ESSAYS
FROM THE EDGE OF HUMANITARIAN INNOVATION

Year in Review 2017

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency
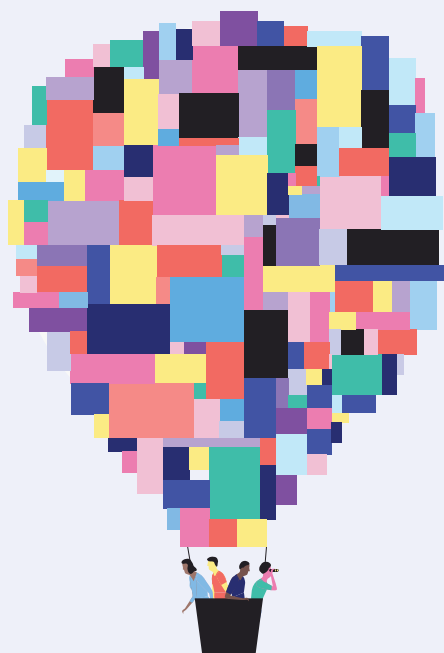
From the editors:
Year in Review 2017

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In the humanitarian and innovation communities, the collective sense of urgency reached new heights this year. Never before has innovation been so important in light of growing needs and fewer resources.

Whilst new technologies and platforms continued to advance, we refocused our efforts to the future. Experimentation, research, and refugee voices were central to the new direction. We continued to argue that innovation did not, and does not, equate technology. UNHCR's Innovation Service was instead focused on behaviour and mindset change - a small nudge team interested less in drones and more in better decision-making.

2017 was also the year that we killed our Innovation Labs and invested in a more holistic approach to innovation, diversity, and collaboration in a way that we hadn't before. This past year, our programmes and trainings gave UNHCR staff the opportunity to innovate and test new projects and processes across the world. The availability (or lack thereof sometimes) of data continues to have a profound impact on our work at the Innovation Service.

If you were to look at the themes found in our year in review, they would be focused on data, storytelling, listening, predicting, and monitoring. In our new publication, we've highlighted these themes through stories from the field, stories from refugees, stories on failure, stories on where we've been and a look at where we're going. From research to organisational change, and experiments, take a look back at what UNHCR's Innovation Service was up to in 2017.

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Cover art and editorial illustrations by Ailadi.

Practical tips for innovating in UNHCR

The word innovation is ubiquitous and confusing to most. We'd use a different word if we could. So what are the first steps for including innovation into your day-to-day work at UNHCR? And what does it actually look like in practice?

It's easier than you might think.

We've outlined practical applications of the innovation process to help get you started. Try to innovate how you innovate, whether that's in your team, division, or entire operation. Employ some of the practical tips in this list and other ideas found throughout this publication. If you still have questions - drop us an email.

Be brave.

Innovation is not an easy process but it is worth it. You will have to iterate and fail along the way - but use it as an opportunity to learn. Take the risk to try something new and it will pay off dividends in the end.

Ask the right question.

You won't get an appropriate solution if you're not asking the right question. Defining your challenge is a crucial step in the innovation process. Keep it short and make sure it only contains one challenge. You can continue to tweak your challenge question until you've identified the right problem.

Engage refugees.

Refugees are better at knowing what works for them and what doesn't. They are great innovators and full of their own ideas. Ask refugees for their feedback throughout the process - but explore opportunities to empower them as innovators themselves.

Ideate.

Take advantage of other people's creativity and facilitate a brainstorming session with your team members, colleagues, and refugees to create new ideas. Invite people with a wide range of disciplines. Crazy ideas are welcomed and should be built upon.

Experiment.

Innovation is never about silver bullets. Learn by doing. Try new things. Keep testing your original idea or process. Discover what works and what doesn't. Then experiment again.

Challenge your assumptions.

Everytime we approach a problem, we bring assumptions that limit our ability to think about new solutions. Think critically about the assumptions underlying your innovation and then test them in a systematic way.

Collaborate.

Work with other divisions, bureaux, external companies, academia, and others during the innovation process. Choose a partner with different skills and ideas. Go outside the usual suspects. Be flexible and open to different types of collaboration.

Embrace failure.

Acknowledging that failure happens to the best of us, and using that opportunity to build the skills needed to learn from one's mistakes is key.

Copy someone else's idea.

When is innovation simply imitation? Often. Look at promising practices that already exists elsewhere and apply it to your operation and context.

Launch a UNHCR Innovation Challenge.

Ask UNHCR staff and members of the public to suggest great new ideas. Offer a prize or an incentive. Give people a clear focused goal and they will surprise you with novel ideas.

Innovate with everyone.

Include targets for innovation within your team, division or operation. Measure these targets and the impact you've had. Don't just have one innovation focal point - include innovation into everyone's objectives. Before you realize it, everyone will be a champion of innovation.

A brief innovation glossary

Creativity: The use of imagination or original ideas to create something new.[1] Tendency to recognize or generate ideas.

Imagination: The ability of the mind to be creative or resourceful.[2] Imagination is the heart of creativity.

Invention: A new, unique or novel idea, device, method, process or discovery.[3]

Inventor: Someone who comes up with new ideas and concepts that may or may not lead to innovations.[4]

Innovation: The implementation of a new or significantly improved product (good or service), process, a new marketing method, or a new organisational method in business practices, workplace organisation or external relations.[5] Innovation is an application of invention so that it creates value.

Innovation process: We have a five-step process: 1) Define the challenge; 2) Identify solutions; 3) Test solutions; 4) Refine solutions; 5) Scale solutions. The process is not linear and it is not considered complete, as we seek to continually iterate.

Prototyping and testing: A prototype is a small-scale, tangible representation of an idea or solution (or part of it) that people can directly experience. Prototyping allows you to communicate your idea or solution to others in an interactive way, try ideas out quickly and gather feedback easily. The prototype is tested to make sure it is fit for the purpose and users' need. Based on the feedback, the prototype is improved and tested again.[6]

Radical (or discontinuous) innovation: Innovations with features offering dramatic improvements in performance or cost, which result in the transformation of existing markets or creation of new ones.[7] New to the world.

Incremental innovation: An improvement in performance, cost, reliability, design, etc. to an existing product or process. New to the organization, but not to the world.

Disruptive innovation: An innovation that transforms an existing market or sector by introducing simplicity, convenience, accessibility, and affordability where complication and high cost are the status quo.[8]

Design Thinking: A discipline that uses the designer's sensibility and methods to match people's needs with what is technologically feasible and what a viable business strategy can convert into customer value and market opportunity.[9]

Human-Centered Design (HCD): A design and management framework that develops solutions to problems by involving the human perspective in all steps of the problem-solving process. Human involvement typically takes place in observing the problem within context, brainstorming, conceptualizing, developing, and implementing the solution.[10]

Social Innovation: A social innovation is a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than current solutions. The value created accrues primarily to society rather than to private individuals.[11]

Piloting: A pilot program, also called a feasibility study or experimental trial, is a small-scale, short-term experiment that helps an organization learn how a large-scale project might work in practice. A pilot provides a platform for the organization to test logistics, prove value and reveal deficiencies before spending a significant amount of time, energy or money on a large-scale project.[12]

Ideation: A structured process to generate a lot of ideas, preferably in a relatively short time frame. There are many different ideation techniques, e.g., brainstorming and empathy maps.[13]

Brainstorming: An idea generation technique. Brainstorming combines a relaxed, informal approach to problem solving with lateral thinking. It encourages people to come up with thoughts and ideas that can, at first, seem a bit crazy. Some of these ideas can be crafted into original, creative solutions to a problem, while others can spark even more ideas.[14]

End-users: Individuals who ultimately uses or are intended to use a product or service. End-users are the starting point of the innovation process.

Facilitation: Facilitation is about taking a leadership role in innovation process (instead of content). The facilitator remains "neutral" meaning he/she does not take a particular position in the discussion. Innovation facilitators help to unleash the creative potential in people who own the content by creating and managing the environment so that each individual is able to contribute their best.[15]

Product innovation: Changes in the things (products/services) which an organization offers.

Process innovation: Changes in the way in which they are created and delivered.

Position innovation: Changes in the context in which the products/services are introduced.

Paradigm innovation: Changes in the underlying mental models which frame what the organization does.[16]

1   Oxford Dictionary.
2   Oxford Dictionary.
3   Strategic Management of Technology and Innovation. CTI Reviews.
4   Lean Ventures, Seedcap AB.
5   OECD.
6   TD4Ed – Teachers Design for Education
7   Innovation-3
8   The Clayton Christensen Institute
9   Tim Brown CEO, IDEO
10   Wikipedia.
11   Stanford Graduate School of Business.
12   Techtarget (2017). Pilot Program
13   Lean Ventures, Seedcap AB.
14   Mindtools.
15   The Creative Problem Solving Group, Inc. Understanding the Role of a Facilitator
16   4Ps of Innovation by ©2005 Joe Tidd, John Bessant, Keith Pavitt

Team Predictions for 2018

Combating hate.

I believe we're going to see a greater focus on big tech companies and their role in society, politics, and discourse. The consequences of misinformation, hate speech, rumours, xenophobia, algorithm bias, among other issues that these companies can propagate, will gather more attention and we will witness a backlash on tech. There will be more examples of the harms these platforms contribute to with a lack of proper self-regulation. We've witnessed first-hand adverse effects on the sentiment around refugee and migrant communities on social media already. Perhaps the bigger question here is if there will be a political will to regulate how tech companies are operating and if we can find new ways of combating hate and falsehoods on their platforms. We will continue with information wars until something substantial is done.

Lauren Parater,
Innovation Community and Content Manager

Predicting movements.

It seems that predicting world events and human behaviour is an increasingly impossible task. It's more difficult to look at the past and say that because this and that happened, this will happen tomorrow. In 2018, despite continued effects of climate change, erratic politicians, inequality being rampant in many parts of the world, I believe we will do the seemingly impossible, we will be able to predict the future. As a continuation of the work in 2017 of predicting displaced population arrivals in Somalia, I predict that we will in fact be able to predict population arrivals in major Sub Saharan conflict situations - and we will do this with the help of scientists, engineers, machines and math, not anecdotes and human experiences alone. In our field, this will be a game changer.

Hans Park,
Strategic Design and Research Manager

Continued decline.

Continued decline in the support for refugees in the region with a rising number of global crises and a paradigm shift required in the fundraising model to bridge the gap.

Sandra Aluoch-Simbiri,
Regional Instant Network Schools Officer

Complete redesigns.

The world will be moving into an era of cognitive analytics: platforms that allow us to process faster natural language (e.g. automatized simultaneous translation), speech and object recognition, and human-computer interaction - such as robot personal assistants. Data coming from customer support systems will drive organizations to redesign entirely their services.

Rebeca Moreno Jimenez,
Innovation Officer (Data Scientist)

Human interactions.

Data is pushed as a priority, but human interactions, and qualitative methods are still overlooked.

Chris Earney, Head, a.i.

Emergencies continue.

I have many predictions - we'll need to innovate in emergency contexts because they'll be a lot of opportunity to demonstrate the value-add of data-driven decision making and the importance of engaging communities from the outset (and before) an emergency. Unfortunately the situation in Bangladesh will continue, and the predictions are that the situation in Democratic Republic of the Congo will be the cause of continued displacement.

Katie Drew,
Innovation Officer (Communicating with Communities)

Gender equality?

Ideally, I would like to predict that we would be able to address the hard, cold facts of gender inequality and there would be a big leap in diversity and inclusion in our organisation and also globally. I wish we as an organisation, and beyond, would take a more intersectional approach to gender equality - understanding that gender equality is in relation to other social categories. Unfortunately, this is probably not the case in 2018 as I predict this change to take more time and investment.

Emilia Saarelainen,
Innovation Fellowship Program Manager

Innovation, Diversity and Gender: How you can take simple actions for gender equity.

Caroline Harper Jantuah, Senior Advisor - Inclusion, Diversity and Gender Equity

New ways of thinking and innovation is really important to our organisation. Whilst the prime cause of our work has not changed, the scale and the nature of the issues we seek to address has. We cannot hope to solve them with the old solutions and ways of thinking. Hence our ability to innovate becomes a core competence – new ideas, new ways of thinking, new ways of engaging and relating become critical. Women at the table in our strategy and decision making sessions bring their own characteristic approaches to leading and managing. Women have different life experiences to men and therefore when they are involved, they bring a different perspective to the table. The majority of the people we serve are women and children – seeing women in our workforce is reassuring for them and instils confidence that as an organisation we are in a position to better understand and provide for their needs.; Men and women have different life experiences and see the world differently – having access to this diversity better ensures we look at the issues we are trying to resolve from multiple angles.

Additionally, there's a lot of evidence to show that women are, quite naturally talented with the 21st century competences that really make a difference – more naturally collaborative and inclusive; stronger empathy skills; stronger in diplomacy skills; interpersonal and communication skills; there is evidence to show that the attention to integrity increases as does the attention to impact of decisions on others when there is greater gender balance.

Women are no less ambitious than men, however, their criteria for success may differ; incorporating a more holistic basket of considerations. It is clear from surveys; and from our data analyses that their experiences in the organisation are different by virtue of them being female. For example there are quite a few functional areas where there are fewer women than men - partially because women are not typically associated with careers in those fields – e.g. in ICT; in Field Safety; in Registration; shelter and physical planning to name a few - but also in operational data management; public health/HIV, Project financial control - women are succeeding less well than men. Similarly in terms of rates of progress to senior level roles – a challenge is to shift the tendency for appointments to go to more men than equally qualified women. I believe there is both an individual and systemic, largely unconscious, bias in the system where we struggle to associate leadership with our women.

Another major challenge is our mandatory rotation system which has a more adverse impact on women than men; especially those women with children. It makes it more difficult for them to balance their career ambitions with other commitments. The majority of our locations are in the deep-field and the conditions are arduous. Also, the cultural context of the location often makes living and working there more of a challenge for women. We notice that women in UNHCR are more likely to remain single and tend to have fewer children than their male colleagues.

The review of our progress in respect of Inclusion, Diversity and Gender Equity in 2015 highlighted that whilst we had made some progress there is still much work to be done to ensure that we have an environment that supports the diversity of our workforce and approaches our work with an inclusive mindset.

There is a responsibility on part of the organisation to ensure that we put in place checks and balances around gender equity, and that we have processes and policies. But I would say first and foremost it has to start with each of us at a very individual and personal level. We can make a lot of difference if we take an honest look at our own behaviours and take the time to uncover what our unconscious biases might be from a gender and diversity perspective. That we actually take time to stop and reflect on how our behaviors may be contributing to this. Unconscious bias is something we all have; learning more about our biases and taking steps to mitigate the negative impact is key. Let us not underestimate the power of small changes in our daily actions

These can be very simple things like stopping to consider who it is you go to for consulting on a particular issue – how diverse is that go-to group of people? How can you mix that up? Another example is in terms of meetings, who is invited to the meeting and how diverse is that? Once you get to the meeting, whose voice is heard? Do you notice those who are not getting opportunity to speak up? I think these small things can have a huge impact on the quality of the work environment and how inclusive it actually is. Another example around what we can do around gender equity is to the extent to which we speak up when we see unfair practices against our colleagues. So when we think about what it is we can do to change the experience of women in UNHCR, then it's the responsibility for all of us to share. That's what I would encourage you to do.

UNHCR Innovation Service & Inclusion and Diversity

We believe that inclusion and diversity are the most powerful vehicles to bring about positive and lasting change - within UNHCR - and more broadly within the humanitarian sector. Diversity and inclusion will be key to transforming UNHCR into one of the most innovative organisations in the world.

72.2%
of the Innovation Service's workforce are women

Whilst 50%
of team members identify themselves as European, our team now has representatives from all continents except Antarctica

15
spoken languages in the team

Giving a voice to LGBTQ refugees

Maybe Subhi Nahas was always meant to wind up in San Francisco. What better city for a young, gay activist with a penchant for new technology to put down roots, claim a sense of history and purpose and find a like-minded community of friends and supporters? But Nahas is here by lucky accident of paperwork. San Francisco was the city he happened to be assigned to when his refugee resettlement package came through after years of persecution in the Middle East.

Unlike many Syrian refugees, Nahas doesn't have a neatly spliced before and after based on the civil war in his country. For him, persecution was a part of daily life well before militias began carving up territory and tearing apart communities. "As a gay person, I knew that I was in direct threat because of my sexuality," Nahas says.

Nahas grew up a confused child who wanted desperately to fit in but never could. His classmates and family teased him for the way he walked, dressed, wore his hair and especially the way he talked. When the internet was finally allowed in Syria, he started learning about himself, and recognizing he wasn't alone.

But no amount of awareness could change the way Nahas's own family treated him. As the oldest son, he had a responsibility to represent the family. And to them, his effeminate nature was an unacceptable public face to put forward. After a therapist "outed" him to his parents when he was 15 years old, his parents monitored all his phone calls, outlawed unsupervised time with friends and verbally and physically abused him for years. Even his mother seemed to think Nahas deserved the violence his father dished out.

"If your dad doesn't beat you up, who will?" she used to admonish her son.

Homosexuality has long been criminalized in Syria, with young people perceived to be gay the victims of bullying at school and ostracism and violence by their families. But once the war began their treatment became markedly worse; multiple armed groups routinely targeted gay people for arrest, threatened them with violence and abuse and even stoned them to death and threw them off tall buildings into complacent crowds.

"There was no law and nobody I could go to if anything happened," Nahas explains.

He even feared his own family might use violence against him. And one night, they did. An argument with his father ended with his father slamming Nahas's face into the countertop. He still bears the physical and emotional scars of that night. Nahas felt imprisoned. His family did not accept him but there was no community to which he could escape or seek shelter. "I could not escape my family, I could not escape the war, and I decided I had to leave," he says.

From then on, Nahas began relying on kindnesses and connections, arranging for a place to stay with friends over the border in Lebanon and hoping to find work. He wanted a sustained source of income, a place to stay and form a community, and a new family and life. But as the refugee crisis grew more and more urgent and legal work was not permitted, it was almost impossible to find a job. After six months, he flew to Turkey, where refugees may work as guests. He found people to stay with and a job at a magazine, then with international NGO Save the Children. Then the real threats started.

The first was from an old schoolmate who had joined ISIS. Through a mutual friend, he told Nahas that he knew about his sexuality and his work in LGBT rights, and planned to tell his supervisors. He said they would find a way to kill him.

Nahas knew he was being targeted for his sexual orientation, but he had no idea it could be grounds for receiving refugee status. When he told his colleagues at Save the Children what was going on, they helped him write up his case and start the process of seeking asylum.

He didn't care where he ended up. He just wanted out.

"I was happy with the first result that came in," Nahas says.

He only knew about American culture from music and movies, but when he arrived in San Francisco, Nahas found inspiration in the work of Harvey Milk and other early gay rights activists who had transformed San Francisco into an open, accepting and proud space.

But he also found a disappointing xenophobia that detracted from the sense of welcome he'd hoped would finally embrace him. Most people who asked where he was from ended the conversation once he responded, "Syria." Most assumed he was Muslim, or a certain kind of person based on their preconceived notions of Middle Easterners.

"People have assumptions or stereotypes based on what they say in the news," Nahas says. "It's a bit hurtful. It was also fatiguing to keep attempting to explain the diversity of his region. Nahas grew frustrated in his attempts to build community here.

"I'm not as actively seeking connection with people as much as I expected to," he says. "It's limited my options in reaching out to people and making new connections and building a community and a family."

But despite the challenges of overcoming assumptions and navigating new social networks, Nahas remains committed to his cause: making the world a safer and more accepting place for members of the LGBT community, and especially for gay refugees.

He continues to advocate for them, in part through a nonprofit he founded called Spectra Project. The organization helps with emergency support like shelter and food, as well as resources including legal assistance, health and sex education, and language and vocational training.

Nahas wants the world to realize that the stories of LGBT refugees are too often untold, unnoticed or hidden. "There's not enough coverage of what's going on," he says simply, thinking of friends whose deaths have been covered up by police and blamed on how they looked or dressed.

Nahas's work has come to the attention of international leaders, who invited him to speak about LGBT refugee issues before the United Nations Security Council. He accepted, and was the first openly gay man to do so.

It had taken Nahas years to accept that as a gay man there was nothing wrong with him. He had literally kept silent sometimes in Syria for fear his voice would give his sexual orientation away. So speaking up in such a public forum, and letting his voice be heard, was a terrifying and liberating step. Similar feelings churned within Nahas when he was asked to serve as Grand Marshall for New York City's 2016 pride parade.

"I ended up saying yes because it would not just send a message to myself that it's okay to be who you are, it would send a message to a lot of people, especially gay youth still stuck in Syria, gay youth who became refugees because their families felt ashamed of them or (wanted) to kill them because they're gay," he told Suka Kalantari of the West of Middle East podcast series. "I thought that if they see this it's like a message of hope that one day they'll be celebrated and loved for who they are."

That message has not yet reached Nahas's family. Three of his sisters refused to speak to him after he led the parade. And he is not sure if he'll ever reconnect with his parents. They still live in Idlib, Syria. But the fact that his own story remains one sometimes filled with frustration and sadness does not take away from Nahas's resolve to keep fighting for what he believes.

To the general public, he encourages recognitions that people are all the same. To the LGBT community, Nahas reminds them to stand up for each other and to stand together as part of a worldwide community, not one defined by the borders of cities. For those in the Middle East, Nahas implores them to think before they judge.

He wants them to know that being gay is not a Western concept imported by foreigners. "We're your brothers, your sisters, your best friends and maybe possibly your fathers and mothers," he says. "One day, maybe they'll embrace and accept us as we do them."

Beyond numbers: Why cultural change has to accompany our renewed investment in data.

Chris Earney, Head, a.i.,
UNHCR Innovation Service

Data is important. Obviously.

UNHCR sits on a data goldmine. Data is gathered, circulated, cleaned, analysed, continuously visualised, every second of every day, in emergencies, through to operations focused on durable solutions. From registration, to financial verifications of partnership agreements, we are irrefutably an organisation that relies heavily on data. This won't be the first article that tells us that data is important, and that we need to become more of a data-driven organisation, and it certainly won't be the best-written article making that case. Instead, it recognises that for UNHCR to become increasingly data-driven, we need a cultural change around data rather than simply to say that, 'data is important'. Because that we already knew.

How are data and culture linked, and what needs to change in our culture to become data-driven?

Culture is defined by the way we do things, our behaviours, learnings, and the values we attribute to things. If the way we do things needs to be increasingly through the use of data, then to make our organisation data-driven, means that we first of all need to change how we use data, and how we understand data, as something with a value. It's important to underline that this is not an argument for collecting more data; it's about using better data, and using data better. We've got loads already, let's use it more smartly. Secondly, if the value that we attribute to data is increasing, then our investments in this resource, should also increase. We will use data to make, or complement, key decisions at all levels, and decision makers will have direct access to the data that they need, when they need it. Newly recruited colleagues will understand that data has a value, and that they will need to display competencies that support the production, and use of data. More experienced colleagues will understand that they now need to invest in data as a core part of their job. If they do not have the competencies, they will need to invest in those who do, and we should invest in supporting the acquisition of relevant competencies among those who have been with us for a more extended period.

It seems that we need to become comfortable with the understanding that a specific team does not own data. That is to say, that financial data cannot be owned and guarded by colleagues working in finance,

and protection data cannot be owned and guarded by colleagues working in protection. Instead, data needs to integrated better across operations, across divisions, and across bureaus. Operations cells that form around specific situations, comprised of people from multiple divisions and bureaus, joint analysis exercises, data optimisation exercises, and good data governance are some of the ways we can start, but our most senior management will need to set the example. It would seem prudent to go one step further still and to make data increasingly open to the public. There is a myriad of examples of organisations doing this successfully - and when we say successful, we mean not only the act of doing so, but the positive impacts this has brought to bear, including inter alia The World Bank Group, the European Union, and of course the Open Data Institute. Thirdly, and linked to both of the above, having the confidence to say that there will be mistakes made, some data will not be as accurate as we would like. Finally, placing a higher value on data, and placing it as a valuable commodity that we have a vested interest in nurturing, and using to create better protection outcomes for refugees, the displaced, and the communities that extend support to them by hosting them.

But why do we need to become data-driven?

Because it will make us better. We will be more transparent, we will provide more dignified protection and assistance to refugees, and others. We will produce better evidence on which to base decisions. Data-driven organisations make data available to decision makers when they need it. It also means allowing people to explore data independently, trusting that they can, and will, do so. Decision making needs to be done on the basis of one version of the truth, not many different versions, and data contributes to the compilation of evidence. This is not to say that interpretations, and different proposals for action should not be proffered, indeed, diversity is to be encouraged.

Diversity of thought, including analysis, is important

To make the most of your data, you need diverse groups and users analysing it. Connecting most critical data sources also includes connecting critical

people, many of whom will have very different understandings of what it means. This diversity should be encouraged, because it encourages, and speaks to creativity, to innovation, and to initiative. It makes us more inclusive, and it makes us more effective. We need to be able to make links between data that for example, is gathered around protection incidents, and data that is gathered on outputs of our programmes. We don't necessarily need to look for cause-effect relationships, but we do need to better understand the impact of our interventions. Likewise, how we understand relationships between different actions, and feedback gathered from communities - host and displaced. Introducing stronger links between critical data sources, and new data sets will also uncover new understandings and new people who want to understand the data - including non-traditional actors.

To add to this thought soup, I'd like to add some other considerations. The below are some of the things we will need to do, in order to change the culture of our organisation around data.

1. Partnerships

We don't have all of the tools, expertise, knowledge, products, services, and processes that we need to become as data-driven as some would like. We've got a lot of existing resources, and a lot of very smart people, but we do not have enough. Partnerships with large private sector organisations, with the World Bank, with smaller private sector organisations, with academia, with civil society, with other UN agencies, INGOs, NNGOs, and the public at large, will help to harness these, and will help to guide us, as well as to get us, to where we need to go. If I look at the experience UNHCR went through in the Europe Refugee Emergency, one of the many challenges was overcoming the potentially harmful effects of winter on a population that had been on the move for some time. We needed to find the most at-risk points over a large geography, and we needed to understand not the tactical implications, but the strategic implications that weather would have on our operations. To do that, first of all, we had to recognise that we had a gap in knowledge, practice, and expertise, and secondly, that we were prepared to plug that gap. Which we did with the UK Met Office, among others. We'll learn a lot along the way, and we will likely discover more

unknowns that we will then need to address, but we will advance.

2. Human Resources, training, and new profiles

Part of the change we need to see, includes recruiting new profiles of people, and new training opportunities for the outstanding people we are already fortunate enough to work with. More data scientists, coders, front and back-end developers, data governance experts, data architects, UX and UI specialists, will all help us to unleash more meaning and more impact from our data. But we also need to continue to invest in the expertise that we currently have, provide the training, or find the training that our teams need to pivot and to adjust. This cannot only be for those with roles that currently include heavier interactions with data; rather, this needs to include those who view data as being for other people. If we are not doing the latter, then we are not able to connect the most critical people with the most critical data sources, and we are failing. I was asked the other day if data isn't just the latest buzzword in the humanitarian industry. Aside from such myopic and cynical comments not helping us to advance, of course, the answer is no, it's not. It's the latest tool to make us better at what we do, and investing in the right competencies is part of moving the needle.

3. Setting the pace

We - as a humanitarian community, need to feel comfortable in setting the pace, and stating more assertively, our needs. For a long time, the private sector has been almost fetishised for its resources, for its approaches, but this almost becomes a form of commodity fetishism - we're seeing results, which often gloss over the internal processes, or politics that it took to produce that result. The relationships that we foster, and we garner with the private sector are two-way relationships. We learn from some of the expertise, and some of the skills, services, products. But we also impart knowledge, and expertise, and some of the skills, services, products. And we should not be afraid to recognise that, and increasingly state the needs of our sector, and where the private sector should perhaps be looking to invest. Free stuff is unsustainable, so too is finding a fit for many

things that already exist. We are starting to see some substantial private sector organisations learning from innovations produced within a humanitarian organisation, repackage these innovations, and then attempting to sell these ideas and solutions back to humanitarian organisations.

4. More innovation

The universal truth is that we need more, and more, and more innovation - and that innovation needs to be understood as a set of tools and practices that are accessible to all rather than simply as the application of technology. And that includes Blockchain. We've experimented, tested assumptions, iterated, scaled,

learned valuable lessons with our constituents globally, with the previous High Commissioner, with private sector partners. It works. It needs to work more, and it needs to work better - including for newly emerging approaches to data. We now need to make sure that our own innovation processes constantly change and adapt to match the needs of UNHCR. The danger that we almost fell into a couple of years ago was again, looking to private sector innovation efforts, and thinking we could simply replicate these within our own organisation. As soon as we began to blend private, and public sector approaches, from smaller as well as larger organisations, innovation started to have more impact. A renewed emphasis on the importance of data will require innovation to be front and centre,

as an engine for constant iteration and improvement. As soon as we start to free the data, as soon as we start to make certain data sets technically open, and available to more people and organisations, then we will reinvent what is possible, and innovation will help us to do so.

5. Data security

UNHCR is an ever changing, constantly re-written, multi-layered, palimpsest of data, and it goes without saying, that new approaches in data need to go hand in hand with evolved data security practices, protocols, and technologies that reflect the best of the latest available tools. Indeed, we must also

make sure that evolved becomes evolving - static updates and changes will not suffice. Data is an asset and can be used in a multitude of ways, with a multitude of motivations, and this is evolving rapidly. Unfortunately, some actors have nefarious motives. As we become more digitally, and data driven, we will need to understand that protection now exists in new dimensions as well. This is all obvious to say, nevertheless, also important that we do not approach data protection as an extension to the status quo. Rather, as a new lens through which to manage and understand risk, and mitigation(s) of an ever-evolving risk.

6. Governance

A forward-looking governance structure will be essential to making investments sustainable and effective. Governance will need to optimise what already exists, and allow us to do more with what we already have. It will also look at what we should have, and what internal clearances, practices, and structures need to change in order to make sure that we are as agile, and efficient as well should be. We will need to remember that - if we're doing it right - the consumers of UNHCR data, and analysis, are going to be increasingly much wider than our current consumers. Governance will need to underscore the importance of open data, of breaking down internal silos and making real-time a reality. This requires a radical shift in mindset.

7. Management

All of the above require skilled approaches to management. It takes humble, and experienced colleagues to shape, to guide, and to manage a complex change within a complex organisation, which serves an increasingly interconnected, and complicated world. "We the people" have and will, become more connected, and more complicated. We will constantly need to adapt, and more managed through more processes of change and adaptation, as we will require more sophisticated tools and processes to offer support to the displaced, and those that host them.

So a lot needs to be done. And this isn't even an exhaustive list. Culture change is complex, and it's something that is managed with care, and should be managed strategically. UNHCR currently has many of the right ingredients to affect a cultural change around data, and it has a history of being agile, adaptable. With the above in mind, we're moving through one of the most exciting crossroads in UNHCR's history. If we move through successfully, we will see an organisation that convenes and connects, and one that enables quicker, more effective decisions made, one that catalyses change within many more organisations - current partners, as well as new.

It's a change that we're excited to support, but we will need to make sure that it is inclusive, and does not ostracize the constituents of change that we most need to bring with us on the way.

Essays

From big data to humanitarian-in-the-loop algorithms

Miguel Luengo Oroz,
Chief Data Scientist, UN Global Pulse

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Miguel is Chief Data Scientist at UN Global Pulse, an innovation initiative of the Executive Office of the United Nations Secretary-General, harnessing Big Data and Artificial Intelligence safely and responsibly as a public good. As the first data scientist at the United Nations, he has pioneered the use of big data for sustainable development and humanitarian action. Miguel is also the founder of MalariaSpot.org at the Universidad Politecnica de Madrid- a social innovation platform that leverages videogames, crowdsourcing, artificial intelligence, 3D printing and mobile-microscopy for diagnosis of malaria and other global health diseases.

The Data Revolution is no longer a new topic but a reality trying to catch up with the expectations it has generated. The private sector is investing billions in new start-ups and technology companies that can ingest the vast amounts of data generated by citizens and which use artificial intelligence algorithms to predict when, how and what people are more likely to buy. In contrast, humanitarian organisations today have just begun exploiting the potential of big data to improve decision-making. Measuring the impact of these data-driven decisions will help make the case for further investment in big data innovations. Once humanitarian practitioners understand the return on investment of big data innovations, we can start measuring the costs (financial and human) of not using these data, and we can begin to streamline scaling and adoption mechanisms.

One of the factors contributing to the slow institutional uptake of big data and analytics within the humanitarian sector is a lack of knowledge and capacity to apply these instruments in operational settings. In general, humanitarian and data experts do not speak the same language; they do not share a common vocabulary or context, and often cannot align their goals. This challenge is not a new one. And for me has become a sort of "déjà vu." Fifteen years ago I started working in development biology, where AI and data experts were helping to "revolutionise" the field the same way data scientists are trying to impact sustainable and humanitarian efforts today. New microscopes taking high-resolution images of tissues and organs were viewed the same way satellite imaging showing the impact and recovery from natural disaster is viewed today. Similarly, the same way that fluorescent markers allowed tracking of millions of cells migrating in the body, today we can track the movements of people fleeing conflict using aggregated mobile phone data. It took years for the field to mature while a new generation of researchers, technicians and biologists mutated into multidisciplinary profiles. This is also the case with humanitarian organisations that need to create hybrid profiles, i.e. data translators who can both understand the operational humanitarian contexts and have data intuition. They know what can and cannot be done with data and how to interpret and visualise data and algorithms to provide information for real impact.

At the beginning of this year, UN Global Pulse worked with UNHCR on a project to use real-time information on human perceptions to identify opportunities that can inform the organisation's efforts on the ground, and more largely, its humanitarian strategy. The project combined UNHCR's expertise in the field of humanitarian action, and the years of innovation work leveraging big data for social good from UN Global Pulse, to understand how social media data can inform the perceptions of host communities on refugees and migrants fleeing conflict-affected areas across international borders.

Using new data for insights into humanitarian contexts is a multifold process. Before we can test any innovation project in an ongoing emergency, we need to select a retrospective realistic scenario, or a simulation, to understand the value of the data. This is exactly what we did together with UNHCR, where we explored the viability and validity of Twitter data in the Europe Refugee Emergency crisis. Our goal was to see how we can bring more data-driven evidence into decision-making processes and advocacy efforts, particularly to help UNHCR develop an institutional policy against xenophobia, discrimination and racism towards migrants and refugees. For that purpose, we partnered with Crimson Hexagon, an analytics tool provider, and used their tools to access and analyse social media posts. The findings of the exploration can be accessed in the paper "Social Media and Forced Displacement: Big Data Analytics & Machine-Learning." The project has now entered a second phase, in which the aim is to create a real-time situation awareness tool. It will require finding the right balance to introduce a new approach into existing workflows and operations, respecting the unique strains on staff and responders during an emergency. The co-creation of prototypes with users on the ground is key

to generating useful tools. This is why identifying the right partner, with the right complementary skills, is important.

Once you have created the right team and identified the right questions, the next step is data access and analysis. From UN Global Pulse's experience working with many sources of data from social media, to radio feeds, to mobile surveys, to vessel tracks, postal traffic and so on, we have learned that clear and proven algorithms, and analysis methodologies are crucial to distilling insights from raw data. There is no silver bullet; and recent hype oversimplifies what can and cannot be done with big data and artificial intelligence. Data characteristics including sampling, demographics, completeness or inherent bias have different properties, hence analysis must always be put into context sooner rather than later.

When talking about machine learning and the new neural network architectures that have revolutionised AI in the past few years - aka deep learning- it is important to remember that the machine will be as biased as the data that is used to train it. Though current real-world applications are mostly limited to internet business, digital marketing, playing board games or self-driving cars, there is a wealth of opportunities for AI methods to perform tasks where certain patterns are repeated. One of the critical issues is the need for ethical principles that can govern how artificial intelligence methods are developed and used- and how and to which extent AI should be regulated. The use of autonomous weapons or viruses targeted to individuals with a particular trait in their DNA are clear examples of data driven threats. We also need to develop privacy protection principles on the use of data and agree on frameworks for the way in which these data are processed by algorithms. The principles of responsibility, explainability, accuracy, auditability, and fairness can guide how algorithms and AI programmes work. And although one size won't fit all, especially in humanitarian situations, we can ask what expectations we should have in critical humanitarian scenarios where the well-being of vulnerable populations is at stake. Certainly, the benefits will depend on the nature of the crisis - a medical emergency is not the same as a natural disaster or a conflict-affected area - as will the potential risks and harms. If in certain situations the harm comes from not using the available data, in others, insights distilled from these data could be used to target populations and cause more damage than good.

So what will the future of big data analysis and AI bring for the humanitarian field? In my view, we should imagine a future where we have understood how to augment (and not replace) the human condition by leveraging technology. Data-driven benefits can certainly help reduce inequality. This will require a new research agenda where scientists and technology companies work to solve problems that apply to a wider range of social groups and that include the 17 global goals we have vowed to achieve by 2030. To serve humanitarian practitioners, the current deep learning revolution should pay increased attention to methodologies that can work in data-scarce environments, that can learn quickly with few examples and in unknown crisis scenarios, and that are able to work with incomplete or missing data (eg. "one-shot-learning").

In humanitarian contexts, we could consider an extension of the "society-in-the-loop" algorithm concept - embedding the general will into an algorithmic social contract-, where both humanitarian responders and affected populations understand and oversee algorithmic decision-making that affect them. Before 2030, technology should allow us to know everything from everyone to ensure no one is left behind. For example, there will be nanosatellites imaging every corner of the earth allowing us to generate almost immediate insights into humanitarian crises. Progress will just depend on our actions and political will. What I also foresee is a not too distant future where data and AI can be used to empower citizens and affected communities in humanitarian crises. The digital revolution can help refugees protect their rights and their identities and even create jobs. Imagine a future where refugees could be granted digital asylum in other countries for which they can do digital work and contribute to the growth of that economy. From both public and private sector perspectives, we are living a unique moment in history with regards to shaping how algorithms and AI will impact society. What we need to make sure is that the data we produce is ultimately used to benefit all of us.

Teaching a 'robot' to detect xenophobia online

Rebeca Moreno,
Innovation Officer (Data Scientist)

A robot? Not exactly.

Machine learning (ML) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are two buzzwords, particularly when talking about the realm of data innovation. Artificial Intelligence is the ability that machines have to mimic the cognitive processes of humans. The word 'artificial' comes from this idea that machines are not intelligent per se. Behind them, there are humans programming them to perform certain tasks. Nevertheless, depending on the complexity of their programming, some machines are more 'intelligent' than others. This means that some machines only need to be programmed once and they will continue to perform the tasks or increase the complexity of the task performed, on their own. For data enthusiasts and innovators working in the humanitarian sector, AI expands the possibilities of processing data in a more accurate and timely way - data that could help Senior Management make decisions quicker or prepare our teams on the ground better for eventual contingencies.

According to TechTarget, a robot is a machine designed to execute one or more tasks automatically with speed and precision. Some robots, for example, only need simple programming to do specific repetitive tasks, and sometimes they do not necessarily require AI embedded in them. This is the case of a robot in an assembly line. However, not all AI is necessarily applied into a robot. For example, sometimes AI is applied in a computer or a mobile device. And sometimes - once AI is programmed - it has the ability to 'learn' from the original programming and then compute tasks on its own. An example of this is Siri on your iPhone. Siri, is a form of applied AI that is capable of 'learning' voice patterns and convert them into dictation. It recognises a language, a local accent to then, perform a task—like looking for the weather conditions in a particular city. Siri synthesises millions of data points coming from different words, languages, and even different accents around the world, becoming 'more intelligent' and recognising more patterns every time. Siri uses then Machine Learning (ML) techniques to process all this amount of data, and responds in a matter of seconds—even if the same question is asked in different ways with a different tone—how's the weather today? Is it going to rain? Is it cold? To compute an answer: bring an umbrella.

Applications of machine learning

In the world of marketing, machine learning has been used to process large amounts of information to make decisions on how to design new products and improve services for customers. However, in the humanitarian sector, AI applications are a new area for exploration. AI and ML can allow humanitarians, innovators, and data specialists to compile, process, and visualise huge amount of data in a matter of seconds. Many humanitarian emergencies are complex and first-responders often only have partial information to act quickly. To have a full picture of a complex situation, many various pieces and elements should be analysed. Sadly, humans do not have the time nor the resources to compile all the different information in the short timeframe needed to respond. Every so often decisions are made with partial evidence to act quickly and save lives. And this is precisely where machines can help.

For example, currently UNHCR staff and partners spend time, money, and human resources in analysing from different angles and perspectives the issue of local integration: socially, economically, legally, and culturally. This is done to respond to the questions related to appropriateness and feasibility of integration of UNHCR's persons of concern into local communities.

Big Data: challenges and opportunities in the humanitarian context

Depending on the context and in order to have a full picture of an specific situation, humanitarians frequently use proxies: data points that are not by themselves directly relevant, but that provide sampled insights of some issues that are completely unknown to them. Oftenly these insights are found in traditional forms of data: secondary data, census information, surveys, focus groups discussions notes, interview recordings, household visits or key informant interviews. However, additional insights can also be found in other forms of data, the non-traditional datasets: radio broadcasts, earth observations and geospatial data, call centre/call data records, remote sensing, wearables, downloads, news outlets, and social media— just to mention a few.

Jetson: insights into building a predictive analytics platform for displacement

The amount of data produced by these non-traditional data sources is huge and usually 'heavy' in terms of: 1) data storage, occupying large disks/server space (volume); 2) produced in short intervals - often even produced at seconds intervals (velocity); 3) comes in different formats, like voice recordings or free text (variety) and often; 4) the information is produced from one single—and occasionally biased perspective/angle (verification). This is the reason why these non-traditional data sources are also known as big data sources - with the four "Vs" which are the primary attributes of big data.

For example, in social media, Twitter produces an enormous amount of data in a matter of seconds. It is calculated that approximately 200 billion tweets are produced in a year (6,000 tweets per second). The amount of energy and time that our UNHCR colleagues, particularly our communication colleagues, would need to have to collect, compile and analyse and visualise results to respond to specific questions—would be a challenge to their already burdensome work. Some of them have done it manually, through compiling meaningful insights. Compiling social media data is important to humanitarian organisations, like UNHCR, to understand persons of concern most urgent needs and to establish a two-way communication with them. But to scale-up this process, and most importantly, to be able to quantify it with a certain degree of statistical significance, humanitarians can rely on machines: to sample, compile, and catalogue data in real-time.

Training a machine to detect xenophobia

In 2015, the UNHCR Innovation Service partnered with UN Global Pulse, the United Nations initiative for big data analytics, to find additional insights into a rapidly-evolving setting: the Mediterranean situation. Originally intended to analyse intentions for predicting movements, the teams turned to Twitter data to identify patterns that could help provide insights into cross-border movements. The teams used machine-learning to "find", "read", "compile", and "catalogue" tweets found in specific geographical locations and particular languages (e.g. Arabic, Farsi, English, French, Greek, German) attempting to find movement intentions or comments on services provision that would incentivise their movement. Although some comments were relevant, the sample of tweets found was not enough to provide sound mathematical-based evidence.

However, the machine found anomalies of comments that were particularly exacerbated during the terrorist incidents in Europe. Every time a new incident happened - Munich, Paris, Berlin to name some of the key events - posts with a negative sentiment towards refugees appeared in different parts of the world. Sometimes these posts even had a negative association of refugees with the incidents. The teams then re-trained the machine with a human rights-based bias: to find comments that will trigger intense dislike or hatred against people that are perceived as outsiders, strangers or foreigners to a group, community or nation, based on their presumed or real descent, national, ethnic or social origin, race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation or other grounds. Manifestations of xenophobia include acts of direct discrimination, hostility or violence and incitement to hatred. Xenophobic acts are intentional as the goal is to humiliate, denigrate and/or hurt the person(s) and the "associated" group of people (OHCHR). The team 'taught' a machine to 'learn' how to read, compile, categorise, anonymise, and aggregate different types of Twitter posts, in different languages and across cities and to quantify both xenophobia and integration-friendly comments.

We drafted a White Paper titled, "Social Media and Forced Displacement: Big Data Analytics & Machine-Learning," to share the process and quantitative results of experimenting with machine-learning for understanding the dimension of the sentiment in the region. The conclusions of the paper can serve as insights of one single data source (Twitter) just as one single piece of the puzzle on what host communities think about persons of concern - like refugees - arriving into their countries. It could be used as evidence for humanitarian organisations for preparing an advocacy campaign or drafting policy recommendations to to better counter xenophobia. For UNHCR teams, it could serve them to direct their community-based protection initiatives by understanding the main issues that refugees encounter when arriving into a new country.

The promise of machine learning: more questions than answers

By using machine-learning, both teams had a snapshot of evidence on questions related to integration for just one single region. However, in data science - where data is king - data insights produce always, more questions. After analysing some of the results of the experiment, the teams reflected on the following questions: A) how can we use AI for advocacy purposes in other regions? B) how can we help other agencies and organisations to use these tools in order to understand complex contexts where social media is not prevalent, or there is no electricity/connectivity? Also, when more walls are going up, C) how can we leverage AI to analyse big data and create a counter-narrative for hate speech? And finally, D) how can we translate integration and counter xenophobia in a digital world? If you have an answer to any of these questions or would like to experiment with us to respond to them, feel free to reach us. We have some 'robots' that could help with some of the tasks.

Project Jetson is a platform aimed to provide UNHCR operations predictions about population movement (arrivals/departures) for specific regions or countries. Jetson - a machine-learning based application - measures multiple variables to see how changes over time affect the movement of UNHCR's persons of concern, particularly refugees and internally displaced people. This experimental project was launched by UNHCR's Innovation Service in 2017, to better understand how data can be used to predict movements of people in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the Horn of Africa.

We asked **Sofia Kyriazi,** Artificial Intelligence Engineer, and **Babusi Nyoni**, User Experience Designer, from the project team to discuss the challenges of predicting displacement and what success may (or may not) look like for the project as it moves forward.

Why is user experience so important to this project?

BN: Project Jetson, a project about the future of displacement, is one that must be articulated carefully. On the one hand, as a

team broaching a future-facing project, a visual representation befitting of the magnitude of the work would seem appropriate. A willful disregard for user experience convention would be permitted to a degree considering the rationale that an idea of the future deserves a matching facade. On the other hand, the future, because it is unknown, is intimidating, and sometimes scary. A misstep in proper articulation could nullify the purpose of the website when users of the site failed to comprehend the content and how to interact with it.

What were some of the challenges you faced during the process of developing Jetson?

BN: Mapping the user experience had its fair share of challenges. First of all being the responsibility of presenting an interface that both the general public and UNHCR staff will find intuitive. This presented interesting challenges in creating a unified visual experience while still catering for very specific use cases such as UNHCR staff on the ground in Somalia and their more office-oriented colleagues in Geneva considering that the bandwidth disparity between the two is extensive. Another challenge was that the map visual morphed over time from something static

to a very dynamic representation of conflict and displacement data over time. The use of multiple references contributed to the near-convolution of this process, but this was expected as the main consideration was that the solution would have to be bespoke and tailored to the scenario. As we continue to define the story, the visual is expected to change to something more befitting.

SK: The first and most important challenge was the question: what are we trying to show? Which number is important to us. Implementing all different based mathematical functions, to approach the actual arrivals, a lot of times the results were completely off, even though we were doing the training with all the available data. This could either mean that the data is not correlated and that we needed to expand with more information or that we were working in the wrong way.

BN: Additionally, presenting information in the most succinct manner was challenging in that while the website was meant to house the predictive engine, the map visual, and long-form content, considerations had to be made as to how much information and how to display it. A user-

friendly summarisation of the engine was conceived that gave casual users of the website a brief view of the engine metrics and results with the option to view the parameters at depth.

SK: Another challenge for me was the uncertainty over correlations between datasets, of various formats, that we were collecting and how they could assist in predicting arrivals in each region. The datasets had to be cleaned, transformed and grouped per month, with the use of scripts in python or/and R, an action required to minimise the input to the modelling engine. The scope of the project had to be limited in modelling arrivals in the region of Bay. These were challenges regarding the volume, thus to apply our effort and focus researching one use case, the pilot case, and documenting the process, in order to systematise it for the rest of the cases. Eureqa, an A.I. powered modelling engine, as a tool lacks in examples of time series predictions, future predictions. Only through forums, we were able to find a way to modify the research function to be able to predict arrivals for a month in advance. The produced functions were implemented, with the use of R, commonly used for statistical analysis, and the predictions were collected to be

compared with the official real numbers of arrivals. The "winner" function, (maybe Rebe can say a bit more here), was used in the final application, developed under the Shiny library, hosted in the shinyapp.io platform.

What has worked so far?

BN: An essential part of the process was the weekly standup/check-in meetings that helped track progress and kept this mapped to the project goals and deliverables.The mid-process workshop held in Geneva with all members of the team physically present fast-tracked progress on the resolution of a number of pain points. It also assisted in the rapid iteration of recommendations to the current state of the respective deliverables.The ability to tap into UNHCR Innovation's domain expertise in big data and on-the-field information came in handy when framing the solutions and validating outputs and having the collaborators on-site meant our efforts could very easily be contextualised for UNHCR's needs, which is something the team appreciated.

SK: It was a matter of time for the team to gain the same speed on dealing with requests, and we overcame the barrier of depending on completion of each

other's tasks, to proceed with our own. We managed to automate the process of collecting and transforming data to assist future predictions, this part is now done in a short time and with ease. We have created a systematized process we follow, to expand on other regions of Somalia, in terms of collecting results from the tools we use, implementing, testing and iterating to come up the best estimation of movements..

What will success look like for the team, for the product?

BN: Success from a user experience perspective is an intuitive interface. It is one that tells a story that can be understood without supervision and that users can articulate to non-users of the website accurately. This includes powerful imagery where necessary; concise representations of data; and interactions that convey trust all aide in creating an experience that is the best representation of a platform's intent. For the team, success lies in presenting deliverables that articulate, with cohesion, the team's mandate with regards to the task. This begins with defining and adhering to a team dynamic that works and also, at the same time, allowing for a level of fluidity from team members in executing their

responsibilities respectively. And finally, the product should be trustable enough to use without any degree of failure, either by the product (in doing what it is expected to) or by the user (in achieving their goals).

SK: It would be a huge achievement to have the image of arrivals and departures for each region, meaning if someone would want to see, what is going to happen in Somalia over the course of the next month, they could be able, ideally in a more visual way (not just numbers) to see where big movements will take place. It would be even better if we got an "out of the ordinary" prediction, such as an alert of an unconventional movement. This would indicate that the engine has been trained enough to predict abnormalities. Regarding team success, over the last couple of months, we took time to make mistakes and sometimes we used time, expecting result,s from each other. Our over the weekend workshop had some amazing results and it gave the team a new pace, faster and more confident. To try to define it more, I would want to see everyone expressing their creativity and passion while being on the same track.

Numbers <u>suck</u>

The failure of raising awareness for refugees in
a world of data, disinformation, and empathy

Lauren Parater,
Innovation Community and Content Manager

The limits of information in communicating refugee issues

In 2015, I wrote an article discussing the UN Refugee Agency's (UNHCR) recently released Annual Global Trends Report which highlighted what I called "the insane fact" that worldwide displacement had totaled nearly 60 million people. I commented on these numbers explaining the failure of this numerical discourse as a medium to gauge the reality of the situation:

"Yes, these are indeed the numbers representing the world's refugee crisis. They're unfathomable in my opinion. What do 60 million people even look like? When you imagine 60 million displaced persons, does it look that different from 40 million or 20 million? The numbers are so large it can be difficult for some people to put that staggering "60 million people" into visual terms that can be fully understood."

The paradoxical need for numbers to explain the gravity of displacement, coupled with the failure of these numbers to register to our audiences, continued to bother me. Why wasn't this data having an impact on policymakers or governments to do more? Where was the emotion that I hoped would elicit action?

Fast forward to 2017—to a world where disinformation and hate speech floats at the top of our newsfeeds, and suddenly "insane facts" didn't matter. Welcome to what many call the "post-truth" world, where daily posts exhaust people's emotional resilience before they have time to act. In the Stanford Social Innovation Review article titled "Persuasion in a "Post-Truth World", authors Troy Campbell, Lauren Griffin and Annie Neimand explain that it is no longer enough for messages to rely on facts and data to support arguments around social issues. They explain that "by moving beyond facts, using smart storytelling, and crafting solutions that don't require audiences to sacrifice their values, organisations will be better equipped to move the needle on ideologically or politically sticky issues."

The challenges for communicating strategically on social issues such as migration, climate change, and displaced populations have become more apparent. The consequences of sowing confusion and fueling disinformation can be catastrophic to the cause itself, destroying the role that trust plays for policymakers and the public pertaining to social causes.

2017 was also the year UNHCR Innovation Service looked deeper at this paradox and set out on a path to better understand how the human mind interprets the usefulness of information and the complicated role of communication when it comes to humanitarian innovation and refugee issues. We started digging into the assumptions we had about what worked effectively in highlighting the plight of refugees in addition to persuading audiences to invest in innovation. We were on the offence. We sought to understand how we could overcome these barriers and collective shutting down of compassion against the backdrop of the highest level of displacement since World War II.

The failure of numbers

Paul Slovic, a well-known psychologist and editor of the book "Numbers and Nerves" argues that through his research he has found that it is not in our psychology as human beings to interpret and respond appropriately to the large numbers seen in catastrophes. But, we can respond to another person's story and use this as a medium for compassion and response. Slovic states how science indicates: the more victims, or people in need of aid, the less compassion people will have.

In "Numbers and Nerves" Slovic and his co-editor Scott Slovic state, "in order to make the data mean something (and perhaps even count for something), it seems vital that quantitative discourse be complemented with other modes, such as story and image, which so forcefully inspire human audiences and shape our moral compass. Many of the crises that face individual societies and that challenge all of humanity today are either preventable or correctable."

The atrocities and crises that are causing refugees to leave their home countries don't often "feel real" which creates a barrier to data and information being processed cognitively. Slovic describes this as the psychic numbing of the public's mind, explaining that "our capacity to feel is limited," in the journal article "Psychic Numbing and Genocide."

This is not to say that numbers and statistics don't have any role to play in the work of UNHCR's Innovation Service. We have to communicate these numbers as they are a crucial aspect of UNHCR's work to inform the media, governments, and public — but we should be wary of the limits of human rationality to act on this data. If our target audience is "prey to feelings of inefficacy" as Slovic's research has shown, even when one person does understand the magnitude of challenges represented by numbers, there will still be barriers to effective action in addressing these issues.

One step is acknowledging that the fundamental large-scale challenges of our time require that we use numbers. We must come to terms with the fact that to communicate effectively in light of compassion fatigue, we need to be more innovative and creative in our storytelling strategies. I mentioned above that I have struggled in interpreting the scale of need within humanitarian work, often dense with statistics on displacement and funding gaps. This does not mean we should limit ourselves to stories simply focused on one person (because that also falls short and is susceptible to stereotypes) but rather we should identify new methods for driving behaviour change in our communities.

What strategies can we use to persuade people that we need new ways of thinking in the humanitarian sector? How can we utilise the insights provided by research to counter xenophobia and disinformation online? Are emotions the right medium for using narratives to drive social change? These are just a few of the many questions we will begin to explore. It is not that the human mind is inherently insensitive, but that numbers fail to catalyse the scale of momentum needed to address the challenges of today.

In the end, we need to find ways to balance data and raw information with evocative narratives and storytelling methods. We need to find the right words to depict the magnitude of what we are trying to communicate better, whether that be the importance of humanitarian innovation or action required to address the challenges of refugees — our fellow humans — around the world.

The failure of empathy

If data wasn't going to be our savior, then we can at least count on empathy to convince people to push for social change, right? When we look at buzzwords, empathy is probably one of the most overused. The call for more empathy is everywhere. If you review resources on innovation and design thinking, a key argument for success is empathising with your end users. Grand communications strategies are built with the sole purpose of driving empathy for a specific group. Former US President Obama stated, "I think we should talk more about our empathy deficit – the ability to put ourselves in someone else's shoes; to see the world through those who are different from us." I even have friends who have worn "Make empathy great again" t-shirts. Empathy, like data, is everywhere.

So when I stumbled upon the book "Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion," written by Paul Bloom, a Professor of Psychology at Yale University, I was obviously more than intrigued. After consuming the book, I had questions for Bloom - so I scheduled an interview to understand the limits of empathy in our societies better.

The humanitarian sector is obsessed with giving people the "refugee experience" — whether this is through virtual reality, an app, or taking them through what it's like to be registered. When I questioned Bloom on what people have referred to as "empathy machines", he was quick to argue the limits of technology as a means for understanding the "refugee experience". "Virtual reality is worse than useless. You put them in the shoes of the physical environment of these people, for example, a refugee camp, which could lead to the dangerous delusion that this is what it is all about," he argues. Bloom states that in the case of refugees, it is less about being in a rickety boat for a while, but the mental suffering one faces as a refugee, something that often spans decades, which cannot be appreciated or prompted by these tools. The emotions associated with their experience of becoming a refugee is not engendered by such simulations.

During our interview, Bloom also highlighted that he does not disagree entirely with using these simulations, if the singular goal is to attract individual donors at an event or to educate an audience about the physical environment of refugees. But he is also quick to caution that when deciding to donate to a cause, one should focus on the more altruistic idea of "what will do the most good" which then "automatically precludes the idea of putting yourself in someone else's shoes."

One of the critical arguments Bloom presents is understanding how empathy is being used on political discourse continuum. "Empathy

has always been used, but now we're worried because the other side is getting good at it," he explains. We discuss the case of newly arrived refugees in Germany, where in one sense the open border policy was driven by empathy for those who were forced to flee, and most Germans were eager to accommodate and welcome those who had newly arrived. This then shocked the other side to start using empathy for arguments such as "what is it like for Germans now losing their jobs" or false claims of refugees bringing terror into communities. Empathy can be used to exploit distinct groups of people, such as refugees or migrants, with the intention of discriminating against or hurting the respective group. Regardless of which side you are on when it comes to social issues, empathy is a tool that can be used by all parties within a community to promote their viewpoint or opinion.

It is important to also note how Bloom defines empathy, which is feeling what another person feels or synonymously "putting yourself in someone else's shoes." Therefore, if you are feeling lonely, I could pick up on this loneliness through empathy. This is distinct from compassion which he argues is more centred around the idea that "your life has value to me, I want to help you and improve you." In his book, Bloom presents a significant amount of scientific evidence that empathy and compassion activate different parts of the brain and while they may sound similar in theory, this verbal distinction is critical for understanding the risks of empathy in communications.

Bloom argues that there are the moral limits of empathy and there are biases we each have within ourselves that make it a poor moral guide for everyday life. In his book, he explains, "We are not psychologically constituted to feel toward a stranger as we feel toward someone we love. We are not capable of feeling a million times worse about the suffering of a million than about the suffering of one." Empathy may appear as an obvious source of compassion, but it can also be a tool that is exploited to harm others. The limits of empathy can be correlated with the innumeracy described by Paul Slovic; a person may act when they see one child in need that looks like them but inaction in the face of large-scale crises.

Design for bad and empathy

I think there are useful parallels in the arguments Bloom presents that can be mirrored in how we discuss the usefulness of design in our work. While design and new solutions can be used for good – they can also be utilised against our own mission and hurt the same people we are striving to protect. Sure, design can be used for social good, but it can also create new challenges in UNHCR's work. That wall that has gone up, that policy that takes away rights or bans a specific group, that speech or bot on social media sparking hate – it is all product of a different type of careful design.

My final question for Bloom focused on what tools we can use if we aren't smart enough to rely on empathy. He quickly answered, "I would like to see governments have objective triggers for action – regardless of who is in trouble. It would be good to have a triggering event that forces an investigation or a government to act in the case, for example, of possible genocide." In an ideal world, Bloom also believes everyday citizens should hold politicians more accountable to their promises or lack of action around the issues that affect us. If we were able to bring rational compassion and rational arguments more effectively into these discussions he argues, the landscape would look very different.

And the best tool for actually driving empathy? Bloom suggests a small, simple resource: a book. "In general, we're bad at imagining the lives of people very different from us. We're better off with literature because they provide a more personal experience. The problem of being a refugee is not just sleeping in a tent – it's not having a home. The hardship of their experiences you simply cannot simulate or begin to imagine."

The bigger question here might be: how do we make people care if empathy also fails as a tool? How do we make people pay attention when each day presents a new tweet to be angry about, another distraction at the forefront of our newsfeeds, an additional frustration in believing we can't change the status-quo? Again, this is not to say that there is no place for the role of empathy (or design) in UNHCR Innovation Service's work – but in the same way, as we must recognise the limits of data, we need to recognise that empathy isn't necessarily the end all to be all.

Data isn't everything - where do we go from here?

Reflecting on the past twelve months, it was a year of discovery for us. We were able to question a lot of the assumptions we had about our communication strategy and bring in experts to assist us in research around public interest communications. While we came to many conclusions, we were also faced with even more questions. Where empathy and data fall short, we have found a new space for science and research to answer our questions. We're beginning to understand how UNHCR Innovation Service can experiment in communications - and no, that does not mean just having a fancy website. If 2017 was the year of discovery, 2018 will be the year of testing and doing in this field for us. We want to continue to test how behavioural science, psychology, data, research and value-based decision-making methodologies can all be used to structure the way we communicate about refugee issues and humanitarian innovation. One early takeaway is that communication is integral for each person in our team – whether they are working on connectivity, data, energy or protection. Everyone communicates, and everyone should know how to communicate strategically, especially around what many consider the complex processes around innovation.

There is this predictable language of change where we talk about "innovation" and also the word "disruption" in the humanitarian

sector. But all innovation is not progress, and all disruption does not lead to results that have good impact. We have to train ourselves to know the difference, and one of the ways we can do that is in the way we are communicating and evaluating the work we are called to do.

The humanitarian sector does not offer many models for what it looks like to learn in public, but innovation necessitates the potentiality of being wrong and learning through doing. We certainly haven't figured it all out yet, and we need to be ready to admit that, while also taking the time to ask those around us: what should we be doing differently?

We want to move away from stylized 'innovation' jargon into a space focused on creating a community or dare I say, movement around humanitarian innovation. In many ways, the word movement is characterised principally by the community which forms it. And while at the heart of the community are those who truly believe and have the will to bring new ways of thinking into this sector, we also have to be ready to allow critics into this space. When we are looking at the discernment about where we are going, it is crucial we listen to those who can see what we can't see, to get feedback from those who disagree with us and to open ourselves to those difficult conversations.

Maybe empathy isn't the end all to be all for communication and social change. Maybe data shouldn't be the only factor driving our decisions and how we work. Maybe the cognitive apprehension of numbers fails to push us forward to take action – even when morally we know we should. We are still learning.

Community will be critical for us moving forward. Changing individual behaviours and instilling action-oriented goals will be core to how we view our communications. It will be vital to recognise that decision-making should be about more than just data and numbers when careful judgments and direct interventions are required. More importantly, though, innovation will continue to be about changing mindsets and critically engaging those who have traditionally been the "them" in the "us versus them" showdown.

If there is one thing we hope for 2018, it is less of the divisiveness within the "us versus them" dichotomy – whether that be in our politics, our societies, our conversations, and how we behave in our organisation. If we can come together, even for just a moment, there is the possibility for better impact. Our hope is that by moving past raising awareness and investing in public interest communications, we can begin building a movement that is less about numbers and more about changing perceptions. We are laying down empathy and facts and picking up new instruments: emotions and science.

Data may be useful in evaluating the world and empathy perhaps a decent fundraising tool, but they will wash past audiences and fail to ignite the action we truly seek in having an impact for refugee communities.

So, I'll leave you with this. In humanitarian innovation, where big data, blockchain, artificial intelligence, and financial tech reign – words still matter. They may be one of the few things left that drive people to take action around the issues they care about.

Why UNHCR is experimenting with communications

Annie Neimand, Ph.D. candidate, frank Research Director
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When we're deeply invested in an issue, our first impulse is to raise awareness of it--to ensure that everyone cares as much about the issue as we do. When we're faced with something as profound as protecting 65 million displaced people throughout the world, it makes sense to think about how we can raise awareness to enlist more support for refugees' profound needs.

New awareness campaigns are launched every day, and little if anything is different after. People who know more or are more aware are not more likely to act. Consider, for example, the Occupy Movement, or countless campaigns that work to raise awareness of particular conditions or diagnoses. Awareness can be part of change, but unless it's connected to a call to action that gives people something specific to do that they believe will make a difference, it's useless. This idea–that more information will result in better decisions or new actions–is referred to in academia as the information deficit model. But we often refer to it as a majestic unicorn. Unicorns are beautiful and lovely, but were never real. And the information deficit model was debunked nearly as soon as it was captured.

People aren't failing to act to help refugees because they don't know about the issue. They don't take action because they don't care or they don't know what to do that will make a real difference.

UNHCR is driven by its mandate to protect refugees. The Innovation Service is charged to work within UNHCR to identify new ways of thinking that can improve UNHCR's effectiveness. However, innovation is a fluffy buzzword that people tend to associate with apps, gadgets, new technology, and data science. Unfortunately, this association obscures the real work of the Innovation Service, which values new ways of thinking and approaching challenges even more than it values new technologies. Behavioral and cognitive science and insights from published academic research can be as powerful as anything coming from Silicon Valley. Academic research can offer insight into what motivates people to care and to take action. Putting this deep reservoir of knowledge to work can offer new insight to challenges that have previously seemed insurmountable--and help UNHCR move beyond awareness.

We are working with UNHCR's Innovation Service to dive into science that helps explain, for example, how worldviews shape behavior toward refugees. Or what motivates prejudice, and how to address it. Exploring what social, behavioral, and cognitive science has to say about these topics provides a different type of foundation for addressing barriers the organisation faces in serving its mandate and will reveal new messages and calls to action.

We're also deeply interested in the power stories have to affect how people think about an issue. We know that stories drive empathy, and during our visit, we interviewed countless people who believe the most important thing they can do is help someone understand what it would feel like to lose everything and flee for your life, like a refugee. As the Innovation Service has adopted a stronger storytelling culture, this theme has dominated their stories.

Work by Christopher Booker has identified seven story structures that nearly every story ever told adheres to. They are: Overcoming the Monster, Rags to Riches (or Riches to Rags), Voyage and Return, Comedy, Tragedy, Rebirth and the Quest. UNHCR stories that are designed to drive empathy almost always follow the riches to rags structure. This creates two communication challenges: the first is that people may stop paying attention to the stories the Innovation Service is telling because they follow predictable arcs, and also end predictably. It's also possible that people who care about refugees are checking out of stories that are deeply sad because they empathise with the experience, but want to avoid feeling unpleasant emotions.

The second is that these riches to rags stories may uphold a master narrative about refugees that portrays them as always in need--and may be less effective in helping the organisation protect refugees. Too few stories show the strength and benefits refugees can bring to new communities, or highlight aspects of refugee life beyond their struggle. This master narrative is easily exploited by those who don't support refugees. We'll work with the Innovation Service to test this idea and experiment with new story structures that can help show dimensions and context that can reveal new aspects of the refugee experience, and also connect with emotions like triumph, pride, and curiosity.

When we visited UNHCR during the discovery phase of our partnership, we discovered that while everyone we talked with understood the importance of strategic communication to serve the mandate, communication was siloed to one team within the organisation. We plan to experiment with building a different understanding of communications throughout the organisation. One where everyone recognises the role of communication in their work and can apply basic principles to a more thoughtful and effective approach to communication. And one that measures belief and behavior change, not awareness.

This begins with using a four-question framework to help people think more strategically about communication.

These questions are:

1. What do we want to be true that isn't true right now? What would be different if more refugees were protected?

2. Whose behavior change is critical to making that happen? This is about targeting a narrowly defined audience whose action or behavioral change is fundamental to your goal.
3. What would they believe if they were taking that action? In other words, what does that narrowly-defined audience care about most and how can you include that in your messages?
4. Where are their eyes? (or ears). Answering this question helps ensure that your tactics will connect with where they are, whether you're using social media, posters, face-to-face interaction, or the news media.

In the coming year, we'll experiment with three ideas to help UNHCR Innovation Service use communication as a tool.

1. Use cognitive and behavioral science to develop a communication strategy that both raises the profile of UNHCR's Innovation Service and serves the mandate to protect refugees.
2. Identify the kinds of stories the organisation is telling, and experiment with new structures as a way of changing the narrative around refugees and building more support for overcoming profound challenges they face.
3. Establish a culture of communication in which each member of the Innovation team can answer the four questions and tell stories about their work that change how people see refugees.

We are eager to get to work. Like the people who walk through UNHCR's doors each morning and work in the field every day, we are here to serve the mandate and build better protection for refugees. As we experiment with the Innovation Service on their communication, we will work with them to share what we are learning throughout the organisation. As these ideas take hold, we believe that we can help the UNHCR build support for refugees throughout the world.

INNOVATING COMMUNICATION: AN EXPLORATORY REPORT

CONTENT

UNHCR INNOVATION SERVICE &
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, COLLEGE OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATIONS

How connecting neuroscience, storytelling, and psychology can create measurable impact for refugee youth

Mohsin Mohi Ud Din, Founder of #MeWeSyria,
Storytelling Innovator at Ashoka's Youth Venture

#MeWeSyria is both a methodology and youth platform built in collaboration with local community-building NGOs (such as DARB and Questscope) and technical partners like Ashoka, and Beyond Conflict. #MeWeSyria 2017-2018 is being made possible thanks to UNHCR Innovation, and the Ford Foundation. Previous years of #MeWeSyria were supported in part by the German Government and Porticus Family Foundation.

Today, science shows us how stress and trauma impact our physical bodies and even genetics.

But there is a layer that science still needs to penetrate when it comes to understanding how narrative therapy and storytelling can support a person's mental health and inner resilience. Also, how do stress and trauma reshape--or not-- the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves?

But let's step back from a second. Why are we even talking about stories and narratives in the first place?

Stories remain humankind's carrier of moments, histories, and futures that either expand or clog our mental and physical pathways for connecting the mind with the heart and our breath. This consequently shapes how we treat ourselves and others.

At an anecdotal level, in our global storytelling work with youth, we see the physical and mental impacts of a young person who grows up under an arrested narrative: one where a person leaves their life's narrative to be written by moments and circumstances imposed by everyone and everything but him or herself.

It is our hypothesis with MeWe - our innovative storytelling programme - that an arrested narrative of oneself fuels an arrested development marked by:

- a persistent disconnection of mind, heart, and breath
- higher levels of stress and anxiety, and disassociation from the present
- challenges in being empathetic, communicating needs, collaborating with others
- limited capacities for being aware of one's senses and inner resiliency assets

If true, this is not only a tragedy and missed opportunity for the person affected, it is a loss for their family, for their community, and for our world.

Our counter-narrative to this would be that discovering and reclaiming control of one's own narrative can activate a person to build inner resilience, self-awareness, empathy, as well as enhanced capacities for collaboration and positive relationships. Each year in #MeWe, we are seeing growing evidence of narrative's role in activating behavioural changes in our beneficiaries.

What can stories do?

MeWe believes that the process--not the product--of storytelling and communication gives exercise to critical skills needed for youth to be healers and community-builders: leadership, collaboration, empathy, and creative problem solving--all ingredients for sustainable peace and development. The MeWe storytelling methodology, now being self-replicated by refugee youth in their communities, attempts to sync neuroscience, media literacy, and psychology into a single program that activates youth to literally and figuratively re-author their lives as Changemakers.

The body of research for storytelling's role in behavioural development is nascent, but there are a number of pioneers coming up with some fascinating studies connecting neuroscience, storytelling, and psychology.

Dr. Uri Hanson, neuroscientist and researcher with Princeton University, has been demonstrating through brain scans how a storyteller's words can shape the brain activity of listeners. According to his research, words and stories can stimulate neural coupling, where the same regions of the brain can be activated from the teller to the listener. In other words, empathy is not just a nice word, it is something physical and biological in our brains and body chemistry.

According to neurobiologist Paul Zak, stories actually influence brain chemistry. In various studies, Dr. Zak's research has shown that stories of a particular structure can trigger the release of the hormone 'oxytocin', which is associated with connectedness, and by some empathy. Certain narratives also were found to be linked to the release of the stress hormone, 'cortisol', in listeners.

Psychologist David Yeager's research with U.S. high school students is showing how light narrative therapy exercises associated with reading and writing are effective coping tools for stressed students. His narrative interventions involve students accessing knowledge about how change is possible;

then students write personal stories about overcoming stressful situations for younger students to read. The intervention's data shows reduced cortisol levels and cardiovascular reactivity compared to the study's control group.

There is also the widely held theory that what has kept our species alive has been our unique ability to form networks for social cooperation, which most likely would not have been possible without our ability to imagine shared experiences and transcendent purposes that unite a people. Dr. Yuval Hariri beautifully articulates this point when he writes that from the beginning of the cognitive revolution, communication among homo sapiens shifted how our species survived, "The survival of objective reality now depends on the grace of imagined realities."

Shared experiences, social cooperation, goal-setting, and knowledge sharing have no mobility if not for stories and narrative. This has helped our species to survive because stories require us to maintain a universal truth: all of us possess the ability to change. Dr. Daniel Amen, who has analysed more than 83,000 brain scans, and reports that his number one takeaway is "We can change our brains. You are not stuck with the brain you were born with."

This truth carries promise for all youth work and humanitarian work because it proves humankind's ability to make change. This means we can heal one another, just as much as we can destroy one another.

Discover | Reclaim | Unleash

"Neuroscience research shows that the only we can change the way we feel is by becoming aware of our inner experience, and to befriend what is going on inside ourselves." (Van der Kolk)

The journey of the #MeWe methodology follows three stages: Discovery of shared experiences; Reclaiming control of the narrative; Unleashing change. Each module in this framework follows a deeper three-stage process of:

i. Mental observation and self-discovery
ii. Actively reclaiming control of narrative by writing/drawing/media literacy
iii. Unleashing me to we through peer to peer sharing, active listening, digital storytelling

In the mental observation portion of the program, we run through mindfulness practices where we explore our breaths as a gateway to observe--not filter---the stories inside of us. Our breaths—past, present, and future-- carry the stories we tell ourselves and don't tell ourselves. These stories shape our self-awareness and emotions.

For some, the concept of exploring what our future breaths will do and what our past breaths have experienced triggered anger and frustration and anxiety.

One participant in Zaatari refugee camp shared that "I see loss and pain when I close my eyes. I must keep my eyes open and adapt to what is around me....the future is uncertain, and causes discomfort."

For others, it was an opportunity for self-discovery. After running through the exercise once, we then included the breathing and reflection exercise as a daily practice to start and end each day, so that incremental goal-setting at the beginning of the day, and reflection at the end of the day became more digestible for participants.

"Being aware of your emotional state each day, and having a start and end point in your day's goals--we feel psychological rest. I try and keep close positive memories and songs, so I feel how I used to be." says Mohammad, after going through the exercise in Zaatari refugee camp.

The intention with starting each intervention with quiet 'visual reflection' is to routinely exercise activity in the prefrontal cortex, which is associated with judgment and critical thinking, and connectedness. Frequent exploration of one's mind and body would build comfort and confidence with exploring one's own ideas, emotions, and stories.

Reclaiming control of your narrative

Before participants engage in a series of individual and collaborative storytelling exercises for writing and video blogging, we walk them through concepts about how the brain works, and how trauma and stress impact the brain and body. Through interactive modules, co-designed with neuroscientist Michael Niconchuk from Beyond conflict--- participants reflect, write, act out, and share scenarios of self-written stories where the characters are the brain, or one of their senses--like sight. The brain or sense characters

encounter a negative trigger or challenge, that then must be overcome. Such an approach borrows from narrative therapy, in which the participant and his/her problem have cognitive distance which allows for self-awareness and creative problem-solving.

Such exercises reinforce the psychological concept of interoception (sense of the physiological condition of the body), and support youth to discover where they feel stories and words, and recognise their bodily states. In another exercise, youth perform a self-audit of their own resilience assets accessible in self-defined moments of chaos and stress. Once identified and shared peer to peer, participants take the positive and negative triggers and formulate a hero's journey narrative in the form a letter they will keep for themselves in the future.

Across three countries, the majority of our refugee teams replicating MeWe identified the following modules to be the most impactful for youth:

- Learning about the fast and slow systems of the brain
- Learning how trauma impacts the connection between mind and body
- Authoring hero's journeys about their brains and future selves

Initial feedback from refugee youth hubs to #MeWeSyria, Ashoka, and Beyond Conflict indicate that what youth respond to the most is knowledge about how our own minds and bodies are capable of change. This is foundation resilience and health.

Peer to peer sharing and putting empathy to action

Across each medium of communication--the mind, the paper, and group sharing--one's stories/ideas transform a bit. In each one, the participant is exercising awareness of their senses, exploring their emotions and imaginations, and connecting their inner emotions and stories to the physical networks around them.

Peer to peer sharing is a crucial element of our methodology as relationship building and creative collaboration remain essential to healing. One way we perform group shares is by giving the option of participants to read their own story themselves to the rest of the group, or the teller selects someone else

to read their story for them. Having someone else read your story for you allows for the writer to have distance from their own story and observe it more deeply from another perspective.

Another tactic is having the audience physically show empathy and active listening by standing across from the teller and taking one step towards the teller any time they feel a connection or emotion to something being shared. With later stage exercises, we encourage the recording of video blogs, where participants exercise looking at themselves on camera, hearing their own vice played back to them, and practising message delivery on camera. For many past participants, this would be the first time they are about to hit the record button, and it is an incredible symbolic moment of pushing a button to give oneself permission to unleash their feelings and ideas.

"In sharing with a group, I began to really explain myself in a different way. Before, I was not able to share my story honestly because I was only sharing with myself on the inside. I was doing this for one year," a Syrian woman expressed at our recent training in Lebanon.

After sharing his story, another participant in Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan said, "There is a relief when someone understands you."

Future to Present

Building upon the discoveries and stories they discovered and unleashed in the 'Heart's Maze', 'Brain Story', and 'Power of Why' exercises, participants write a hero's story where they are the protagonist. In this case, they are writing from months or years in the future to themselves in the present time.

The exercise offers an opportunity for 'Goal-Setting', which is part of #MeWeSyria's therapeutic core, in addition to 'Control' and 'Interoception'. After doing a free write, participants are then encouraged to formulate one action they can take to help bring the future one step closer to the present.

"In my own life, I have never been so courageous," one female participant says. She is astonished with herself and what she was able to unleash and record. While she admits she is uncomfortable watching her 'Power of Why' video blog till this day, she still references and watches her 'Future to Present' video blog from 10 months ago as

a motivator and reminder of the goal-setting narrative she began to craft for her life's story.

Meera, normally a quiet and shy participant, recently shared a piece of her future to present story to the group inside Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan: "My voice is louder. My eyes are wider. I find things in me I didn't know were there... You will never be you unless you feel yourself, and love yourself."

What's next?

Through the refugee-led platform and methodology of #MeWeSyria, Beyond Conflict, and Ashoka's Youth Venture are exploring ways to reframe the relationship between neuroscience and storytelling.

We are increasingly observing how refugee youth can ripple positive change in their communities if youth are given access to the right knowledge, followed up with safe opportunities to exercise this knowledge, specifically when it comes to accessing: the science of trauma and stress and its impact on the body; how the brain works and how it reacts to language and stories; the role of language and communication healing and changemaking.

As the Syrian war continues into its seventh year, 15, 20, and 40-year-old refugees are increasingly put in positions where they feel a need to provide some level of psychosocial support to their friend, their parents, or their siblings. With support from partners such as Beyond Conflict and Ashoka's Youth Venture, it is our aim to create new tools and materials that make inaccessible scientific knowledge available and useful for youth communities who desperately can benefit from it.

Fresh tools are needed for effectively measuring the impacts of narrative therapy and communications on the social and emotional development of a young person.

Since October 2016, we tried piloting iterations of a psychometric scale--a pre and post assessment-- measuring for empathy, problem-solving capacities, and perceived stress and situational control. Data was gathered from more than 200 refugee youth participants. Findings indicated promising patterns in enhanced capacities for empathy and perceived stress and situational control. However, the scale also showed a lot of inconsistencies and gaps within the respondent's answers.

We discovered that this was in large part due to lack of investment/resources in co-creating the questionnaires with our youth communities, and there was a critical need to properly train the communities on the ground implementing the scale so that they had a comfortability with the scientific concepts associated with each measure in our scale.

I now realise that the premise for why we measure should be co-created and driven by youth beneficiaries of a program---not funders or organisations.

Thanks in part to support from UNHCR Innovation Service, we have been working with neuroscientists and M+E experts--such as Mike Niconchuk from Beyond Conflict and Mallory Feldman-- to refine our impact assessment tools in the process, working alongside affected communities to unpack, reframe, and translate questionnaires on affect labeling, alexithymia, cognitive flexibility, empathy, and other correlations of psychological resilience.

Since January 2017, Syrian youth teams have replicated the program to more than 600 mothers, children, disabled children, street children, and teenage Syrians across eight cities in three countries. In this recent stage we now have a proof of concept for how Syrian teachers and Syrian youth facilitators can mobilise and reach younger refugees with an innovation as powerful as MeWe. Having just returned back from co-creation sessions with our refugee teams, we are seeing an increased demand to scale the storytelling methodology and community-based MHPSS toolkit being co-authored with Beyond Conflict. We are also excited the refugee hubs for the next five months will reach another 300 youth, with more planned for the rest of the year. We are excited to continue working with partners like the UNHCR Innovation Service to further support and celebrate these brave and dedicated young changemakers.

**This article reflects learnings and insights from our recent #MeWeSyria missions in Jordan and Lebanon, co-led by Mohsin Mohi Ud Din (Founder of #MeWeSyria/Ashoka's Youth Venture), and Michael Niconchuk (Beyond Conflict).

Why there's no innovation without experimentation

Emilia Saarelainen, Innovation Fellowship Programme Manager

"Almost any question can be answered cheaply, quickly and finally, by a test campaign. And that's the way to answer them – not by arguments around a table."
Claude Hopkins,"Scientific Advertising" (published in 1923)

Experimentation is a crucial part of innovation, and some would argue that there's no innovation without experimentation. If innovation and experimentation are so closely linked together, before we can start talking about experimentation, we need to understand what innovation is. The big misconception is that innovation is about new ideas: as long as we have ideas, everything else will magically get solved. We associate innovation to colourful post-its and countless brainstorming sessions. Whereas searching for novel ideas is part of innovation and the process, it is not the real challenge and the most challenging part of innovation. Understanding innovation as "the best idea" is a myth and it's not only a too narrow and simplistic understanding, but it's also harmful.

The Business Dictionary defines innovation as: "The process of translating an idea or invention into a good or service that creates value." The focus is on the process and the value creation, instead of ideas or inventions and this is where experimentation comes into the picture. It is very rare to have a lone inventor having a light bulb moment (another myth of innovation) leading to a successfully implemented solution. Making an idea or concept into reality, into something meaningful has thousands of variables that you can't figure out alone or "by arguments around a table." Experimentation is fundamental to get insights and new knowledge. So, in relation to innovation, experimentation can be seen as a "search for new value" (Zevae M. Zaheer), a journey to innovation.

There are a countless number of approaches to experiment, i.e. exploring opportunities, identifying opportunities, gathering feedback, testing and evaluation ideas/solutions, translating ideas into solutions. Have you heard of Randomized Controlled Trials (RCT)? How about prototyping? Minimum Viable Product (MVP)? Design Thinking? Human-Centered Design? No wonder there's confusion on what we actually mean when we talk about innovation or experimentation. In 2017, we made a strategic move to incorporate the word experimentation into how we describe our innovation process. This decision was made to begin stripping down the innovation jargon used in our communications. Experimentation is a bit like innovation, a word that can mean different things to different people and in the worst case, it is just an empty word without meaningful intent. However, experimenting itself doesn't need to be complicated,

in the purest form it is about trying things out in small-scale. We don't need to know the extensive experimentation vocabulary to test our ideas or to experiment. We can spend ages on brainstorming good (or bad) ideas, but without testing them, they are just concepts without any evidence to prove that they would work. So, the question to ask is not "what's your idea?" but "how have you tried to test it?"

Why we need experimentation

There are three (+1) main reasons why experimentation is essential.

1. We learn.

Experimentation is all about learning. It is about answering your questions and testing your assumptions. It is about gathering data. Experimentation helps us to make more informed decisions about our ideas and projects. A common mistake is that people take their idea and run with it without testing the assumptions behind the concept. We think we know, but quite often we don't know, we just assume. Still, we make decisions based on how we think things are, without testing any of our assumptions. Many things may feel obvious, but it is always good to test them. We shouldn't be afraid of experiments as they help us gather necessary information and thus, to become more certain. Experimentation helps us to navigate in the avoidable uncertainty that is part of any innovation process.

2. We fail (in a positive way).

Failing is part of innovation, but there should be a recognition of how one fails and how big your failure is. Failures can cost time and money; big failures can cost a lot of time and money. So, "the key is to fail quickly and cheaply, spend a little to learn a lot" (Vijay Govindaran, Professor, Tuck School of Business). Experiments can help you to do that. By trying things out at small scale and as early as possible, you experience temporary mini-failures that provide you with a lot of information and thus, help you to avoid making significant failures that could get your (untested) projects failing disastrously.

3. We save money.

Running experiments doesn't need to be expensive as there are several ways to test your assumptions and inexpensively run small-scale experiments. Another way to think about the costs of experiments, is to consider how much does not experimenting cost. Too often projects are rolled out without much trialling. Without testing ideas, products or services, we might end up having large (untested) projects that fail to deliver. What are the costs of failed projects? It would be wrong to say that experimenting doesn't have costs involved, it does. Even small-scale experiments take up resources from something else. However, equally, it would also be wrong to think that doing nothing, or waiting, would be risk-free. It simply is not. Ultimately, doing nothing is also a decision that can cost us money. So yes, there's a risk of doing, but there's also a risk of not doing.

4. We have better products and services.

Our chances to deliver excellent services are better if we really understand what kind of services people need and want. Instead of guessing what's working and what's not working, we can make adjustments based on real feedback or even kill off an idea that we thought would be a good one, but our users, refugees, didn't agree. User-involvement leads to better services.

Planning vs experimenting

A traditional approach to design interventions is to plan, prepare and execute. This is a great methodology when we are executing something we are familiar with and operating in an environment we are familiar with. It doesn't mean that there wouldn't be risks involved, but in such situations, we can assume that if we study enough, we will know. There's a fundamental difference between risk and uncertainty, as explained by Marco Steinberg "risk is probability, uncertainty is lack of probability". Known solutions or environments have risks that can be calculated and managed, but if we are really to do something new, we don't know the risks. We don't even know what we don't know.

In addition to that, often the environment we operate is increasingly complex and uncertain, the

issues we are trying to tackle too complicated for a linear process, and there are no ready-made solutions available. The traditional plan-prepare-execute approach is not sufficient, but we need other tools to deal with complexity and uncertainty. Experiments bring tangible evidence early in the process when it is still possible to change the direction without big costs. Therefore, the earlier we start experimenting and collecting information, the quicker we can reduce the level of uncertainty (see "experimenting" image).

How do you experiment?

Every experiment condition or context is different, so there is not necessarily a one-size-fits-all type of guidance to experimentation. There are tools, techniques and protocols available, but still, it can be challenging to get into nitty-gritty of experimentation and get started. However, we have identified a few main steps that can help us guiding with experiments.

The basic idea is simple, to do the least amount of work, and get the most amount of information.

Here are six steps to get you started:

1. Define your purpose. Any experiment needs to have a clear purpose. Ask yourself, why are you running this experiment? A good experiment will tell you something, even if it's something negative. If you already know the outcome, it is not an experiment and if you are not going to introduce any changes anyway, then there's no reason to run an experiment.

2. List your assumptions. Be clear on the difference what you know and what you assume. Ask yourself, what do I know about my idea or solution? How do I know? What do I assume? Then, start by listing assumption and/or questions you have about your idea or solution. What kind of assumptions do you have? What are the things you are unsure about or don't know? List them all.

3. Identify the most critical assumptions. We have lots of assumptions on any idea or solution, but it would be difficult to test them all at once. Focus on testing just the critical ones. For example, you can weight each assumption on an individual scale and then prioritise
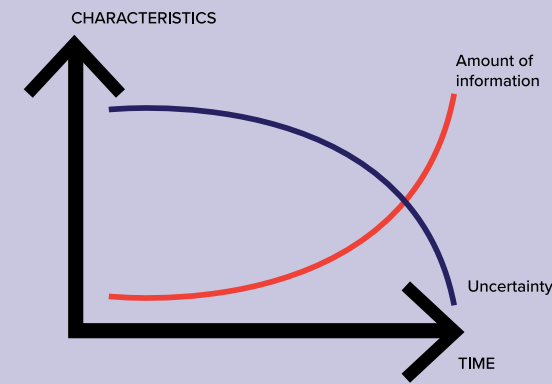
Planning

Experimenting

the ones that you need to get right, or otherwise, the result will be a failure. Another useful tool to prioritise assumptions is to use a matrix. Prioritise the assumptions keeping you awake at nights!

4. Design and run your experiment. Whatever you do, keep it simple. Design your experiment so that you can start tomorrow and put a (not too long!) timeframe on it. The idea is to collect as much as information with as little effort as possible. Forget surveys and market research, run your experiment with real people in an actual setting. People are funny creatures - they may say one thing and then do another, so the best way to test your assumptions and find out is not necessarily to ask but to try out and see what works.

5. Collect data. Record everything: data you collect and record, will guide you further.

6. Review results and decide on next steps. Assess the impact of the experiment against its goals. What did you learn? What do you need to change? Change your idea/solution based on what you learned. Do you need to repeat your experiment? Do you need a new experiment? Will you move forward with the solution or do you need more data? Decide how you are going to move on.

Sounds easy? Well, yes and no. Designing and running small-scale experiments and tests doesn't need to be complicated. In the simplest form, it is just about "trying things out". However, what makes it hard is that uncertainty is an inevitable part of the process as well as the possibility to fail. Outcomes
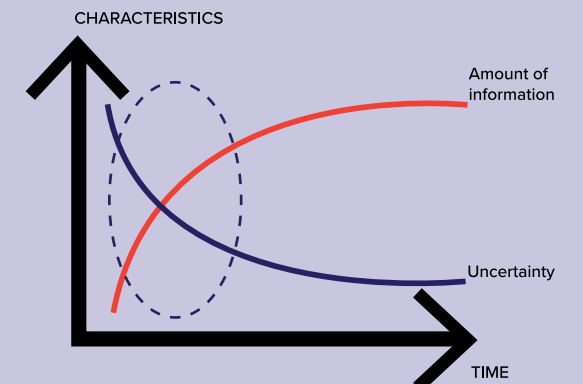
are not predictable, and we don't want to fail, no one wants. We don't know what is waiting for us and still, with experiments, we are asked to jump in and try something we don't know what the outcome will be. We must be able to say, "I don't know" even if it makes us uncomfortable. We need to be curious to constantly question and challenge our own assumptions, be open to risk and failure and have trust in the process. All this is a lot to ask and what makes it even more difficult is that it goes beyond individual innovator's ability to experiment. It requires an enabling environment for experimentation that supports learning from mistakes and some level of risk-taking.

Most organisations embrace the idea of innovation, but either don't understand or don't want to understand that you can't have innovation without the pain of experiments (including the failed ones). The biggest responsibility lies with leaders and managers to create that space where people feel comfortable to experiment, safe to take risks and to remove speed bumps in the experimenters' way. Creating a testing mentality across the organisation is a big shift in attitudes: moving away from "only fully perfected is allowed" to a mindset of "I don't know, but I will find out (that's why I run an experiment)" won't be easy. But it is the only choice we have if we wish to innovate.

Much of the inspiration and thoughts in this article came from Nesta's previous publications. To learn more about experimentation check out: Towards an experimental culture in government: reflections on and from practice and Better public services through experimental government.

Manufacturing Innovation

Innovation won't work if we don't embrace inclusive collaboration

Hans Park,
Strategic Design and Research Manager

Most innovation teams fail, and there is a significant risk that what has become a multimillion-dollar industry of humanitarian innovation, may fail as well. Failure in the sense that it becomes stagnant, never grows out from its initial phase, and stays irrelevant to create meaningful impact in our work for and with displaced populations. Failure in the United Nations (UN) system is not akin to the private sector where 'people move on' and entities disappear. The failure of initiatives and systems in the UN system may mean that things are not killed off, but linger and add dead weight to the bureaucratic machinery. Recognising failure, cutting it, moving forward, and imagining the next big thing is hard - very hard - in the UN system. The reason why innovation teams are so fragile and at risk of failure in the humanitarian sector is that they work to enhance the culture of inclusive collaboration and are set up against organisational cultures that are opaque and siloed.

There should be no middle ground in terms of where innovation is situated within UNHCR. Benefits and applications need to be clear and understood – and if we as the Innovation Service cannot deliver this clarity, we risk being irrelevant to refugees and to our colleagues. So the pressure is on us, the Innovation Service. There is no doubt in my mind that if innovation, and the Innovation Service along with it, succeeds, UNHCR will continue to remain in a strong position in the future of humanitarian relief. We must never become dead weight.

We see massive innovation opportunities in UNHCR, and one of the key areas is in structured decision-making based on evidence. This evidence should be based on data, both small data (intuitions based on human interactions, and experience), and big data (information that can lead to machines learning patterns, among other things). Data will shape our focus in 2018.

The organisation-wide data 'push' is necessary. It creates the core infrastructure required to move forward with providing continued and more effective support for refugees. Simultaneously, I believe, that if the organisation does not act on the culture of collaboration and experimentation, we will not manage to deal with its current and future challenges. A data centre, for example, is useless if people do not actually want to collaborate or know how to identify questions that data can help to answer. Paired with infrastructure, we need to learn and understand that our minds need to change.

Being aware of the risks of irrelevance, these are the two steps we will take from a strategic communication, and design, point of view:

- Think less and experiment more - and demonstrate that this is effective;
- Enhance links between strategic design, strategic communication, and take innovation learning to new heights.

What does this mean and how do we do this?

The need for experimentation

The Innovation Service understands the model for innovation as a specific mix of many learnings from different ecosystems, teams, and individuals. Within the Innovation Service, we are slowly shaking off the notion of the 'Silicon Valley' model of innovation being an effective one for us. We are convinced that the 'Western corporate-based' innovation approach alone is not going to create long-lasting impact. We live in a world where results are not only hired through partnerships and consultancies but through a healthy combination of internal and external skillsets acquired into the 'problem sphere'. We are also learning as a service, that to be relevant to the organisation, we have to build bespoke innovation models that work for UNHCR. This requires everyone in the organisation to invest time in innovation, commit to the innovation process, and have an appetite for experimentation. Without experimentation we end up with bad solutions to problems we didn't define well - we waste time and resources. So not only do we as a Service show that experimentation works for the team, but that it is the way forward for everyone.

In many ways, the past twelve months have been a year of experimenting and testing our assumptions of what works and what doesn't in the Innovation Service. We have been testing and testing, and we are excited to take some experiments to the next level, and others we will fold in 2018.

Read more about our approach to experimentation in Emilia's article found earlier in this publication.

Opening minds, narrowing gaps in teams

We need to move forward with one of the core human elements of innovation: behavioural change. How many people still think innovation is about "labs", colourful rooms, young people, drones, hackathons, and 3D printers? The same way the humanitarian system still deals with legacies of "awareness raising" as a key toolset for communication (this is outdated), innovation in the humanitarian sector suffers from being associated with technology, and is attributed to 'cutting edge problem-solving'. This narrow understanding of innovation and acting upon this understanding is a lost opportunity in the world of humanitarian innovation. As this narrow understanding does not create sustained impact, it increasingly becomes difficult to be heard. Nobody will listen if we as a society of humanitarian innovators are not demonstrating valuable impact.

We need to understand better why people have this narrow view, why it persists, and we need to learn more about how we communicate about the benefits of innovation as a process, not as a product - the Service needs to help change people's behaviours, not only minds.

We are also aware of the lack of understanding about what diversity means in innovation. As we quickly associate innovation to technology, somehow we also equate technology to men. While we know that innovation is absolutely not about men only, it is difficult to shake that perception. More work is needed to speak candidly about the makeup of our teams, meetings, and the biases we carry when we carry out trying to create change. Diversity is a tool to reach better outcomes, not a game of statistics. One of the gaps in innovation is diversity. We can fill that gap with gender equality and by applying diversity of thought in everything we do. Mobilising diversity into the world of innovation will create the needed boost for innovation becoming "regularised" in all corners of our operations. At the Innovation Service we are acutely aware of biases we carry, but proud to say that the team, and the people we work with, is diverse. We are inclusive and diverse in terms of nationality, sexual orientation, personal backgrounds, the languages we speak, and thoughts we express. But we can always do better and there are already good plans for 2018 to improve our diversity further.

Mindset and inclusivity above all

How do we move forward? At the Innovation Service, we started to apply strategic communications (we are working with leading experts in Public-Interest Communications - read more from Lauren), and we embrace strategic design, and what we today may call strategic learning. And so for 2018, I believe we must double down on design, content, communication, research and tie it all to 'strategic learning'. In practice, at the moment this means taking key learnings from the Innovation Fellowship programme that is set to help build competences in our colleagues and expanding it to an ecosystem of innovation. Our Innovation Fellows facilitate innovation across teams in UNHCR and are our ambassadors for positive and

effective change. Having the Fellows is a fantastic starting point to expand innovation learning to more parts of the organisation and ultimately to the entire humanitarian sector.
See figure 1.

Having opportunities to develop an attitude, and a mindset to act in an innovative way (approaching a challenge, knowing what to do with a complex question, how to have people in the centre, and do it quicker and better) is key to a lean and agile UNHCR. When the Innovation Service succeeds in providing innovation learning opportunities to colleagues, more people will understand the benefits of testing assumptions, receiving feedback from refugees, and ultimately build programmes and act based on this feedback whether it's from an experiment or our constituency.

Setting an example for the organisation

The mission of UNHCR's Innovation Service is to help build the most innovative organisation in the world, that benefits displaced populations. To achieve this, we need the best team in the world. The best teams work well together. At the Service, we sometimes forget in our daily work that we have the opportunity to set an example of how to work better, be inclusive, accept dissident, keep eyes on the goal (not be bogged down by politics, personalities). When we forget to set an example, we fail to innovate or facilitate innovation. A positive, inclusive and diverse approach is the key ingredient for innovation. For us to reach our goals and ultimately our mission, we need good people to work at full capacity, and in sync. I will leave you with a few tips that I have noticed that have helped the Innovation Service (probably the best innovation team in the humanitarian innovation sector) to move forward when we have run into sticky teamplay situations:

1. Keep in mind that for innovation actions to have an impact, teams need to work well. And if you're unsure how to run or be part of a particular team, then the first thing I recommend you do is to familiarise yourself with how to be more self-

Ecosystem
Organisation
Operation
Office
Team
Individual

Figure 1:
The ecosystem of innovation in UNHCR.

Figure 1 based (and edited) on Benoit Gailly, Developing Innovative Organizations: A Roadmap to Boost Your Innovation Potential. 2011.

aware and developing stellar soft skills. Many times misalignments in teams in my view are due to people not being aware of their own biases, and their influence on others. Harvard Business Review and Stanford Social Innovation Review are good places to start to read more on this;

2. Innovation is not only about thinking; it is about doing things. We are all smart people and as smart people, we are used to being rewarded based on how well we think (hence the good scores in school and alas, employment). But thinking too much can lead to a backlog - either your, or your team's and this is not good for refugees. It's better to think, and test, then think again and test again. If you're thinking about something for more than three days at work regarding a particular 'problem', stop thinking - go test your assumptions. This is how you can move on and start doing;

3. Innovation is about safe mental and physical environments for everyone. Voice discriminatory and inappropriate behaviour, and voice roadblocks too. If something does not make sense, voice it, document it, and think about action points you will take forward to fix it – then share it (you can share it with the Innovation

Service if you can't initially find a channel for this). Don't expect others to fix your problems and be ready to fix problems that are not in your terms of references (and if others fix problems that are in your terms of references, embrace them, thank them!);

4. And lastly, don't be afraid to make management accountable for their decisions and actions that are counter-intuitive to innovation practices (transparency, collaboration, experimentation, action-driven clarity, decisions based on data and feedback are good places to start). Speak to your management and tell them their actions are none of the above. And if that sounds scary, take the energy of after-work complaining and build a movement instead. Learn about building movements in the Stanford Social Innovation Review article Building Movements, Not Organizations.

If you have further questions, please reach out to us to learn more about our work, the innovation work by our colleagues or about humanitarian innovation.
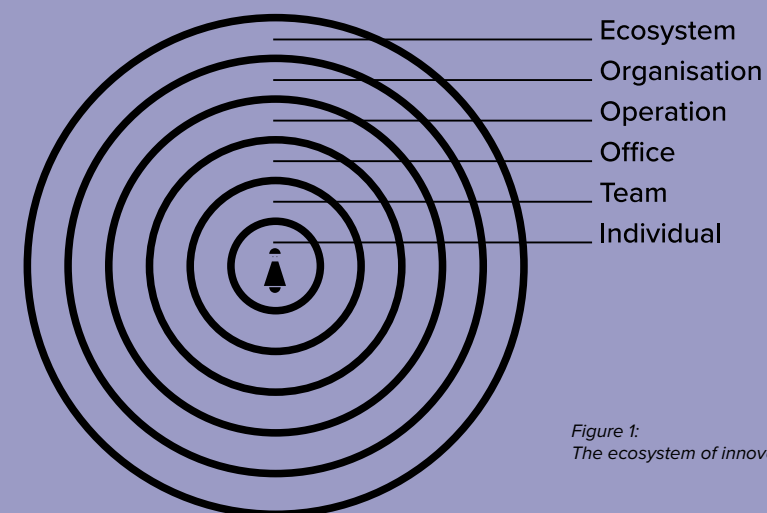
Three lessons learned in supporting refugee-led innovation

The reality of modern day displacement is that many refugees live in camps for years, even decades. As such, we need to start designing service provisions in the face of uncertain timelines. In other words, we need to create support mechanisms focused on improving quality of life that are adaptable to accommodate indeterminate stays. This thinking challenges the status quo of current aid delivery and implementation which focuses on addressing immediate protection needs. It also carves out a space for meaningful partnerships with people of concern as adaptability will require solutions relevant to, and effective in, each unique situation best informed by local knowledge. We need to be willing to invest in the creative, new and even unconventional ideas to truly build and strengthen the capacity and capabilities on the ground. If we follow through with this investment, we can capitalise on the innovation that already exists, support it through implementation, ignite further innovation, and strengthen not only individuals, but entire communities.

The Innovation Fund

The Innovation Fund is designed to pursue and expand such efforts. With an Innovation Fund grant given to the Tindouf, Algeria operation, allowing them to support refugee Tateh Lehbib Breica's idea, UNHCR took the initial steps to support refugee-led innovation. Tateh designed and built a home out of reused plastic bottles for his grandmother that was not only stronger, but also more environmentally efficient than the adobe brick homes normally constructed in the refugee camps of Tindouf. The Innovation Fund discovered his creative idea and decided to invest in this project, both through financial and non-financial means. The project has been very successful to date, as Tateh, along with other local community members have already built 25 homes.

Developmental evaluation

In May 2017, UNHCR's Innovation Service went to Tindouf to speak with Tateh, along with UNHCR staff members, local youth, and other community members to gain a holistic sense of the programme, its strengths and weaknesses. The goal of such an evaluation is for the Innovation Service to understand what is working and what isn't in implementing the Innovation Fund and to assess positive or negative second-order effects of the project. Early evaluation is necessary to identify these areas for improvement and ensure they are addressed and adapted in time to enable maximal success.

Lessons learned

The Innovation Service identified a number of initial areas for improvement during their mission to Tindouf, Algeria:

1. Holistic support

The importance of holistic support was highlighted by both members of the Innovation Service and community members. Supporting a project like Tateh's through the entire process of implementation and evaluation requires much more than just financial means. Providing outlets for collaboration and communication with a variety of actors within UNHCR and externally is a critical factor of success. As refugees create their designs, it is invaluable to be able to talk to other designers, engineers, artists, and environmentalists to push their ideas further than originally envisioned. This also has the potential to create new ideas for all partners involved and highlight any potential issues that may have been overlooked.

2. Community-level acceptance

Change is difficult, and the initial unease about a new circular housing structure (compared to the rectangular Sahrawi khaimah traditional large family tent and adobe brick homes) in the community presented a challenge to Tateh. Many were sceptical about living in homes constructed with plastic bottles and some even believed the durability they afforded instilled a sense of permanence in the camps, which

the community rejects. Using social media, Tateh spearheaded community acceptance efforts to challenge these assumptions. Understanding, prior to implementation, the atmosphere and attitude around the project proved vital for Tateh to communicate and implement the project without opposition from key stakeholders.

3. Ongoing assessment

Looking towards the future, it will be important to test these shelters in all seasons to validate their durability in the harsh climatic conditions of the Sahara desert. Such continuous assessments are necessary to ensure the project continues to remain successful, useful, and beneficial to members of the community.

Additional thoughts

When addressing persistent challenges with novel solutions in a protracted conflict setting, it is important to note these solutions should not immediately supplant current aid efforts. Instead, these new solutions are about changing how we think about aid, how we deliver it, and what other improvements can

be implemented simultaneously. Critical humanitarian aid, such as food and water, are crucial for displaced communities that live in the remote and harsh conditions like the Sahrawi refugees do. However, this type of aid is not appropriate as the sole source of aid for a community that has been living in refugee camps for over 40 years. In addition to this critical aid, refugees require sustainable and creative solutions as a means of investing in their future.

Catalysing innovation at the community level is a critical tool to effectively and efficiently adapt to the evolving needs of persons of concern. Enabling factors needed for innovation to thrive already exist in the refugee camps of Tindouf, from connectivity to educated community members and extensive female participation in all facets of life. With such a foundation, it is important we establish a system of support to encourage innovative ideas from refugees and provide the resources necessary for these ideas to grow and thrive.

Innovation Fellowship: Driving innovation through mindset and cultural change

The UNHCR Innovation Fellowship is a year-long learning programme for UNHCR's workforce. The Fellowship programme focuses on building Innovation Fellows' innovation skills and competencies in addition to supporting them to facilitate innovation with colleagues, partners, and refugees in their own operations or divisions. Over the course of the year, Innovation Fellows learn and use innovation methods, tools, and embed new approaches in innovation projects. They focus on problem-solving, ideation, and experimenting solutions to real-life challenges in the field or at Headquarters. They are the organisation's ambassadors for innovation and lasting positive change.

The Fellowship is grounded in the idea that to have sustainable innovation you need to focus on mindset change and culture. We believe the only way to achieve this is to change individual behaviors at all levels of the organisation. The programme encourages continuous learning, challenging assumptions, and perspectives, the value of collaboration and openness for failure and risk-taking. It is a mindset that leads staff to question if there is a better way of working, communicating, and thinking.

Another 25 staff began their journey in 2017. The new cohort of Fellows participated in two workshops, one in Bangkok and one in Istanbul, where they learned about experimentation, positive influencing, and how to create better outcomes for their operations and UNHCR's constituency.
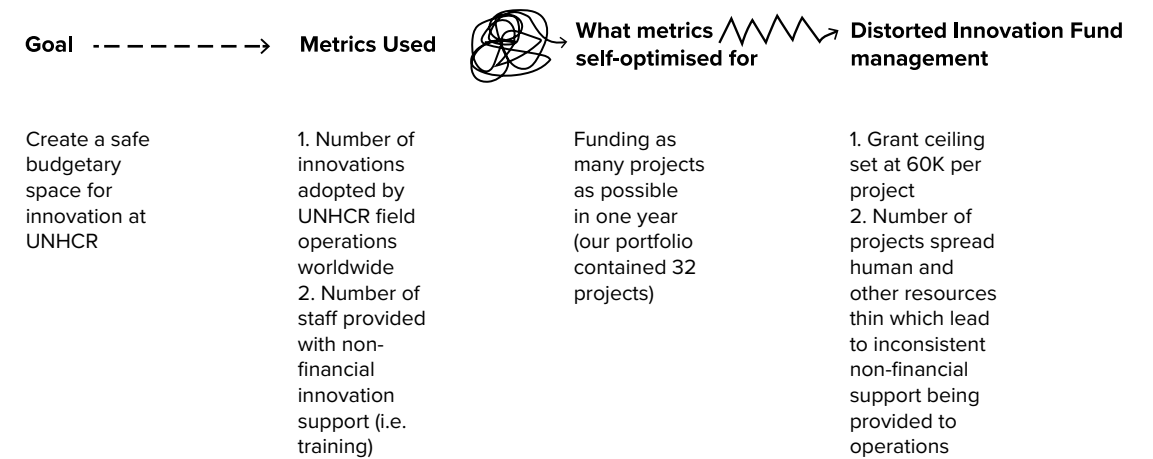
Developing humanitarian innovation impact metrics: where do we start?

Dina Zyadeh,
Innovation Officer (Operations)

In mid-2016, we set out to create a funding mechanism in UNHCR that would encourage innovation across our 130 operations worldwide. With displacement becoming increasingly complex and causing untold suffering, we were moved by a sense of urgency to support our colleagues in developing novel ways of addressing the growing challenges. Establishing an experimental budgetary space for innovation seemed like a compelling endeavour, since the need to develop these solutions couldn't come at the expense of our ongoing operational assistance to refugees and the communities hosting them, particularly in emergencies.

As the Innovation Fund took shape, we were faced with the difficult task of establishing metrics to support our goals and measure impact. But measuring something as nebulous as innovation and its impact perfectly is impossible, and this difficulty was compounded by our Fund's sector-agnostic portfolio approach. Since a universal set of innovation impact metrics simply doesn't exist, we did our best to select a handful of proxy metrics to help us gauge the impact of our funding on UNHCR and refugees.

With implementation underway, it became evident that the metrics we chose were both optimising for incremental solutions and distorting the day-to-day management of the Fund in a way we hadn't anticipated nor wanted. This largely happened because our goals and metrics were misaligned and because our goals were ambitious but underspecified. Here are some examples to illustrate this:

Goal - - - - - - - →	Metrics Used	What metrics self-optimised for	Distorted Innovation Fund management
Create a safe budgetary space for innovation at UNHCR	1. Number of innovations adopted by UNHCR field operations worldwide 2. Number of staff provided with non-financial innovation support (i.e. training)	Funding as many projects as possible in one year (our portfolio contained 32 projects)	1. Grant ceiling set at 60K per project 2. Number of projects spread human and other resources thin which lead to inconsistent non-financial support being provided to operations

While these proxy metrics indicated the scale and scope which we were trialling novel solutions at UNHCR, they optimised for short-term, incremental innovations that had to come to fruition in less than one year. This happened because:

1. Our metrics and goals were misaligned.

Metrics are notoriously difficult to get right, especially when they're used to measure intangible concepts. This reality is reflected in the humanitarian sector's overreliance on activity metrics as proxy indicators to measure complex social phenomena. Consider public attitude towards refugees as an example: in trying to cultivate empathy for refugees and improve the public's attitude toward them, we've seen the metric # of public awareness campaigns conducted being used to measure the performance of advocacy work. That metric, like all activity metrics, aren't inherently bad, but they are prone to distorting behaviour since they're deceptively simple to measure. Because of this, they often create incentives to prioritise meeting the target (launching many public awareness campaigns) to the exclusion of the very goal that target intends to measure (creating strategic and targeted advocacy campaigns that create sustained and positive behavioural change).

In the case of the Innovation Fund, one such activity metric used was the implementation rate: a measure of expenditure against pre-defined activities in a given timeframe. This metric is applied to almost all of UNHCR's projects and programmes as a means to ensure that resources allocated for specific activities are utilised over the course of the year. Programmes with low implementation rates at the mid-year point are often required to 'free up' funds that are then rechannelled to programmes and emergencies demonstrating greater need. A high implementation rate for the Fund was thought to indicate that a greater number of UNHCR operations were undertaking both incremental and transformative innovations as a result of the Innovation Fund. But what

this metric actually optimised for was a de-risked Fund that favoured only incremental innovation projects that could disburse funds and implement activities in one year.

In hindsight, it's easy to see how our goal to encourage both kinds of innovation in UNHCR was misaligned with the activity metrics we chose. We learned that alignment between our goals and specific impact measures comes with some trial and error, but that it's important to move away from activity metrics as our sole units of measure. At best, these metrics showed we were stoking the boilers of innovation, and at worst, they created incentives that optimised for incremental solutions at the expense of transformative ones.

2. Our goals were ambitious but underspecified.

When optimally aligned with goals, the right metrics facilitate the management of complex projects and systems since they provide valuable feedback about the effect of a given intervention throughout its lifecycle. In our experience, metrics also helped us align the team's actions toward the execution of the Fund's goals since they gave us quantifiable indicators to converge and converse around. But we learned that for metrics to be truly effective at aligning our collective actions toward achieving our aims, we needed to have well-defined goals. As obvious as this seems, clearly articulated goals circumvent the misalignment that comes about from having underspecified goals and overpowered metrics.

Taking the Fund as an example, our goal to stimulate innovation in UNHCR field operations didn't specify the kind of inclusive innovation we sought to encourage (both incremental and transformative). This vagueness then lent itself well to misalignment between our goals and the robustly tracked activity metrics that measured things like the # of innovations adopted by UNHCR worldwide or the implementation rate of our project portfolio. This misalignment doesn't necessarily lead to failure, but in our case, it made it more likely that whatever overpowered activity metrics we used to measure our goals would inevitably lead to mismeasurement, since they optimised for something other than the intended goals.

A way forward: what we plan on doing differently

The urgency to develop solutions that introduce new tools and processes or creatively and substantially adapt the services we provide to refugees continues to grow in importance. Inclusive innovation will be a key driver of this change, since it places emphasis on developing both incremental and transformative innovation, therefore permitting a large number of people to participate in the process. Because forced displacement is a global challenge, both bottom-up and top-down solutions need to be developed, and the metrics to measure the impact of these initiatives will play a key role in aligning our actions toward our goals.

Moving ahead, here are three considerations we have as we rearticulate our goals and reformulate our metrics:

1. Maintain a portfolio approach for projects with funding streams for both incremental and radical innovation. To develop and hone this, we'd like to learn more from public funding institutions that have successfully encouraged socio-economic development and technical change by including both streams of innovation into their work. There's a common perception that private capital has been the driving force behind investments in startups across many sectors when in fact, most early-stage, high-risk finance has been provided through public sources like the Small Business Innovation Research Program (SBIR) in the United States and SBRI in the United Kingdom. Learning how these institutions and others like them manage risk and assess the impact of their investments will help us develop better metrics.
2. Develop a handful of impact metrics and avoid activity metrics to simply feed the data beast. Another common perception is that real-time data translates into better decision making. But having many (sometimes hundreds) of metrics can easily overwhelm people, who then revert to making calls based on personal judgement or intuition. Real-time data can also establish tighter feedback loops that reinforce incentives to meet the target, often at the expense of the overall goals of a given intervention.
3. We know that measuring impact is important, but given that measurement is resource intensive, we'd like to develop a leaner model that tracks only a handful of impact metrics aligned with our goals. We hope to develop metrics that also influence and facilitate timely and thoughtful decision-making, since we'd like to see more emphasis placed on real-time programmes, instead of only real-time data.
4. Set specific goals and align them with our mission. We've already started rearticulating our goals to counter the misalignment brought on by having underspecified goals and overpowered metrics. We'd like to make mission-oriented investments combined with patient, long-term strategic finance, while maintaining a sector-agnostic portfolio. We believe this is important because our mission and goals will address challenges that cross sectoral boundaries, since one sector alone cannot solve the political, economic and environmental challenges that result in or stem from forced displacement.

If you're working on developing financial instruments in the public or private sector to encourage both incremental and radical innovation, we'd love to hear about your experience developing innovation impact metrics. You can reach us at: innovation@unhcr.org.

The promise of boring innovation

Salvatore Vassallo,
Senior Admin Programme
Associate, and
Edina Bata,
Admin Programme Associate

Administration is probably the first contact point anyone has in the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). In reality, everything we do has a sort of administration process linked to it. When one of us joined UNHCR in November 2007, an era that was already embracing Facebook and long past the early days of the internet, we were handed over a few typewriters to begin our work. This is unfortunately not a joke, but a reflection on how long it can take organisations to catch-up to the real world. Coming from the private sector, this was a bit of a shock to say the least. I witnessed these same feelings wash over the faces of the even younger new recruits who were told we had to use them to fill out separation documents as one of our first tasks. I took this challenge head-on, quickly teaming up with a few new colleagues and recreated the same form but in Microsoft Excel. I consider this my first feeling of innovation in UNHCR. Sometimes innovation is quick and boring, but it brings efficiency to a process – and to me this is the key to making our organisation and other UN agencies more innovative.

The bureaucratic state of play

Each day in admin and finance we are working with strongly controlled processes. On one hand rules are important because they frame each step to accomplish a goal – whether that is in procurement, contracts or travel requests. These rules ensure that the processes which drive our organisation are transparent and trackable; and this is important. However, rules and regulations also need to evolve with the passing of time. We cannot allow these rules to be a burden when they are expected to add concrete value to a process. In many ways, working in administration at UNHCR is a bit like fighting against the bureaucracy itself. If these rules, which act as our guiding light, become overcomplicated or impenetrable, we can simply not be efficient. The heaviness of this workflow can become a barrier in serving the interests of persons of concern. For example, if we are not able to process a payment quickly enough, then this can directly affect the work going on in our field operations.

We are not here to argue against rules – we concretely believe that UNHCR needs guidelines, standards, and order. We need this in many aspects of our life. But we do believe that when these rules have turned into clear bureaucracy, we should cease the opportunities to improve them. Bureaucracy is a real barrier to innovation. Even if someone within the organisation has a brilliant idea, the long processes of reviewing, selecting, testing, authorising, clearing, and signing off of this solution can kill it before it even has had a chance to impact refugees. It is within this institutional structure that we need to find the space to try new things and innovate the old. The structural speed of our processes needs to catch-up with the innovations currently taking place in the field and Headquarters. The current state of play of our traditional and institutional architecture needs a facelift.

Actions for a more efficient way forward

So what would a better system look like for us? A quick answer would be: faster, simplified, agile, and more flexible.

First, it would focus more on the outcome rather than the format in which such an outcome would have to be finalised. Within UNHCR's Innovation Service, we pride ourselves in acting quickly to respond to requests. This is something that should be mainstreamed across the organisation at all levels. Our main priority is the well being and protection of the 65 million people displaced – this level of efficiency would not only change how we work, but how we could approach challenges.

These are some areas where we can start acting on now: Decreasing the number of authorisation levels for administrative processes

- De-partitioning general administrative tasks such as travel requests
- Implementing a programme cycle more aligned with the needs of the field
- Identifying and prioritising processes that can reasonably be simplified
- Creating a better system for internal communication between the field and HQ

Moving into 2018, the UNHCR Innovation Service will begin mobilising around some of these areas for experimentation. While we argue that technology does not equate innovation, new technology does offer a lot of opportunities for change in administration activities. Currently, when a memo needs to be approved internally, assistants go from person to person asking for signatures to clear the memo. If we could utilise automation and shorten this approving process, colleagues would have more time to get other important work done. But all solutions don't have to be all about tech. What if we had a corporate card that accrued all the miles from the flights the organisation is spending money on? We would be earning points and using the rewards to ensure new flights cost the organisation less overall. This would be one simple change to save the organisation quite a bit of money. Or if UNHCR were to go paperless, it would truly be a disruptive form of innovation for our institutions.

The first step for realising this change will be to admit as an organisation that we need it. We need to evolve and we need to make our backend processes and rules fit for purpose. Our call to action is to ask you to put down your typewriters and invest in big, boring, and bureaucratic innovation.
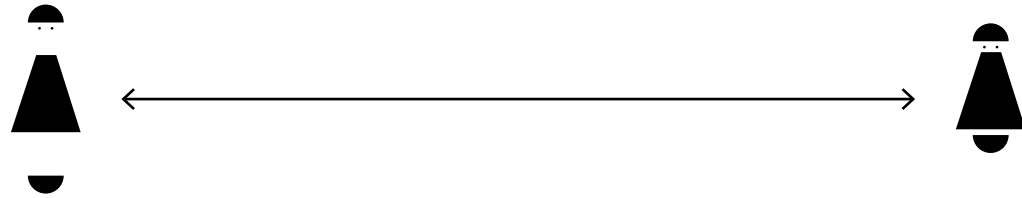
The Measurement Problem

The need for building better data and monitoring mechanisms in humanitarian action

Clara Van Praag,
Humanitarian Education Accelerator Coordinator

A challenge that education staff have always grappled with is getting real-time data collected (efficiently) from the field to inform the direction of programming. This is a challenge faced across the humanitarian sector and by multiple project partners in our Humanitarian Education Accelerator Programme (HEA).

The HEA Programme is an innovative, multifaceted programme managed through a joint partnership between UNICEF and UNHCR that is funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). UNICEF has the lead on providing an external impact and process evaluation for innovative education projects, whereas UNHCR is assisting the teams to enhance their Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Capacity. The HEA hopes to achieve this by building the capacity of the project partners to accurately monitor, report, and analyse the data they collect.

The HEA is trying to bridge a gap in knowledge of what M&E should be used for, starting from the student who is the primary recipient of the programme, to those who run the projects, to those who define education strategies for the country and further to those refugees themselves. In 2017, we added two more projects to the HEA, making a total of five projects that are being supported in this process.

1. Kepler University Programme - Tertiary blended online learning using a competence-based model to achieve an AA and BA degree;
2. War Child Holland - Can't Wait to Learn, educational games on tablets;
3. World University Service Canada (WUSC) - Remedial education for girls;
4. Libraries without Borders - Ideas Box, a mobile library containing multimedia centre, connectivity, and tablets;
5. Caritas Switzerland - Essence of Learning, psychosocial support programme.

For Kepler University Programme, a key HEA activity was the chance to build key skills amongst their staff and teachers by challenging them to develop their own mini-research programmes to understand problems they see in their classroom. One teacher noted that female students are frequently more absent than their male counterparts. They wanted to understand what was stopping the girls from regularly attending classes and set about to develop a Theory of Change, and a research plan to address this challenge. Through empowering the teachers to find solutions to their everyday challenges, capacity is being built, and students are receiving a better service.

Initially, we thought the funding from the HEA would easily fill a significant gap in the way the projects are run as money is limited to conduct and strengthen M&E practices. Frequently, budgets only have a lump sum amount to conduct a rapid evaluation at the end of the project duration. Often, spending limited resources on M&E Officers and training is simply not done as it is what is considered a "nice to have" but not a must. However, even with proper funding from the HEA, it took our project partners an average of five months to come up with a concrete plan on how they would use the funds given to them through the HEA. Soley receiving funds dedicated to building M&E capacity was not the norm, and though they knew what their gaps were, identifying what trainings and capacity building was needed was challenging. It was easy to identify the data collection needs for the external impact and process evaluations, but translating that into longer-term capacity amongst their staff to improve their M&E was a completely new challenge.

In Kenya, the World University Service Canada programme wanted to digitise the way their data was collected. From attendance registers, to follow-up tools and classroom observations, the time it took to gather information from the field to the Head Office was very

long. Using paper-based systems, the data and feedback mechanisms are slow, and weekly meetings in the field office was the only means project staff could understand what was happening on the ground. But with the introduction of tablets and Kobo (a data collection tool) questionnaires, data will be stored and shared more securely. The analysis of programme activities will become more efficient and feedback to the teachers and community mobilisers should be more streamlined. In 2017, WUSC will spend a significant amount of time testing the tools and software and hope to make a full rollout in 2018.

Why data must be fit for purpose

Commonly, it is not that the wrong data is collected but that field staff are not aware of the overall M&E strategy. This can lead to staff not being able to interpret how the analysis of the results will impact their project. Programme Officers conduct data collection and monitoring in order to report against their impact indicators which is then linked to their funding. More attention and focus needs to go into collecting a different kind of dataset and feeding that analysis back to the schools and teachers on why the data was collected, and how this could lead into a positive change in programme design.

This ultimately means the circle is not complete. In education programmes, data needs to be collected for the teachers who work directly with their students. They need this data in order to improve teaching techniques and improve the overall score that their students' reach in exams. This data is different to the information needed by the project manager who has a results framework and is keenly following what impact the programme has on the students, i.e. the end user. This may differ again slightly to the data needed for overall reporting against the state of education for national governments and donors who fund the programme.

At the end of 2017, one of the key deliverables for the project teams was the drafting of an M&E framework. Breaking down what indicators were measurable and could show the impact of the project, and how this data would be collected was the focus of a workshop held in November. Working with the M&E Officers from each of the five teams, guidance was given on how to improve data collection, using digital tools for collection and analysis as well as comprehensive tools on how to monitor projects.

Linking monitoring and evaluation with a pathway to change

We are only half way through the HEA journey, and in 2018 we will continue to work with the teams to ensure that there is a comprehensive M&E framework in place. This M&E strategy will not necessarily be linked to the proposal for funding of the project but linked to the further development and scaling of the project by showing clearly impact and evidence of what works. The M&E plan should directly link to the overall Theory of Change of the project, and ensure that the indicators that are being measured are backed up by data that supports the impact of the project.

The HEA will work together with the teams to streamline better processes of data collection through digitisation of data collection and enhanced software tools for analysis. And most importantly, it will aim to ensure that every person working on the project is trained and understands why certain methods are used in the monitoring of the project, and can actively engage with the M&E officers to improve the impact of the project. Through enhanced capacity of the teams, the HEA will ultimately provide a solid evidence base of how innovation in education in emergency and crisis settings can work.

The beginning and end of the Innovation Index

John Warnes, Innovation Technology Officer, and
Hans Park, Strategic Design and Research Manager

The Innovation Index Experiment

Over the course of 2017, the UNHCR Innovation Service has been undertaking an experiment. We created an Innovation Index; our first attempt at measuring how we're doing when it comes to innovation in our field operations. We never released the product. This piece outlines our Index story looking at the whys, the hows, and most importantly the lessons we learned from the experience.

The Product: What is it?

The Index is a product that aims to provide a framework to analyse diverse approaches to innovation. It applies this to nine pre-defined UNHCR country operations to determine how they approach innovation across four key pillars: Community Engagement, Data Driven Implementation, Innovation Capacity and Space, and Access to Services. For each 'pillar' there are a number of indicators made of up publicly and internally accessible data. Operations are then given a score based on this data and ranked. The product includes anecdotes of specific activities and initiatives within operations and outlines some case studies that demonstrate good practice.

The Reason: Why did we do this?

The Index was a product of an innovation process in and of itself and started somewhat by accident. With the topic of innovation being featured prominently in the High Commissioner's Strategic Directions, the Innovation Service understood that a new degree of rigour was required in respect to how UNHCR is collectively reforming its programming and incorporating innovative approaches. We needed to understand better how the Innovation Service could have an added value regarding the support we provided to country operations.

Like many other units in UNHCR, the Innovation Service has to prioritise its activities and interventions. How could we do this? We realised that it was hard to determine with the information we had on hand where opportunities lay, and how we might be able to support, without having a clear understanding of how innovation is being approached in different field operations.

While we didn't know precisely what might come out of this process, we realised when we started that creating an Index was something we needed to embark on. The Index acted as a container for some of the more significant questions marks we had as a team. By bringing them together we felt we could tackle them together and link them to UNHCR's strategic vision of innovation, and how it contributes to making a positive impact on the lives of refugees. We'd seen other indices such as the Big Max Index, or Corruption Perceptions Index and saw how powerful they could be at telling stories. By doing this ourselves maybe we would be able to learn more about ourselves as a Service.

Ultimately, it also sought to improve how we can hold ourselves to account. UNHCR has made commitments to innovate more, and we were resolute that we should be able to measure how we are, and how we are not achieving this.

UNHCR Innovation Service

EXPERIMENTATION INDEX

The Journey: How did it happen, and how did it evolve?

The accident of the Index started in the context of UNHCR Innovation Service looking to support a field operation. As part of this, we wanted to delve into UNHCR's programming data in the operation to find out whether there was anything that might be construed as innovative, but there were limits to what we could infer from the data available. We then expanded on this to see whether we could discern anything from other operations' data in this regard; it was complicated. There was a considerable variation from country to country which also meant it was hard for us to compare; we needed to do this to help us prioritise where action was needed, and where opportunity lay.

This first assessment led us to realise that we needed to define better variables or 'indicators' for innovation, as well as the limitations of our existing programmatic data in terms of measuring these. The idea of developing an 'index' evolved thus, requiring the relative assessment of innovation across a number of operations. The approach was to start small and to expand the exercise if successful.

Internally, the Innovation Service had some debate about the indicators, and content of the Innovation Index. Every member of the team was enthusiastic about its potential, and everybody had their own idea of what the Index should be doing. To be completely candid, it was challenging to build something that resembled consensus. One team member stated:

"Each member of the team needs to be able to stand behind each of the indicators and defend them wholeheartedly."

The team made its best effort to make that the case. Variables included quantifiable 'objective' variables, such as the number of Innovation Fellows within an operation, as well as more 'qualitative' variables, such as the quality of UNHCR's coordination of Communicating with Communities initiatives. Once these were determined, an exercise was undertaken to populate the variables, with data from a range of sources. During this phase, two issues were evident: there wasn't data available for many of the variables, and the Innovation Service didn't have consensus on what was being measured. The lack of consensus was particularly the case with regards to output focused variables.

While the concept of creating 'Innovation Indicators' developed, it was recognised that they could also be used for internal advocacy - to communicate both good practices as well as areas of improvement. One other key learning from this phase, is that innovation cannot be measured by outputs, although these are inherently less subjective they do not enable an assessment of the result of an intervention. It was at this point that we recognised the Index was inherently subjective.

After a number of revisions, the Innovation Service produced a draft copy of the Index, which subsequently was tested amongst a number of UNHCR staff of different genders, backgrounds, length of tenure in agency, and levels of knowledge around humanitarian innovation.

The Failure: Why we didn't publish?

Ultimately the Index was never published. It was clear from the conversations that we needed to revisit the objectives and the purpose of the Index. With so many things on the agenda that were exciting both for us and for those we tested the Index on, we realised we were trying to do too much with one product.

Innovation is difficult enough to define as it is, and will probably remain a porous concept. Blurring certain elements of monitoring and evaluation, with looking at 'enablers' to innovation, as well as stories of good practice: who knew what our admittedly loose target audience was meant to take away.

Feedback showed us that consensus amongst the Innovation Service itself wouldn't currently build the framework we need for innovation. There are too many projects and initiatives either inherited, politically driven or disassociated from operational delivery that feedback told us shouldn't be incorporated into a set of criteria applied to operational delivery. They are too specific to the Innovation Service itself; we couldn't see the wood for the trees.

The Success: Understanding impact

There was no aspect of success. This was a dismal failure.

When we confront failure, we need to understand that failure derives from both external and internal factors. We must to be able to ask ourselves the difficult questions like how engaged were we to make this a success, were we diligent enough, or at what point did we stop believing in the process, and why did we pivot late? So as much as the failure of the Index to 'launch' was due to the very complex nature of measuring innovation, it was also due to the project team; perhaps the setup or resourcing of team was wrong, maybe the skillsets weren't right to make this work. As we asked these questions, and examined our roles in this failure, one of the surprising things about receiving feedback from UNHCR staff on the Innovation Index was how positive they were about the prospects. We were told not to stop working on this and to keep reevaluating its place in our organisation.

The Future: What's next for the Index

While we didn't publish the Index, the Innovation Service learnt a lot about the work thematic of innovation - particularly, how different parts of UNHCR Headquarters view innovation and UNHCR's Innovation Service. Most excitingly, this helped bring a degree of clarity and understanding to the strategic direction of the Innovation Service. New products and directions were identified that can help support more consolidated objectives of how the Innovation team services the field, including tools to support UNHCR operations improve their practices.

We want to be transparent about this and are open to comments and suggestions about how we can help. In due course, we'll revisit the Index but most likely learning from this process by breaking the product apart. You'll be able to find more examples and case studies on our website. We want to start engaging with academic institutions and others to look at how we can develop a better understanding of enablers of innovation.

And before the Innovation Service starts looking into actions of field operations, we want to start at the beginning: helping our field operations understand how they can be innovative through innovation capacity building sessions and toolkits. If there are things you'd like to see from us, please get in touch and let us know.

Why UNHCR is taking action on climate change displacement

From her office at UNHCR Headquarters in Geneva, Erica Bowers keeps track of the wildfires ravaging Santa Rosa, California. For weeks it has destroyed homes and consumed possessions, forcing thousands to flee and taking the lives of dozens of people. Most scientists agree that climate change contributed to the elevated temperatures and drought-dried vegetation that made the flames especially hard to contain.

"Climate change is clearly one of the largest challenges facing our planet in the 21st century," says Bower, an Associate Climate Change and Disaster Displacement Officer. "One only has to turn on the T.V. to see storm after storm and flood after flood and drought after drought and wildfire after wildfire." Her relatives' Santa Rosa home was completely ruined. But with a strong social support network and the financial security to bounce back, they are the lucky ones. Many families in California suffered deeply, but homes will be rebuilt, residents and tourists will return, and life will go on.

Those kinds of financial security and support networks are not universal. Communities around the world are unable to bear the burden of disasters. In many of them, when people are forced from their homes, they are unlikely to ever return. And with climate change both causing displacement and complicating responses to it, Bower believes UNHCR has an important role to play in contributing to the international community's response.

The reality of climate change and displacement

There's a tendency to think of climate change as a futuristic threat: one to start preparing for before it's too late. Bower says, it's already here. And the effects are evident today.

Weather-related disasters already force an average of 21.8 million people to flee their homes every year, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. Vulnerable populations are more likely to be displaced by climate change impacts and remain displaced for a longer time.

In some places, the geographies of climate change and displacement overlap, creating a melee of factors that confuse analysis of how best to tackle either. In others, climate change issues or disasters follow on the heels of conflict related displacement, complicating the international community's response to both.

Sudden onset disasters like hurricanes or earthquakes lead people to rush out of their homes quickly, leading to different protection needs than slow-building crises like drought, erosion or sea level rise. But communities can easily fall victim to both, or both at once, like a coastal area that suffers the devastation and damage of repeated storms due to depleted barrier islands and deforestation. Climate change can also affect the idea of 'safe and dignified' return, completely changing the idea of what a durable solution is. "You can't expect someone to return when their island is submerged or their land is rendered uninhabitable by desertification," Bower says. "I would argue that many assumptions that underpin the whole 'solutions' paradigm need to be rethought."

Relevant protection frameworks

Most climate change displacement is internal, not cross-border. These persons are protected by Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. While some displaced people may be refugees under criteria of the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1969 OAU Convention or the Cartagena Declaration, most will not fit these criteria. There is still a legal gap in their protection.

Roundtables, conferences, and state-led initiatives have resulted in commitments by countries to prevent and to address cross-border climate displacement. In 2015, 109 governmental delegations endorsed the Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda, which identifies tools to help states prevent, prepare for, and address "protection needs of people displaced across borders in the context of disasters and climate change." And in 2016, The Platform on Disaster Displacement was launched to ensure implementation of this Protection Agenda. States are already using the tools it provides, such as humanitarian visas or temporary protection and stay arrangements, but administration is not always harmonised or systematic.

People who've been driven by their homes by disasters may need assistance and protection. While state practice is emerging, questions remain as to how the world can respond, and at what pace.

UNHCR and climate change displacement today

UNHCR is playing a growing role in addressing climate change displacement. And despite more and more frequent headlines, it's not a new focus: UNHCR has been working on how to tackle the issue since the mid 2000s .

UNHCR continues to work with states to develop the legal and policy approaches that would provide protection for people affected by climate change displacement. A lot of this work involves enhancing protections for IDPs, supporting the Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda and the Platform on Disaster Displacement.

But it's not all conference calls and policy briefs. Costa Rica and Panama recently led a bi-national workshop where they simulated a disaster and both sides had to deal in real-time with the virtual fallout. "I think it's quite novel," Bower says. "That's the type of initiative that's really forward thinking and will get actors to plan for these responses in the future."

UNHCR has also developed guidelines for temporary protections like the ones the persons displaced across Panama border in the simulation exercise might have needed. And it works in a lot of different fora to promote coherence on protection for disaster displaced people across other policy agreements like the Sendai framework on disaster risk reduction, the global forum on migration and development, the Global Compacts on Refugees and Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, sustainable development goals, and others.

Another critical forum where UNHCR engages on this issue is by providing technical support at the climate change negotiations to Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change,. "At first, UNFCCC Parties focused on mitigation of greenhouse gases. Then, it turned to adaptation," explains Bower. In the last five years, she says, discussions turned toward loss and damage: What happens when we can't adapt to climate change and communities experience tangible losses and damage—including loss of their heritage and culture?

In this context, UNHCR participates in the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage Task Force on Displacement, which Bower says was an important platform to talk to a whole new set of stakeholders like climate change experts and Ministries of Environment, and get them to recognise the importance of displacement.

"The new challenge now is to identify what the Task Force recommendations can add that is new and unique, and complements other efforts such as the Platform on Disaster Displacement ," Bower says. Transferring technologies like early warning systems from country to country would be one example. Using

forecasting to be better prepared and respond faster is another.

Today, on the ground responses are not often on the table. Three conditions must be met before the UNHCR will get involved in this way: There has to be an existing UNHCR presence, the government of the affected country must request UNHCR intervention and it must be part of an interagency response. These conditions were met in situations including the recent earthquakes in Mexico and Ecuador, after typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines and during drought and famine in Somalia.

Even though protecting those internally displaced by climate change is not a core role for UNHCR, she says, "it's a reality and it's going to keep happening more and more with climate change exacerbating the frequency of these events."

The question of global leadership

Governments are responding to the growing crisis. But they're doing so in ad hoc, reactive ways. One of the roles UNCHR can play is to help coordinate the responses to these challenges, and make sure the international community is being innovative and forward-thinking in creating frameworks and approaches to dealing with climate change displacement.

"Right now, the way UNHCR and a lot of the humanitarian world addresses these issues is from a crisis management approach," says Bower. "It's focused on the here and now and what's at stake today."

That makes sense for a lot of reasons, she adds. Limited budgets, for instance, a constant rotation of staff, and the sheer scale of existing displacement crises. "It's overwhelming how much trauma already exists on this planet. It's hard to think about long-term trends and future risks."

But Bower believes shifting from a crisis management approach toward one of risk management—one that instead of looking three or ten years down the line looks 30 or 100—would be a big step forward. "We owe it to the future to start to build the infrastructure and institutions and conceptual approaches to respond," she says.

UNHCR is taking baby steps in the right direction. Its Multi-Partner Protection and Solutions Strategies are stretching planning documents in country operations from one year's focus to three. Now looking ahead, there's a lot the organization can do, like build better partnerships within the disaster risk reduction and climate change communities and even the private sector.

By looking at future risk as an integral part of the planning process, UNHCR can make sure solutions to displacement automatically include measures to prevent future displacement.

"This future risk question has to be integrated across everything UNHCR does," Bower says.

If she was in charge? UNHCR would be bold, and not shy away from the realities of climate change and disaster displacement. To those who say that kind of focus is mission creep, Bower says not at all. UNHCR does not need to be the one to lead climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction activities, but it does need to collaborate with partners whose work intersects with protection. After all, these issues are already affecting the organization's populations of concern and intertwining themselves in existing displacement situations. It is no longer just about supporting people who've been displaced, but about proactively supporting them to be more resilient and reduce chance of displacement when disasters strike.

That could even mean helping them with planned relocation, as a last resort, something the government of Fiji is already piloting and a move Bower thinks UNHCR could play a bigger role in developing tools and guidance for. "Because it's about protection," she says. "This is what protection means."

Interventions like these are outside the norm, and certainly UNHCR's current comfort zone. But they're approaches that fit with a new reality.
After all, Bower says, "The rules of the game are changing."

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Q&A with Jeff Wilkinson from UNHCR Aleppo on designing solar street lighting with the Syrian community

Q&A

Jeff Wilkinson has been based in UNHCR's Aleppo office since October 2016. Prior to moving to Syria he worked with UNHCR as Head of Field Office and in additional protection roles in Colombia, Ecuador, eastern Ukraine, as well as emergency missions to South Sudan and northern Greece.

The street lighting project discussed below has been made possible thanks to the work of UNHCR's Samer Hababat (Protection), Manaf Hamam (Field) and Lian Touma (Supply) who have been engaged in every step of project and at the forefront of the work in the field as well with community members, local authorities, and contractors.

How did you originally come up with the solar street light project idea for Aleppo? What was the need or challenge identified?

The issue of lighting really came first from members of the community, especially internally displaced persons (IDPs) who had returned to eastern Aleppo at the beginning of the year. From the end of December and into the first weeks of this year, there were already thousands of persons returning, and that number has continued to increase, now at almost 300,000 in Aleppo city alone. The scale of damage and destruction we came across is difficult to describe in words but approximately 40-50% of the buildings in eastern Aleppo and the former front line area have been damaged, and about 30% have been destroyed. And so for the people returning the conditions have been extremely challenging having lost homes, schools, businesses or workplaces, in addition to running water, public electricity...the list goes on unfortunately.

Amidst all these pressing needs, it was interesting to find that a common message from all parts was the need and importance of street lighting. For many returnees, this was identified as something basic for safety and security in general terms as well as some sense of normalcy, for lack of a better word. But many people were also highlighting this a key factor in preventing or mitigating protection risks. Whether it was for the purposes of collecting water or attending classes since those schools which are open often run double shifts, or to travel across neighbourhoods due to limited public transportation and employment opportunities - community members repeatedly highlighted how the absence of lighting inhibited their ability to safely pursue daily or routine activities necessary for their own basic needs and life opportunities. In other words, lighting was being equated with meaningful autonomy and decision-making in addition to the other reasons more evident to most of us. Additionally, many community members also stressed the importance of lighting for the reduction of social isolation and the restoration of community ties. As long as the streets remain in darkness, people are reluctant to leave their home and this limits not only the interaction among neighbours but also the sense of mutual support and a more protective environment.

So initially we started out with some small-scale lighting through CBIs (Community-Based Initiatives), but it was apparent the magnitude of the challenge was too great. This is when the discussion began to shift to something more ambitious, and management at both the country and regional levels was very supportive from the outset and helped to secure funding, facilitate technical guidance, and support us in their interactions with the competent authorities.

Are solar street lights new to the Aleppo context?

Generally, yes, they're new to this context. Aside from a few street lights in targeted areas and some solar-powered traffic lights in western Aleppo, this technology is not commonly found here. And what UNHCR is going to install is more sophisticated technically and more ambitious in terms of scale that what has been carried out to date. In total, we are targeting 54 neighbourhoods (289,000 persons) with 2,000 solar street lights as well as 650 more in the key rural communities Deir Hafer and Al Khafsa (8,900 persons) recaptured from ISIS a few months back.

Innovation is not about any single technological fix but about being adaptive and responsive to the context. How does this project do that?

That's exactly right. Along the lines of the response to the first question, there was no plan from the start to get into solar street lighting. It was more a question of how to respond to multiple needs and protection risks since we cannot address them all, unfortunately. And in this case, it turned out that technology would have to be the vehicle for addressing some of those priority concerns --- combining opportunity with outside-the-box thinking. The same applies to some other issues we have been working on such better two-way communication with the population, new approaches to the shelter response, evolving NFI needs, etc. UNHCR Aleppo is trying to experiment with changes in the local context and in this regard, the Innovation Service has been helping bring greater structure to those processes, among which the solar street lighting is one.

Who are the key stakeholders in the project? What are their roles and how do you work together?

The project involves multiple stakeholders. With Nama'a, one of our NGO partners in Aleppo, we have used a team of ORVs (outreach volunteers) to assist in the work with community members. This has involved neighbourhood-level assessments of protection risks and the mobilization of community members to help design where and how lighting will be prioritised. We are also working with the Governor's Office and Municipality who have lent their support to the prioritization process coming from community members, participated in setting the technical requirements, facilitated authorizations to carry out the work on the ground at the various stages, and they will contribute up to 700 poles for the lights to be installed.

Can you tell me a bit about the mapping aspect of the project – how did you select the neighborhoods?

Much of the infrastructure damage had already been mapped out through a coordinated assessment process across the WASH (Water and Sanitation for Health), Early Recovery and Shelter sectors (the latter led by UNHCR) and population tracking is regularly updated by the UN. That information combined with our regular field work gave us a pretty good idea of the areas more likely to be prioritised. At the ground level though, community members were instrumental in helping to identify where to prioritise each light and the reasons to do. In each neighbourhood or area, they helped us identify and prioritise locations which would maximise the positive impact of street lighting and also helped to assess the current condition of each proposed instalment location to know which will need new foundations or poles, for example, in addition to the lighting itself.

Why is it important to include the community in the project and perform user testing?

Working with community members on this project has been essential. Given its technical nature and the fact that infrastructure is usually associated more with the authorities, it was not clear at the outset how far we could hope to take the community component. But we knew that we had to try at all stages one way or another. Not only did we believe that it's good practice, we also felt this was important for the standard we strive to set with the authorities, humanitarian partners and the community members themselves: that "beneficiaries" can and should be more involved in the

humanitarian response that even in a project like this one it's still possible to do so. And since the intended impact is for their benefit above all else, we want to ensure they are engaged in the testing process to see what is working and what requires adjustments or improvements to move closer and closer to the desired impact. We are also engaging the authorities and the contractor to prioritise using community members as a potential resource in terms of labour (for example, installation and maintenance). We are also working with key segments of the community to raise awareness about the purpose of this project and to increase the number of persons mobilised to help out. In addition to seeing community members benefit from this project, we aim to see they understand its purpose and take a measure of ownership for it.

What are the main challenges – technical or otherwise – in this project?

There have been plenty of challenges thus far, and I'm sure we will encounter more as installation progresses. From a technical standpoint, deciding upon the most appropriate technical specifications was a learning experience for all involved. We had to find a balance between what is needed and what is possible, from both a technical and financial standpoint. A lot of time and effort was required to get the provincial and municipal authorities on the same page. Some neighbourhoods, for example, have UNESCO heritage status and so carrying out any

work in those areas carries with it additional considerations. Finding a supplier with the capacity with the technical and operational capacity to implement this project was a challenge as well. This isn't a project that lends itself to quick implementation, but we also knew that we had to move as quickly as possible since more and more people have been returning.

Why did UNHCR decide to focus on infrastructure in Aleppo?

It's not so much that there was a conscious decision to tackle anything specific to infrastructure. UNHCR continues to prioritise life-saving assistance, responding to protection needs on multiple fronts, and improving self-reliance and access to basic services. But in the context of spontaneous or self-organised returns, whether IDPs or refugees, the aim is to adapt to the realities on the ground and find ways to reduce risks and/or dependence on humanitarian assistance. In this case of Aleppo, with the scale and multitude of the needs, UNHCR felt this was an opportunity to respond to several of those needs, reaching a large number of people, and covering a major gap not being addressed by other actors.

Do you think it's possible to innovate in the Aleppo urban context? Why is innovation needed?

Yes, from what our team is learning so far this year, it's apparent that innovation can be applied to many circumstances and contexts. That doesn't mean

it's easy, or even necessary, in every instance, but for sure it's possible. I think the main reason our office and operation felt it was needed in the context of Aleppo you don't often come across a situation like this. Within a matter of weeks the operational context completely changed, multiplying the size of the area and the number of persons that required a prioritised response, and on a scale of destruction, loss and hardship that goes beyond all "regular" humanitarian programming. So at the very least, these challenges forced us to reflect more purposively on what we're doing, how we're doing it, and if there are ways we can do our work differently or more effectively.

What is the future of this project? What do you hope to accomplish in 2018?

If the project is successful, we hope to see that it might be expanded or replicated elsewhere, if needed and appropriate. And we definitely hope that with the authorities and the community we can consolidate a system of monitoring, maintenance and collective ownership of the project. That would certainly be what we hope to see in 2018. For our Aleppo team, it is our hope that the lessons learned from the process itself can inform how we approach future situations which may require the application of innovation principles and practices.

A future-looking approach to energy and environment in Angola

Julie Gassien bats at an incessant onslaught of gnats attacking the moisture in her eyes. All around her is the green fernery of the Angolan bush, the sounds of burbling water soothing from the forested background. She stands on an intricately balanced web of ecological importance, and steps from a newly constructed refugee camp meant to house up to 50,000 people.

Lóvua settlement in Northeastern Angola's Lunda Norte province suddenly became home to an influx of families fleeing violence in the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of Congo in August 2017. As new refugees poured in their immediate needs mounted: wood for cooking at heat, water for drinking, cooking and cleaning, places to safely and hygienically dispose of human waste. Familiar requirements.

"When you put tens of thousands of people in a natural area," says Gassien, "you don't need an environmental PhD to know it's going to be complicated."

But in Angola, a recognition by both the government and by UNHCR that protecting the environment was an important factor to consider led to an unusual approach: an environmental and energy plan that was implemented from the beginning.

Gassien is part of it. An energy and environment officer with UNHCR, she's charged with working alongside the Angolan Ministry of the Environment to ensure that the land, soil and water of this corner of the country have a durable solution as well.

"We are paying attention to reducing any potential impact from the start," she says, blinking as the bugs attack her face in the moist air. That includes working across sectors to keep a minimum forest density that avoids soil degradation and erosion, managing rainwater and pollution, and identifying common waste disposal sites that will be controlled, identified and of benefit to refugee and host communities.

This kind of environmental planning can make a huge difference in the lived experience of those involved. Conditions are dire nearby, in the overcrowded transit center in Cacanda, where refugees lack basic humanitarian standards of water, sanitation and hygiene and shelter. And

in protracted situations elsewhere, environmental degradation has led to increased sexual and gender-based violence, antagonism between refugee and host communities and, in Haiti, an infamous and deadly cholera outbreak caused in part by a poor wastewater management strategy.

Getting things right from the start

Gassien knows how critical it is to get things right here in Lóvua . She started with an environmental assessment to identify the area's main sensitivities, undertaken in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and required by national legislation before certain projects like new construction.

"In countries where we intervene, we tend to forget there are environmental laws," reminds Gassien. "There is legislation, and countries have signed treaties. This has to be in the package of decisionmaking."

As UNHCR set out to clear land for the settlement, Gassien's analysis ensured protection of the most foundational plants and species. They marked trees that should not be cut to preserve density and diversity, and carefully opened up other spaces where people could grow food in sunlight.

Gassien and her team are working on an environmental management document to define the measures that should be taken to reduce the environmental impact of the settlement, to be signed by UNHCR and the Angolan government.

They're also meeting with refugees in focus groups to get a sense of their cooking needs, a main driver behind cutting down trees for firewood. Many refugees here use the "three-stone fire" method of putting wood in the middle to form a hearth and balancing a pot on the tripod of three stones. It's one of the highest energy-consumption methods of cooking and generates a lot of unhealthy smoke.

Educating refugees on sustainable firewood collection will allow them to reduce what they're taking now, and lay the groundwork for long-term

sensitization and support for alternative techniques like biomass or solar energy. Gassien and her team are already collaborating with the community on designing fuel-efficient cookstoves, with a target of 2,000 refugees and 500 host community members using one by the end of the year.

They're also continuing to work on a waste disposal solution that moves away from unhygienic, unsanitary and dangerous refuse pits commonly used in emergency situations.

As for energy, Lóvua is totally off the grid. So every refugee will have a solar lamp, and UNHCR is installing local switch lights in common areas. Gassien hopes to install off-grid solar lighting systems at main points like schools and health and community centers—small "plug and play" systems that community organizations can manage themselves. Refugees will manage, watch, clean and repair solar systems and reap the monetary benefits in addition to the environmental ones.

Not a place to waste

Each initiative Gassien and her colleagues are planning is being undertaken with community involvement: One of the hardest things to do, if you ask Gassien, but also one of the most essential.

"The first idea was to say, you have to pay attention to this place because there's a community around here, because it's a forest, because it's for your own sake," says Gassien. Without the activities undergirding that sentiment in place yet, Gassien admits they are just words. But she wants Lóvua 's new residents to recognize that their new forest home is "not a place to waste."

"We really emphasized the environmental awareness-raising component, because we know it's important to go back to the people and to explain and go back and explain again and go back again and explain again," Gassien says.

So far, it seems refugees here have taken the message to heart. Community Natural Resource

Management committees are starting to assemble to discuss challenges and options, and to put mechanisms in place to encourage dialogue about environmental issues with the host community even before any conflicts arise.

Gassien says a small group of young mobilizers are especially enthusiastic about the initiatives. And refugees beyond that core group ask what to do if members of the host community come to chop down trees the refugees have been cautioned to preserve.

But here is just one more example of how thorny things get. Because the answer is: nothing.

"This is their home and they can do what they want to do," explains Gassien. When she talks to refugees living in Lóvua , she suggests leaving some trees for fruit and others for shade, and making conscious choices about which areas to clear for gardening. But she can't make them, or their host community counterparts, do anything. "That's why it's really complicated. The environment is a collective asset but it's only about individual action."

Hope for Lóvua

If she could snap her fingers, Gassien says Lóvua would not exist. She hates seeing this swath of forest under such pressure from humans with no better options. But since they are here, Gassien hopes they can all work together to ensure that the damage is proportional.

Green corridors could guarantee the health of fauna, birds and insects that are important to the ecosystem. Thorough and responsible local waste collection and disposal would minimize contamination, pollution and disease. Using local materials for shelters could reduce the environmental impact of trucking building materials in. And fostering awareness among kids especially could ensure respect for the area for years to come. After all, the average stay in a refugee camp is 17 years. The children who learn to be good stewards of these forests and water today will most

likely be the ones managing these assets well into the future. Gassien's vision will not be easy to implement.

"Bringing this to the fore in humanitarian situations is hard," she says. "Everybody knows it's important, but no one does anything because we have so many challenges."

She says decisions are still too often based on short-term visions: latrines hastily constructed without forecasting how long refugees will realistically stay, for instance. In most cases, that's when the environmentalist gets called in. When the place is literally overflowing with excrement.

Even in Lóvua , Gassien got behind the curve. She and her colleagues had time before the refugees from Kasai arrived to responsibly clear land for three villages, leaving the right amount of open space while managing the vegetation. But as more and more people relocated they overtook UNHCR's ability to prepare spaces for them, and refugees were basically dumped in the bush to fend for themselves. "In those villages, the degradation is much higher than where spaces were opened and properly marked," Gassien says. Her team is catching up with the delays, and making things right.

That's why Gassien is so hopeful for Lóvua . Since she's been here from the start, she's able to recommend precedents and rules that will carry these people—refugees and the host community both—through to a sustainable short-term solution.

That solution doesn't mean zero environmental impact. That would be unrealistic. But it should be one that took these streams and trees and soils and even gnats into account.

We should be able to say, "Yes, we assessed, and yes, it's been a choice," says Gassien. "We decided to degrade the environment in this way because we put other priorities first. For me that's the most important thing. To say you considered these things."

No progress without collaboration

Agnes Schneidt,
Innovation Officer (Energy and Environment)

We must understand that collaboration is needed more than ever due to today's accelerating environments, with multi-faceted crises and emergencies erupting around the globe, fragile political environments, and severe weather events such as drought, hurricanes, floods, and extreme heat. Each of these issues has a serious impact on the world's most vulnerable people, often leaving them with no choice but to flee from their places of origin to ensure survival.

To future proof the humanitarian system, we need to put in place more effective partnerships among actors from various sectors. This can only be achieved if we proactively start asking each other what our shared objectives are, what we are trying to accomplish, and how we need to support each other to meet these goals. We need to learn from recent good practices and examples of collaboration, successful or otherwise.

Similar to many other groups working on specific topics at UNHCR, the energy and environment community has currently limited exchange between its members. There may be many reasons for this: the geographic dispersion, limited resources, and also the job descriptions of staff that often do not match the actual responsibilities and tasks that are being carried out. A WASH Officer might as well be the person that works on issues concerning the waste management in a certain operation - but we wouldn't know this. In other operations, this may be the Field Officer or SGBV Officer working on lighting issues. As such, these persons may not appear to be part of an energy and environment community because their existence within the community is not defined through their terms of reference or job title. But in reality, these colleagues are doing a lot of work related to energy and environment. A colleague could be working on implementing solar lights to reduce protection risks - but again, we wouldn't know. UNHCR does not have any database that outlines this information, which makes it nearly impossible to engage and interact with energy and environment colleagues to distribute policy guidance, provide technical support, or to address specific knowledge gaps and training needs. This was our challenge.

Diversity of thought, the new frontier

True collaboration is hard, and it does not mean compromise or consensus-building. It means having the right attitude, giving up control to other people, and never losing sight of the shared, common goal. It means being vulnerable. Innovation does not work in silos. Collaboration is inherently messy but comprises a great deal of creative energy that benefits everyone involved. It requires empathy and a pinch of humility, as well as trust and respect. Every person brings something to the table as long as there is an agreement to the pursuit of a defined, common goal.

This diversity of people from various cultural backgrounds, gender, and age creates a broad spectrum of thoughts and opinions, which makes teams and groups of individuals working with each other so rich. This seems to be largely underestimated - even in international work settings. The most effective teams today are often not only multifunctional and highly diverse, but also include voices of customers, suppliers, and partners. As a consequence, the Innovation Service has started to purposely work in multi-functional project teams where skill sets and the experience of a diverse group of people are leveraged. We did not only see benefits from bringing together people from various backgrounds and experiences to jointly solve a challenge, but we also saw a special dynamic that gave the space for every person to contribute in addition to a cross-pollination of knowledge between them.

Building a community of collaboration - the role of tech

Collaboration does not start with technology, but with people having the right attitude. Once this is in place, technology and tools can assist in making collaboration more efficient. The core goal of any team is to bring the right skills and abilities together, wherever they reside - this is where technology platforms can help. Technology allows us to create a digital workplace that we may access by using laptops, cell phones, or other devices. The platform choice must be adapted to the community needs and it must be intuitive and effective so as to encourage adoption. It must meet the specific and common needs that the community and users express.

Here comes the Sun

When we were brainstorming with the IKEA Foundation, thinking that we'd know the gaps that some of our energy and environment colleagues face, we initially had in mind to develop a set of tools that would help them to effectively carry out their duties, such as a rapid environmental assessment or mapping tools. To make sure that this assumption matched the needs of our colleagues, we engaged them to better understand what they actually wanted in a community of practice. We have spoken with colleagues working in the field as well as headquarters, UNHCR staff and affiliated workforce, be it energy and environment experts and focal points, WASH, Programming, or others that are somehow dealing with energy and environment issues.

One of the recurring findings of the needs assessment was that there is a disconnect between Headquarters and the field as well as among the various colleagues working in UNHCR offices and field locations across the globe. It was recognized, that there is a great potential in peer-to-peer exchange and mentoring by being able to speak to one's colleagues in an informal manner and thus overcoming the barrier of sending rather formal emails or speaking to someone on Skype or the phone. Colleagues considered it to be of high value to have a dedicated space to share and get to know good practices that are already happening at UNHCR. People were asking for a central common place where they could find a repository of the most important resources, such as strategies, guidelines, technical documents, and other information. All of which is not only crucial for the day to day business of staff, working on energy and environment challenges, but also to the onboarding of new colleagues. Currently, it is almost impossible for people working on similar challenges to find each other and to collaborate on finding a joint solution.

Based on these findings, we refrained from developing a toolkit and moved towards a more comprehensive product that addresses the

above challenges while including various toolkits that already exist. We are aware of the fact that there are various existing platforms at UNHCR, however, we were searching for a practical solution that may find acceptance among the targeted users. A digital platform is simply pointless if there is no active community behind it, pushing it. Nonetheless, we are pursuing this experiment knowing that this product can only succeed if all attention is given to creating and stimulating the community. The technology behind it – a web based platform – is nothing but a vehicle.

With this platform, that we've titled Sun, we hope to leverage opportunities that derive from having an active community of practice, that will prevent us from losing time by continuously reinventing the wheel or conducting desk research that may not always be necessary if a proper exchange of experiences, information, and ideas was established.

The core services we've identified for the platform are:

- Communication: Facilitate communication between staff at headquarters and the field level as well as communication among the field staff, through live text messaging;
- Information: Build a repertoire of the most relevant and up to date energy and environment related documents and information that staff members will find helpful for their day to day work;
- Presentation: Allow staff to present their good work to a wider audience; overcoming a certain disconnect between the field locations;

- Idea generation: Offer access to UNHCR's Ideas Platform, that helps its members to generate ideas to certain energy and environment related challenges;
- Identity: Give energy and environment staff the feeling of belonging to a certain community that is working on an important cause, and that appreciates and values all its members.

To see if we are providing appropriate services to our users and to further enhance the user experience, we have conducted and will continue to conduct guided user testings with various scenarios. We are documenting the outcomes and continuously work on improving the platform.

By giving birth to our Sun, we are hoping to bring about more diversity within the sector, new ways of thinking, unveil good practices through the community of practitioners and hype a spirit of collaboration that is open and constructive, and most importantly - action oriented. Or, we might as well find out that a web-based energy and environment community of practice platform doesn't work at UNHCR. So we'd document and learn from it.

The Sun officially goes live in January 2018. Please visit and sign up to a new spirit of collaboration: http://sun.unhcr.org. For further information, feedback, all sorts of expected and unexpected criticism, and ideas, please contact innovation@unhcr.org.
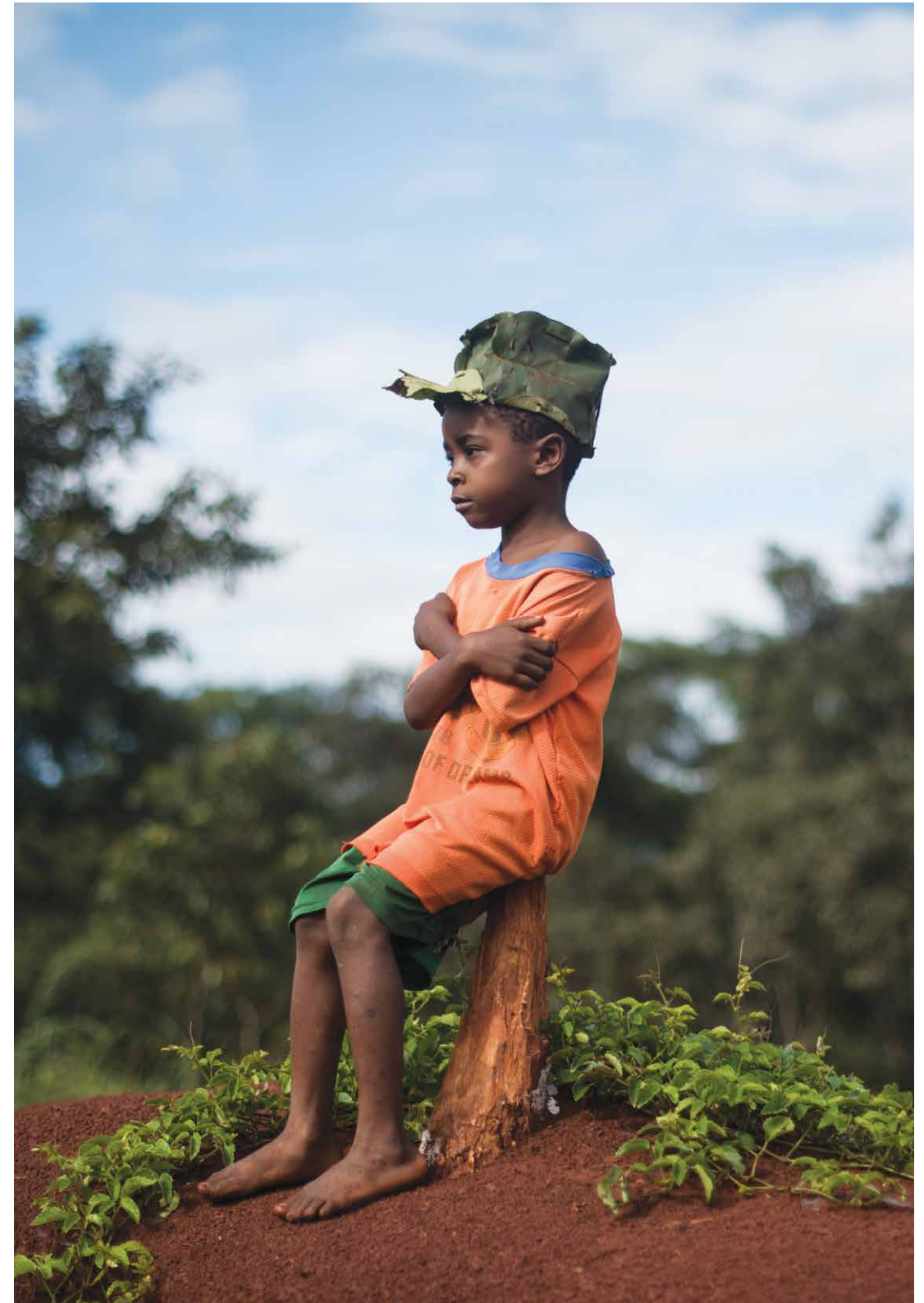
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Our Innovation Labs are dead. Long live Innovation!

Katie Drew, Former Emergency Lab Manager, now Innovation Officer (Communicating with Communities)

'Peak Lab'

In an entirely 'non-scientific poll', the Centre for Impact asked respondents where different government 'innovation initiatives' sit on a so-called hype cycle. Respondents indicated that [policy] labs were the 'peak of inflated expectations'. The next 'looming' step for these policy labs is dramatically framed by the Centre as: the 'Trough of Disillusionment'. In this trough, we face the vast disparities between what has been 'promised' and what can feasibly be delivered. The conclusion: we are at 'Peak Lab'. But, does this also apply to humanitarian innovation - are we also suffering similar disillusionment and lack of delivery?

In a conversation with DEVEX earlier this year Chris Fabian, co-founder of the Innovation Unit at the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), described how 'The word innovation is dangerous, and the term innovation lab is doubly dangerous'. UNICEF has now deleted the term Innovation Lab from their innovation vocabulary. A Ground Truth solutions blog in September delivered a further, more damning, death blow to humanitarian innovation labs: 'Absent a clear sense of direction, labs tend to focus on "innovation by gadget."' The growing backlash is clear. Keen not to jump blindly on the 'no-labs bandwagon', UNHCR's Innovation Service wanted to establish what other modalities could work instead of the now beleaguered lab. However, on this journey, we realised we might not have had labs to begin with - recognising this leaves us in a better position for 2018. UNHCR Innovation Labs: an identity crisis

In its 'Guide for Making Innovation Work' the IBM Centre for the Business of Government details five different structural models that have been adopted by government offices in pursuit of Innovation. These are: Laboratory, Facilitator, Advisor, Technology-build-out and Liaison. Each has a functional description. A 'Laboratory' is an autonomous group charged with developing new technologies, products, fixes. This structural model description, and external interpretations of what 'makes a lab' has caused a mild identity crisis within UNHCR's Innovation Service. We didn't have laboratories. We are certainly not an autonomous group, guided by the organisation's mandate and working within the hierarchies of our structure. In fact, our stated aim is to 'support a culture of creativity and collaboration across the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)'. We'd also strongly argue against the criticism of being 'technology-driven' and spent a substantial amount of 2017 debunking the 'innovation is technology' myth.

Returning to IBM's guide, The Innovation Service finds greater resonance with the other structural models than with 'Laboratory'. The model of Facilitator fits well for example: one person or small group working to convene government departments on internal improvements or external projects. Our UNHCR Innovation website even reflects this identity conflict: 'We don't consider ourselves innovators per se, but rather, the facilitators who bring innovation tools, and learning environments to those who require support, in order to help contribute to improvements in how UNHCR works'. So we didn't need to 'kill' our Labs, but rather capitalise on 'how' to better facilitate innovation. How can we best address the criticism of Labs, and more broadly innovation, for refugees and the organisation?

2017: A new way-of-working

Just over a year ago the Harvard Business Review published consolidated scientific research on 'Why Diverse Teams are Smarter', summarising that diverse teams process facts better and are 'more innovative'. In 2017, UNHCR's Innovation Service began a process-change in the way it worked, based on this 'diversity' assumption. Project teams began working outside the constructed silos of 'Labs'. Practically speaking, this saw us mirror a common way-of-working in the wider organisation: the multi-functional team approach. For UNHCR, the multi-functional team brings together different professional backgrounds and experiences - as well as gender diversity - to work together on similar projects or outcomes. Recognising the advantages this multi-functional team working brings to UNHCR, the Innovation Service wanted to experiment with this approach and innovation facilitation.

Key project groups were formed around focus thematics - including Social Media Monitoring, Predictive Analytics, and Communication with Communities (CwC) in emergency contexts. This also saw joint missions to operations, to allow us to bring a range of perspectives and experiences into conversations with field-colleagues. We moved away from framing our missions as 'a Learn Lab mission' or 'an Emergency Lab mission', but rather work with an operation to determine which areas (thematics) of support they would need. This facilitation team model is still work-in-progress. Through an experimentation phase, we plan to determine how best to formulate these facilitation teams and how we can leverage wider collective expertise within the organisation.

A Lab by any other name ..?

Has this model been successful so far, or are we repeating the 'mistakes' of the Innovation Lab? Joseph Guay, an Associate at The Policy Lab, describes how 'research and experience shows that when innovation does happen, it can be ad hoc, incremental, siloed and forgotten, affected populations and local communities are often excluded from the process'. Does our focus towards diverse teams go anyway to addressing this?

Feedback from colleagues sees them welcoming this project focused, multi-functional approach - it's a functional way of working that they are familiar with to some extent. From the Innovation Service's viewpoint, there have been tangible benefits to adopting this 'non-siloed' working model, even in early stages. Working with differing opinions and experiences is inherently creative, if space is allowed for disagreement and diversity. There have been some real breakthroughs for the Innovation Service this year, due in part to the power of these diverse teams. An example of such would be 'Project Jetson', the predictive analytics project bringing together data scientists, strategic designers, coders, data visualisers and former and current Mogadishu residents, to design an artificially intelligent model to predict displacement (arrival figures), in Somalia. This project demonstrates how we can work free of silos, with the early results showing more than incremental change in the area of applied humanitarian predictive analytics.

The Innovation Service is not claiming an innovation breakthrough - but are fully committed to rise to the 'challenges' our contemporary innovation critics share.

2018: Keeping our Communicating with Communities focus

Throughout this process, have we lost our thematic focus? The Emergency Lab was designed to support innovation in the field of Communicating with Communities (CwC) - is this no longer a priority for UNHCR's Innovation Service? Quite the contrary, the need to bring affected populations into our multi-functional team approach is a key priority for 2018. The eternal challenge being, how to move beyond tokenistic representation and to their meaningful participation and leadership in the development of Innovative Solutions. Communicating with Communities is everybody's job.

The Emergency Lab is dead, long live communication.

Using data to make your humanitarian organisation more client-focussed

John Warnes,
Innovation Technology Officer

Communicating with communities. Data. Information Management. Accountability to affected populations. To me, saying these terms in a row highlights how disassociated these different terms are for many, and how acutely humanitarian-centric, i.e. jargonistic they sound. They form - on the whole - mostly separate job profiles amongst different humanitarian organisations (including UNHCR), and are areas that have worked much better in rhetoric than in practice until this point in time.

But concepts around, data, engaging communities and the nexus/bridge that is the general rubric of 'Innovation' have more in common than many would think. The most forward-thinking organisations across the public and private sectors are doing more with data to support a new generation of service delivery focussed around the needs of their clients, customers, and constituents than is currently achieved in the humanitarian sector. Why is this? What can we do about it?

Concepts of Feedback and Accountability in the 20th Century

Only a couple of decades ago was the 'feedback box' the latest technology for soliciting feedback from community members in humanitarian response. This, alongside humanitarian actors' face-to-face presence on the ground, was the mainstay of our accountability to affected populations.

In some respects and contexts, sadly this is very much the same today. While societies have transformed across the world because of social, economic, and technological changes, creaking humanitarian architecture is struggling to keep up. And this is reflected in a lot of programmatic decisions that are taken by organisations that fall under the rather broad umbrella of 'humanitarian aid and development'.

And one of the most challenging things to grasp? That we actually know a lot of what should be taking place, both in terms of the types of approaches, and technologies we should be using and even nuanced considerations to mitigate risk and uphold humanitarian principles. For example, we're always talking about not letting the loudest voices shout down the quietest and most vulnerable across 'inter-agency fora at a global level'. So much of

humanitarian delivery is based on anecdote. How has this remained the status quo, and what's preventing us from understanding the data behind the concepts put forward in feedback from the people we're serving? [NB: A colleague pointed out that this point itself was anecdotal so to illustrate the point with evidence more or less: the Humanitarian Data Exchange contains only 3 datasets that have 'feedback' in the title, alongside a couple from the Inter Agency Common Feedback Project Nepal (CFP) - not exactly a goldmine!]

Let's be realistic. We as humanitarians don't have a good understanding of how feedback and perceptions function in humanitarian operations, in particular, what the data related to this looks like in practice.

There are many different approaches to how data is collected in the humanitarian system, and we know there are lots of pieces of data that are available within agencies. Beyond what is being captured, there is still plenty of work to be done around capturing non-digital methods from focus groups to workshops that either go undocumented or where feedback is not captured using tools that can electronically aggregate the data; paper files left on the shelf. For what is captured electronically much of this is kept in silos, either organisational or within organisations or disciplines.

We are increasingly seeing a need for more intelligent sharing and access to feedback and perceptions data amongst organisations working in humanitarian response. To address this, there are also initiatives such as the Humanitarian Exchange Language (HXL) which is aiming to align terminology used in humanitarian data, and the Humanitarian Data Exchange - a central repository for open humanitarian data, and more are making an effort to try and bring organisations together to better share and open up data to help develop a more nuanced understanding of the needs of people affected by crisis. On top of this, when we are compiling data, we're often not sure what specifically is needed to bridge the gap back to humanitarian programme delivery.

This is not to say we have to be wedded to data, or even data in the form of feedback we're getting from communities. Some fear that embracing data-driven implementation means removing all human intuition and the nuance from decision-making. The reality is potentially quite the opposite; the grounding of evidence can make it easier for managers to resist

trends and opt for something that maybe the data doesn't point to directly. They would be knowingly going against what the figures say, rather than blindly fumbling through the darkness. This requires absolute conviction and determination; something maybe less applicable when we're unsure about precisely what we're dealing with.

Even some of the most forward-thinking pieces from humanitarian agencies only outline some of the first steps in how to better integrate concepts of data and community participation holistically in their programming. The language around the 'participation revolution' pervades the rhetoric, yet the frame of reference of this is squarely humanitarian reform. The CDAC Network is an inter-agency network that brings together local, regional and global actors to catalyse communities' ability to access

information and have a voice in humanitarian emergencies. Their 2016 annual report rightly highlights the need for strengthened coordination and even 'common service' models for engaging with communities. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) works with GroundTruth Solutions - a third party organisation that developed their own methodology on capturing perspectives of communities affected by crisis - to independently gather perspectives of communities. They make a concerted effort to link these with IRC's humanitarian programming, nudging the organisation forward.

This is all good and could be marked as best practice today. But this is where we should be today. Our future path to really ignite the 'participation revolution' needs to be a lot more ambitious. There is much more that can be done, and data lies at the core of this effort.

Using data to understand constituents

Beyond the general goals, what strikes me about the language used - and we're guilty of this too - is how unambitious it is. Many who work in the realm of feedback data often see the challenge as how to 'incorporate it into programming'. Incorporate doesn't imply revolution, does it? We're looking for a paradigm shift in how humanitarian programming works!

To do this, we first need to understand how data-driven decision-making can work for in the best interest of communities, and capitalise on what we can learn from others.

So let's take the traditional approaches to capturing feedback: there's more to making something client-focussed than merely recording perceptions of individuals that we've gone out and solicited. In IRC's Lessons Learned Report on the Client Voice Pilots, they acknowledge that feedback 'is rarely considered in isolation of other data' and that other information is considered when looking at decision-making processes. Let's turn this around. When looking at data requirements for decision-making, is the feedback data solicited the only constituent-focussed aspect?

Most of the documentation and policy guidance around Accountability to Affected Populations refers to feedback. When the policy wonks or even practitioners talk about this it usually means explicit, solicited, feedback from communities, either because they've been asked directly, or they've reached out to humanitarian organisations. But perhaps there are also ways to understand the needs of our constituents in a less direct way. By looking at their actions, and associated metadata we can gain insights about the community's preferences around particular services they are receiving, or situation they are in. Improvements can be inferred from data points and actions allowing us to build better solutions that can be mapped onto other forms of feedback received by the communities.

And here comes the shift: We need to see client or constituent-driven programming which combines feedback data, with other types of data that drive or signal a shift in focus to constituent needs. This includes better capturing our face-to-face interactions securely. This includes passive reception of feedback data. This includes looking at the way services are being used, i.e. who is showing up to pick up goods at a distribution. Who is making a request to have more? Or who is accessing more or fewer medical services? It includes data on how community members are interacting with institutions and each other. This all paints a picture of individual's perceptions of their needs and desires, mapped onto what they are doing, and what is actually taking place around them, to develop and enhance our insights as providers and/or regulators of protection and service delivery.

It's not only the data that directly relates to the attitudes and actions of individuals. Metadata also provides a huge amount of insights that can be better leveraged by humanitarian agencies. When systems

become digitised the amount of metadata generated can be leveraged to provide much clearer idea about how services are used, how people communicate and move, how people spend time, and what choices they are making. This metadata can enhance targeting, drive efficiencies and ensure that more tailored and customised solutions can be provided for individuals based on their interests and needs, just like many in the private sector are doing today with metadata generated by customers.

Nonetheless, the prevalence of metadata doesn't come without its risks. Even if no personally identifiable information is captured, metadata can be used to triangulate individuals when it is cross referenced with other data. It can also be used to infer locations, file formats of messages and more that, when in the wrong hands, can put people's lives at risk.

Should these other data elements and metadata gathered from client behaviour be considered any less seriously than maybe the explicit feedback of one individual? By then connecting this data with feedback data - and other aspects of constituent contribution such as social media content - humanitarians could gain even greater insights as to what is going to have the most impact and deliver 'satisfaction' for clients.

Trends from the private and public sector

"The first step a company can take to stay competitive in the customer revolution is to unite traditional, social and demographic data under one roof in an easy-to-access location. This allows data to be seen holistically, enabling teams to derive more value and insights as opposed to separate, siloed bits of information." - Andy MacMillan is SVP and GM of Salesforce's Data.com.

So what can we learn from others? To understand the potential of this approach we can look towards the public and private sector. It's no surprise that in the majority of analysts reports on recent years point to a greater involvement of clients/customers in services delivered by organisations full stop.

From a scan of materials exploring this area, we see reports that to some degree formulate a broad consensus around different trends that are occurring and priority areas for action. There are also some good examples that demonstrate how different

sectors and organisations have tried to revolutionise the way they operate to bring clients closer and utilise data in more creative ways to deliver solutions.

To start, this graphic from Deloitte contains many of the elements included in other research that point to similar things. The priorities echo what has been on the mind of many at UNHCR. We're seeing a drive for more customer-oriented solutions, and by this, meaning a tailored experience for the individual rather than the masses.

Given how far behind the humanitarian sector is, we have a relatively clear understanding of how to borrow many aspects applied to private and public sector reform to move us forward ten paces, yet there are still some contextual differences that make it difficult for the humanitarian system. Rather than act as essentially one entity like the government do, there is an entrenched separation between humanitarian actors. The challenge remains though: McKinsey acknowledge that "governments have made efforts to improve service delivery through online portals or "one-stop shops" like centralized call centers… [Citizens] find it's often still necessary to speak with multiple parties before their question is answered."

Governments are increasing the amount they are opening up their implementation of policies and have developed principles to citizens to give install a sense of democratic accountability. For instance, the UK government for instance prioritises involvement of individuals and organisations within their main portal. Highlighting a variety of issues they refer to the relevant organisation who take responsibilities for different things.

McKinsey highlight the need to identify natural break points in customer satisfaction. They state that by understanding data around customer satisfaction (specifically 'break points' where satisfaction falls off the cliff edge) they can determine acceptable levels of service delivery to ensure that resources are prioritised effectively. They point to an example of call centre staffing and waiting times, something traditionally challenging for humanitarian organisations.

Further to this they also recognise the importance of blending different types of data to gain further insights. They cite the example of the Australian Tax Office that combined different types of feedback data and general data from call-centre operation to improve IVR systems. They allude to it in this section

of the article but if we transpose this onto the wealth of data created within humanitarian operations, rarely do we cross-check feedback data for correlations on other types of data sets (that may be easier to gather!). By doing this, we might have a better understanding of issues before clients/constituents even raise them.

For many years the private sector has used the framework of 'customer journeys' to bring together different aspects of a business from data to resources to product to make this as smooth as possible. As humanitarians we have a very hard time coming to an agreement or an understanding of what a container could be to bring the different types of data to better understand the needs of our constituents, and this practice could have application in this sector. By putting ourselves in their shoes as a starting point, it helps us frame our understanding around different aspects of our work with the impact it has on this journey. Research has proven that those companies who have focussed on journeys rather than isolated incidents or interactions are doing better at meeting customer needs than those who don't.

From these examples and trends, some might argue there is an ideological bent in that it assumes the model of support and protection will see a greater role for the private sector and an evolution of the role of humanitarian organisations. It is a natural occurrence in modern liberalised economies and the link with general economic development is unequivocal. When we think about how this integrates with the commitments made in the New York Declaration, we need to start thinking how comprehensive solutions are providers and that humanitarian organisations work more closely with the private sector, both in delivery and learning, to make humanitarian programming more client focussed.

What do we need to work on?

This challenge may appear insurmountable, 'not my job' or just a plain headache to affect. There are simple things that you can do today to help us on this journey, and maybe kick-start a sort of domino effect regarding how we're using the vehicle of data to make our programming more constituent-driven.

1. How to work as one: collaboration not competition

Time and time again it is the underlying politics of competition that hamper progress in the humanitarian sector. We find it hard to reconcile feedback, and data more broadly, across different humanitarian agencies. If we can't overcome this, we will fragment and disintegrate. That's not to say there aren't a number of individuals within organisations that endeavour to make this happen, but I know I've been looked at with surprise by internal colleagues when opening up data or (securely) sharing information to partners that has previously been siloed. To start building a better collective understanding, we need to open up data, collaborate transparently, and build insights around our constituents needs together, rather than in isolation from each other.

What can I do today?: Start by reading "10 defining principles of radical openness" on our website for simple actions you can take. Be open-minded to working with others and leave your ego at the door. If they've got a good thing working, see how you can get involved, rather than build a competing system/product.

2. Borrowing from the private and public sectors: be faster

There are a number of documents discussed in this article that outline trends, but there are many more pieces available that don't fall across the desk of the humanitarian practitioners. We need to get better at seriously considering them, along with other analyses of societal, business or other trends, at a high/senior leadership level. The lessons learned can help save humanitarian's time and money, but also provide ideas for how we can do more practical things for instance with customer service approaches, or intelligent use of metadata for gaining insights.

What can I do today?: Think about how aspects of your job are tackled by public/private sector organisations. This could be anything from design of transit areas for large groups of people to developing call-centres. There's a wealth of resources, many referenced in this piece that are a mere google away. Take the time to reach out and learn.

3. Innovation is here to stay

Perhaps I'm biased, but if there's one thing I've gathered from speaking with peers in the private and public sector, and from documentation and reports such as the above, it is that innovation is here to stay. There's the oft-quoted phrase 'We need to innovate to survive'. This is how it should be. We have a nasty history of resting on our laurels in the humanitarian sector and to provide client-centric services based on solid data, we need to be able innovation, and adapt quickly to changing contexts. We have to bring the end-users into our solution design and development at the earliest stages to make sure that it's driven by their needs. This is the modus operandi of the UNHCR Innovation Service.

What can I do today?: Give your staff space to innovate. Take time out of your busy schedule to think about how to do something differently. Apply for our Innovation Fellowship or work with us.

4. Ask for evidence

So we need to start organising the data we have, jettisoning what isn't useful (i.e. stop capturing it) and start capturing things that are going to provide real insight. Securely store your data and learn how to leverage it in the right ways to support decision-making processes. Think about what these processes look like, what you/your manager needs, be transparent and allow the data to speak for itself.

What can I do today?: Invest in the right staff and tools to work with data. Learn about data. Stop working from anecdote and do your best to make the data backing up your decisions as robust as possible.

5. Bringing constituents closer is the only way forward

Perhaps the hyper-involvement that we're seeing on the fringe of some private sector organisations (who are using crowd platforms to determine the overall direction of service delivery and philosophy) would be too much for humanitarian organisations. Ultimately, there will be demand for greater input from all constituents involved, including those who are providing the finances to make the work happen, and those who are recipient to that.

Where this hasn't been applied, organisations fail. Simple as that.

What can I do today?: Check out our practitioner's guide to Communicating with Communities. Be pioneering in your programme design by getting tangible involvement from communities in decision-making. Make sure you're open to and acting on feedback from communities and don't shy away from opening up channels because of lack of capacity. There are ways to deal with it, and groups that will support you in this journey.

The 'refugee journey' of the future

The lives that people are leading are not determined by humanitarian actors. In reality, despite UNHCR, national governments, and partners providing services, occasionally managing settlements and so on, a large portion of people's lives are lived amongst their friends and family without intervention. When interventions do take place, perhaps it would be good to consider these in their entirety? From the above resources, we saw the idea of a 'citizen journey' put forward as a framework for making sure data was being used to make services more customer-centric. I'd like to re-frame this for UNHCR as the 'refugee journey'. Not the journey they take to flee a country, but the metaphorical journey they take when they interact with the humanitarian response community. If from now on we start thinking more holistically about this journey, we will be better placed to understand the motivations of individuals, what they want and don't want from their journeys and how they can be more satisfied upon completing each journey. Maybe even easing the real journey they're taking towards a life free from persecution.

Listening & Learning: The Future of Communicating with Communities

Anjali Katta, Intern, UNHCR Innovation Service

My phone has become a natural extension of my right hand. It can confirm or deny a dinnertime argument or help me find the closest hospital, all in a matter of seconds. With something as small as my phone, my fingers can reach people and information past the lengths of my arms; I can access resources that I wouldn't have access to otherwise. The ways I can reach the information is wide and varied--I use email for professional or more lengthy discussions, texts for simple conversations, Snapchat for funny little instances, Facebook to stay in touch with people, Whatsapp for relatives, and push notifications from apps to stay up to date on the news. My window to the world has opened wider than it's ever been--I can reach a much wider audience with my own opinions and learn much more from people around the world. The obvious precursor to these modes of communication is reliable internet and connectivity so translating them to the refugee context is currently very difficult, and in some cases, impossible.

However, I think we can take inspiration from what we use in our daily lives to influence the refugee context. Not just communicating for the sake of communicating but realising how the various forms of communication have allowed us to improve our own lives. We need to stay vigilant in remembering how the benefits of technology, intended and accidental, overweigh the effort it took to learn how to use the technology and integrate it into our own lives. Indeed, the creators of Twitter did not anticipate their platform would be used as a tool to communicate for justice and democracy, and we need to step back and analyze just how much technology has impacted our lives in these revolutionary (and not so revolutionary) ways. We need to ask: how has social media galvanised movements for justice? How has customer feedback platforms created better services? How has open data increased transparency? The answers to these questions inevitably reveals that communication, particularly two-way communication, is valuable, can result in change, and can lessen the power differential between providers and recipients and thus provide more effective services. In the refugee context, this means acknowledging refugees as individuals who know what is best for themselves and communicating to provide services that best fit their needs.

Once we acknowledge that communication itself is valuable, we have to look at which modes of communication are the most effective. This requires us to better remember all available technology in the world we know—rather than simply manipulating the technology already used in refugee contexts. This isn't to say that we would introduce a completely new system of communication that undermines the ways refugees already communicate; we must do exactly the opposite. We need all involved members to understand that refugees know best about their own communication ecosystems and act upon that understanding. We have to look at ways to incorporate or introduce technology that builds upon pre-existing modes of communication as these systems would be more easily adaptable and will ultimately reach more people.

After understanding the ways in which refugees already communicate in a specific context, we then need to get better at systematically considering all possible modes of communication to find the best fit. For example, with urban refugees with internet or SMS, we need use targeted communication and leverage the existing connectivity. Moreover, we need to be more comfortable in pivoting when one form of communication doesn't work. If a problem with SMS is that people may not feel comfortable using their number for security reasons, you could use something like push notifications through an app that is less personalised. Innovating in this sense is messy, complicated, and at times, tedious, but this goes back to the notion that good communication is worth the effort that it may take.

It's also important to note that the landscape of communication is constantly changing and the future may pose challenges beyond our control. As physical borders increase and the ways in which people control data change, we may end up in a world where access to information and services is heavily restricted. Governments may target and prevent refugees from accessing mobile phones, social media, or having digital identities. Countries may want not only the physical presence of people to be limited, but also their digital presence. In such a world, there might not be much UNHCR can do to reverse online restriction, however, it can be an advocate for free and open internet based on the idea that access to information is a human right. In a constantly changing world, anticipating specific challenges is impossible. However, we can prepare by adjusting our mindset to be open and adaptable to new technology and new ways to approach communication issues.

As for the immediate future, I think there needs to be a centralised (but context specific) way to gain feedback based on refugee concerns and feedback. There needs to be some sort of page or source where, for each region or situation, there is a list of the issues that refugees say are the most pressing to them, to help service providers figure out what services are being delivered and how to best deliver them. A statement that I've heard tossed around at UNHCR in my nine weeks is "We know how to prioritise, but we don't know how to deprioritise". Looking at what refugees say they want help with may help us narrow down our goals to the ones that will help refugees the most. Moreover, to truly get to the heart of what concerns refugees face the most, we have to figure out a way to frame questions that don't result in specific answers; we need a way to systematise open-ended dialogue. This also leads to the question of understanding what we, as service providers, may think people need versus what people may actually want. Open-ended dialogue would allow service providers to answer that question more honestly to prevent unnecessary solutions from

moving forward and be able to involve refugee voices along the way. To do so, services need to be more open to feedback that may cause it to change course. The benefits of open-ended dialogue is two-fold; the recipient can hold the service provider accountable, giving them more autonomy, and the service provider will become more effective at delivering their services.

The inevitable reality of providers who understand the benefits of communication, figure out the best way to communicate, and figure out how to collect and store data within the chosen mode (or modes of communication), results in solutions that are more targeted, context, specific, and directly influenced by refugee concerns. The common label of refugee, IDP, or stateless unites people under a mandate but not under identical experience. Community-specific needs and localised solutions are the future because they acknowledge the individual and the role they play in local dynamics to transform services from the bottom-up. The heart of communication is the ability to transcend your physical location and influence ideas that will directly (or indirectly) impact your life. With UNHCR's constituents, the ability to transcend physicality is imperative as the forced movement into another location is what makes them part of the constituency. Communication that empowers people needs to be specific, honest, and systematised. Communicating with communities cannot be a box you simply check-off, it has to be a core mindset shift where service providers understand that refugees know best when it comes to their own lives.

A system that listens

Mika Koch, Intern, UNHCR Innovation Service

When I arrived at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) nine weeks ago I was acutely aware of the resources and unique breadth of the organisation to implement change for over 60 million people worldwide. And yet, I had also heard, as many have, of the challenges such a large bureaucracy faces in responding to their constituent communities. As such, I was particularly excited to be working with the Innovation Service, a team focused on increasing impact and effectiveness.

As I began to learn about the Innovation Service's focus areas, I was particularly drawn to the work they are seeking to do under the term "Communicating with Communities." To me, this term was both ironic and powerful. Ironic in that it seemed obvious that if you are trying to give people shelter, food, money, citizenship, and other rights that you would have to communicate with them. Powerful in that an initiative in this regard means there is the recognition that changing the way one thinks about communication, as well as how it is implemented on the ground, is at the core of innovating for better outcomes.

Now, looking back on nine weeks of learning about the system, particularly the Innovation Service's work, I have a renewed understanding, and appreciation, for this Communicating with Communities emphasis. This term, as I see it, is imbued with the reminder that we, the humanitarian sector, have to go beyond the mindset of "how do we help them" to "how do we support their efforts to help themselves." To me, it is more than just a sense of sustainability in the "teach them to fish" paradigm – it is about changing the organisational mindset to understand that innovation flourishes locally, to appreciate the diversity of people's experiences and needs on the ground, to believe in the resourcefulness and capability of the people we

serve, and to listen more than we speak. I believe fundamentally incorporating this mindset, to believe that refugees are the best people to make decisions for themselves, can change the way in which the UNHCR utilises resources and personnel. It is also, I believe, what will be required to address the reality of a rapidly evolving world.

I believe this approach is not only the right thing to do, but more importantly, it is the smart thing to do. The knowledge of needs, resources, and changing circumstances resides most accurately in the field and in urban settings -- with those who are themselves displaced. As such, their empowerment results in not only better protection outcomes, but also more effective and adaptable service provisions.

To arrive at this more powerful and sustainable state, we need to engage in a conversation with those we seek to serve, which often means listening more than we speak. While such communication efforts have many challenges, they also have a high return on investment. And yet, despite an awareness that listening to the voices of those we are working with is a necessary and integral part of the humanitarian response, I am struck that much of the current communication is still one way-- providing information to refugees and stopping there. If we don't acknowledge this, not only are we doing persons of concern a disservice, but also becoming an active obstacle to their empowerment. Truly understanding what two-way communication would look like means going beyond merely communicating with communities to communicating with individuals. This means understanding not just the trends and majority views, but the ranges of opinions, perspectives, needs and capabilities. These populations are incredibly diverse, and a failure to understand these differences will hinder the organisation's ability to achieve its goals. When we

think about improving the lives of persons of concern, what does that look like for them?

Executing this approach is not readily obvious. As with any approach, there are many challenges to such communication that need to be addressed if UNHCR is going to honour its commitment to improving the lives of refugees in a sustainable and effective way that doesn't compromise individual dignity and integrity. It will take investment in creative thinking to create the sustainable dialogue required across communities. The landscape in which persons of concern are living in is rapidly changing, increasing structural barriers to communication as a result: people are continually on the move, speak different languages, some settle down in urban areas making them difficult to reach, and many have varying experiences with new communication methods such as Facebook and WhatsApp. As these communities change so too must the ways in which we communicate with them.

While we need to innovate to execute, the initial issue is more fundamental. It is critical that we address the topic of how the humanitarian sector communicates with those it is trying to help and while it may seem obvious, I think practice shows that it is not. It is important we are constantly reminded that persons of concern are at the forefront of every intervention. It is important that their voices are heard and they have the space to be agents of change within their own lives. I hope that in the future UNHCR can arrive at a point where Communicating with Communities, in its broadest sense, is imbued into all aspects of the organisation and a component of everyone's role, both at headquarters and in the field. Only then will we have created a system that listens, and as a result, truly lives up to its potential as an organisation in service to refugees.

10 Things Haziq Hated About Humanitarian Aid

Vinicius Feitosa, Associate Research and Information Officer (Protection)

Ideating Outreach Solutions with Refugee Communities

Haziq is a persona: a concept widely used by user-experience designers and marketing professionals. Personas are archetypes with names and feelings who represent a wider, real segment of the population we work with and want to better understand. In this case; persons of concern who are skeptical about the work of humanitarian agencies. Instead of using demographics, UNHCR's acronyms or reporting formalities, the idea of this first story, which is part of larger series, is to promote refugee voices and to explore innovative ways of fostering their participation and our accountability in the process.

Haziq was invited for a talk with the UN Refugee Agency.

"I don't want to go. I hate the UN," he said to the social assistant.

"Well, so I think you go and tell them why," she replied.

Haziq followed her advice, dressed in crimson and converse. He let the anger heat his blood so he could tell them all the things choked in his throat. The perfect storm was tonight.

Coffee and baklava in a little waiting room. "I want no candy." He acted cool while noticing their self-evident blue presence. A dude wearing UNHCR's t-shirt told them a set of commands. All women stay here, men in the other room. Come with me. Shake my hands. Tell me your name. Did you come from work? What's your age again? It all looked a bit fabricated to Haziq. The guy smiled while writing everything down, on the side, like a foolhardy spy. He told they were going to be asked questions about their life in São Paulo. A so-called "Participatory Assessment," that would help them plan interventions and projects.

"Any questions?" was the chance for Haziq to speak his mind.

"I have questions and problems, but you won't have the answer to them. You always talk about our problems on behalf of us." Haziq hyperventilated, while everyone stared at him.

Cutting the deep, heavy silence, the man from UNHCR told Haziq they were there precisely to make their voices heard. "What do you need from us?"

"I want the UN to stop sugarcoating all the terrible things that are happening in the world. The massacres, the injustice, the scandals... By the way, how much money do you make? If you're gonna help us, we deserve to know everything." Haziq was so unsettled he stormed out of the room without answers.

He got a call the morning after. It was UNHCR. The guy was sorry for the fact that Haziq was upset and wanted to make it up to him with another meeting. "You do deserve to know everything." So here's the deal:

We don't know you and it seems like you don't know us.

You can try to give us a chance to explain how UNHCR works in the world and in this country.

For that, you deserve to know how we invest our resources: from the moment we receive funds, on how we plan projects, to how we work with partners, the governments and NGOs, whom you might know better. You need to know more on how we programme.

So, finally, we would appreciate if you could tell us your most pressing problems so we make sure to prioritise going about them in everything we do.

If that sounds fine, then come to meet us next week. This time we won't do a focus group discussion. We will actually meet in the course of four months with a group of refugees and local social entrepreneurs. We will call it "Creatathon," a marathon of creativity, collaboration and design thinking, where the group maps their biggest concerns and programmes to build solutions. Together.

On a Thursday evening, in pouring rain, there was Haziq. Looking over his glasses, but curious to be a part of this process. "I guess I still hate the humanitarian aid universe, but at least I understand more UNHCR. I can tell them all my problems, but they have to confide me theirs too. Some call it camaraderie... or simply just having accountability as a foundation to everything we do."

Principles behind the Creatathon

In collaboration with local partner Migraflix – social business aimed at promoting migrants' and refugees' livelihoods through cultural workshops – and Google, UNHCR Brazil fostered the Creatathon—a process in which refugees mapped their most pressing demands along with local entrepreneurs and developers to collectively create solutions and business models for them.

Along four months, a total of six events were held on design thinking, business model, client development, pitching and storytelling. The groups received mentorship of the Brazilian Small Business Support Service and Google Campus to seed ideas and solutions.

- Collaboration: Join forces with local network that can advance solutions and empowerment.
- Scalability: Move from focus groups to communities of practice. Involvement of the government and components that foster long-lasting change.
- Need-centered and participatory design: Explore design thinking techniques to foster engagement of refugees in the design of processes that affect their lives and create services tailored to their needs.
- Accountability: Revolutionise the way we plan interventions by having accountability as the cardinal rule in each and every programming stage. When there is two-way understanding, there will be transparency, space for true feedback and respect for each other.

Who is Haziq?

Haziq represents skeptics about UN and the humanitarian world. He is young, connected, pragmatic and has a lot of opinions about the world around him. He hates injustice and turns off quickly when he is not motivated. He is sometimes read as arrogant. He is compassionate and kind. He loves his friends and family more than anything and is extremely loyal.

Note from the illustrator

When UNHCR Innovation Service asked me to create illustrations for their Year in Review publication, I was very happy to collaborate on a project with an organisation whose mission is to really help people in need. I also got excited to be part of their determined and enthusiastic approach to do things properly, leveraging contemporary opportunities to address its challenges, daring to move out of a comfort zone and change the traditional way things are done.

Even if just contributing with images, I could be part of their effort. Illustrations, besides being an aesthetic companion to a text, serve a 'utilitarian' purpose of introducing the context and give a high level glance-ability of the article's subject matter. They are associated to a text, enhancing its readability by creating a balanced rhythm with the words to keep the attention active by jumping from text to image and vice-versa.

But the aspect I like the most is when illustrations are used as tools to tell a story on a different level, hinting at an idea and requiring the reader to complete it with their interpretation. I think strong illustrations are those that convey a message and trigger thoughts in your mind.

Well, that's what I try to do, it's not a given that I manage.

My task had two different aspects. On one side there was a constraint to produce digital images that would not weigh much in terms of file size, to allow people in the field to access the website quickly from locations with a reduced internet connection. This involves the technique used to produce the illustrations and influenced their aesthetic. The second aspect is how to convey visually the issues UNHCR Innovation Service is facing and talking about in the articles.

Either of these two aspects is good to start defining the images. The Innovation team offered me a good constraint to work with:he weight limit is an awesome constraint to turn into a creative strength and opportunity.

Given the digital weight constraint, how can you do more with less?
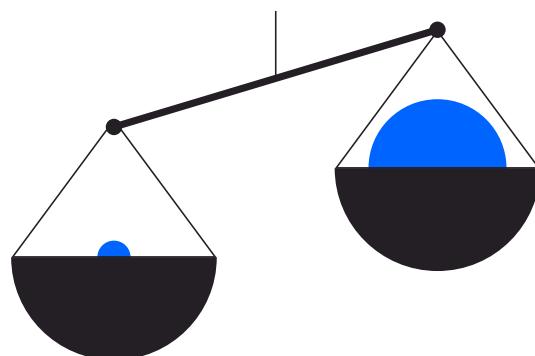
A powerful alternative to raster images is presented by SVG graphics. This format is optimal to create vector shapes with a limited range of colors or gradients. It would not be good to recreate complex images like photographs, but it's more than enough to make interesting illustrations.

SVG allows you to do more with less weight.

It would make sense for UNHCR Innovation Service to base their illustrations on SVG and a vector style - not just for this publication. Thinking ahead and imagining an illustration language that could accompany UNHCR Innovation Service in the future, this could be a contemporary communication language that suits their needs.

Ok, enough of technical part, what do the illustrations represent?

I asked myself what would be a good metaphor to represent the issues faced by UNHCR when dealing with Big Data? As you might have read in the previous articles, it implies both great opportunities and inherent difficulties. Big Data is like an enormous mass of different pieces information that by itself means nothing.
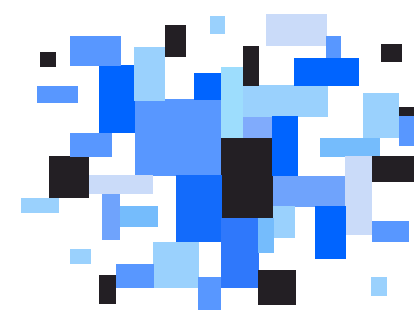
There could have been quite a few different ways of representing data, but I liked how malleable this idea was to visualize the diversified use of Big Data and at the same time how it reinforced the need for a shared vision across all UNHCR teams to use this resource effectively.

Big Data can be overwhelming. Dealing with data requires a joint effort to analyse, canalise, and filter to be put into perspective.
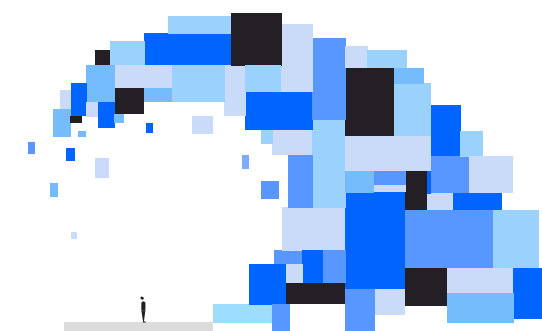
Collaboration is key.

The force of the action comes from the union of the different inputs, perspectives, and skills of the different people or teams.

Big Data can be helpful to gain an understanding of the situation.

Big Data can shine a light on a problem or see it from an higher perspective, like from a hot-air balloon. Big Data is a means to achieving a goal, a useful tool, a bridge.

Cover art and editorial illustrations by Ailadi.

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