UNHCR INNOVATION SERVICE

STRATEGY 2018

Geneva/Nairobi/Budapest
January 2018

Our mission: To build UNHCR into the most innovative organisation in the world working for the forcibly displaced, and those that host them.

Vision

Our vision is a UNHCR in which every single member of the workforce understands when, why, and how to draw upon innovation. It is an Organisation that thrives on innovation, and embraces new approaches, and new ways of thinking and doing. Innovation is understood as both a process and a set of tools and methodologies, rather than conflated with technology and specific products. It is a UNHCR that collaborates openly, and embraces partners to help solve problems and challenges facing refugees and those that host them. UNHCR plays a leading innovation role in humanitarian settings.

Why

Innovation already plays a key role in achieving the strategic directions of the High Commissioner. This not only needs to continue, but innovation as an approach needs to become increasingly central to our way of working - the old is increasingly irrelevant and ineffective - that includes how we solve problems and address challenges. UNHCR's ability to absorb new ways of working, including the skills and tools that encompass innovation, are critical to the future of refugee[1] protection, and therefore the future of UNHCR.

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.
– **Caroline Harper Jantuah**, UNHCR, Senior Advisor - Inclusion, Diversity and Gender Equity

What

The Service's strategy for 2018 includes building a wider understanding of innovation, and building innovation competencies and capacities throughout UNHCR. We will be an team that chases problems, solving them on a project-by-project basis.

Our Service goals are to:

- Create value by making UNHCR organisation easier to understand and use by staff, and by the displaced;
- Make innovation understandable and accessible to as many actors as possible, including in particular, to refugees, staff, and partners;
- Drive humanitarian innovation through a wider set of partners, including the private sector, academia, and development actors;
- Prepare UNHCR for the future of displacement and protection.

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1   'Refugee' is used to refer to all persons of concern

Principles/core values

The Service aims to make innovation bigger, and better, with greater impact, standing for agility, creativity, and non-hierarchical structures. We place strong values on being collaborative, diverse, building consensus around what we want to change. It is a team that embraces risk, and maintains a positive outlook, identifying capacities and opportunities. We believe in investing in people to generate cultural change. And we believe in transparency as an essential tool to bring about that change.

How

Innovation tools and methodologies underpin every action we take. The Service supports emerging and existing innovation within UNHCR - particularly field operations - using innovation methods and tools to support ongoing initiatives. The Service also takes on challenges and solves problems using a mixture of incremental, and radical innovation. Finally, the Service plays an important leadership role within humanitarian innovation more broadly, together with key humanitarian partners such as inter alia WFP, UNICEF, and ICRC. Outside of the humanitarian organisations, partnerships with the private sector, and development organisations remain crucial for three strategic reasons: 1) to harness core competencies and experiences in order to apply them to challenges presented in the protection and displacement setting; and 2) to set the pace, and to influence agendas and future workstreams; 3) to understand the future of protection and displacement.

The following objectives drive the Service's strategy:

Competency building and learning programme (1 flagship project)

The Innovation Fellowship builds competencies of 25-30 staff globally, agnostic of operation, age, functional expertise, or grade. It provides learning outcomes that make innovation understood, accessible, and usable in everyday work, particularly for colleagues based in field operations. The Fellowship ensures that innovation can be driven by field operations, and that innovation spreads through UNHCR, living beyond the Service through the Fellows' careers.

Ongoing competency building for field operations

Training and support builds competencies for staff within field operations that the Service engages with. More simple, lighter overviews are provided to staff and partners at the field level to provide a basic understanding of innovation being an approach, and set of tools. More engaged competency building is also provided to specific operations requesting a more robust understanding of innovation, suited to operations that wish to invest more in innovation and staff competency building. The latter targets Sub-Offices, or Field Offices, the former a broader constituent.

In 2018 the Service will use a combination radical and incremental innovation^ (see also background), whilst providing competency and capacity building opportunities as well as more prosaic, ongoing innovation support and advice. This will be done by the Innovation team focusing on innovation project delivery together with our constituency, colleagues, and partners.

Innovation projects** will be challenge-based, and triaged through the project selection guidelines (see more below). The projects will be divided into:

1.   Larger scale, radical innovations (1) projects
2.   Incremental innovation (2) projects

**Challenges defined by our constituency, field, Divisions, Bureaux, DHC and others will be solved through innovation project teams. This means innovation project teams will comprise of people with a wider set of skills, utilising innovation tools and methodologies to solve challenges, agnostic of technology and specific thematics. Members of challenge teams will consist of Innovation Service staff, UNHCR colleagues, partners, and members of our constituency.

Radical innovation projects (1-3 projects)

UNHCR faces substantial challenges in the way that it functions. There are challenges in human resources, modalities of aid delivery, opportunities to engage with distributed ledger technologies, as well as how we engage with refugees, and understand needs. Radical innovations have features offering dramatic

improvements in performance or cost, which result in the transformation of existing markets or creation of new ones. They may include services, or products, that are new to the world. UNHCR is ready for, and needs, radical innovation, or at least has a responsibility to attempt radical innovation for the people it serves. The Service will incorporate 1-3 large scale radical innovation projects, identified by a number of sources, whether from the Executive Office, or by evidence of particular situations or global/regional needs.

Incremental innovation projects (10-12 projects)

The majority of existing innovation, whether generated by field operations, by partners, or by the Innovation Service, can be understood as incremental innovation. That is to say that they offer an improvement in performance, cost, reliability, and/or design, to an existing product, service, or process. These innovations may be new to UNHCR, but are not to the world. Incremental innovation plays an important role in constant improvement, and plays an important role in making more space for innovation, in particular with middle - senior management. There are an incredible number of challenges, agnostic of functional area, agnostic of front or back office function, that could benefit from incremental innovation projects. Triaging requests for support, and defining which projects are prioritised, will be key to channeling the Service's efforts.

Scaling projects (4 projects)

The Humanitarian Education Accelerator, the Instant Network Schools programme, Connectivity for Refugees have all reached a scale of experience that now require them to transition to more appropriate parts of UNHCR in order to create increased value. All three programmes require a different treatment, the former a longer transition, increasing the ownership of the Education team, the latter requiring the compilation of evidence and a recap of experiences to date in order to determine a way forward.

The Innovation Fund, as with CfR, requires a developmental evaluation in order to determine if, and how, it should be repeated in 2018 or indeed, beyond.

In all four instances, relevant Divisions will be engaged to ensure that budget, communication, and in some cases, policies, can be adequately absorbed and taken forward. This requires investment of time and attention at the highest levels of the organisation.

Other projects may also reach the need for scaling activities in the course of 2018.

Communication and engagement

Strategic internal and external communication and engagement are crucial for any action that changes an organisations modus operandi. The Innovation Service is no different, and uses communication and engagement not only to communicate what, how, and why we do what we do, but also to influence. This includes internal stakeholders, who not only need to understand innovation as a set of tools, and methodologies, but also need to change behaviours and current practices. It also includes external stakeholders, for whom actions and altered behaviour is also needed. This will include private sector organisations, the public at large, and in some cases host communities.

Partnership and influence

In order to drive innovation internally as well as externally, partnership continues to be key. UNHCR requires cutting edge expertise and insights in order to be cutting edge. Partnerships with organisations with relevant expertise and experience can be harvested for these. Secondly, where challenges or problems exist that others are best placed to address, the Service will play a role in influencing future outcomes for improved protection for displaced populations and those that host them. UNHCR has a responsibility to be transparent and honest about needs, but also what has worked, and what has not - including how and why. This includes influencing other humanitarian organisations involved in innovation, or attempting to be involved in innovation approaches. Platforms such as the Global Humanitarian Lab will be useful for inter alia providing guidance and support to smaller organisations that may not have the same level of investment in innovation.

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Background

UNHCR Innovation Service has achieved the original goals of 2012. The Service went through an exploratory period in 2017 that challenged many of the initial assumptions of 2012, and highlighted that a different approach and structure was needed for 2018 and beyond. Some aspects of original objectives remain critical to achieving the longer term mission:

Training and learning of innovation competencies, and institutional innovation capacity building;
Engagement in private sector/non-traditional partnerships;
Development and deployment of innovation methodologies;
Community engagement and public interest communication.

Some structural aspects deriving from 2012, are less relevant today:

Thematic innovation labs;
Longer term partnerships with large budgets/programmatic elements;
Nomenclature that makes innovation inaccessible for Persons of Concern, colleagues, partners;
Innovation Team carrying out modernisation tasks.

In 2018 the Service will separate modernisation and innovation. The former will be required increasingly of relevant Divisions, as will the absorption of scaled/scaling projects. Innovation should now move to the next level, beyond thematic labs, towards a more user-centric, and service-oriented approach.

The team will, on cultural change aspects, work more closely with the Change Management team, and on private sector partnerships, more closely with PSP.

Selection guidelines for innovation projects

Select criterias for selection of projects the Innovation team may engage in

- Constituency, HQ, DHC, and/or field request
  - To best of our knowledge, key project assumption is that outcomes lead to improving the lives of refugees, and PoCs
  - To best of our knowledge, creates critical momentum for positive and lasting cultural change within UNHCR
- Project delivery involves community engagement, and feedback loop mechanisms
- Opportunity for project team to build a model that can replace existing (outdated) processes and technologies, and/or opportunity to engage in incremental tasks that require substantial innovation processes to be deployed (ie. solution not defined)
- Project delivery involves institutional innovation capacity building, and/or innovation competency building
- Project delivery involves private sector/non-traditional engagement or non-traditional skillset application
- Project meets 2018 goals, and advances towards Service mission
- Other questions we will consider to select challenge as a project:

- Are there other actors who can do this rather than us (team capacity and skillset)?
- How much time might this take in both duration and intensity (team capacity and skillset)?
- What evidence/data do we/organisation/partners have?
- Should we be supporting through having more general support/guidance materials rather than tailored to this request so as to maximise our time?
- Is our team being used as a broker?
- Where are we in the calendar year - can we deliver (team admin/finance/skillset/capacity)?
- A key focal point identified for project sustainability

No modernisation projects

- The Innovation Team will not engage in tasks that are deemed as modernisation efforts, such as upgrading and updating processes, software, hardware, and technology to meet the 21st century standards. The Innovation Service will however support, as and when required, to provide an experimentation platform when modernisation efforts are tested.

Change management tasks

- The team will work closely with the Change Management team on creating a sustained and positive cultural change in UNHCR.

Future and proactiveness

- The team takes the liberty to conduct research to map out future challenges that may affect the humanitarian response system, and turn research findings into innovation projects

Guidelines for innovation support

- Innovations will be supported by the Service through providing guidance, physical- and creative space for experimentation, and other means deemed necessary for testing of ideas and experimentation. Innovation's are also supported may also be supported through financial means, such as the Innovation Fund or elements of the Innovation Fellowship Program.

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

UNHCR Innovation Service

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