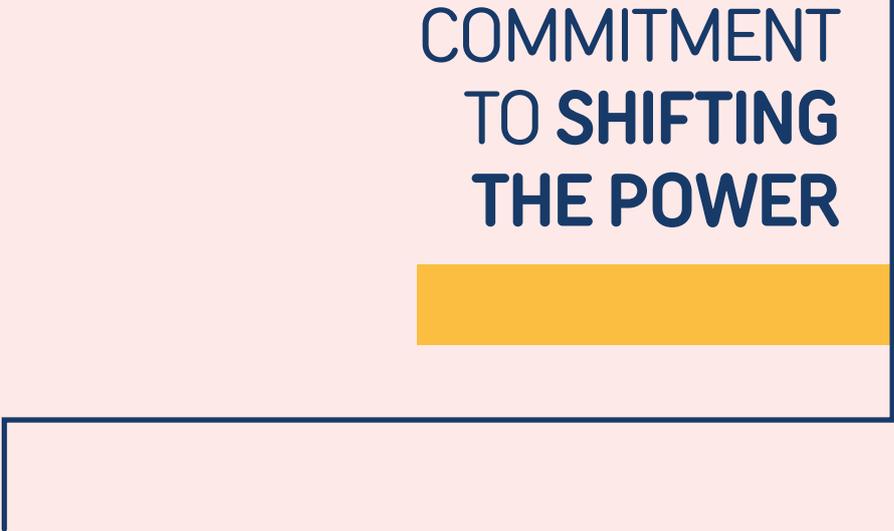
We will:

- **be an anti-racist employer and workplace.**
- **collaborate with the sector and our partners to promote an anti-racism approach.**
- **consider how our work in research and innovation can support an anti-racism agenda.**
- **weave anti-racism into the fabric of our brand and communications.**
- **nurture an environment of listening, learning, and unlearning racism.**
- **develop clear and specific next steps through a detailed action plan to make anti-racism a fundamental and sustainable part of our ethos and work.**

These commitments remain a firm priority for us all and we'll continue to closely monitor our compliance and progress. There isn't one 'neat' pathway forward; eliminating racism in all its forms is an enduring responsibility. But it's one we take on with openness and dedication, because we know we have to make a positive difference. We'll keep asking ourselves and others how we can do better.



**COMMITMENT  
TO SHIFTING  
THE POWER**



We want to see a more equitable and effective humanitarian research and innovation system.



**We want to see a more equitable and effective humanitarian research and innovation system that leads to better, locally informed, and culturally appropriate response for people affected by crises.**

The humanitarian community has so much potential but could benefit from greater inclusion and cohesion. There is an imbalance in voice and power. There are financial inequities in the humanitarian research and innovation ecosystem; money flows largely from donors in higher income countries to the institutions headquartered in higher income countries. Actors with global reach are favoured by research and innovation opportunities that (understandably) incentivise scalable solutions and evidence that can be applied in different contexts. And, too often, local humanitarian actors with expertise and knowledge of local priorities, and researchers and innovators from low- and middle-income countries, are marginalised in, or excluded from, global research and innovation. That's despite recognition that contextual expertise and relationships with local policy, practice and community stakeholders are essential for the uptake and sustainability of research and innovation.

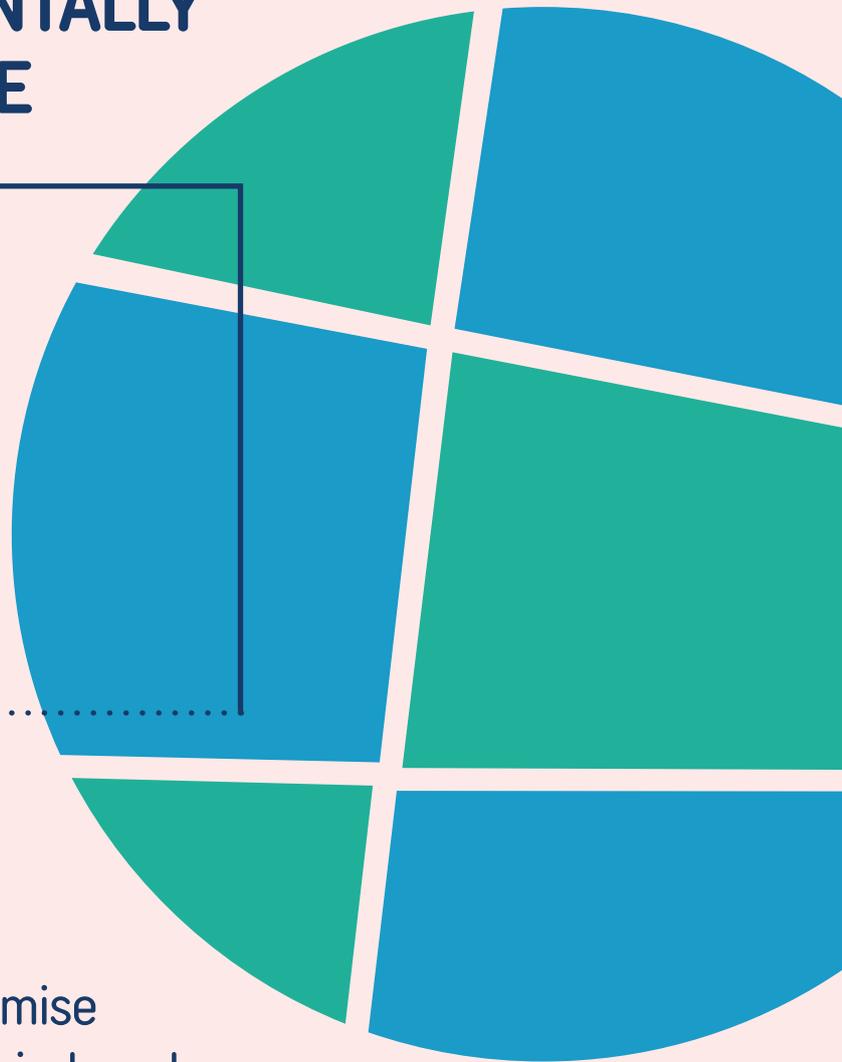
This situation is counterproductive to efforts to improve the lives and wellbeing of people affected by crises. It's driven us to commit to shifting the power, by seeking out more inclusive and equitable models of research and innovation and community-led innovations. We'll work towards creating greater equity in our own work and in the broader system of humanitarian research and innovation.

As we do this, we'll focus on our:

- **strategy, organisation, and partnerships.**
- **programme design and funding allocations.**
- **communications and messaging.**

Transforming the humanitarian system into something far more fair, transparent and dynamic requires us to show agility, commitment and accountability in everything we do. And we'll do this because of the benefits to be gained from a humanitarian ecosystem that fulfils its potential in mitigating the impact of humanitarian crises. We'll do it because maintaining the status quo isn't an option.

COMMITMENT  
TO BEING  
CLIMATE AND  
ENVIRONMENTALLY  
RESPONSIBLE



We want to help minimise the impact of human-induced climate change on the world's most vulnerable people.

**We want to help minimise the impact of human-induced climate change on the world's most vulnerable people, as part of an environmentally responsible international system.**

The human-induced climate crisis is threatening the survival of millions of people across the world. It's leading to unprecedented increases in natural disasters, extreme weather events, greater transmission of diseases and infections, and unsustainable changes in human migration patterns.

As a member of the humanitarian community, we recognise the heavy environmental impact of our international aid system. We are part of the problem that creates the humanitarian need to which we respond. No one working in humanitarian action wants this to be the case. And it will take conscious, committed and collective action to turn this around.

As a community that strives to mitigate the impact of humanitarian crises, we must consider how our work and the way we do it might contribute to the degradation of environments and the worsening climate situation. This is partly about each of us doing the little things, day-to-day, with individual and collective responsibility in mind. It's also about building climate and environmental considerations into every aspect of our organisational practices and into the way we fund and support research and innovation. Part of this responsibility is to recognise that the solutions that our research and evidence contribute to may inadvertently lead to harm if they're not adapted to climate-induced changes, such as weather patterns, disease transmission and livelihood viability. We must ask ourselves if the advances we make and the new technologies we discover are kind to our climate and our environment.

In this Strategy, we are making a firm commitment to becoming a climate and environmentally responsible organisation. Central to this is the Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organizations ([Climate-charter.org](https://climate-charter.org)), which will guide us towards better practices as a workforce and as part of the humanitarian community.

We stand with our local, national and international humanitarian peers to take urgent actions to minimise the greenhouse gas emissions that come directly or indirectly from our organisational activities. We will factor the impact of climate change into our research and innovation, so that the outcomes and effects of this work don't cause harm. And we'll carefully monitor our progress in meeting climate responsibility targets, sharing this openly with our community and encouraging others to join the effort.

# WORKING TOGETHER

To achieve our Strategy's ambitions, we will need to work in partnership with a diverse range of organisations who are committed to achieving a step change in the role and impact of research and innovation in the most challenging humanitarian contexts.

By continuously demonstrating our influence in the sector and our ability to make change happen, we'll strengthen our position with traditional and emerging humanitarian actors and donors, who will see that we're generating robust solutions to priority needs. That we're working to build a better humanitarian system.

We'll continue to work with our highly valued long-term partners too – people and organisations that have supported us since our early years and helped us remain at the forefront of research and innovation practice. While nurturing these relationships, we'll also build and explore new ones.

We believe there is huge potential for foundations, research funders and private sector actors to bring new thinking and expertise to the work that we do. Our deep experience, our established networks and credibility in the humanitarian sector, and our genuine excitement to learn from others and to hear new ideas and fresh perspectives mean we offer a perfect partnership opportunity.

If you share our values, our passion for change and our interest in responsible research and innovation, we'd love to talk.

## THANK YOU

Many people have been involved in the development of this Strategy. We want to thank everyone who took the time to participate in our interviews and community survey. Particular thanks go to our staff, Board of Trustees, funders, and partners, who have supported the evolution of our thinking and continue to help drive our ambition for the future. Finally, we would like to thank our incredible community of researchers and innovators whose work inspires us every day to believe that better is possible.

If you share our values and passion for change and our interest in responsible research and innovation, we'd love to talk.





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