

**Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme**

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Update on innovation

Summary

This paper provides an update on UNHCR's Innovation Initiative, which was first presented to the Committee in March 2012 (EC/63/SC/CRP.4) and updated in March 2013 (EC/64/SC/CRP.5).

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I. Introduction

1. The UNHCR Innovation Initiative (UNHCR Innovation) made significant progress in 2013. Under the supervision of the Deputy High Commissioner, the initiative has launched projects in UNHCR field operations as well as at Headquarters. It has established building blocks to unleash the innovative potential of UNHCR staff in field, including UNHCR Innovation Labs, the Innovation Fellowship program, UNHCRIdeas.org, the Innovation Fund, Innovation Outreach and new partnership development. The partnership between UNHCR Innovation and UNICEF Innovation has prompted a United Nations-wide field collaboration around innovation, which includes organizations from the private sector and governments.

II. Progress

A. UNHCR Innovation Initiative

2. UNHCR Innovation was launched with a small team in early 2012. It is an inter-departmental initiative to foster and support creative problem-solving, experimentation and new kinds of partnerships in responding to delivery and programmatic challenges faced in field operations. It has the ultimate goal of strengthening refugee protection, empowerment and self-sufficiency. By providing space for the discussion of problems and needs, empowering creativity and rewarding innovation, as well as reaching out to broader communities of support, UNHCR Innovation prompts concrete and tangible solutions and supports a culture of innovation throughout the organization.

3. UNHCR Innovation's four-person core team coordinates and supports a set of innovation focus areas, called Innovation Labs. The Labs have emerged in response to largely field-based organizational demands and serve four broad functions: (1) creating an enabling environment and dedicating resources to innovation; (2) developing ideas through the innovation incubation process; (3) capturing, fostering and disseminating learnings; and (4) supporting the expansion of successful initiatives. Each of the Labs is formed around one of five major focus areas: information and communication technology (ICT) in education; self-reliance; access to energy; data and communication; and field delivery. Once reaching a critical mass of projects, each Lab is staffed with a Lab Coordinator, which is jointly funded by UNHCR Innovation and the thematically related units within UNHCR, in addition to joint fundraising for the project incubation.

4. UNHCR Innovation uses a five-step process: (1) fully defining the challenge; (2) identifying possible solutions; (3) testing; (4) iteratively refining solutions; (5) scaling solutions. At all stages the support and expertise of external actors from the private sector, academia, foundations and governments is sought. To date, more than 25 innovation projects have been initiated globally, including the following:

Indicative Innovation projects

Project Name	Location	Description	Partners
Refugee Housing Unit (RHU) project	Ethiopia, Iraq, Lebanon	An alternative modular refugee shelter designed to last three years and built from a water-proof, sun and flame retardant material around a steel frame	Refugee Housing Unit IKEA Foundation, Eindhoven University
Assistance Tracking	Ethiopia, Lebanon	Collaboration with the United Parcel Service (UPS) Foundation, to explore solutions to track the distribution of core relief items and services within a camp environment	UPS Foundation, FlowTrac
Community Technology Access	Kenya	A holistic and expansive approach to formal education, vocational training, and community e-learning in Dadaab	Hewlett Packard, Microsoft, Windle Trust Kenya, Lutheran World Federation, CARE, Norwegian Refugee Council, Vodafone Foundation
Impact Sourcing	Cambodia, Ethiopia, India, Kenya	Exploring opportunities for employment for persons of concern using cloud computing, mobile payment for performing micro tasks - those that can be performed online and linked to business process outsourcing centres	Causebrigade, Crowdfunder, Anudip / iMerit, Digital Divide Data, Refugee Education Trust, Cloud Factory
Ascend ¹	Ecuador	Piloting and analysing the effectiveness of SMS delivery systems to address the communications needs of refugees and humanitarian agencies	Stanford University, FrontlineSMS
Anthropology in Programming	Ethiopia	Testing the use of anthropological concepts and methodology in project design and adaptation to best suit the needs of persons of concern	Desert Rose
Population Data Viz	UNHCR Headquarters	A project to improve the presentation of monitoring and evaluation data with the aim of better communicating refugee needs	Redspeak

B. Innovation Fellows

5. UNHCR Innovation established the Innovation Fellowship in November 2013. The Fellowship is a year-long, project-based programme for creative and proactive colleagues. Among 90 applicants, 20 geographically, operationally and expertise-diverse Innovation Fellows (iFellows) were selected for the 2013-2014 Fellowship. These individuals met in November 2013 for UNHCR's first Innovation Workshop, which led iFellows through a week-long training on innovation design processes – from identifying and defining

¹ This project is one of five that emerged from the Stanford University "Rethinking Refugee Communities" course in collaboration with UNHCR.

challenges, creating and prioritizing ideas, and prototyping and testing different solution options.

6. iFellows are working with their immediate colleagues, the iFellows network, and external partners to design solutions to challenges faced in their operations. Upon graduating in October 2014, the alumni become mentors to the next class and support the further development of a culture of innovation throughout UNHCR offices around the world.

C. A social networking platform for innovation: UNHCRIdeas.org

7. UNHCR's new idea-management platform, UNHCRIdeas.org, launched between August and October 2013. Utilizing social networking software, UNHCRIdeas.org permits UNHCR colleagues and external partners to discuss potential solutions to the challenges that the organization faces in refugee protection and assistance. The pilot "challenge" focused on improving refugee access to information and services in urban areas and involved roughly 250 participants from inside and outside UNHCR, including staff from other United Nations organizations and refugees. The exercise generated hundreds of ideas and thousands of comments and votes. After passing through an Expert Review and a final Leadership Committee vote, the top idea from the platform was selected. The winning idea, which advocates for the creation of a refugee-focused UNHCR website, "help.unhcr.org," is being pursued by the Innovation team in 2014.

D. UNHCR Innovation Fund

8. UNHCR Innovation is seeking funding from the private sector and governments to establish an Innovation Fund for projects within UNHCR. The Fund will provide incentives for novel initiatives and innovative risk-taking. The fund has already received a commitment of \$ 1 million from the IKEA Foundation, to be provided on a matching basis with other funders.

E. Partnership

9. Innovation's work to identify and articulate field-based challenges has enabled UNHCR to develop new types of partnerships. Partners provide funding as well as skills, expertise, products and services to address both specific field-identified challenges and wide-spread global challenges. Given the unique nature of the partnerships UNHCR Innovation has fostered, the Innovation Circle was created at the beginning of 2013 to bring together all Innovation supporters and partners, including representatives of foundations, corporations, universities, social enterprises and high-net worth individuals. A first meeting was held in Geneva in May 2013, followed by regular interactions among members and a second meeting in Thailand, including a visit to field operations, in November 2013.

10. In 2013, UNHCR Innovation was supported by significant contributions from the private sector. The founding supporters of UNHCR Innovation - IKEA Foundation, Hewlett-Packard, United Parcel Service (UPS) and Stephanie and Hunter Hunt - remain committed to the initiative. In 2013, the private sector contributed over \$760,000, complemented by a dedicated budget from UNHCR of \$282,000.

11. New Innovation partners addressing field-specific challenges include the following:

- Stanford University's Institute of Design and its Center for International Studies, for projects in Rwanda and Ethiopia and a data visualization project with the Stanford Geo Spatial Center;
- Intel, for projects focused on ICT and education, particularly in Dadaab, Kenya;
- Oxford University Humanitarian Innovation Project, for a project to connect the private sector with livelihoods initiatives in Uganda, supported by Return on

Innovation from Stephanie and Hunter Hunt and the monitoring and evaluation of the initial challenge run on UNHCRIdeas.org; and

- UNICEF Innovation, for joint field projects initiated through UNICEF Labs and UNHCR iFellows.
12. Commonly identified challenges have attracted new partnerships with the following:
- Spigit.com, for the development of UNHCRIdeas.org;
 - Ashoka.org, for stewardship of entrepreneurs;
 - IDEO.org, for the Redesigning Refugee Communities project with Stanford University;
 - The Modi Lab at Columbia University, part of the Earth Institute established by Jeffrey Sachs, for supporting the creation of the Energy Lab; and
 - Causebrigade.org, iMerit.net and Hewlett-Packard, for projects investigating impact sourcing.
13. In 2013, UNHCR Innovation was invited as a speaker to the Omidyar Network Workshop on Impact Sourcing; at the Stanford Social Innovation Summit; Department for International Development (DFID) Innovation workshop; UNICEF's Innovation Workshop; and the United Nations Foundation's Board meeting.
14. On the margins of the October 2013 High Level Committee on Management in Geneva, UNHCR Innovation was invited to lead in the establishment of an informal initiative among OCHA, UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNFPA, and WFP to foster joint innovation activities. UNHCR Innovation invited UNICEF Innovation to serve as the co-lead of this project, tentatively named "United Nations Field Innovation Collaboration Network." A first meeting took place in New York in November 2013 and the next meeting is scheduled for early 2014 in New York.
15. In December 2013, UNHCR Innovation initiated and successfully delivered with the Georgetown University the first Humanitarian Innovation Jam with over 30 organizations represented. It will now become an annual event each December.

F. Outreach

16. To communicate its work and models of engagement, the Innovation team has used social media, including Facebook and Twitter, crowdsourcing software, as well as traditional internal communications tools such as email and staff announcements. UNHCR Ideas, described above, represents an important pilot for testing how to gather, discuss and improve ideas from colleagues spread across a diverse range of operations, as well as from outside partners. Google Hangouts provides Innovation with a platform for hosting live conversations. Webinars, intranet pages, and broadcast emails have provided additional avenues for information dissemination.

17. Substantial efforts were made to engage with the media as well. Responses were provided to over 50 international print and online media requests for information and interviews, including from the Guardian, BBC, CNN, Wired, Fast Company, IRINNews, Deutsche Welle, Policy Innovations Magazine, and the Global Ethic Network.

III. Conclusion

18. The initiative has grown significantly since its inception and continues to be a long-term management priority. The High Commissioner has stated that innovation is one of five priorities for the organization into 2014-2015 and is a crucial tool to "do more with less." UNHCR Innovation will continue with the goal of addressing long-standing challenges through the use of creative partnerships, the use of contemporary technology and the increased engagement of refugee communities. It will provide periodic updates to the Standing Committee.

