IDC/White Paper Submission

ELRHA

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Q.1: Partnership

How do partnerships need to change to restore the credibility of international development and the multilateral system and regain the trust of Global South?

What role should the UK play in this and what specifically should we do differently?

What should we do to ensure we are listening better to those most in need?

Invest in the development of equitable, ethical and quality Humanitarian Research and Innovation partnerships: Research and Innovation partnerships can deliver significant impact on the effectiveness of humanitarian response, supporting humanitarian practice and those that fund it to become more evidence based and adaptive. Elrha's recent impact case studies[1] demonstrate where and how this has been achieved through research programmes funded by Elrha since 2013. Our work supporting hundreds of humanitarian R&I partnerships has demonstrated that Impactful, ethical research and innovation relies on *explicitly* bringing together partners with different expertise to work collaboratively. In humanitarian emergencies this requires cooperation between research-focused stakeholders and those responsible for humanitarian response: national authorities and service providers; local leaders and humanitarian organisations; regional and international humanitarian organisations, and private sector partners.

Prioritise long-term sustainable funding models that enable direct funding to Global South institutions: The credibility of humanitarian funders from high-income countries has been damaged because the transformational changes foreseen in the Grand Bargain (2016) have not yet been realised (2). This failure is also present in humanitarian R&I. Elrha's recent research found that 'most HRI funding was generated from high income countries and was received by actors based in high income countries. (3). while the UK has been considered a global leader of humanitarian policy, in recent years this reputation has weakened. However, the UK continues to be one of the world's top funders of humanitarian research and innovation (HRI) (4) This presents an opportunity to re-establish a world leading reputation through its continued investment in science, research and innovation for the humanitarian system, rebuilding trust with the Global South by demonstrating an unwavering commitment to equitable R&I investment.

Fund the full costs of southern partners and remove barriers to equity: To do this the UK must provide reliable, long term funding to southern R&I actors and commit to funding the full operational costs of these actors supporting them to build and maintain capacity and expertise in regions where it is most needed. It must also meaningfully shift priority setting, and decision-making on HRI to those who are closer to where humanitarian needs are experienced. Barriers to achieving equity, such as unfair due diligence expectations without suitable capacity strengthening, should be

identified and addressed, with new models of partnership developed. The UK should also seek to identify and promote innovative initiatives that have piloted more radical options on power sharing and equitable decision making.

Commit to and fund inclusive practice in HRI: The UK's commitment to '*leave no-one behind (5)*', means that the research and innovation it funds, must also prioritise meaningful engagement with organisations that represent marginalised and excluded populations, including women, children and young people, people with disabilities and older people, LGBTQI+. etc. Additionally, whilst there is general agreement about the importance of community engagement and inclusion, in practice there are no clear processes for gathering local perspectives and using these to inform programming. The UK can promote the implementation of proven processes to support active listening and action within HRI (6).

Q.2 & 3: Big ideas and Innovations

What are the specific innovative proposals that can accelerate progress in international development?

What initiatives, policies, partnerships, or technologies could result in accelerated progress?

Are there big ideas on which the UK is particularly well placed to play a role?

Increase the annual humanitarian budget with an additional commitment to 2% funding for science, research and innovation: The UK has an opportunity to lead transformative improvements in humanitarian response by recognising the urgent need to invest in new research and innovation that can revolutionise operational practice and address the systemic challenges that create and perpetuate humanitarian crises. Elrha's research into global funding of humanitarian research and innovation found that currently R&I investment equates to less than 0.2% of total humanitarian spend (7). This chronic lack of funding contributes to a system that is slow to adapt and weak in evidence: a system that is '*unfit for the 21st century*'. To accelerate improvements in humanitarian performance the UK should increase its annual spend on humanitarian response with an additional 2% investment into research and innovation (2% would be a minimum standard equivalent of low-tech industries).

Mainstream R&I funding into humanitarian programming: Our research further found that humanitarian R&I is fragmented and largely provided through small scale stand-alone initiatives. Significant improvements could be achieved by mainstreaming R&I funding alongside programming allowing evidence and innovation to become part of the way the system operates. The FCDO could do more to leverage existing R&I investment by promoting relevant evidence and innovative solutions to implementing partners.

Make strategic, long-term investments to address humanitarian challenges: Investment in HRI should be strategic, sustained and challenge driven, it should be wary of being overly influenced by the latest heated trend. Investing in each stage of the innovation process (8)is key. In particular we see value in work which facilitates real time learning (9), sets collective/sector wide research or

innovation agendas (10) and facilitates uptake and scaling (11). Together this ensures future innovation is relevant to the humanitarian sector, provides a value for money investment, and leads to meaningful changes in response.

Invest in foresight research: Humanitarian Research and Innovation (HRI) is likely to be most effective if guided by a problem-led approach. This includes the use of evidence-informed foresight methodologies to forecast core challenges likely to affect the humanitarian sector in the future. Appropriate innovations that could contribute to meeting these emergent needs and trends can then be identified and invested in. It is also critical that innovation is defined broadly and encompasses products, processes and policies that could realise technical, behavioural or systemic change within the sector.

Continue to drive improvements in data architecture and support the Humanitarian community to realise the benefits and mitigate the harm of AI: Artificial Intelligence (AI) is likely to dramatically change our world in coming years. It is vital that the humanitarian sector acts now to ensure measures are in place to protect populations from the potential harms of AI while also making the most of it its potential to strengthen humanitarian response where appropriate. A core challenge in achieving this will be to strengthen the quality and architecture of data sharing within the humanitarian system.

Q.3

What new ideas for development cooperation would make the biggest impact in, or for, low income countries?

Build strategic bilateral partnerships with governments in fragile and crisis affected regions, focusing on mutual benefits with shared responsibility, accountability and transparency: For the UK to amplify its impact it should re-establish itself as a leader in the donor community which embraces and leads on partnership and investment where needs are greatest. This includes building strategic relationships between national governments. The new Strategy should prioritise needs in allocating funding to respond to crises and particularly give consideration to the forgotten crises (12), The correlating investment in Humanitarian research and innovation must be needs driven rather than following broader trade agendas or foreign policy goals. In addition, for middle income countries with high poverty rates which leave them vulnerable to crises, development assistance should incentivise finding solutions, supporting countries in setting research and innovation agendas to mitigate the risk of disaster.

Support countries and regions regularly effected by crises to routinely identify HRI needs and priorities and use this to drive decision-making and direct funding: Currently investments in humanitarian research and innovation are dominated by the priorities of individual donor governments and the major international humanitarian agencies. Elrha's research found that governments , academic institutions, national NGOs and civil society actors from crises affected countries have very little power at the decision-making table and are rarely included in priority setting processes (13). The UK should commit to shifting priority setting, decision-making and funding allocations to those who are closer to where humanitarian needs are experienced. Local actors are often the first responders to any humanitarian crisis, and they hold most of the

knowledge about what works best in their settings - yet their contributions are often overlooked. Funders should commit to bringing these actors into priority setting processes.

Invest in Science and innovation leadership, infrastructure and capacity in crises affected regions: To prevent the drain of talent from crises affected regions the UK should increase its support to initiatives such as the *Science for Africa Foundation* (14) that provide leadership and investment in critical infrastructure and capacity strengthening, so that scientists can achieve fulfilling long-term careers in their home regions. The UK should work with these actors to support the inclusion of humanitarian research and innovation priorities into their strategies for R&I in the region and increase its support to research fellowships for researchers from LMICs that are specifically targeting the humanitarian sector. For example, the UKHIH humanitarian fellows programme (15)

Support and sustain national level R&I hubs: Facilitating the uptake of innovative ideas or processes within the humanitarian sector is inherently challenging due to the pressures of humanitarian response and the ethical implications associated with research and innovation. The UK can support uptake by investing in national level R&I hubs which could set context-appropriate parameters for innovation exploration(16), convene actors around promising ideas, strengthen capacities on R&I, and support the translation of evidence into practice. The government should also increase its support to programmes that fund locally-led innovation to generate solutions to challenges that are driven directly from the communities that experience them(17).

Q. 4 & 5: Levers, ODA and Beyond Aid

How can Official Development Assistance (ODA) be most effectively targeted and built upon?

How can non-ODA financing be mobilised to ensure ambitious, innovative, and transformational international development?

Strengthen the HRI eco-system and support the development of a global agenda for humanitarian research and innovation: The humanitarian system has all the necessary components to drive a responsive and coordinated approach to research and innovation but hasn't yet realised this potential. The UK as a leading funder of HRI should continue to demonstrate its leadership and vision by investing in system strengthening for HRI alongside more targeted thematic research and innovation funding. Elrha's research over the years documents that the current HRI system is limited 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; and,
- It is difficult to demonstrate the collective impact that research and innovation investments make.

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Investing in work that can support HRI actors and funders to address these weaknesses will deliver immediate and long-term value to the effectiveness of humanitarian action.

Align with existing global strategies and fund priority setting where there are gaps: For ODA to be more effectively targeted within the humanitarian system it needs to be strategic and aligned to global strategies including humanitarian R&I agendas where they exist, for example the Humanitarian *WASH Road Map 2020-2025* (18) and the supporting *WASH research agenda to 2030 (19)* which was commissioned by Elrha in collaboration with the Global WASH cluster. Where there are obvious sector gaps the UK government should fund similar prioritisation and agenda setting exercises that involve diverse stakeholders and centre the perspectives of people affected by crises.

Return to the intended scope for ODA: ODA should not be used to support work which falls outside of its strategic scope, and which damages the UKs credibility. For example, ODA budgets should not be utilised to support refugees in the UK, nor used for the core funding of UK research institutions. Instead, the UK government should put in place stronger accountability mechanisms and must be more transparent in demonstrating that they are allocating funding in a way that is consistent with development and humanitarian goals (i.e. aligning to SDGs). This should be supported by comprehensive UK strategies and policies recognising and taking its fair share of responsibility. Home Office Policies and language have an important role in acknowledging these interconnected challenges and responsibilities, in particular in regard to the refugee crises, which deserves the highest levels of compassion and respect to those most vulnerable and in need of support.

Q.4

How should scientific and technological expertise, private finance and the private sector, trade and investment, civil society networks and diplomacy be engaged to support global development action and accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

Prioritise and support mechanisms that enable coordination between local and global actors during a response: The relevance of these stakeholders and their expertise do not only have the potential to accelerate the SDGs but to make a substantial contribution to humanitarian response. There are two recent examples which powerfully demonstrate the impact of engaging with different actors where the UK has a track record of doing this well: the global Covid-19 response and the Ukraine response both serve as positive examples of partnering in this way [20]. Public, private and academic partnerships flourished, but relied heavily on civil society engagement to nurture trust and confidence which was not always easy to achieve on a global scale. Donors such as the FCDO have a role to play in ensuring responsible private sector partnerships that work through existing coordination mechanisms

Drive and support transformative multi-sector partnerships: Transformational change around big humanitarian challenges requires donors to support processes which convene stakeholders and foster collaborative partnerships that can support co-learning, co-creation of solutions and which can champion policy change or scale innovative ideas. The UK's strong track record in facilitating such innovative multi-sector collaborations means it is well positioned to play a similar role in the humanitarian system. An example of where we feel this has been done well is the GAVI initiative which not only connected actors working on vaccination, but also redefined the way the sector

operates, creating a vaccine market, securing long-term funding and being able to capitalise on the comparative advantages of private sector capacities and resources to ensure vaccinations are available to the most marginalised globally (21).

The UK Humanitarian Innovation Hub has developed an *Accelerated Innovation Collaboration model* (22) which 'crowds in' resources and capacities around humanitarian challenges. The model provides a way of connecting the perspectives of communities affected by crises and the experiences of humanitarian actors, with UK and global capacities and resources.

The UK should seek to build strategic relationships between humanitarian actors and traditional and non-traditional funders. This could increase the impact of resources available for HRI without diverting funding from operational budgets. The government should also continue to invest in mechanisms such as the *UK Humanitarian Innovation Hub* that enable the best of UK science and technology to work with humanitarian actors on priority humanitarian challenges.

Uphold humanitarian principles and ensure regulation and governance gaps are addressed: Building trust amongst different stakeholder groups for common good is an important component of leverage to access the full capabilities of all stakeholders. Ethical considerations, regulations and humanitarian principles are critical to achieving this and upholding Humanitarian Principles of Humanity as well as international standards and commitments such as International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law.

Particularly relevant and topical at this time is ensuring proper governance; for example, ensuring the adoption of a regulatory framework for Artificial Intelligence is in place so the humanitarian sector can move forward confidently using this technology, which is almost certain to have a profound impact on the humanitarian sector.

Q.7: Multilateral and Bilateral Action

What are the top priorities for strengthening multilateral effectiveness in international development?

What are the issues and challenges most suited to bilateral cooperation (considering all levers)?

Invest in multilateral coordination between donors funding humanitarian research and innovation: Without coordination and alignment towards common critical agendas the risk for funders is that they will continue to support research and innovation that leads only to case-by-case solutions instead of tackling the systemic barriers at their roots. Elrha has developed a body of evidence to support this with a synthesis report available in December 2023 through its *Global prioritisation Exercise* (23). Donors should work together to align strategies, avoid duplication, and pool resources. This is a priority that is realistic, achievable and can genuinely advance international development goals.

Work with global research funders to include Humanitarian priorities within their International Development strategies: The need for higher quality evidence to inform practice in humanitarian response, requires a greater volume of research funding. Currently although research funding is available humanitarian issues are not understood or prioritised in many of the global research agendas. The UK should use its influence to encourage research funding bodies and mechanisms it contributes to within and outside of the UK (UKRI, EU Horizon, Grand Challenges etc) to build more strategic dialogue with the humanitarian system and include humanitarian issues and priorities within their remit, particularly in the light of the global impacts of climate change and migration.

Demand that R&I is a priority focus in multi-lateral coordination bodies, including the global Clusters:. HRI should be more systematically embedded into humanitarian work. The UK should work to (re)establish donor coordination mechanisms for research and innovation. Identifying key questions and existing initiatives will allow better targeting of resources and sharing of learning. Coordination should include innovation platforms and alliances, as well as resourcing global clusters to ensure agreement on identifying key questions to address, and how systemic change might be achieved in each sector.

Adopt a responsible approach to risk and learning: There is a need to actively analyse and learn from failure as well as success. The UK government should embody and champion that approach, nurturing a culture of continuous improvement, recognising investments will not always be successful, but that the learning and intent moves the agenda forward. Understanding that and taking a context responsive approach to Value for Money (VfM) will encourage improvement. Where research and innovation are proven, it will ensure R&I is considered in programme design and practice to amplify impact.

Invest in capacity and knowledge management for R&I within the FCDO: To maximise the impact and truly support partnerships it is essential to build capacity in donor governments for research and innovation. Donors should invest in their own knowledge management and capacities around research and innovation to strengthen the link from evidence and learning into policy and practice. Without this, systemic change is undermined. This includes retaining experts within humanitarian departments who can influence policy decisions and advocate for effective development and strategies from within, to amplify the impact of HR&I. The UK government should continue to lead by example and encourage other multilateral donors to do the same

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