
“Towards a global compact on refugees”

Thematic discussion three: Meeting needs and supporting communities

18 October 2017

Panel four: how can we bring innovation to humanitarian assistance to achieve greater efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability?

Summary

The suggestions contained in the concept paper were welcomed, and a number of additional useful suggestions were also made.

Throughout the discussion, five key themes emerged:

1. Innovation is about technology, but not exclusively. It is also about partnerships and processes.
 - The key to all innovation is finding new ways to overcome barriers as effectively and efficiently as possible by experimenting with new processes and making use of a wide range of partners, including those from line ministries, civil society, academia and the private sector.
 - In this regard, it was suggested that a collaborative space for interaction between humanitarian actors and the private sector could be established through the programme of action.
2. As shown by the wide range of examples cited, there is already considerable innovation in the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Examples that we heard included:
 - using the savings generated from the transition to efficient sources of light to facilitate internet connectivity for refugees;
 - creating mechanisms for predictive analytics;
 - using block chain technology for cash delivery;
 - establishing standby mechanisms and rapid financing for emergency response; and
 - co-designing resettlement assistance programmes with refugees.
3. With innovation well and truly underway, the challenge is to support the scaling up innovations that work.
 - A key example in this regard was cash-based interventions. These are now widely used, but challenges remain in ensuring that they are scaled up and used wherever appropriate, linking them to existing social protection mechanisms and ensuring that cash based interventions are subject to the strong monitoring.
 - Participants also advocated for the coordination of cash-based interventions as they are brought to scale, so that parallel and duplicative cash programmes administered by multiple agencies are consolidated.
 - Many of these lessons from cash-based innovations could also be applied to other innovative approaches.

- A suggestion was also made to include a mechanism in the programme of action for fostering further innovation.
4. We cannot overlook the need for accountability when it comes to innovation, and throughout the programme of action.
- We need to ensure that accountability mechanisms keep up with the pace of change and that we do not lose sight of protection and security.
 - Innovations in the programme of action should ensure that persons of concern can provide input and feedback on the assistance that they receive.
 - Furthermore, we should acknowledge the importance and potential of refugees' own innovations.
5. Improving the data and evidence base is crucial to feeding innovation.
- Issues concerning data and evidence were noted in the concept paper and have been raised repeatedly in interventions over the past two days. Issues of respect for privacy were also mentioned.
 - It was noted that data collection and evidence on refugee issues is scarce and sometimes disorganized. This makes proper analysis and planning difficult, and the impact that this has on persons with disabilities was specifically mentioned in this regard.
 - One specific proposal to address this issue for the programme of action was the establishment of a data and evidence alliance, which would bring a range of important stakeholders together to:
 - identify critical gaps in data and indicators;
 - develop frameworks for collecting and sharing data;
 - collate and conduct regular reviews of evidence to support programme design; and
 - conduct cost analyses in displacement contexts.

UNHCR
6 November 2017