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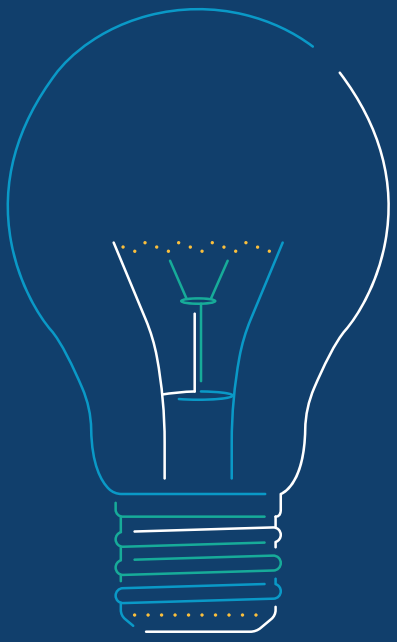

Humanitarian Innovation Fund:

Progress Review

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Glossary of acronyms and key terms

AI	Artificial intelligence
ACF	Action Against Hunger
CfP	Call for proposals
CLIP	Community-Led Innovation Partnership
DOAI	Disability and older age inclusion
DFS	Data Friendly Space
EEHF	Emergency Environmental Health Forum
FCDO	UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
GBV	Gender-based violence
GPE	Global Prioritisation Exercise
HIC	High-income country
HIF	Humanitarian Innovation Fund
HNPW	Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFRAD	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IM	Innovation manager
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
KII	Key informant interview
LLM	Large language model
LMIC	Low- and middle-income country
MEAL	Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning
MHM	Menstrual hygiene management
MUAC	Mid-upper arm circumference
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
MOOC	Massive open online course
NCE	No cost extension
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PM+	Problem Management Plus
R&D	Research and development
SOP	Standard operating procedure
SROI	Social return on investment
SWOT	Safe Water Optimization Tool
TWG	Technical working group
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UKHIH	UK Humanitarian Innovation Hub
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VfM	Value for money
WASH	Water, sanitation and health

Elrha team

Refers to the core team at Elrha responsible for overseeing this consultancy.

Tinkr team

This report was authored by Hannah Reichardt, Ian McClelland and Linn Bogsnes Miles, on behalf of Tinkr.

Introduction

Introduction

The Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF) conducted an independent evaluation of its work from 2019–2022,[1] which set out a series of recommendations and was accompanied by a formal HIF management response.[2]

To document progress made since the evaluation, Elrha issued a call for proposals (CfP) on 1 July 2025 for the production of a HIF Progress Review. Tinkr was subsequently contracted to deliver the progress review, with work carried out between August 2025 and February 2026.

Since the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022, Elrha and the HIF have operated in a period of significant change within the humanitarian sector. This has been marked by increasing complexity and frequency of humanitarian crises, heightened expectations around evidence and impact, and enormous shifts and uncertainty in the funding landscape.

Against this backdrop, the progress review provides Elrha with an opportunity to pause and reflect on developments since the evaluation, examining both areas of progress and ongoing challenges. The progress review is intended to be a clear and action-oriented document, generating insights relevant to Elrha and the wider humanitarian innovation ecosystem, and supporting senior leadership in considering future ways of working.

Purpose and objectives

Anchored in the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 and the research matrix (see the annex for more information) for this progress review, the analysis ensures continuity with past findings and management response commitments, while also providing a foundation for future improvements. It supports learning and reflection by examining the HIF's portfolio and practices between November 2022 and October 2025, highlighting both areas of progress and remaining challenges.

The progress review also enables the systematic tracking of progress by assessing how the HIF has responded to the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 recommendations and the commitments set out in its management response.

Analysis is structured around four objective areas:

- **HIF Evolution** – To understand what the HIF has funded, and how and why this has evolved over time. This will include exploring the types of innovations funded and what was new about them, as well as the degree to which the HIF has developed a portfolio approach.
- **Innovation Journeys** – To explore the trajectories of the innovations funded. The progress update will seek to understand what happened to HIF innovations after the end of funding and the extent to which attempts to promote their adoption were successful.
- **Living Up to Commitments** – To reflect on HIF support of commitments to shifting the power and localisation.

- **Sharing and Learning** – To explore convening, connecting, monitoring and learning. This will offer insights into the role played in convening and connecting innovation actors, sharing learning and generating internal learning.

As part of this progress review, cross-cutting recommendations and lessons learned are examined across all four objectives. The analysis also considers potential recommendations arising for the findings that may inform Elrha's future work.

Executive summary

This HIF progress review was commissioned to assess progress made since the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 and support reflection on how the HIF is evolving in a changing humanitarian and funding landscape. Covering the period from November 2022 to October 2025, the progress review examines achievements and ongoing challenges across four objective areas outlined below, with a focus on learning, adaptation and future strategic direction.

Overall, the findings indicate that the HIF has made meaningful progress in strengthening its role as a catalyst, connector and evidence-builder, while also highlighting areas where further consolidation and systematisation are needed to maximise long-term impact.

HIF Evolution

Since 2011, the HIF has supported 190 innovation projects with over £25 million in funding. The HIF's evolution is characterised by three distinct periods. These include an early exploratory phase utilising open funding, a growth phase shifting toward thematic Innovation Challenges, and a recent period with a more mixed portfolio and a new focus on AI.

The HIF's approach to portfolio management is primarily characterised by a funnel logic, prioritising rigour and evidence. While the HIF pipeline is managed through different follow-up funding mechanisms, rather than a stage gate process, the HIF has translated its ambition for end-to-end funding into reality, evidenced by an increase in repeat funding and investment in scaling.

However, the shift toward problem-led Innovation Challenges has created a tension between practicality and novelty. While the funnel logic ensures projects address critical operational gaps, it may structurally disadvantage transformative ideas in favour of solutions with more predictable, measurable utility.

The HIF has cultivated a valued culture of flexibility, with staff acting as critical friends who support grantees through necessary pivots. But there is more to be done to support the 'boring revolution',[3] addressing the constraints of administrative systems and short funding cycles. The HIF could also use its recognised soft power and credibility in the sector to advocate more for its grantees.

Innovation Journeys

This progress review finds that HIF grants are designed to help innovations reach specific development objectives, with the expectation that grantees will continue to advance the innovation's development beyond the grant period. As a result, much of an innovation's progress and uptake occurs post-grant, reinforcing the importance of systematic follow-up to understand longer-term learning and outcomes.

Historically, limited post-grant tracking constrained the HIF's ability to understand these longer-term trajectories. In response, recent internal analysis has prompted the design of a more systematic longitudinal tracking approach, marking a significant shift toward understanding innovation journeys across their full lifecycle rather than only within funded periods.

The HIF has made notable progress in addressing barriers to adoption through targeted dissemination and adoption funding. Dissemination grants have supported innovators to build credibility, visibility and connections with key humanitarian actors. Adoption challenges have introduced an intentionally demand-side model that funds adopting organisations to test and integrate proven innovations in real operational contexts. These grants are designed to act as a spark, enabling development and prototyping, partnerships to be incentivised and learning to be generated about what enables or constrains adoption in practice.

Across portfolios, however, innovation trajectories continue to be shaped by systemic factors beyond the scope of individual grants, including procurement norms, evidence standards, organisational incentives and regulatory constraints. The progress review highlights that, while the HIF's adoption model is well-aligned with its catalytic role, the learning generated points to the importance of a broader systems lens – both to understand the complete picture of the intended successful adoption of an individual solution, as well as situating adoption grants within wider organisational, market and policy environments.

Taken together, the findings suggest that the HIF's recent experimentation has strengthened understanding of how adoption happens. It also raises strategic questions about how catalytic funding can best contribute to system-level change without extending into long-term implementation roles.

Living Up to Commitments

Since the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022, the HIF has demonstrated clear intent and taken concrete steps to strengthen inclusive and locally-led innovation. Progress since November 2022 reflects early but meaningful movement toward embedding these ambitions more consistently across the HIF portfolio. Grant distribution data show modest but positive shifts in organisational diversity, while highlighting that funding continues to be largely held by organisations headquartered or founded in high-income countries (HICs).

A range of targeted accessibility measures, including adapted application processes, translated materials and tailored support, have supported participation by some locally-led organisations and generated valuable learning for future practice. While these approaches are not yet applied consistently across all thematic portfolios, they represent important experimentation and signals of change.

Structural features of the HIF's grant-making systems continue to shape accessibility for smaller and locally-led organisations. At the same time, increased awareness of how due-diligence requirements, language expectations and donor compliance processes affect access provides a strong foundation for further system-level adaptation to advance localisation and power-shifting ambitions.

Sharing and Learning

The HIF has re-established momentum as an innovation connector, with renewed visibility and convening influence most evident in 2025 through flagship events and sector engagement. Internal convening mechanisms have created valuable and well-regarded spaces for learning, collaboration and thematic exchange across the portfolio and among grantees, while external engagement continues to support sector dialogue and relationship-building.

The HIF generates a strong and credible body of evidence and learning products that inform practice and strategic thinking across the humanitarian innovation ecosystem. Further gains could be achieved by strengthening consistency, learning capture, and the coherence and accessibility of shared insights, particularly for locally based actors. Significant progress has also been made in strengthening monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL), with a shift toward a more learning-oriented function and the introduction of longitudinal tracking, enhancing understanding of innovation outcomes.

Overall conclusion

Taken together, the findings show that the HIF has:

- made solid progress in response to the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 and other learning
- challenged some of its core practices to drive significant evolution
- strengthened its offer to the wider humanitarian innovation ecosystem.

This progress review has identified clear ways in which this progress and momentum for evolution can be sustained, ensuring continuing leadership in the sector and in service of the critical function of humanitarian innovation. The next phase of impact will be shaped by consolidating these gains through a more consistent application across the portfolio, strengthening system-wide learning and follow-through, and further aligning catalytic funding with longer-term innovation and adoption pathways.

Methodology

Methodology

This progress review has been guided by the research questions outlined in detail in the research matrix (see the annex for more information) and summarised in the table below.

Objectives	Key questions
HIF Evolution To understand what the HIF has funded, and how and why this has evolved over time. This will include exploring the types of innovations funded and what was new about them, as well as the degree to which the HIF has developed a portfolio approach.	1. What has the HIF funded? This is mostly a descriptive review of the HIF portfolio from its start and since the last evaluation to identify changes and recent trends in the portfolio.
	2. To what extent has the HIF developed a portfolio that is greater than the sum of its parts?
	3. What was new about the innovations funded by the HIF?
Innovation Journeys To explore the trajectories of the innovations funded. The progress update will seek to understand what happened to HIF innovations after the end of funding and the extent to which attempts to promote their adoption were successful.	4. What happened to HIF innovations after the end of funding?
	5. How successful were the HIF's attempts to promote the adoption of innovations?
Living Up to Commitments To reflect on HIF support of commitments to shifting the power and localisation	6. To what extent has the HIF supported commitments to shifting the power and localisation?
Sharing and Learning To explore convening, connecting, monitoring and learning. This will offer insights into the role played in convening and connecting innovation actors, sharing learning and generating internal learning.	7. What role has the HIF played to convene and connect humanitarian innovation actors (among themselves and within the broader humanitarian system)?
	8. What steps has Elrha taken to strengthen its MEAL system as recommended by the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022?

Overall approach

This progress review employed mixed methods and was driven by an inductive approach. Data sources were determined by the questions set out in the research matrix (see the annex for more information) and the need to explore progress Elrha made since the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022[1] and its management commitments[2] in response to it.

Analysis has drawn on both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative analysis has included descriptive statistics, comparative analysis and trend analysis based on HIF grants data. The qualitative analysis has combined methods including thematic coding and analysis, comparative framing (eg, by thematic area or between different funding calls), and cross-referencing with commitments or key concepts/definitions (eg, for localisation and shifting the power; novelty).

To strengthen validity and reduce bias, triangulation has been applied across different data sources, ensuring that findings are verified through multiple perspectives.

Data sources and analysis

Qualitative data sources included key documentation relating to grant funding calls and learning outputs (listed in the References section). Additionally, 26 key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with representatives from across these following categories:

Category	Number of KIIs (individuals)*
Elrha staff – Current and recent ex-staff members	16 (11)
External advisors – Including members of technical working groups (TWGs), the HIF Funding Committee, advisors and other external partners	4 (4)
Grantees – Including individuals from organisations in receipt of current or past HIF grant funding	6 (6)

* Many of the questions in the research matrix (see the annex for more information) depended on current and ex-Elrha staff members as data sources. As such, several individuals were interviewed a number of times to cover the range of questions adequately.

Qualitative data collection and analysis were complemented by the analysis of quantitative data relating to HIF grants, financial flows and novelty.

Grants and innovation data were consolidated from a number of different sources used within Elrha:

- HIF Grants Tracker – The core source and most comprehensive record of grants data.
- Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)-Funded Innovations – Reporting data for FCDO, with additional categorisation by type of innovation.
- HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 Data – Data compiled for the previous evaluation with additional categorisation by type of innovation.
- Innovation Tracker – Internal analysis with additional categorisation by organisation type and containing information used to match unique innovations with multiple grants.
- Wash, Sanitation and Health (WASH) Catalogue – A catalogue of WASH innovations with additional categorisation by type of innovation and innovation stage.

The data consolidation began with the HIF Grants Tracker as the core source, gradually integrating information from the other sources.

This process involved extensive data standardisation, for example:

- converting grant types into consistent thematic areas and funding calls
- grouping multiple grants as they related to specific innovations
- replacing contractual amounts with actual expenditure, where relevant
- standardising the approach to naming countries and categorising regions
- consolidating and extending the analysis of types of organisations
- standardising the approach to allocating grants to innovation stages.

Deep dives

This progress review also called for deep dives to be undertaken for two thematic portfolios: AI and WASH, applying the research questions to these at a deeper level of analysis, as well as enabling broader reflections to emerge from the data relating to innovation management.

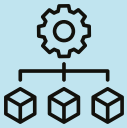
The deep dives are structured according to Elrha's 4D framework to facilitate a more integrated perspective:

Define

Identify and prioritise the most pressing problems within humanitarian response, and plan the research and innovation approaches needed to tackle them.

Develop

Invest in the right people to research, explore, develop and test the solutions to these problems. This 'D' includes all of the HIF's grant-making activities.



Distil

Create and share practical tools and guidance based on evidence of what works.

Drive

Empower the humanitarian.

Progress against objectives

Objective: HIF Evolution

To understand what the HIF has funded, and how and why this has evolved over time. This will include exploring the types of innovations funded and what was new about them, as well as the degree to which the HIF has developed a portfolio approach.

Key findings

- The HIF has established a clear funnel approach to portfolio management that prioritises rigour and evidence. Having developed this filtering approach, the HIF is now well-positioned to evolve its strategy by connecting projects to create community and share learning that makes the portfolio greater than the sum of its parts.
- The HIF has successfully translated its ambition to support end-to-end funding into reality, evidenced by its funding patterns. By providing multiple grants to successful projects and investing significantly higher amounts in mature innovations, the HIF has demonstrated a pathway for proven solutions to survive and grow.
- The strategic shift to problem-led Innovation Challenges has addressed the concern of 'solutions in search of a problem', placing emphasis on utility and efficiency, and ensuring the portfolio remains focused on critical operational gaps. While this may have reduced novelty, new approaches are seeking an appropriate balance.
- The HIF has cultivated a strong culture of flexibility where course correction is actively supported rather than penalised. Staff are highly valued as 'critical friends' who help grantees navigate major pivots during crises, providing a solid foundation of trust. Better alignment between administrative systems and the demonstrated flexibility of staff would benefit grantees.
- The HIF has established significant credibility and weight within the sector, which has been effective in opening doors with donors and national authorities. This represents a potential under-utilised asset that the HIF could leverage, alongside greater support for entrepreneurship, to complement its technical support offer.

The following sections provide a review of the HIF portfolio over three distinct periods.

This is followed by closer analysis of:

- the types of innovations that the HIF has supported
- its approach to portfolio management and the corresponding implications for grant progression and novelty
- its operational flexibility and non-financial support it offers.

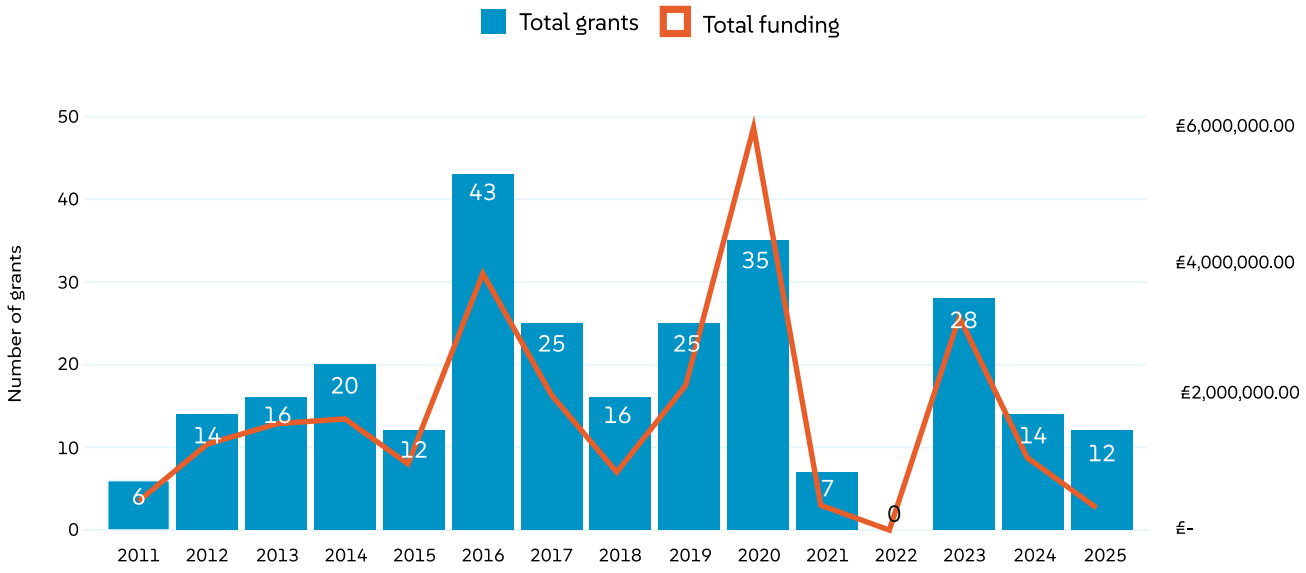
The aim is to understand what the HIF has funded, how it provides support and some of the strategic drivers behind its evolution.

While this report serves as a progress review for the HIF, covering the period since the last evaluation, it also requires placing recent progress in the context of the HIF's wider portfolio, dating back to 2011. This chapter on the evolution of the HIF therefore combines an overview of the HIF's portfolio since it became operational, with comparisons to the progress review period November 2022–October 2025 and reflections on more recent changes since the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022.

Please note: All figures provided for 2011–2025 cover the whole of the HIF's portfolio. For the current review period and previous comparisons, the analysis focuses on four focal areas specified for this progress review: WASH, Inclusion of People with Disabilities and Older People (or 'DOAI'), Scaling Innovation (or 'Scale') and Artificial Intelligence (AI). As such, the figures for these periods do not include any additional grants, including any grants made through the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) portfolio or the Locally-Led Innovation portfolio.

Evolution of the HIF: 2011–2025

Chart 1: Total number of grants (n=273) and total funding (n=£26m) from 2011–2025

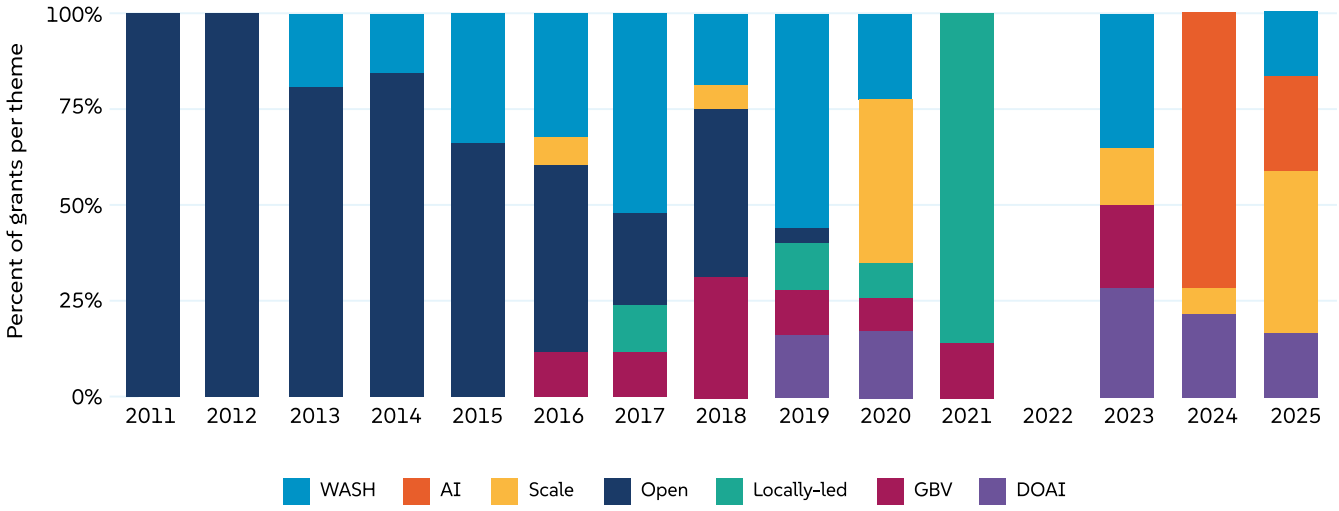


Since 2011, the HIF has supported 190 innovation projects with 273 individual grants, totalling over £25,750,000 in funding. The HIF's evolution throughout this time can be characterised according to three distinct periods based on changes in funding volume, thematic focus and the maturity of the innovations being funded (see Chart 1 above and Chart 2 on page 17).

The early period from 2011 to 2015 was exploratory in nature, characterised by relatively low volumes of funding and a lower project count. The thematic focus was broad, with open funding calls for Early-Stage Innovation, Development and Implementation, and Diffusion based on the maturity of the idea and the size of the grant without specific requirements to address key sectors or problems. The focus was more towards early-stage innovation, with the majority of projects classified as either Invention (29.4%) or Pilot (51.5%).

The period from 2016 to 2020 marks the HIF's growth and expansion in the wake of the World Humanitarian Summit 2016, with Transformation through Innovation as one of its four themes. During this period, there was a notable strategic shift away from open funding towards thematic funding connected to specific Innovation Challenges. The WASH portfolio was the first thematic portfolio, followed by GBV and DOAI. During this period, the HIF also introduced its Journey to Scale grants and started to explore locally-led innovation through a number of small grants. This period corresponds with a massive increase in activity, including a peak of 43 grants made in 2016 and a funding spike in 2020, reflecting a significant investment in the second round of Journey to Scale.

Chart 2: Percentage of grants (n=273) in each funding stream, by year

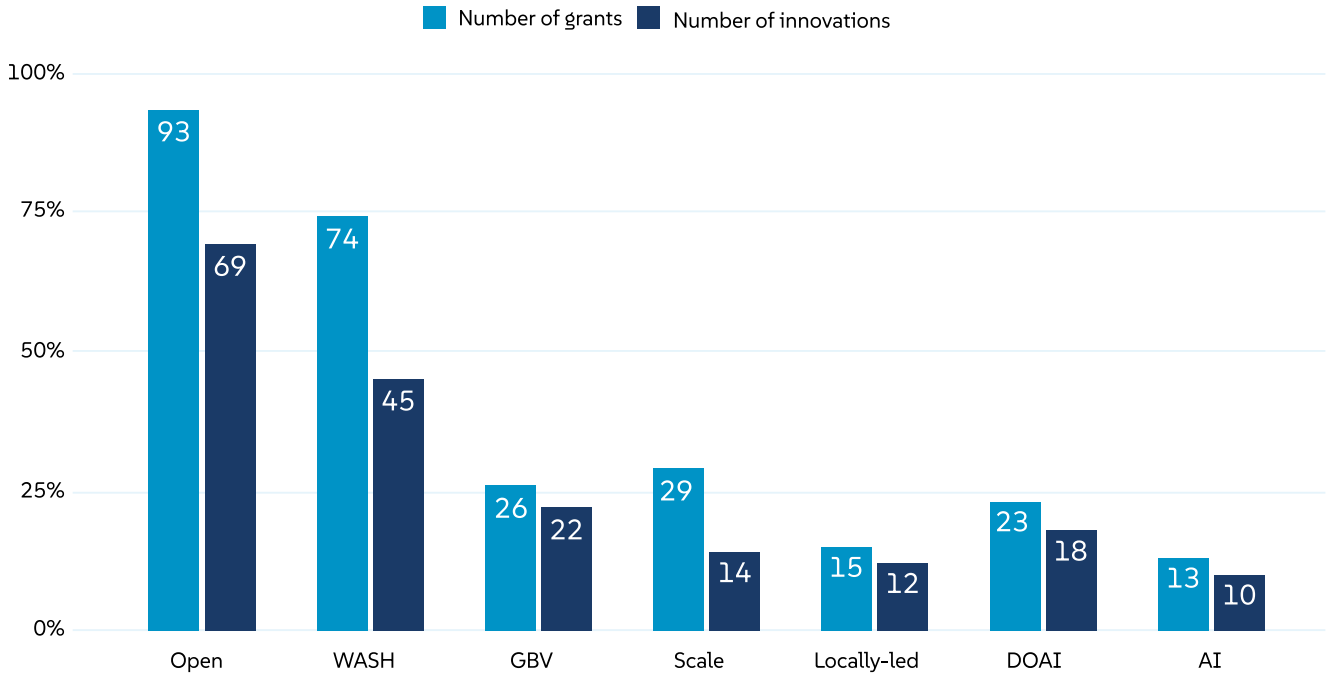


The most recent period, from 2021 to 2025, including the progress review period from November 2022 to October 2025, reveals a move towards a more mixed overall portfolio, with the focus on WASH becoming less dominant and the introduction of the AI portfolio. While the HIF had previously been agnostic about the domain of solutions, the AI portfolio represents a notable shift towards the focused application of frontier technology. The HIF's emphasis on the adoption and scaling of proven solutions has also continued.

Corresponding with changes in the HIF's portfolio make-up, the period from 2021 to 2025 has been marked by a significant degree of financial instability. The HIF experienced a sharp decrease in funding from 2021 to 2022, aligning with delayed effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and cuts to the UK aid budget. While funding rebounded in 2023, the HIF operated under one-year cost extensions in 2024 and 2025, impacting both the design of funding calls and support offered.

Throughout its evolution, the HIF's funding mechanisms have been characterised by numerous different approaches to supporting innovation. In its early years, open funding allowed for experimentation across different themes, with grants defined primarily by the stage of the journey. The three core thematic areas (WASH, GBV and DOAI) have since focused funding on addressing specific innovation challenges, with WASH making up close to 30% of grants and 25% of innovations, and GBV and DOAI each making up around 10% of grants and innovations (see Chart 3). The AI portfolio marks a further change in approach.

Chart 3: Total number of grants (n=273) and innovations (n=190), by funding stream, 2011–2025[i]

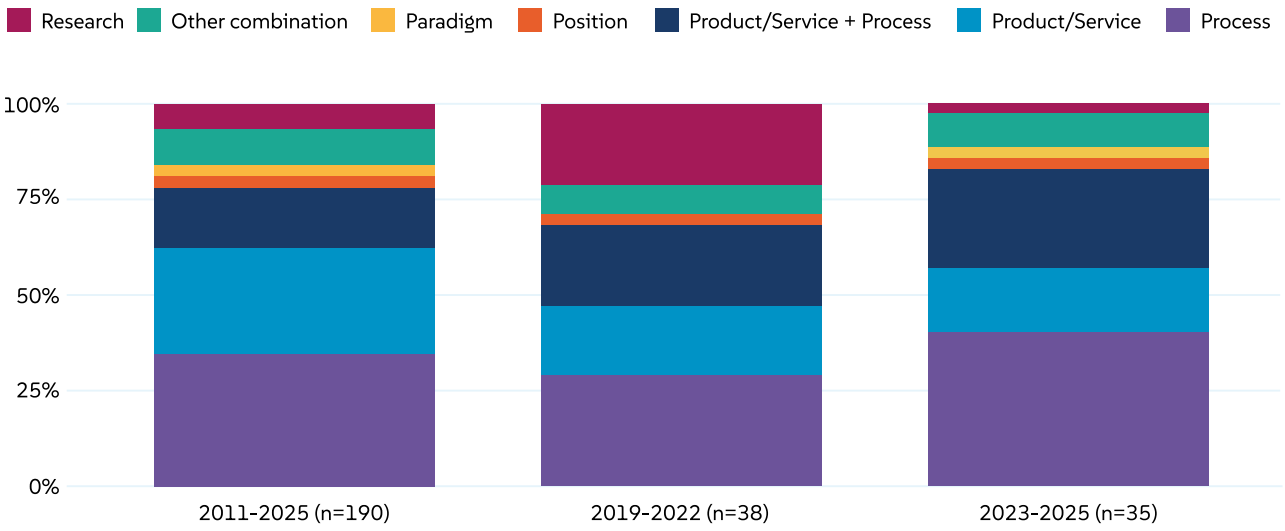


The HIF's funding mechanisms have also addressed other specific aims. In 2016, the HIF launched its Journey to Scale funding in response to the specific challenge of how to scale, with a smaller number of much larger grants. In 2017, the HIF also started funding locally-led innovation, responding to questions regarding who gets to innovate, with small grants for community-based organisations. Most recently, the AI portfolio emphasises technology as the object of innovation, with a learning-driven agenda and small grants to explore how AI can be used responsibly.

[i] Where innovations have been funded by multiple funding streams, they have been assigned to the most recent funding stream to avoid double counting.

Thematic focus and types of innovation supported

Chart 4: Percentage of each type of innovation, by time period



The following section explores the nature of the innovations supported by the HIF and examines the strong correlation between thematic areas and the types of innovation supported.

The HIF uses Tidd and Bessant's 4Ps framework to distinguish between four different types of innovations, which guides the analysis[4]:

Product/service

A change in what is offered, eg, developing culturally-appropriate menstrual hygiene management (MHM) kits.

Process

A change in how a product or service is created or delivered, eg, developing a user-centred design approach to delivering sanitation services in emergencies.

Position

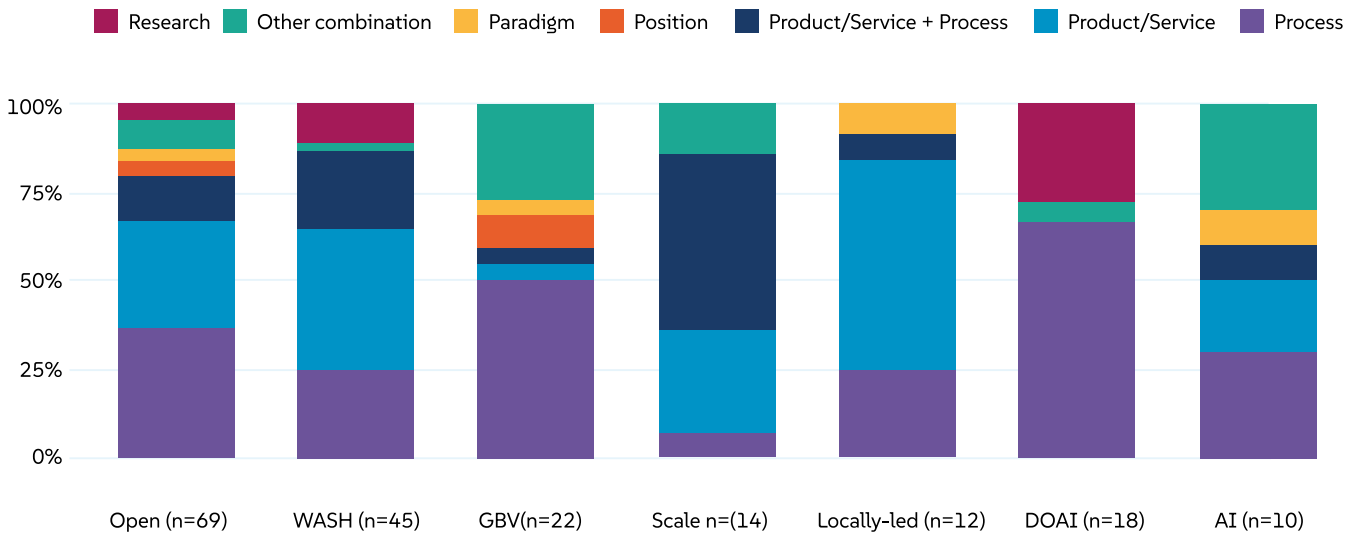
A change in how a product or service is targeted and delivered, eg, use of the mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC) bracelet by mothers/caregivers to detect and screen for severe acute malnutrition, rather than measurement by community health workers.

Paradigm

A change in the underlying mental models that govern our approach, eg, encouraging a structural shift towards local manufacture of necessary relief items rather than importing ready-made items through humanitarian supply chains.

The HIF has primarily funded Product/Service innovations, Process innovations and combinations of the two, which collectively make up 78% of HIF-supported innovations to date (see Chart 4). This distribution has remained fairly consistent over time. During the period of the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022, the same types of innovation made up 68% of innovations supported. During the period of this progress review, November 2022 to October 2025, they made up 83% of innovations supported.

Chart 5: Percentage of each type of innovation, by funding stream, 2011–2025[ii]



The WASH portfolio is primarily concentrated in Product/Service innovations, which make up 40% of projects supported (see Chart 5). This arguably reflects the nature of WASH gaps and problems, which are often caused by poor WASH infrastructure requiring tangible engineering solutions. The next highest type is a combination of Product/Service + Process innovations (22%), highlighting a common need to complement physical hardware with behavioural or delivery changes. The absence of Paradigm and Position innovations suggests a focus on execution, with less emphasis on reframing problems or reconsidering target groups.

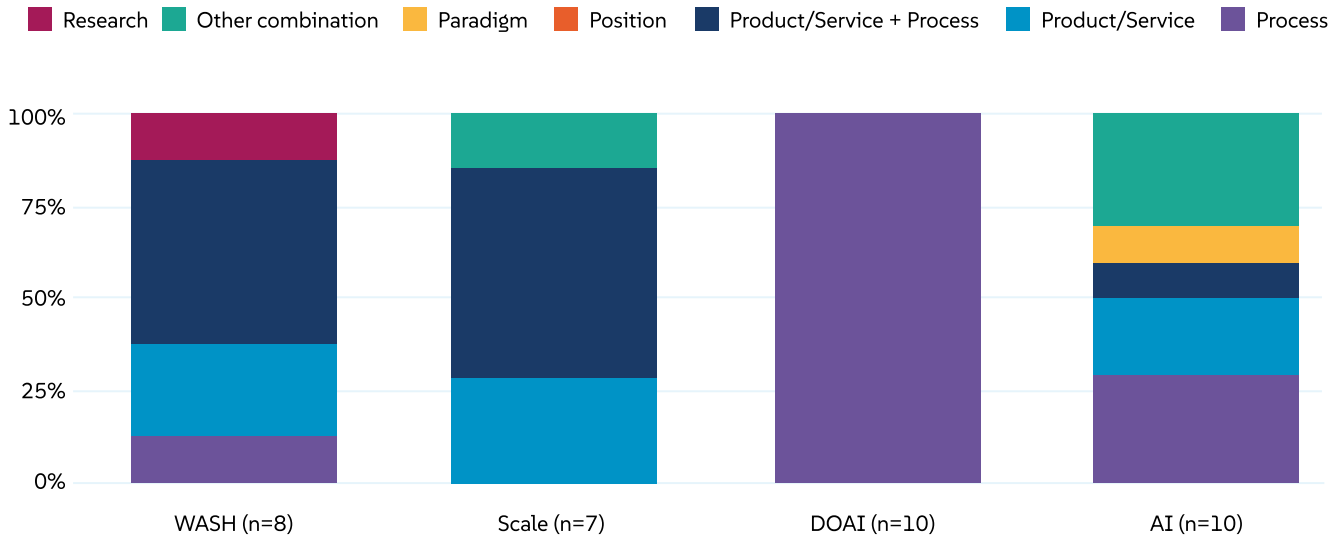
Similar to WASH, the Locally-Led Innovation portfolio is primarily focused on Product/Service innovations (58%). This is potentially a function of the grant recipients being smaller community-based organisations operating in close proximity to the communities they aim to support. In such settings there are often significant gaps in existing services and demand for immediate, tangible solutions that address daily challenges, with less attention given to the systemic or administrative efficiency improvements that may be prioritised by larger humanitarian agencies.

Both the DOAI and GBV portfolios are dominated by Process innovations, accounting for 67% of DOAI projects and 50% of GBV projects. This reflects the emphasis of the DOAI and GBV themes on improving the ways in which humanitarian aid is targeted and provided, rather than necessarily innovating specific new Products/Services. The remaining DOAI projects are either research-focused (28%) or combinations of different types (5%). The remaining GBV projects are Product/Service innovations (5%), Product/Service + Process (5%), Position (8%), Paradigm (5%) and combinations of different types (27%).

[ii] Where innovations have been funded by multiple funding streams, they have been assigned to the most recent funding stream to avoid double counting.

The Scale portfolio is dominated by Product/Service and Product/Service + Process innovations, accounting for 78% of projects in total. This could signal a filter for tangibility and replicability. Unlike Paradigm and Position innovations, which are more abstract classifications, integrated Product/Service and Process innovations are more directly amenable to codification through blueprints, standardised toolkits and standard operating procedures (SOPs). The significant presence of Product/Service + Process innovations could also reflect the operational reality that, as a solution scales, the focus shifts from 'does it work?' to 'how do we distribute, maintain and train people on it?', necessitating a tight coupling of Product/Service + Process.

Chart 6: Percentage of each type of innovation, by funding stream, 2023–2025



The same patterns are broadly reflected in the types of innovation supported during the current reporting window (see Chart 6). All the projects in the DOAI portfolio are Process innovations; 75% of WASH projects are Product/Service innovations or Product/Service + Process innovations; and 86% of Scale projects are Product/Service innovations or Product/Service + Process innovations. The AI portfolio is more varied, potentially reflecting the more experimental nature of the portfolio, with innovators exploring different possibilities and use cases.

Portfolio management approach

HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 findings	While the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 does not directly evaluate the HIF's approach to portfolio management, it notes that the structure tended to support grantees separately, with a tension between challenge and end-to-end models and a tendency toward lower-risk, incremental innovation.
Management response	Elrha management committed to developing its portfolio approach, including plans for a funnelling approach to ensure end-to-end funding for the highest-potential projects. In the research matrix (see the annex for more information) that guides this progress review, a portfolio approach was associated with a portfolio that is greater than the sum of its parts.
Progress Nov 2022–Oct 2025	The funnel logic is the HIF's dominant portfolio approach, aligning with previous management commitment to prioritising high-potential ideas. However, there is a potential tension between the funnel logic and approaches which seek to ensure that portfolios are more than the sum of their parts, which warrants further exploration and consideration.

Following the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022, HIF management committed to developing a portfolio approach, primarily in response to recommendations to improve support for end-to-end funding for the highest-potential ideas, and to ensure a mix of incremental and more novel innovations. In the management response, the need to develop a portfolio approach was equated to developing a funnelling approach; for this progress review, a portfolio approach was associated with a portfolio that is greater than the sum of its parts.

The logic of a funnel approach is that "innovation should operate as a funnel, filtering ineffective ideas through each consecutive phase of the innovation process – until only the best is scaled".[5] The strategic innovation agency CHÔRA (formerly Axilo) contrasts the funnel approach, which emphasises competitive elimination (reducing network effects), with a layering approach, which favours coherence and complementary learning between projects (increasing network effects).[6]

Both perspectives emerged in interviews with the HIF team. While there was significant inconsistency in understanding what should constitute a portfolio approach and how the portfolio mandate should be enacted, discussions as part of this progress review highlighted four conceptions of a portfolio approach, including the funnel approach and three distinct approaches to layering:

Portfolio as a funnel (filtering logic)

Value is created by shepherding individual innovations through progressive stages of maturity and scaling.

Portfolio as curated funding (ex-ante logic)

Value is created at the point of funding design and selection; innovations are chosen for their contribution to a portfolio composition.

Portfolio as community (relational logic)

Value is created through the interconnection of grantees, fostering peer learning, active convening and a shared community of practice.

Portfolio as synthesis (ex-post logic)

Value is created by aggregating evidence across the portfolio to interpret patterns and generate high-level insights.

The logic of portfolios as a funnel is strategically explicit and arguably the dominant viewpoint across the HIF. As well as being noted as a strategic ambition in the management response to the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022, staff explicitly refer to the HIF's funnel approach. For example, it was noted that the WASH portfolio is viewed as "mature", having developed a substantial pipeline of innovations, and increasingly shifting its focus towards generating evidence and encouraging adoption. By contrast, the AI portfolio is relatively nascent with a limited number of projects in the pipeline focused on early-stage exploration.

The logic of portfolios as curated funding is present in the logic of certain sub-portfolios, but not strategically explicit. Within thematic portfolios, such as WASH or DOAI, funding design and selection are commonly based on gap analyses and problem identification research. The WASH portfolio, in particular, has experimented with a number of different funding designs, some of which have been explicit in their intention to fund a mixed composition of ideas. For example, the Handwashing Challenge explicitly aimed to support different complementary strategies for handwashing, including product solutions and behavioural solutions.[7]

The kind of curated funding approach relies on the maturity of the field. Within the wider field of WASH, decades of investment in building the ecosystem and generating evidence have successfully established the types of problems and interventions that constitute the field, the ways in which they interrelate and the trajectories of change. This maturity allows for a more complex and systems-oriented approach where interventions can be deliberately layered. This dynamic suggests an evolutionary path for emerging fields, with initial exploration undertaken by individual projects to help define the space before it is sufficiently established to enable coordinated portfolios.

The logic of portfolios as community is present in HIF activities, but with some strategic ambiguity. Convening is a critical part of Elrha's strategy, and several grantees identified in-person convening as a valued and effective mechanism for building a community of practice that transcends individual projects (see Sharing and Learning). However, from a portfolio perspective, it is not clear whether convening is intended to support project outcomes or whether the value created through community-building provides its own distinct logic. Limited evidence suggests more could be done in the design and communication of events to make clear the ways in which they are intended to bring together portfolio communities and with what outcomes in mind.

The logic of portfolios as synthesis is strategically explicit, but less visible in the HIF portfolio. In Elrha's strategy, the Distil pathway to change envisages the systematic collection and synthesis of evidence on effective innovation solutions. However, while there is a significant emphasis on generating evidence within individual grants, aggregation of this knowledge is relatively weak. Staff stated that the organisation currently lacks the building blocks to aggregate results or assess a portfolio's impact as a whole, noting a lack of logical alignment and consistent definitions for key terms.

While the funnel is the dominant approach to portfolio management in the HIF, it is arguably in tension with the logic of layering. As noted by CHÔRA,[6] the ideal structure for a funnel is predicated on comparability using common metrics. In contrast, the ideal structure for layering is predicated on complementarity, relying on a diverse mix of projects that work together, reinforce each other and build collective value in order to become greater than the sum of its parts. By pursuing both types of logic, there is a risk that neither is pursued optimally.

On the one hand, an ideal funnel approach is suited to a strategy that prioritises quantitative impact measurement, social return on investment (SROI) and risk management. This approach would benefit from the careful selection of projects amenable to this specific model, where reasonable comparisons can be made on the basis of impact and SROI. As the drivers of innovation in the humanitarian sector are often multifaceted, and qualitative evidence is often critical for understanding impact, the funnel is not universally suitable for every type of innovation.

On the other hand, an ideal layering approach offers a complementary pathway to value creation by fostering coherence and learning between projects, rather than filtering them. Elements of this logic are already present in HIF activities, but without a clear and shared logic of value creation separate to that of individual projects. Further, while there is a strategic ambition to generate systematic learning across the portfolio, the HIF currently lacks the necessary building blocks, such as consistent definitions and taxonomies, to fully aggregate results and generate high-level insights beyond individual success stories.

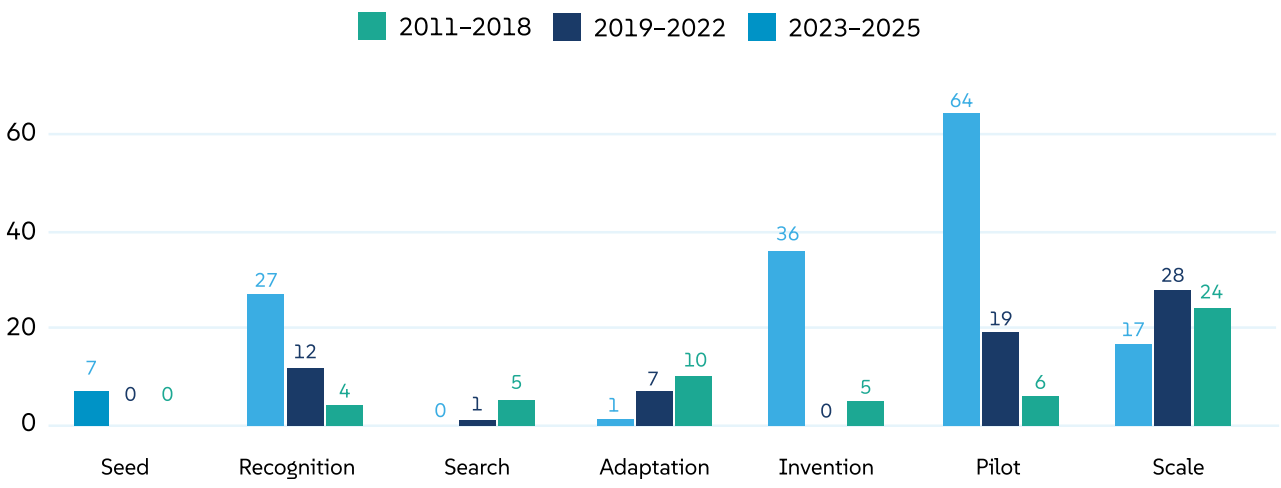
Multi-stage and repeat funding

HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 findings	The HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 found that the Innovation Challenge model often failed to support innovations beyond the pilot stage. Data indicated that the HIF's greatest contributions occurred when it engaged in multi-grant commitments with grantees. It also found no clear pathway from recognition grants to later funding opportunities.
Management response	Elrha management committed to providing opportunities for projects previously funded by the HIF to progress further and ensuring end-to-end funding for the highest-potential projects.
Progress Nov 2022–Oct 2025	There has been a significant shift towards repeat funding in the current reporting period, aligning with the HIF's commitment to providing more onward opportunities.

A key driver in the development of the HIF's approach to portfolio management is its aim to provide end-to-end support for innovation. This means supporting both different innovations at each stage of the journey and the same innovations through multiple grants. By examining how resources are allocated across different stages of the journey, we can also deduce the de facto portfolio logic. This analysis moves beyond strategic intent to map the operational reality.

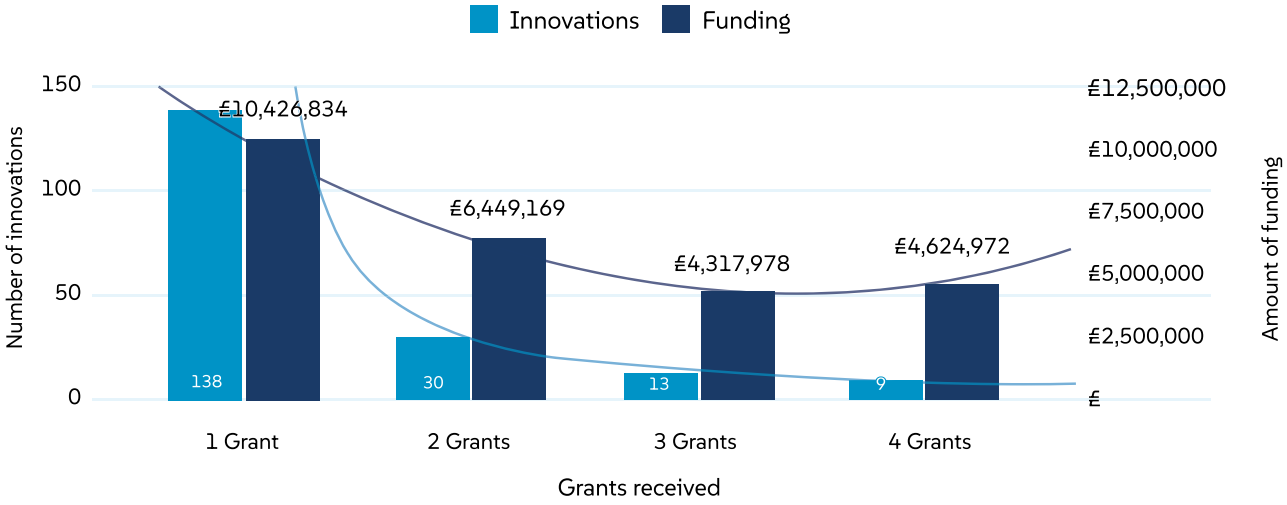
Grant analysis reveals a marked shift over time, with initial support for early-stage innovation balanced by later support for scale. Since 2011, the HIF has made 273 grants. Of these, 89 (33%) were at the pilot stage, 69 (25%) were at the scaling stage and the remaining 115 (42%) were across the early stages. When the grants data is analysed across the current reporting period, the previous evaluation period and the period before that (2011–2018), it is clear that there has been a marked shift towards funding for scale since 2019, continuing into the current period (see Chart 7).

Chart 7: Number of grants (n=273) by stage across different periods, 2011–2018, 2019–2022 and 2023–2025



The number of grants received by each innovation follows a classic power law distribution, which is a common characteristic of high-attrition investment funnels. Chart 8 shows an initial steep drop-off, reflecting a high rate of attrition for early-stage innovations, from 138 innovations that received one grant to 30 innovations that received two grants. This is followed by a long tail of successful multi-grant projects with a much lower drop-off rate, from 13 innovations that received three grants, to nine innovations that received four grants. The most challenging step for an innovator is to secure a second grant, but their survival rate improves thereafter (see Chart 8).

Chart 8: Number of innovations (n=190) receiving multiple grants and corresponding funding, 2021–2025



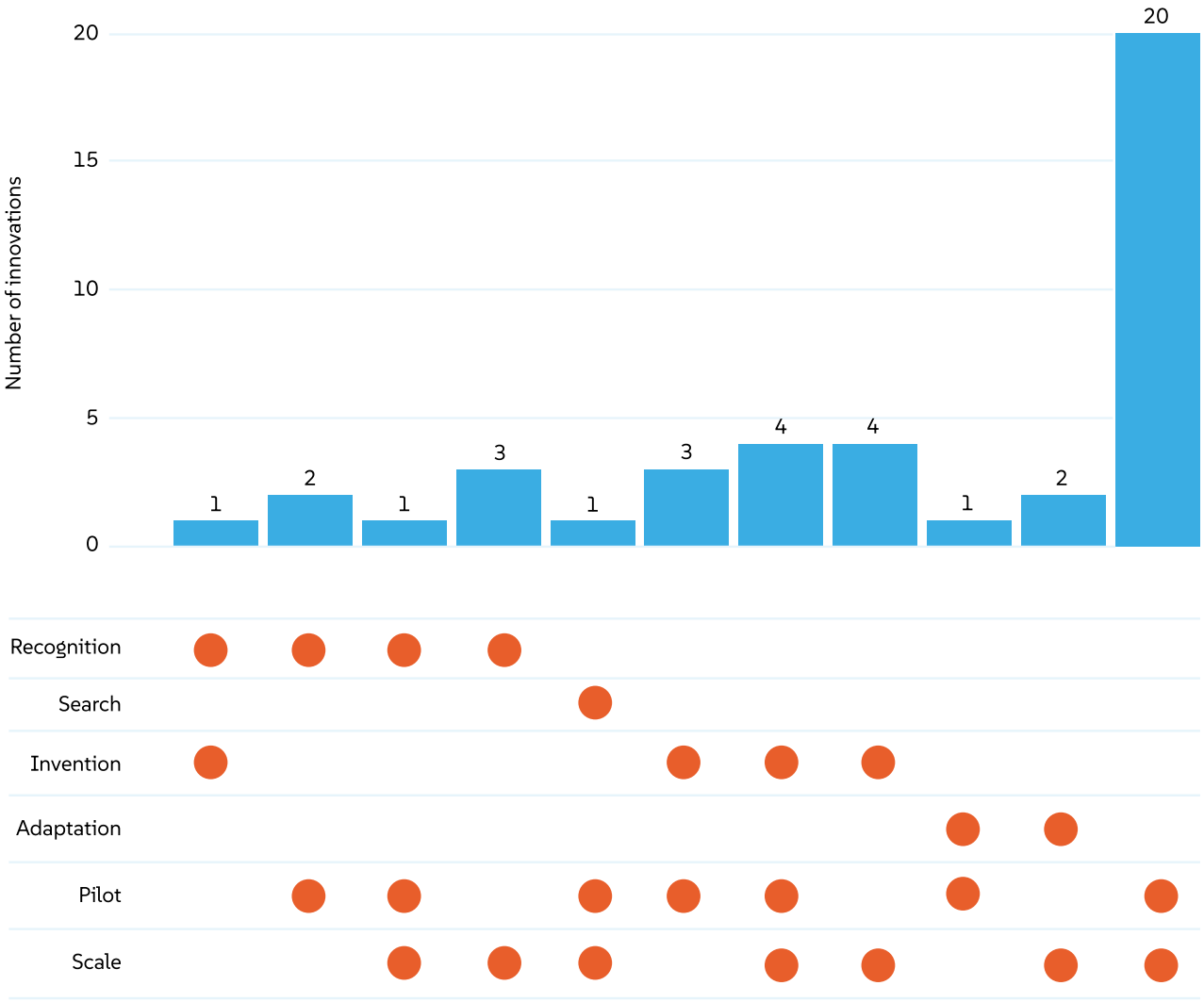
It is significant that the funnel is visible not in the distribution of grants across innovation stages, but in the distribution of innovations according to the number of grants each receives. This suggests that the number of grants an innovation receives is more relevant to decision-making from a strategic portfolio management perspective than the stage it is at. The HIF acts less as a stage gate investor, filtering innovations through highly-defined stages, and more as a momentum investor, with progression from one grant to the next as the critical filter. The rigorous process of securing consecutive funding acts as the primary validation mechanism.

While a funnel logic requires attrition, the severity of the drop-off after the first grant may suggest a bottleneck with viable innovations failing to progress due to funding gaps, evidence barriers and other structural causes, rather than lack of intrinsic merit. In the Innovation Challenge model, the first grant is often at the pilot stage, and both the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 and Elrha's recent Failure to Scale report[8] identify a funding cliff edge after initial pilot grants. This suggests that the allocation of resources should be optimised to improve the survival rate from a single grant to a second grant, ensuring that attrition reflects rigorous testing rather than administrative friction.

While the relationship between the number of grants and the number of innovations is characterised by a steep drop-off, the distribution of funding is characterised by an initial dip followed by a slight rise. Aggregate funding initially dips as fewer projects receive second and third grants, but then rises again for projects receiving four grants, reflecting the significantly higher costs of scaling successful solutions. These patterns provide strong evidence in support of the HIF's intention to balance early-stage innovation while also investing significantly in scaling proven solutions.

The most common progression pathway is pilot → scale. In total, 42 innovations have received multiple grants at different stages (see Chart 9).[iii] Of these, 36 innovations have received funding at two stages, including 20 at the pilot and scale stages, making it the most common progression pathway. Six innovations have received funding across three stages, with four of those innovations funded at the invention, pilot and scale stages. Given the management commitment to improving the connection between recognition grants and future opportunities, it is notable that while there have been 43 recognition grants, only seven have gone on to receive funding at later stages.

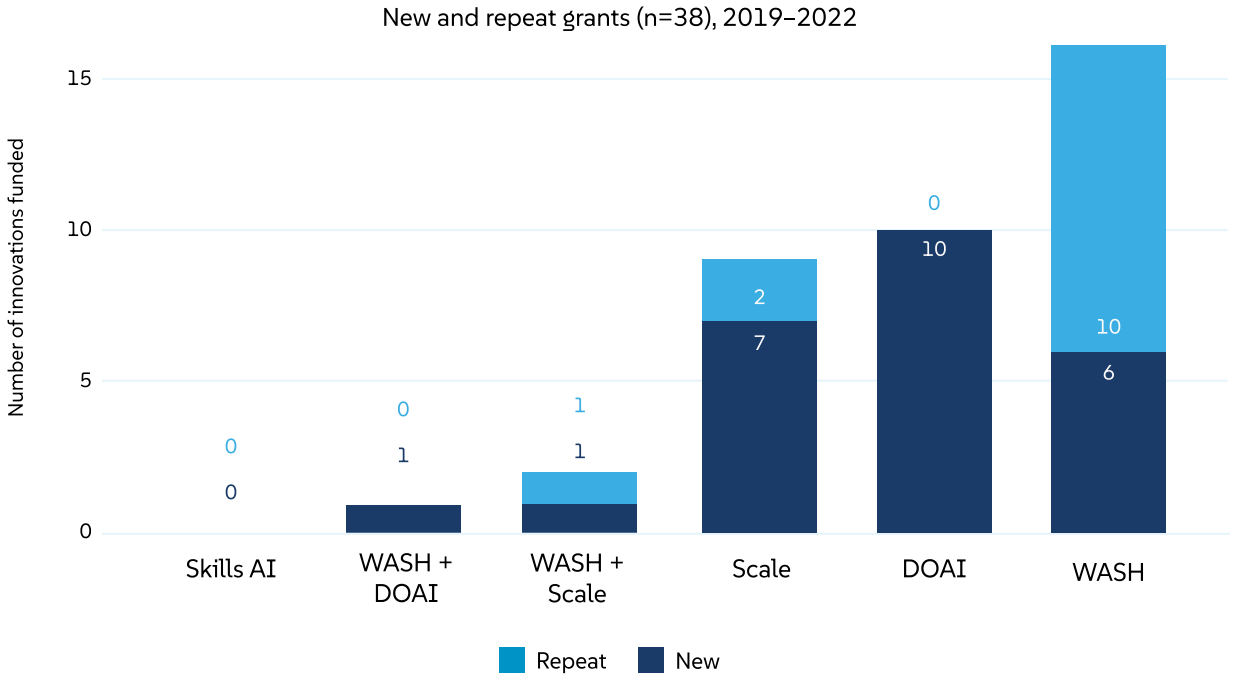
Chart 9: Number of innovations (n=42) following different pathways, 2011–2025

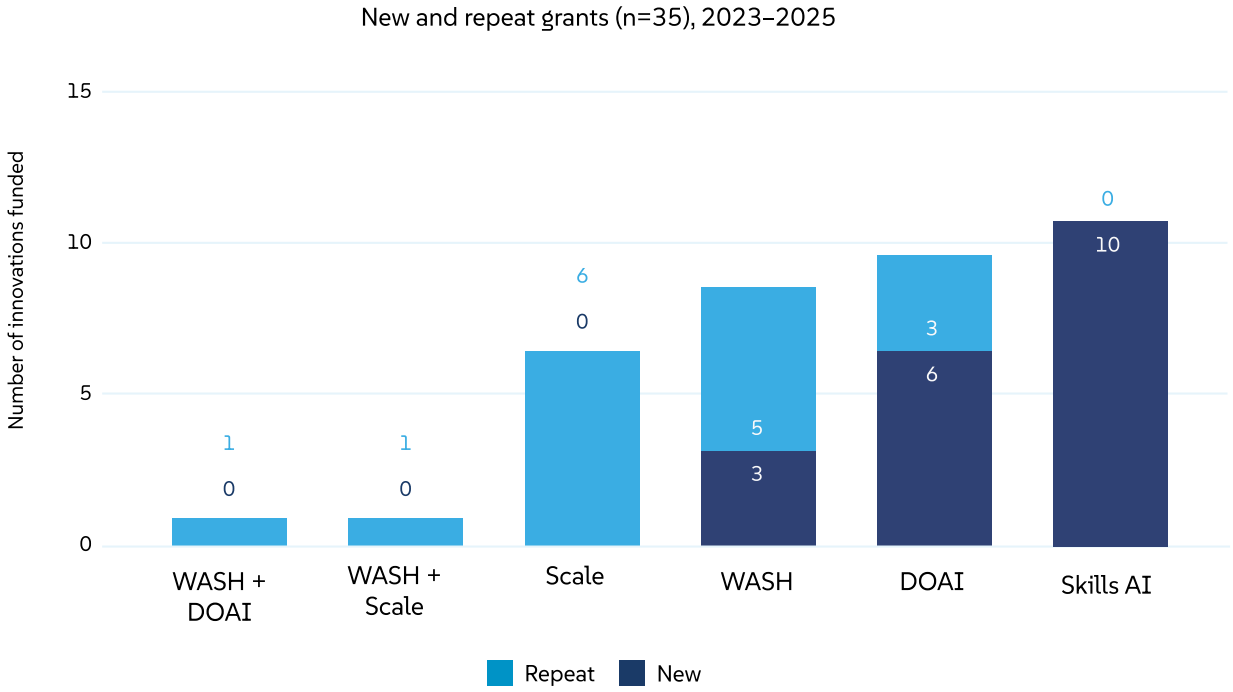


[iii] While 42 innovations have received multiple grants from the HIF, this does not necessarily reflect funding for different stages of the innovation journey; some innovations have received multiple grants at the same stage, for example, different kinds of scaling grants.

There has been a significant shift towards repeat funding in the current reporting period, aligning with the HIF's commitment to providing more onward opportunities. Between 2019 and 2022, 25 new innovations were supported (66% of total grants) and 13 innovations received follow-up grants (33%); between 2023 and 2025, 19 new innovations were supported (54% of total grants) and 16 innovations received follow-up grants (46%). Excluding the AI portfolio, which only launched in 2024, 64% of grants during this period were for innovations that had previously received funding, driven primarily by the WASH and Scale portfolios (see Chart 10).

Chart 10: Comparison of new and repeat funding across reporting periods, 2019–2022 and 2023–2025





Novelty in the HIF portfolio

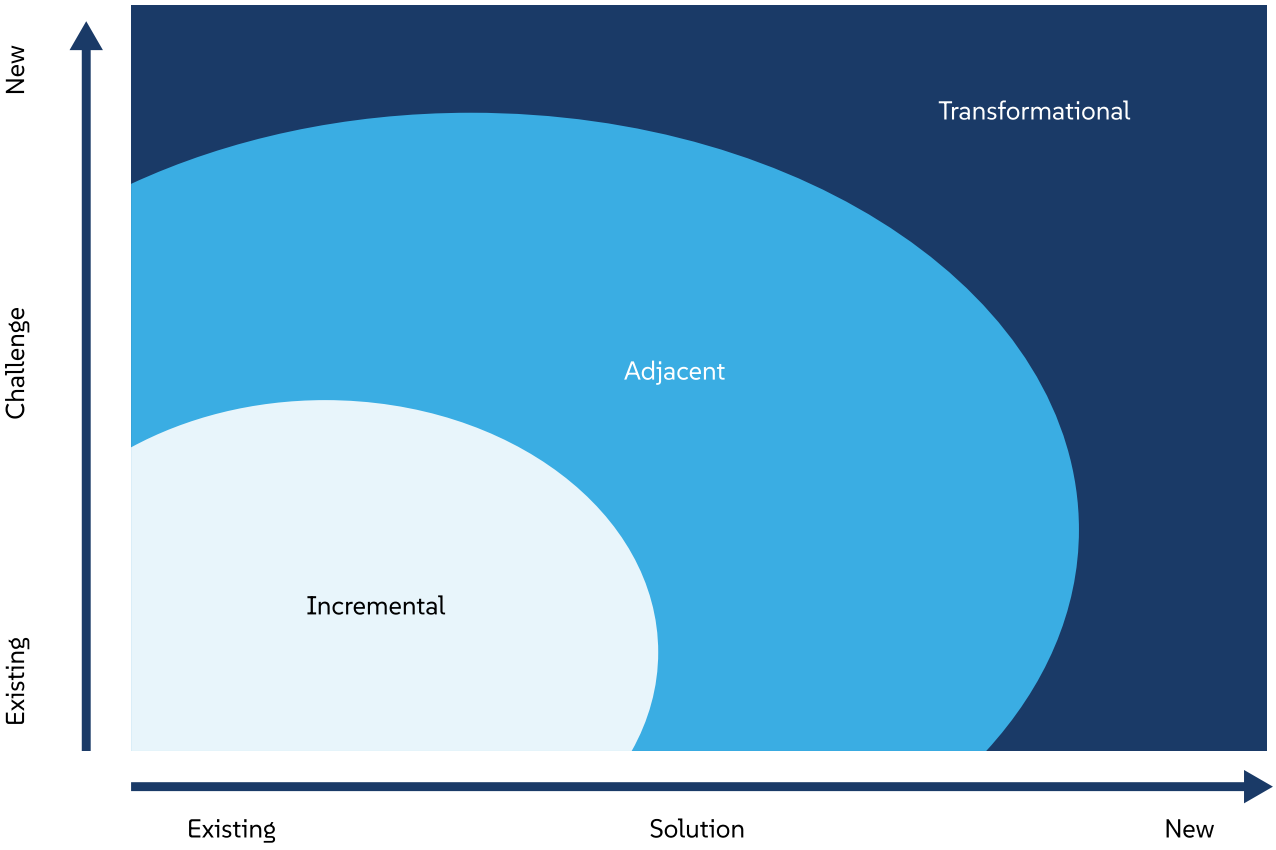
Evaluation 2019–2022 findings	The HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 found that stakeholders perceive the HIF as cautious, often prioritising likely impact over high-risk exploratory ideas. It is recommended the HIF be bolder in supporting "novel and unproven ideas" rather than incremental innovation.
Management response	Elrha management committed to designing future funding calls to ensure a "high degree of novelty" within the overall portfolio, deliberately funding "highly novel, high-potential ideas" that lack evidence and carry a risk of failure.
Progress Nov 2022–Oct 2025	The HIF's funding models tend to favour incremental, sustaining innovation, and there remains a lack of consensus regarding the definition of novelty, and how it relates to portfolio strategy. However, the launch of the AI portfolio marks a concerted effort to prioritising higher-risk exploratory innovation.

To date, novelty has generally been understood in the HIF as operating along a single spectrum, ranging from incremental to radical. For some members of staff, an innovation must be new to the humanitarian sector, while for others it need only be new to an organisation or a specific setting. According to innovation managers (IMs), incentives within the HIF generally align with utility over high levels of novelty, favouring simple, practical ideas over more disruptive approaches. In this view, solutions are valued primarily because they address specific problems in a context where traditional approaches have failed.

This tendency towards utility is reinforced by a lack of consensus among staff, advisors, and in the humanitarian innovation literature regarding the definition of novelty and its relative importance. This ambiguity extends to the management of thematic areas, where there is no standardised approach to considering the role of novelty in the design of funding calls. Reviewers have also noted that novelty is not explicitly defined in selection criteria, leading to inconsistent interpretations during the selection of innovations. The lack of an agreed conceptual framework makes it challenging to systematically select for, categorise or measure novelty across the portfolio.

To address the lack of clarity around understandings of novelty, discussions held as part of this progress review explored the use of an adapted version of the Innovation Ambition Matrix.[9] The Innovation Ambition Matrix considers novelty along two axes: the novelty of the solution and the novelty of the challenge. This is an important distinction that offers contrasting clarity between two different trajectories for innovation and two corresponding aspects of novelty. While humanitarian innovation can encompass both 'challenge novelty' and 'solution novelty', it is useful to consider innovation along each axis separately.

Chart 11: The Innovation Ambition Matrix



A primary focus on solution novelty, following the x axis, aligns with an emphasis on Product/Service and/or Process innovation in the 4Ps model. This is referred to as "sustaining innovation" by the former Harvard professor Clayton Christensen.[10] In the humanitarian sector, sustaining innovation focuses on improving the performance of humanitarian assistance within existing understanding of the needs of users or target populations, and in line with existing categories of solutions. High novelty may encompass the use of radical new materials or technologies, but the focus of innovation efforts remains within the current paradigm.

By contrast, a primary focus on challenge novelty, following the y axis, aligns with an emphasis on position or paradigm innovation in the 4Ps model. Christensen refers to this as "disruptive innovation". In humanitarian innovation, this form of innovation focuses on changing the targeting of humanitarian assistance, addressing neglected or emerging problems, or challenging the dominant mental models that govern approaches. High novelty may involve applying existing solutions in ways they have never been used before. It may also address challenges that reconsider or reposition the role of humanitarian actors or other stakeholders in the system.

As discussed by Christensen in The Innovator's Dilemma,[10] the vast majority of value in the private sector is generated through sustaining innovations rather than disruptive ones. These innovations generate value by improving the performance of established products and services along dimensions that mainstream customers already prize. Similarly, Paul Knox Clarke argues that improvement in the humanitarian sector results more often from incremental shifts in procedures and structures rather than transformative agendas.[11] As in the commercial sector, these sustaining improvements are easier to achieve because they align with established dimensions of humanitarian work.

What do we mean by 'novelty'?

During this progress review, the following definition of novelty was developed in discussion with the Elrha project team: "Novelty is the quality of being different to anything known previously. In humanitarian innovation, novelty is understood as being relative to the sector and operating on a spectrum from incremental to transformational".

As part of this progress review, the evaluation team also developed a Novelty Assessment Tool, based on the Innovation Ambition Matrix. This tool considers novelty along two axes, both in relation to the novelty of the challenge (eg, changes in perspective or mental models) and the novelty of the solution (eg, applying a new approach or technology).

The HIF's strategic shift toward directed innovation has increased relevance, but may have inadvertently reduced challenge novelty. In 2016, the HIF moved away from its open funding model towards thematic Innovation Challenges that respond to evidence-based problems. The rationale was that undirected support for innovation was resulting in too many technology-driven 'solutions in search of a problem' that failed to gain traction or generate impact. The problem-led approach was intended to prioritise relevance, ensuring that funded projects targeted real and recognised problems where there was a clear demand for a solution.

The directed innovation approach, by definition, defines the degree of challenge novelty, limiting innovators to focusing on solution novelty as a key criterion for winning funding. HIF staff acknowledged that this approach provides the necessary guardrails for relevance, but expressed reservations about the effect on novelty. The approach shifts responsibility for challenge novelty to the HIF, requiring careful framing with explicit consideration of strategic intent. Unless the problem definition itself supports disruptive approaches, Innovation Challenges incentivise sustaining innovation, with innovators focusing on solution novelty within a prescribed problem space.

For example, the Faecal Sludge Management Challenge has the potential to generate ideas with high solution novelty, but it sets a limit on challenge novelty by excluding technologies that eliminate the production of sludge entirely. This narrow framing is not inherently negative; in this case, it is well-justified by evidence of a critical operational pain point. However, a risk arises if the HIF's strategic intent is to support more transformational forms of innovation and the Challenge stands in isolation. Unless it is part of a joined-up strategy that also includes mechanisms for capturing broader, systemic reimagining, the pursuit of direct relevance will be at the expense of big picture change.

The general logic of the funnel portfolio approach also tends to favour sustaining innovation over disruptive or transformational innovation. As described earlier in this progress review, the funnel logic underpins the dominant understanding of portfolio management in the HIF and characterises the composition of the HIF's portfolio. Christensen argues that the standard innovation funnel (which he refers to as the "resource allocation process") favours utility and relevance over discovery and disruptive novelty.[10] Similarly, evidence from the HIF portfolio suggests a preference for novelty as it applies to sustaining innovation, rather than disruptive forms of novelty.

According to the funnel logic, attrition is necessary, and therefore some projects will be continued while others are ended. Attrition may be due to the failure of some innovations, but it may also be a necessary part of the decision-making process for projects that are performing differently. If there is a further assumption that projects receiving multiple grants should be progressing clearly towards impact and scaling, this favours safer ideas – ones that are easily measurable and comparable with existing solutions over disruptive ideas that approach problems in new ways and may be incomparable with existing practices.

Beyond strategic design, constraints in the funding environment act as a further limiting force on more disruptive forms of novelty. While donors are often drawn to transformative ideas, their funding structures and incentive mechanisms implicitly prioritise tangible, measurable results in stable contexts. Grantees specifically cite short funding cycles, extensive documentation and rigid budgeting requirements with lengthy approvals for reallocations as barriers to the deep research and development (R&D) required for radical innovation. These operational realities may lead to a risk-averse feedback loop, steering the portfolio toward incremental innovations rather than transformative ideas that require time and flexibility to mature.

The HIF's recent launch of the AI portfolio represents an opportunity to find balance between the aims of high relevance and a greater range of novelty. AI offers both significant potential to improve existing processes (sustaining) and entirely reimagine humanitarian decision-making (disruptive). By utilising a learning journey model, this portfolio allows for the exploration of a high-novelty frontier technology before locking in the constraints of implementation funding. This approach seeks to balance the radical nature of the technology with a grounding in ethics and utility, widening the funnel to allow for initial exploration before narrowing the focus to relevance.

Agility and responsiveness

HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 findings	The HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 found that while the HIF was "fast and flexible" during COVID-19, constraints included slow due diligence processes and "laborious" forms for due diligence and budgeting. These were a significant time burden for grantees, especially for smaller organisations.
Management response	Elrha management committed to providing "flexible and responsible grant management", ensuring high-quality processes and adapting systems to be "fit for purpose" for supporting smaller, local organisations.
Progress Nov 2022–Oct 2025	While there is significant individual willingness to support programmatic flexibility, the HIF still faces many of the same administrative constraints that were noted in the previous evaluation. During this period there has been an increasing emphasis on sector advocacy to drive change.

The HIF's ability to respond to changing contexts is characterised by a distinct tension between high programmatic flexibility and significant administrative constraints. While the HIF is strategically supportive of pivoting and adaptation, the operational machinery of grant management can act as a brake on this agility. IMs display a consistent willingness to accommodate changes, yet this is countered by systems that grantees and advisors describe as restrictive.

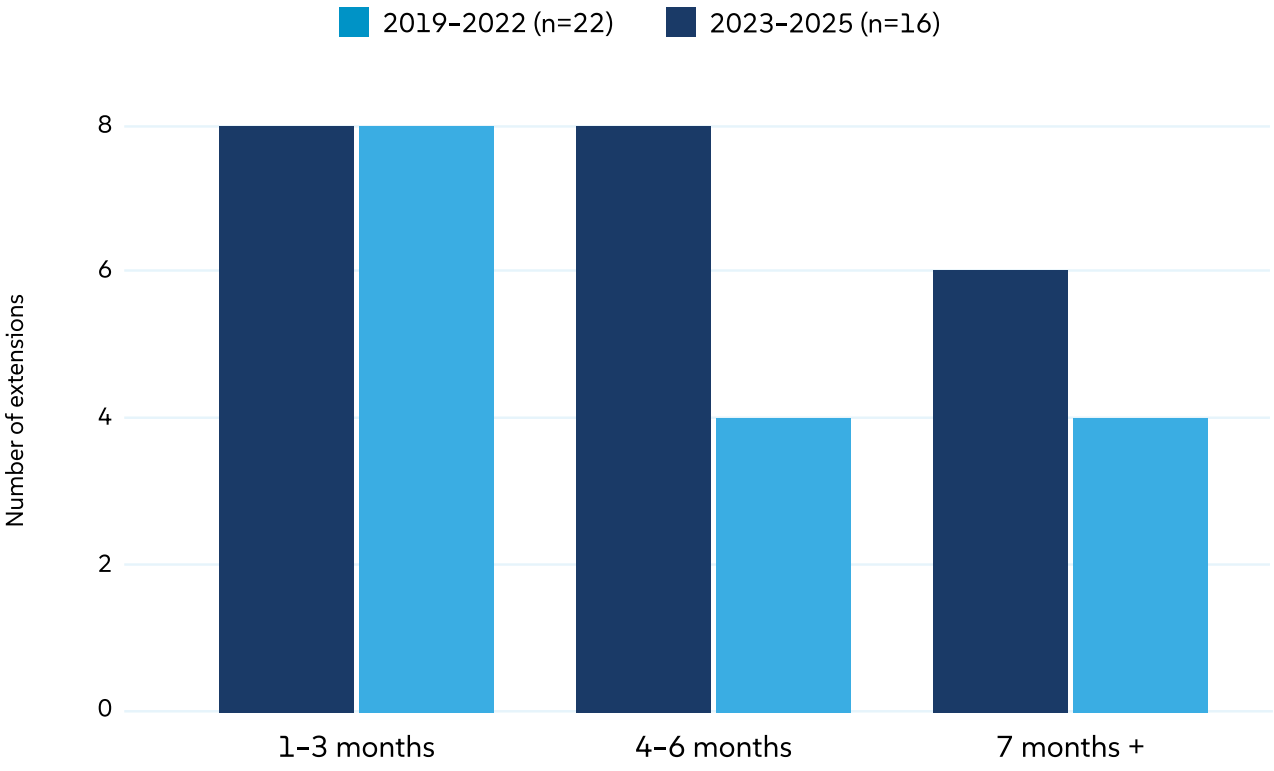
At a programmatic level, the HIF demonstrates a high willingness to support changes when original plans become untenable. IMs and grantees alike describe a culture where course correction is common and supported rather than penalised. The HIF has successfully facilitated major pivots, such as moving project locations due to conflict, shifting methodologies from in-person to digital delivery or changing technical partners mid-grant when disputes arose. This flexibility extends to personnel changes, with one grantee noting that when key staff members departed unexpectedly, the HIF responded with understanding and flexibility.

However, this strategic adaptability is challenged by administrative and financial processes described by grantees and advisors as both restrictive and bureaucratically slow. A recurring theme identified across multiple grantee interviews is that while the people managing the grants are supportive, reporting requirements can be onerous, and more complex contract or budget amendments may involve lengthy approval processes. In some cases, grantees reported waiting up to three months for significant budget reallocations. At the same time, many interviewees noted that Elrha has made concerted efforts in recent years to streamline administrative processes, with simple amendments often processed within a matter of days. Elrha's leadership in openly acknowledging these challenges, including its role in advancing the boring revolution agenda,[3] reflects a proactive approach to reducing administrative friction. Nonetheless, where delays do occur, the associated compliance burden can impose an opportunity cost, with time spent navigating minor variances, diverting attention away from core project delivery.

Financial rigidities create specific barriers to responsiveness, particularly regarding budget reallocation and cash flow. Grantees expressed frustration that saving money on one budget line to spend it on another required complex approvals that stifled agility. Furthermore, the reimbursement-based payment model creates severe cash-flow stress for smaller start-ups, with one grantee reporting they lacked payroll funds due to payment delays, threatening the continuity of the innovation itself. This highlights an equity issue, as the administrative burden disproportionately penalises local actors and smaller entities lacking unrestricted reserves while international agencies can often absorb these delays.

The use of no cost extensions (NCEs) offers a mixed picture of agility. In the current progress review period, 27% of grants received an NCE, compared to 38% in the previous evaluation period. Breaking this down by duration reveals a distinct trend[iv] (see Chart 12). The volume of short-term extensions (one to three months) has remained constant, while there has been a reduction in medium- (four to six months) and long-term (seven months +) extensions. The consistent use of short-term NCEs might suggest a pattern of administrative delays in the close-out process, whereas the reduction in medium- and long-term extensions is likely because the HIF was itself operating under one-year funding cycles.

Chart 12: Number of contract extensions, by duration (2019–2022 and 2023–2025)

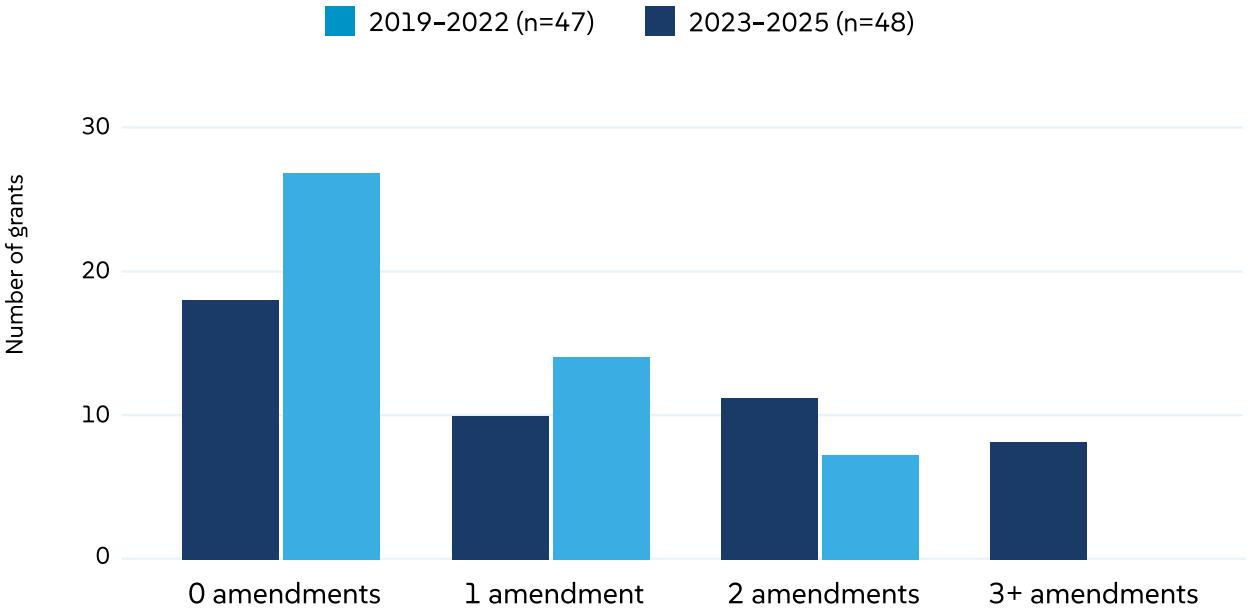


[iv] Due to limitations with the data, it is not clear whether extensions were made with single amendments or multiple amendments, which may affect the findings. For example, a single long-term extension suggests a decisive strategic pivot, whereas three consecutive short extensions would suggest a reactive approach, symptomatic of uncertainty or lower psychological safety between grantee and donor.

There has been a significant reduction in projects making multiple amendments during this review period. Out of 48 projects funded in this review period, 21 requested amendments (44%), with 14 making one amendment, seven making two amendments and none making more than two (see Chart 13). In comparison, out of 47 projects funded in the previous evaluation period, 29 requested amendments (62%), with ten making one amendment, 11 making two amendments, and eight projects making more than two amendments.

A lower number of amendments in general may suggest that there is improved flexibility, with fewer grantees forced to trigger formal administrative processes for minor variances. It may also suggest less learning, with fewer grantees adapting their approaches and updating their original plans, or it may suggest that grantees are avoiding putting in requests due to the administrative burden. However, as with NCEs specifically, it is most likely that the reduction in amendments is simply because the HIF was itself operating under one-year funding cycles, limiting possibilities.

Chart 13: Number of grants, by number of amendments made (2019–2022 and 2023–2025)



Ultimately, while similar issues were raised in the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022, these constraints are not unique to the HIF, and it is unclear to what extent improvement is possible. Many of the administrative hurdles cited are driven by the accountability and transparency requirements of institutional donors and reflect inherent constraints in the humanitarian system. However, they do also pose a specific risk to the HIF, given its focus on innovation and the corresponding need for greater agility in comparison to traditional humanitarian financing.

As Elrha notes in its provocation on the boring revolution,[3] innovation is frequently constrained by the operational machinery that governs the sector. For the HIF, the challenge is not just a lack of flexibility, but a sector-wide disconnect where 'boring' financial, legal and compliance systems have not caught up to the rhetoric on innovation. Unless these processes are rewired to reward ethical risk-taking, iterative learning and improvement, and uptake of research and innovation, they will continue to act as a systemic brake regardless of individual willingness.

Non-financial support

HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 findings	The HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 found that non-financial support, such as mentoring and partnership brokering, was highly valued, especially by smaller organisations, helping innovations thrive. However, larger organisations saw less value in this support.
Management response	Elrha management committed to delivering non-financial support, directly or via external experts, to build grantee skills in responsible innovation management as a central component of their strategy for driving adoption and supporting end-to-end pathways.
Progress Nov 2022–Oct 2025	The HIF's support as a critical friend and its provision of technical support, coaching and connections to expertise continues to be highly valued. Further improvements could be made by addressing barriers to participation, better advocating for grantees and providing training on entrepreneurship.

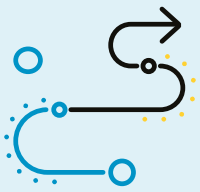
Along with funding, the HIF team provides valued non-financial support, including coaching, mentoring and networking. Both staff and grantees highlighted the value of the personal relationships they have built, with one staff member describing the HIF as acting as a "critical friend" who checks progress but also challenges grantees if they stray from their proposal's aims. This dynamic was corroborated by two different grantees, with one describing the push for scientific rigour as "tough but fair", while another felt the team provided a necessary "second eye" on their work to help refine it.

To address specific capability gaps, the HIF connects grantees with specialised external experts. A significant recent example is the support programme developed for the AI portfolio, led by Data Friendly Space (DFS). This was highlighted by several interviewees who noted the value of providing structured technical support in areas where international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) may lack the necessary skills and capabilities to innovate, with one grantee reflecting on how the feedback helped to build their confidence and improve the quality of their work. In other cases, the HIF has connected innovators with legal firms offering pro bono support to navigate issues such as intellectual property rights.

While the HIF successfully convenes grantees for learning and networking, structural barriers still hinder equitable participation. The HIF has created several opportunities to bring grantees together during this reporting period, notably including the Humanitarian Innovation Forum in Nairobi (February 2025) and the HIF Innovation Learning Exchange in London (October 2025). The Forum, in particular, was recognised as a highly inclusive event, with the decision to host the event in the Global South appreciated by grantees and generating appetite for similar future events. This was contrasted with the Innovation Learning Exchange, which some grantees were unable to attend due to visa issues, raising questions about equitable access and engagement.

While the HIF holds significant informal soft power, its general approach prioritises technical rigour over the politics of scaling. On one hand, the HIF acts as a powerful advocate. One grantee noted that a site visit from a staff member greatly helped them to make their case with the national Ministry of Health. Another interviewee said that the HIF often underestimates the "weight of its presence" in a room and its capacity to open doors. On the other hand, grantees note that the operational focus remains on technical innovation, with less emphasis on business strategy, market analysis and influencing. By prioritising technical output over active advocacy, the HIF misses a strategic opportunity to leverage its weight to reduce grantee vulnerability and support scaling.

Overall, the HIF's non-financial support is highly regarded for its relational and technical strength. The critical friend model and access to expert networks are clear successes that drive quality, and increasing support for communications recognises the importance of influencing. To maximise the potential of its portfolio, the HIF should consider addressing practical barriers to equitable participation while increasing advocacy for high-performing projects. It should also consider broadening its support mandate to ensure that innovators are equipped not just with technical support, but with the entrepreneurial capabilities required to scale sustainably.



Objective: Innovation Journeys

To explore the trajectories of the innovations funded.
The progress update will seek to understand what happened to HIF innovations after the end of funding and the extent to which attempts to promote their adoption were successful.

Key findings

- Given the HIF's catalytic, time-limited grant funding model, significant innovation progress and adoption typically occur after grant closure, making tracking post-grant trajectories central to understanding innovation journeys. Recent analysis by Elrha has led to it designing more systematic longitudinal tracking, marking a shift toward understanding innovation journeys across their full lifecycle rather than within grant periods alone.
- Dissemination grants have played a valuable role in enabling visibility, credibility and connection for innovators, but evidence of their longer-term influence on uptake remains uneven.
- The HIF has meaningfully progressed its approach to addressing major scaling barriers, in particular incentivising and supporting partnerships between adopting organisations and innovators. Adoption grants have been designed to act as effective catalytic inputs which enable fit and integration to be tested but do not (and are not intended to) support the full pathway to institutionalisation.
- Structural barriers beyond the control of innovators – such as procurement systems, organisational risk appetite, and policy or regulations – continue to shape innovation journeys after HIF funding.
- Learning relating to adoption support raises a strategic question about whether the current balance of catalytic support is sufficient to maximise learning about, and contribute positively to, adoption pathways without extending into long-term funding roles.

The following sections provide a review of the trajectories of HIF-funded innovations beyond the grant period, followed by a closer analysis of the support provided for dissemination and the specific mechanisms designed to promote adoption. The aim is to understand what happens to innovations after funding ends and assess the ways in which the HIF's efforts have contributed to its support for innovation scaling.

Post-grant tracking and contact with grantees

HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 findings	The HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 found that the HIF had no structured system for tracking innovations beyond the end of funding, leaving it with limited visibility of whether solutions were sustained, adopted or scaled after grants closed. Post-grant engagement was described as largely absent, occurring only through personal relationships, grantee initiative or isolated follow-ups. This lack of systematic tracking created a major gap in the HIF's ability to understand longer-term outcomes or generate evidence about the real-world impact of its investments.
Management response	Recognising that post-grant engagement had been inconsistent and often under-resourced, the HIF committed to developing a more intentional and better-resourced Drive strategy to support the adoption, uptake and scaling of promising innovations. This included providing more structured follow-up to grantees, as well as improving pathways for mature innovations to navigate procurement and integration into operational systems. The HIF also committed to rebalancing resources across its 4D framework in order to give more weight to Distil and Drive activities that include longer-term accompaniment of grantees. This was done to support grantees through critical stages where impact is realised.
Progress Nov 2022–Oct 2025	The HIF's intentional shift from prioritising early-stage innovation to more actively supporting adoption represents important progress which underpins the importance of sustained post-grant contact with grantees. For instance, recent adoption challenges have created a structured process for reconnecting with past grantees whose innovations had progressed. IMs continue to maintain informal, ongoing relationships with former grantees, monitor the progress of key innovations after grant closure and broker relevant introductions or visibility opportunities when appropriate. Additionally, the HIF has begun designing more systematic approaches to longitudinal tracking, recognising that most adoption and scaling occurs after grant completion and more structured follow-up is required to capture longer-term outcomes and learning.

Across research data, and outside of specific funding calls targeted at prior grantees (such as adoption or dissemination calls), it was suggested that post-grant contact remains informal and variable. It would be dependent on individual IMs, the proactivity of specific grantees, or coincidental opportunities such as invitations to thematic events or capacity-building sessions. Grantees described receiving occasional newsletters or invitations to technical workshops, but these channels do not constitute a tracking system and are used inconsistently across portfolios.

These informal practices also create structural biases in who remains visible to the HIF. Grantees who are proactive or whose innovations were successful tend to stay in contact, while those who struggle, pause or pivot may disappear from view. Several grantees proactively share positive progress updates with HIF staff in order to maintain visibility of their project, particularly where the HIF's convening role or future funding were important. As a result, HIF staff are likely to hear more frequently from 'positive grants', which may reinforce a skewed understanding of post-grant trajectories.

Research data also highlight that no systematic monitoring of adoption, scale or impact occurs after grant closure, and very limited collated data on onward journeys. HIF Funding Committee members currently receive no follow-up data on the progress of funded solutions, and IMs reported that once contracts end, the HIF has limited capacity and no obligation to respond to continued requests for support. Staff described this as a longstanding capacity limitation, affecting the HIF's ability to learn from innovation journeys or substantiate claims about adoption.

In response to these persistent gaps, the MEAL team undertook significant scoping and analysis which led to the development of a bold proposal for a change in process and practice for the HIF as well as research programmes within Elrha, which has recently been approved.[12] This will introduce two or three-year post-grant follow-ups for future rounds, enabling greater project monitoring and broader rich learning about innovation journeys and the impact of innovation and research over time. This reflects the HIF's own analysis that most scaling and adoption occurs after the funded period ends, and that maintaining structured contact is essential for understanding longer-term innovation trajectories.

While this shift has yet to be operationalised, it represents an important step toward addressing the evaluators' concerns and strengthening the HIF's ability to learn from the full lifecycle of the innovations it supports. It will be valuable to reflect on whether this new initiative will also address the need for ongoing relationship management systems and practices with grantees – investing in ongoing relationships, as well as solution monitoring.

Support for dissemination

HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 findings	The HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 found that dissemination was an active but inconsistent element of the HIF portfolio. While the HIF supported a substantial volume of outputs (including peer-reviewed papers, blogs, reports and presentations), they were unevenly distributed across grants and not guided by a coherent organisational strategy. This resulted in variable quality, reach and alignment with broader portfolio objectives. The evaluation also highlighted the absence of a central repository or system for curating outputs, limiting the HIF's ability to understand and amplify its collective learning.
Management response	In response, the HIF committed to strengthening dissemination by improving MEAL capacity, enhancing systems for capturing learning and monitoring research uptake more systematically. These commitments reflected a recognition that dissemination is not only a project-level activity but a core, cross-portfolio function requiring clearer objectives, dedicated structures and better integration with outcomes monitoring.
Progress Nov 2022–Oct 2025	Since the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022, the HIF has continued to recognise the importance of dedicated dissemination funding to support critical learning and knowledge-sharing work. Dissemination activities take place both within grant-funded projects and through stand-alone dissemination calls, including WASH (2023) and successive DOAI calls (2024 and 2025). A reporting template has been developed for dissemination grants, though this is not yet fully embedded in practice.

Dissemination support amplifies the reach and credibility of innovations. Across portfolios, dissemination activities were diverse and widely used, with grants supporting conference participation, publication costs, communications products and targeted visibility. Grantees described dissemination funding as essential, enabling them to strengthen credibility, share findings with technical audiences and access networks that would otherwise be out of reach. Examples include presentations at conferences such as AidEx,[13] the Emergency Environmental Health Forum (EEHF),[14] peer-reviewed papers and sector-facing materials such as toolkits, animations and factsheets.

Dissemination grants were experienced by grantees as highly valuable, often generating practical and catalytic benefits for innovators. Grantees reported that dissemination support enabled engagement with humanitarian actors, clarified sector expectations around evidence and operational feasibility, and strengthened organisational credibility.

Many innovators leveraged their own expertise and networks alongside HIF's communications channels and activities to maximise reach, with dissemination activities frequently opening new opportunities for partnership, follow-on engagement or future scaling.

Embedding dissemination more strategically and predictably could strengthen portfolio impact. Dissemination grants are predominantly opportunistic rather than strategically designed, emerging when funding is available rather than embedded in HIF architecture. This current reactive funding pattern may limit the HIF's ability to plan for portfolio-wide visibility or influence, or practice consistency. However, this opportunistic nature has enabled the HIF to test this approach to reinforcing visibility and influencing previous grants. Moving forward with strategic intent and building on learning gained will require addressing short funding cycles and securing the availability of such funding with the donor to enable it to be incorporated into HIF planning and practice.

A model constraint worth considering in future iterations may be a lack of clear objectives or structured design for dissemination support, recognising the value of balance with opportunism and intentional flexibility. The MEAL team is not routinely involved in assessing dissemination strategies or outcomes, potentially undermining alignment between dissemination activities and any potential for portfolio-level influence, if sought. This finding may suggest that without articulated goals, dissemination efforts risk being fragmented and difficult to measure, with potential implications for their effectiveness.

HIF's dissemination approach supports reflective practice. Aside from reaching a solution, dissemination activities led by the HIF are likely to have played an important role in building communication and reflection capacities among grantees. This assisted them in their learning during a grant period and probably beyond. The AI learning journey, for example, required public-facing learning diaries, while reporting templates encouraged reflective blogs across grants. These outputs increase transparency and help normalise reflective practice within the portfolio as an important part of the innovation journey itself, which grantees may apply to their work outside of the grant.

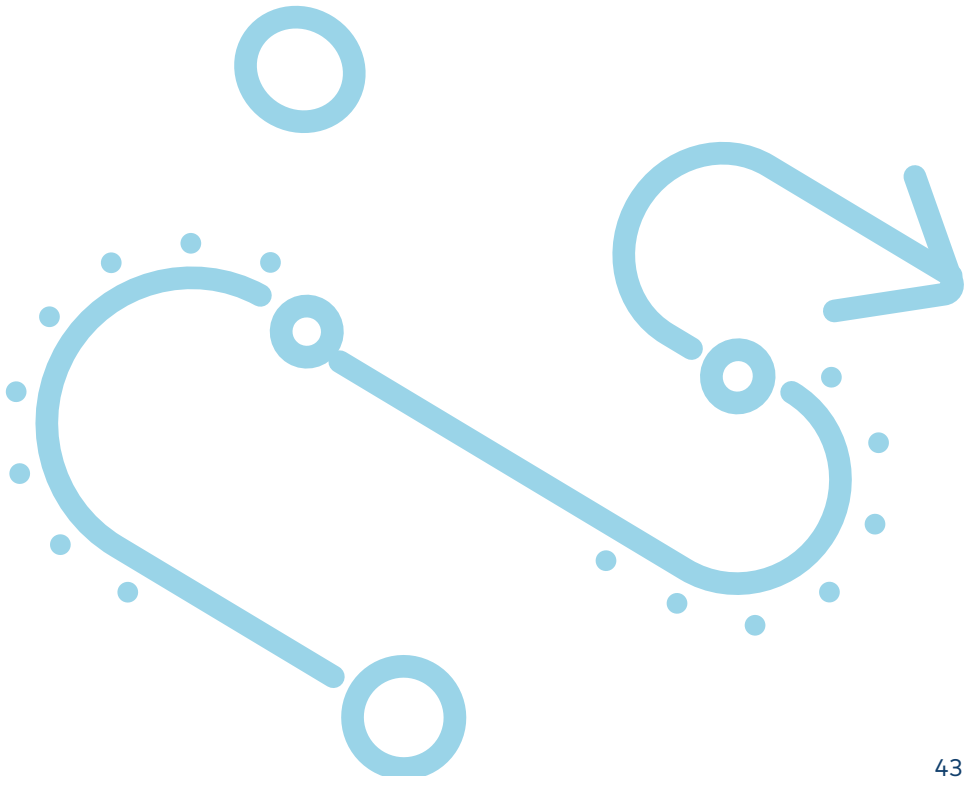
There is limited external visibility of HIF-funded innovations. Despite the catalogues listing HIF-funded innovation for WASH and DOAI portfolios, the HIF does not have a central catalogue of innovations; this may be a limiting factor for systematic solution dissemination, learning and broader visibility of HIF's funded solutions and efforts in the humanitarian space. The creation of WASH and DOAI portfolio catalogues[15, 16] was resource-intensive and not sustained, but the visibility gap continues to hinder cross-portfolio visibility. Elrha is actively considering new initiatives that address this sector-wide issue.

Dissemination does not overcome systemic adoption barriers. An important insight across portfolios is that dissemination alone rarely drives adoption, and this is widely understood within Elrha. The WASH thematic portfolio showed that extensive dissemination cannot overcome barriers such as procurement constraints, organisational risk aversion or the need for context-specific adaptation. This underscores the importance of linking dissemination with broader adoption and influencing strategies with a systems lens.

There is scope for strengthening dissemination through strategic design. Whilst dissemination grants are valued and support vital activities, there are opportunities for a more strategic, long-term approach to dissemination, with potential to support broader learning and inform portfolio management.

These include:

- strengthening the embedding of dissemination expectations into grant design
- integrating more systematic monitoring practices into dissemination grants (perhaps with expert support from the MEAL team)
- using more varied communication formats (eg, multimedia)
- considering longer-term or more sustainable funding structures.



Support for adoption

HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 findings	The HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 found that while the HIF had enabled several positive adoption outcomes, its efforts were not systematic, lacked a clear strategic framework and were not embedded consistently across portfolios. Adoption emerged as a priority because even strong, well-evidenced innovations struggled to gain uptake. However, the HIF did not yet have the mechanisms, organisational approach or sustained follow-up needed to understand or drive adoption beyond the grant period. Structural humanitarian barriers were identified as major barriers that Elrha alone could not resolve, in particular rigid procurement, inconsistent evidence requirements and organisational risk aversion.
Management response	Elrha's management response committed to developing explicit adoption strategies within portfolios, supporting grantees to build practical pathways to scale and strengthening Elrha's role in convening technical communities of practice. It committed to building a deeper understanding of procurement and programme design to influence the systemic conditions that shape adoption. These commitments align with the broader end-to-end support model and signal an intention for Elrha to become more deliberately involved in brokering, enabling and influencing adoption – not only funding it.
Progress Nov 2022–Oct 2025	Since the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022, Elrha has made significant efforts to advance the scaling of solutions that it has funded – specifically through providing funding opportunities designed to incentivise and integrate solutions into varied humanitarian implementation organisations and real-world contexts. All adoption funding opportunities were accompanied by a clear commitment to learning. During this period, the HIF produced a range of concrete learning outputs, including the Adopting humanitarian innovation report; the Scaling series; adoption-focused case studies; portfolio-wide evidence summaries; and a dedicated Humanitarian Innovation Forum session on moving from pilots to practice. Together, these outputs have strengthened the evidence base on what enables real-world adoption and provided practical insights for implementing organisations and the wider sector.

What do we mean by 'adoption'?

Defining the term for this progress review required us to consider the domain of usage and implementation of an innovation, the type of innovation, as well as the goal of the action. In this case, informed by the HIF's targeted initiatives to support adoption, it has been relevant to consider adoption as distinct from 'diffusion', 'awareness', 'replication' or 'uptake', despite all these terms being used in relation to adoption in discussions.

The definition used for this progress review is:

"Adoption is when an innovation moves beyond the domain of its initial development and is taken up, used by and integrated into the systems and norms of one or more organisations, or through sectoral mechanisms, so that it becomes part of normal practice rather than an exception."

Since the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022, the HIF has implemented the following adoption challenges:

- **WASH Adoption Challenge (2023–2024)** – Expanded opportunity for adoption funding to wider geographies and sectors.
- **Scaling Challenge: Adopting Innovations in High Severity Settings adoption call (2023–2024)**[17] – Designed specifically for protracted, high severity humanitarian crises (such as conflict-affected or long-term displacement contexts). This call focused on innovations with the potential to improve service continuity, resilience and quality under severe operational constraints.
- **Scaling Innovation in a Rapid Onset Crisis adoption funding (2024–2025)**[18] – Closed funding opportunity for the adoption of an innovation to support the initial phases of implementation in a sudden-onset crises. This funding tested how quickly an innovation could be deployed and integrated into response workflows, and the nature of the integration challenges faced.

Demand-side adoption funding is informed by scaling experience. The HIF's unique and intentional design of these recent adoption calls is based upon its experience, learning and reflections – shifting funding to the demand-side, as opposed to the supply-side of innovation (innovators). The funding supports organisations in implementing previously HIF-funded innovations in real humanitarian operations, creating a clear incentive for uptake rather than further development. The model combines this financial support with structured matchmaking between innovators and adopters, encouraging partnership formation, shared risk-taking and practical testing of innovations in real-world contexts.

Designing adoption funding in this way reflects an intentional choice by the HIF, in response to many years of learning generated from funding scaling journeys.

This includes the identification of multiple barriers to adoption in the humanitarian sector such as:

- lack of knowledge and skills for supporting innovations to scale
- lack of funding for scaling innovation
- insufficient evidence of the impact of humanitarian innovations.

Adoption calls bridge the gap between innovation and organisational integration. Across the research data, adoption calls were consistently recognised as addressing a genuine gap between validated innovative solutions and real-world uptake/integration. Centred around the adopting organisation, adoption call grants allowed humanitarian agencies to trial solutions at low risk. The approach focused directly on creating brokered matches between innovators and adopters, enabling partnerships that might not otherwise have formed.

Key component steps included:

- inviting implementing organisations to express interest in testing their organisational adoption of a proven WASH innovation, previously in receipt of one or more Elrha grants.
- sharing the Elrha WASH innovation catalogue[15] to allow potential applicants to select tested innovations relevant to their needs.
- connecting potential applicants with innovators to explore opportunities to form a partnership, and supporting them to scope or develop a proposal.
- obtaining commitments from grantee organisations to continue integration and operational use of the innovation following the grant period as long as agreed thresholds were met.
- providing both funding and other forms of support to the grantee organisation through the grant period.

The partnership between Oxfam and the innovator Reemi (which produces menstrual health management garments and washing bags)[19] was frequently cited as a direct result of this model. Financial incentives and structured convening created the conditions for trust and collaboration between the partners. This has enabled adoption-related learning and testing, and the ongoing deployment of the solution into Oxfam's programming in humanitarian contexts.

Adoption calls and matchmaking created legitimacy beyond funding. For both innovators and adopters, adoption calls brought legitimacy and increased visibility through formal selection, public framing and HIF facilitation. Several grantees credited adoption calls with opening doors to new networks, credibility with donors and internal organisational conversations about whether adoption was appropriate. Some partnerships that were not funded through the call continued working together – evidence that matchmaking itself had catalytic value, even without a grant.

Short-term adoption grants catalyse momentum, but it's not clear yet whether they lead to sustained adoption. Evidence across portfolios suggests that adoption typically requires extended timeframes (with some staff estimating five to ten years), whilst adoption grants are intentionally designed as short, catalytic interventions, rather than comprehensive end-to-end support. It is expected that after this funding, adopters and innovators will continue independently if the

partnership proves viable. Grantees described the funding as generating early momentum; however, data is not yet available to determine whether this catalytic input leads to deeper organisational procurement or policy integration required for sustained adoption. Current evidence relates to the effectiveness of adoption grants as catalysts but not yet to their higher goal (and longer-term) effectiveness.

System-level barriers continue to constrain adoption. Multiple barriers to adoption were highlighted which are not directly addressed by adoption call design:

- procurement rigidity
- bureaucratic processes
- fragmented evidence expectations
- risk aversion
- supply-chain issues
- timing misalignment.

The recent learning project by FLUSH Associates on HIF's adoption challenges examined these barriers,[20] and its findings add to the HIF's own boring revolution insight output from its Humanitarian Innovation Forum in early 2025[3]: adoption is not restricted solely by the viability or desirability of the innovation itself but by the system around it required to put it into sustained practice. The boring revolution insight output highlights that this systemic perspective requires addressing such diverse factors as culture, infrastructure, policy constraints and so on.

Inconsistent evidence expectations remain a major barrier to adoption. As grantees reported, different agencies require different forms and levels of evidence, often demanding more and more without clarity on acceptable standards or thresholds of evidence. Adoption calls cannot resolve these sector-wide inconsistencies. Multiple interviewees also described evidence mismatch as one of the most persistent barriers in adoption pathways. INGOs, United Nations (UN) agencies, governments and donors may all expect different types of evidence, ranging from operational feasibility to academically rigorous evaluations. Several innovations with strong early-stage evidence still did not progress because the adopting agency required something different. This underscores a broader insight: without coordinated evidence norms in the sector, innovators may continue to face moving goalposts, and Elrha's adoption efforts will remain constrained.

Relational and organisational factors shape adoption journeys. Adoption journeys are affected significantly by a wide range of non-technical factors, including internal organisational politics, leadership buy-in, cultural readiness and organisational incentives. Interviewees emphasised that adoption is both a technical and relational exercise. The (anticipated) adoption success of promising solution examples (such as Oxfam's use of Reemi's menstrual health management solution)[19] relied heavily on hands-on leadership, strong solution-adopter relationships and solution system agility, not just on funding or evidence. This validates the HIF's focus on matchmaking but also suggests that short grants alone may not be sufficient. Fostering greater commitment and a stronger partnership between the innovator and adopter may contribute to the goal of sustained institutional uptake.

Adoption often requires additional adaptation beyond piloting. Research suggests that many

solutions may require additional R&D, technical adaptation, market analysis or additional partnerships before adoption is feasible. This insight may be especially relevant for more technically complex innovations such as faecal-sludge management solutions. The HIF's support is strong on evidence and knowledge sharing, but several grantees noted that the organisation may underestimate the range of technical and financial requirements that need to be addressed before adoption is possible. For future calls, as highlighted in the recent adoption challenge learning report,[20] an adaptation stage may be necessary between piloting and adoption to systematically meet any adoption challenges.

Adoption call design choices surface new challenges. As with any funding call design choice, unintentional negative effects of this model of adoption funding are likely to arise and invite further exploration. The specific design of the adoption funding calls may have presented additional challenges in the central relationship between implementer and innovator that may add further complications to adoption. One grantee felt that the adoption call created tension between the innovator and adopter, as only the adopter could be the direct grant recipient, leading to a sense of loss of autonomy for the innovator – despite their active role in the integration and adaptation of their solution in the adoption process. The adoption calls centred on an initial partnership creation approach, and not directly managing the partnership itself throughout the grant.

It is likely that when goals diverge between the HIF, the innovator and the implementing organisation, the HIF's ongoing facilitation role could become critical. For instance, without careful partnership facilitation and dialogue, the priorities of the implementing organisation (likely to be centred on its own internal integration challenges) and the HIF (likely to be centred on generating solid learning and supporting the implementing partner) may be experienced as different and potentially undermining to the innovator's goals (such securing investment in their stock, resolving supply chain issues, building their branding and investing time in broader market engagement).

Strengthening adoption identification requires clearer definitions and tracking. As noted in earlier findings, the HIF lacks a consistent tracking system, definitional clarity and longitudinal follow-up. These all contribute to confidently identifying solutions which have been adopted, using the adoption definition presented earlier. Currently, confident identification of adopted solutions that have been funded by the HIF is possible only through insights shared by IMs, and not from systematically collated data. Elrha staff noted that organisations in receipt of recent adoption funding did not count as successful adoption cases, as sustained usage and integration would follow the period of tested integration and usage funded by the grant.

Examples were given that illustrate the value of sustained, adaptive support for adoption. Several innovation adoption partnership examples were identified by Elrha staff, and are highlighted on the next two pages. All of these partnerships have benefitted from more than one Elrha grant as part of their journey to date, either to the innovation organisation or the adopting organisation. Overall, these examples indicate how the HIF's grant-making approach has evolved and adapted, providing support to innovators and adopters at different points along a pathway. For those solutions benefiting from this longer-term accompaniment, this approach is likely to have enabled learning, iteration and adoption of innovations. This may have been done through providing resources and other forms of support which enable solutions to navigate the inherent complexity and uncertainty of development and scaling over time.

Reemi and Oxfam[19]

With HIF funding from both high severity and rapid onset adoption calls, Oxfam implemented Reemi's reusable, antibacterial menstrual underwear and associated washing and drying bags. This work was carried out in fragile, high severity humanitarian contexts (specifically, the Central African Republic, Mali, Somalia) and a rapid onset context (Gaza) to improve MHM for women and girls.

HIF funding was used to finance the adaptation, procurement, distribution and field testing of the products.

Strong evidence was generated that showed users' extremely high satisfaction and willingness to continue use (>98%), reductions in reported infections, and a shift in social attitudes – including successfully engaging men to challenge the stigma around menstruation.

Despite a range of operational challenges (flooding, supply delivery delays, staff turnover), the adoption partnership demonstrated that reusable, low-cost MHM solutions can be acceptable, durable and culturally sensitive in challenging crisis contexts. It offers strong potential for adoption on an even wider scale through inclusion in standard humanitarian WASH household kits.

Problem Management Plus (PM+) and SOS Children's Villages[21]

SOS Children's Villages, with support from the HIF, is rolling out PM+ in Haiti to bring low-cost, community-delivered mental health support to people affected by conflict, violence and other crises.

Funding from the HIF's Adopting Innovations in High Severity Settings call helped fund adaptation, training of local PM+ Helpers, and translation and contextualisation of materials into Haitian Creole. All of these were important steps to ensuring cultural relevance and local ownership.

By training non-specialist providers, rather than relying solely on scarce mental-health professionals, the programme is designed to scale cost-effectively and reach hundreds of clients, easing pressure on Haiti's overstretched health system.

Early feedback indicates that users report benefits, which include better emotional regulation and improved family relationships.

Médecins Sans Frontières's (MSF) simplified MUAC methodology and Mercy Corps[22]

The project introduced easy-to-use uniMUAC bracelets so that caregivers and health workers could screen pregnant/lactating women and children under five for acute malnutrition in conflict-affected Taiz, Yemen.

HIF's support enabled training of 1,506 caregivers and 44 community health volunteers, resulting in over 3,100 screenings and 56 early referrals for severe acute malnutrition. The model helped decentralise nutrition screening, reduce delays in treatment and relieve pressure on formal health services – demonstrating that community-based, low-literacy tools can increase detection coverage in fragile settings.

The project highlighted important learning about the need for culturally appropriate training materials, ongoing refresher sessions and partnerships with local health authorities. This reinforced the understanding that community-led approaches can be viable and scalable in humanitarian crises.

Safe Water Optimization Tool (SWOT) and multiple organisations[23]

SWOT is a web-based decision-support tool that generates context-specific chlorination targets to ensure safe drinking water at the point of use in humanitarian settings.

HIF's support has played a critical role in funding the foundational research that demonstrated the limitations of universal chlorination standards, as well as subsequent development, validation and uptake activities of SWOT. Through multiple HIF grants, SWOT evolved from evidence generation to a robust, field-tested tool that integrates routine water quality data with advanced modelling.

The solution has been adopted and used by multiple humanitarian organisations, including MSF, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (via partners), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Oxfam, BRAC and Solidarités International, across diverse crisis contexts. SWOT has supported improved water safety outcomes for hundreds of thousands of people and is now recognised as a credible, evidence-based innovation within the humanitarian WASH sector.

Faircap, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Action Against Hunger (ACF)[24]

Faircap Family Water Filter is a low-cost, gravity-fed household water treatment solution designed for use in humanitarian contexts, developed with sustained support from Elrha.

HIF funding supported Faircap across multiple stages of development, including prototyping, laboratory validation, field testing in humanitarian contexts, operational learning, dissemination of evidence and participation in a WASH Adoption Challenge.

The solution adapts membrane filtration technology to treat highly turbid water without the need for chemicals or electricity, addressing a common operational gap in WASH emergency response programmes.

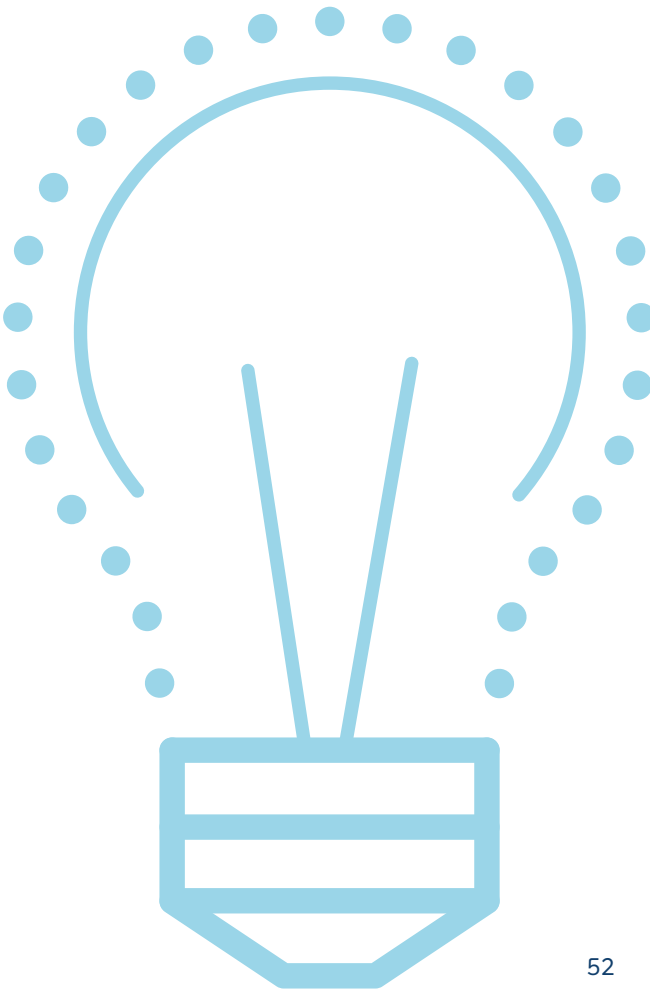
The filter has demonstrated strong pathogen removal performance and durability in field conditions. Adoption has been undertaken by UNICEF and ACF, following HIF-supported evidence generation and operational testing. Faircap has distributed thousands of filters across multiple crisis-affected countries, reaching tens of thousands of people, with additional humanitarian organisations engaging through pilots, trials or exploratory discussions.

It is possible that other positive adoption cases could be identified from the grant data if a more forensic examination of innovation journeys was undertaken. As previously discussed, novelty is sometimes considered as new to the organisation or context, in which case projects classed as innovations in the pilot stage might actually represent instances of adoption between organisations and contexts. Research data also suggests that most Scale portfolio innovations continue to scale after grant completion, but this is not yet captured systematically. It is therefore possible that many more positive examples of adoption exist within the Elrha portfolio but are not currently identified.

Adoption calls act as catalytic tests within constrained systems. As stated above, adoption of solutions typically occurs over extended timeframes beyond a short grant period. Elrha's adoption calls act intentionally as short, catalytic interventions rather than comprehensive, end-to-end support, providing a boost which enables adopters and innovators to test organisational fit, assess feasibility and reduce early adoption risk. Deeper organisational, procurement or policy integration may require different inputs and sustained and targeted efforts over time.

These findings suggest that adoption calls function intentionally not as a complete solution to adoption but more as a mechanism for testing viability and building relationships. It can also surface the wider system conditions that may shape whether adoption of an innovation is possible (eg, procurement barriers, additional capability requirement, alignment of organisational incentives and evidence requirements). It is possible that, viewed in this way, adoption calls remain a valuable part of the HIF's approach. This is not because they overcome systemic barriers on their own, but because they help reveal and navigate the full picture of an adoption system centred on a solution that is necessary for longer-term success.

HIF is a leader on taking a learning-led approach to adoption. The HIF's thinking, learning and experimentation around adoption support is likely to have contributed to a growing shift in the humanitarian sector toward sourcing and adopting solutions developed outside organisational boundaries. In particular, the HIF may have contributed to raising the profile of adoption as a distinct stage of the innovation journey and legitimising cross-organisational approaches to uptake. This potential emerging openness in the humanitarian sector may suggest growing momentum for adoption-focused work grounded in partnership, shared learning and system-level understanding.



Objective: Living Up to Commitments

To reflect on HIF support of commitments to shifting the power and localisation.

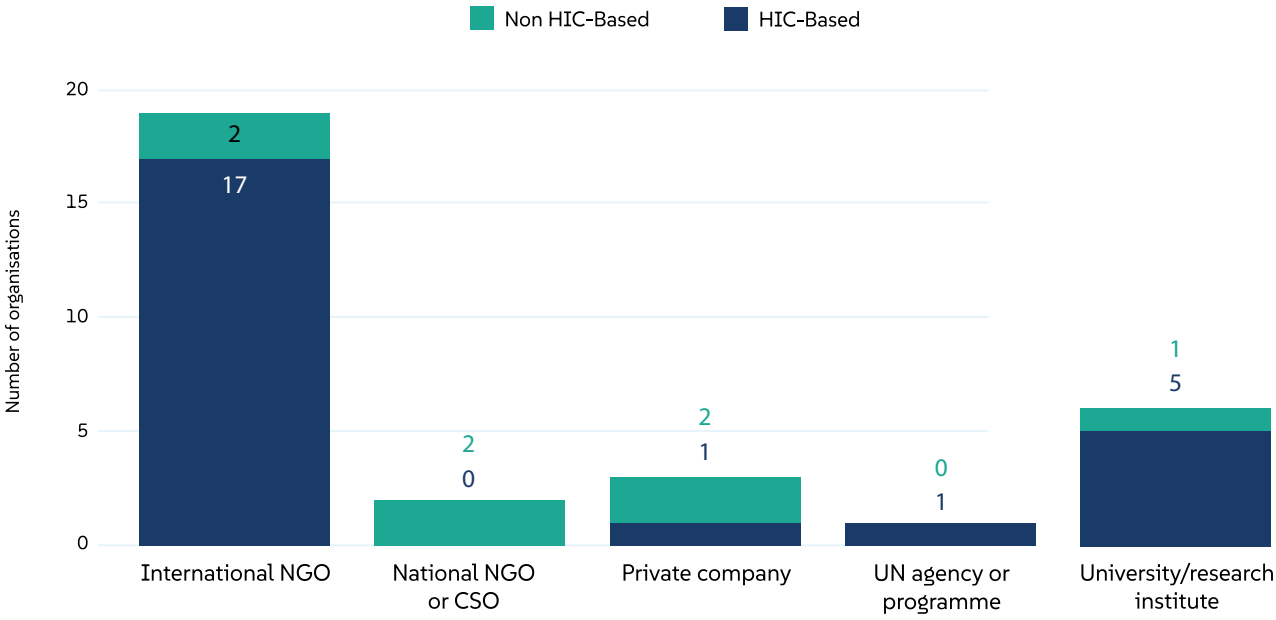
Key findings

- Elrha responded to the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 with clear commitments to more inclusive and locally-led grant-making. Progress since November 2022 reflects some nascent steps toward embedding these ambitions more consistently across the HIF portfolio.
- Grant distribution data show modest improvements in funding organisations in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), amid an ongoing concentration of funding among organisations based in HICs.
- Targeted accessibility measures have supported increased participation by some locally-led organisations, providing useful learning, though these approaches are not yet applied systematically across portfolios.
- Structural features of HIF's grant-making systems continue to shape accessibility for smaller and locally-led organisations, particularly due to the demands of due diligence processes, language requirements and donor compliance expectations.

The following section provides a review of the HIF's progress in supporting localisation and shifting the power since the previous evaluation, followed by a closer analysis of grant distribution patterns and accessibility of funding mechanisms. The aim is to understand the extent to which Elrha has translated its strategic commitments into inclusive practice, examining both the targeted measures introduced to support local actors and the structural barriers that continue to shape the portfolio.

HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 findings	The HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 called for stronger efforts to remove barriers faced by locally-led organisations, particularly the high attrition of local actors during application processes. While it found that Elrha's Community-Led Innovation Partnership (CLIP) was leading the way in supporting locally-led innovation, it also highlighted a lack of clarity on how CLIP connects to HIF's broader portfolio and other HIF activities.
Management response	In response, Elrha committed to more inclusive grant-making by improving programme design, funding allocations and access to learning outputs. It also pledged to increase locally-led, high-potential innovations through new approaches in its technical and scale portfolios, while addressing sector-wide gaps in ethical, participatory innovation through targeted research and guidance.
Progress Nov 2022–Oct 2025	Progress toward operationalising the access and representation commitments outlined in the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 is at an early but developing stage. Further concerted efforts are required to ensure consistent practice across the portfolio. In its 2026–2031 strategic plan, Elrha commits to advancing localisation through targeted measures to shift power, which will be important for strengthening future practice.

Chart 14: Type and location of lead organisations (n=31), 2023–2025



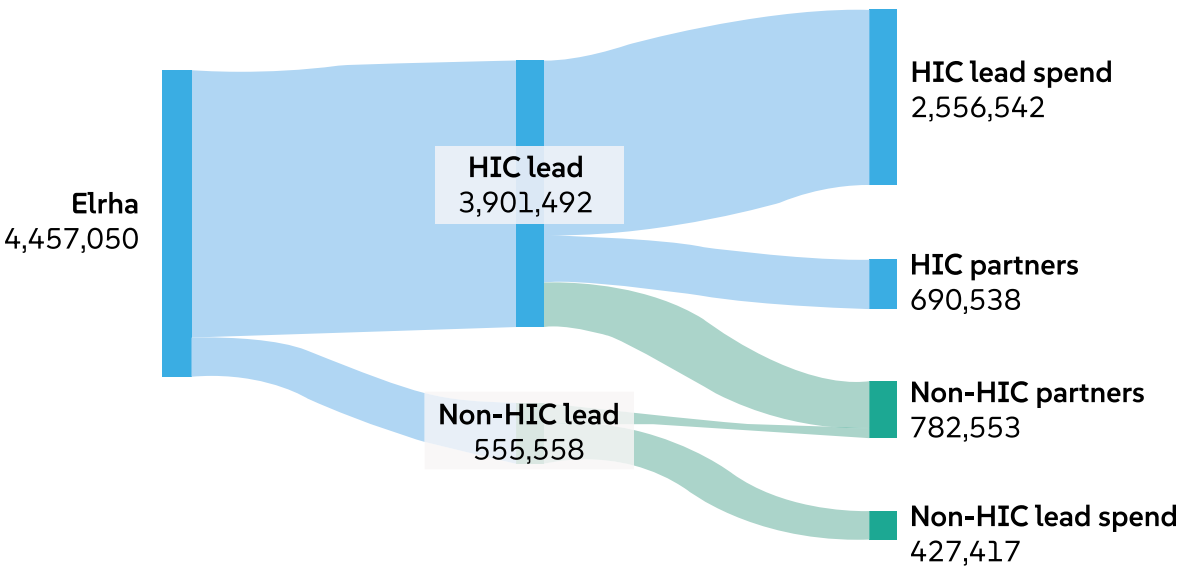
In this review period, there has been a slight increase in the proportion of grants going to organisations based in middle-income and low-income countries. From 2023 to 2025, 48 grants were made to 31 unique lead organisations (see Chart 14). In total, 24 organisations awarded funding were based in HICs (77%), including 17 INGOs (affiliates or headquarters based in the Global North), five universities and research institutes, a UN agency and a private company. Seven organisations awarded funding were based in middle-income or low-income countries (23%), including two INGOs based in the Global South, two national non-governmental organisations (NGOs), two private companies and a research institute.

By comparison, during the HIF's previous evaluation period, 2019 to 2022, 47 grants were made to 35 unique lead organisations across the four core thematic areas. Of these, 29 organisations were based in HICs (86%) and six were based in middle-income countries (14%). The six organisations based in middle-income or low-income countries included four locally-led organisations, as well as World Vision Vanuatu and Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund Office for Indonesia and the Philippines.

A little over a quarter of the HIF's funding is transferred to organisations based in middle-income or low-income countries. As part of our analysis, we also examined a sub-set of data for innovations supported during the current progress review period that includes detailed information regarding the flow of funds to the third tier partners of each lead organisation (see Chart 15). This data shows that 88% of funding went to lead organisations based in HICs, and 12% went to lead organisations based in middle-income or low-income countries.

Of the funding that went to lead organisations in HICs, 18% went to partners in HICs and 17% went to partners in middle-income or low-income countries. The lead organisations retained the remaining 65% of funding. Of the funding that went to lead organisations in middle-income or low-income countries, 23% went to partners also based in middle-income or low-income countries, and 77% was retained by the lead organisation. In total, 27% of funding ended up with organisations based in middle-income or low-income countries, and 73% of funding ended up with organisations based in HICs.

Chart 15: Financial flows from Elrha to lead organisations and partners, 2023–2025 (GBP)



Across the DOAI, WASH, AI and Scale portfolios, localisation practices and experimentation are not guided by a unified approach to localisation. This may help explain why the HIF portfolio has not yet fully met its ambition to ensure that a greater share of high-potential innovations are led by local actors and that funding is increasingly directed to them. Elrha's CLIP programme is widely recognised for advancing localisation but is, by design, positioned as distinct from the wider HIF portfolio.

Elrha's 2023 Annual Report notes that accessibility and localisation efforts have not yet been fully mainstreamed across the HIF portfolio, with most grantees still based in HICs.[25] Research data reinforces this finding and highlights the absence of a shared organisational definition and methodology for applying localisation principles in grant-making processes. This gap contributes to INGOs and research institutions continuing to receive the majority of grants. Grant-tracking datasets (November 2022–October 2025) further nuance this picture: even where projects are implemented with local organisations, grant holders based in HICs retain a substantial share of resources.

There are significant structural barriers to supporting more organisations from LMICs. The Humanitarian Innovation Forum 2025 and subsequent insight paper on localisation and power dynamics highlight the need to adapt funding systems to better reflect local operational realities.[26]

Recommendations included:

- simplifying application processes
- clarifying disbursement timelines
- providing more substantial upfront payments
- offering constructive feedback to unsuccessful applicants.

Research data indicate that several structural and procedural features of HIF's current grant-making systems may limit accessibility for local organisations based in LMICs. It was noted that application and due-diligence processes remain complex and documentation-heavy, shaped by donor compliance requirements that offer limited scope for simplification. English-dominant materials and expectations around formal proposal and report writing were also cited as potential barriers for organisations with less established administrative capacity.

Insights from grantees similarly suggested that HIF's funding mechanisms often reflect the operational norms of larger international organisations rather than the financial and institutional profiles of local innovators. They described due-diligence and reporting requirements as resource intensive, particularly for organisations without dedicated administrative teams.

Analysis points to a range of measures introduced to improve the accessibility of funding mechanisms for LMIC-based organisations. These include translating call materials, more purposeful outreach and tailored organisational support for local grantees. For example, within the AI portfolio, CfPs were translated, promoted in hard-to-reach areas and allowed for video submissions. These measures are likely to have supported greater accessibility and contributed to the selection of two locally-led organisations as grantees in Uganda and Syria. Similarly, the

DOAI portfolio has placed greater emphasis on targeted accompaniment, partnerships, and the engagement of national and local actors.

Changes to CfPs requirements aimed at reducing barriers for smaller organisations have also been tested. For example, the decision not to request a results framework at the proposal stage was intended to accommodate applicants without formal MEAL systems. HIF staff have also conducted follow-ups with unsuccessful LMIC applicants within the AI and rapid response calls. However, staff noted that these activities have become less frequent due to resource constraints.

Language accessibility emerged as an area of incremental progress. While fully translating application and reporting materials has historically been cost-prohibitive, it was noted that advances in AI-enabled translation may support more multilingual approaches in future. To date, steps have included producing multilingual materials where feasible and increasing the geographic diversity of TWGs. However, English remains the primary working language, meaning participation continues to be concentrated in English-speaking contexts, with some additional engagement from French-speaking West Africa.

Some smaller, local organisations have been able to access HIF grants with support from Elrha's finance team to meet due-diligence requirements and develop missing policies. While effective in individual cases, this support was highly resource-intensive and not feasible at scale. This led to discussions on the potential value of a six-month capacity-building phase prior to application, which would allow organisations to strengthen financial systems and required policies in advance. However, Elrha's two-year planning cycles limited the feasibility of implementing such a phase. The approach remains a possible option for the future, particularly where organisations lack only specific policy components that could be addressed through targeted support.

There are emerging efforts to strengthen engagement with LMIC-based actors beyond the grant-making mechanism. Hosting the Humanitarian Innovation Forum 2025 in Nairobi was a positive step that helped re-establish the organisation's convening role, with its regional hosting viewed as an important aspect of that progress.[26] One of the four pre-forum online meetings, attended by more than 60 participants, explored the meaning of localisation and its implications for humanitarian innovation, underscoring the importance of locally-driven leadership and solution development. Building on this discussion, the HIF developed a paper on localisation and power dynamics.[27]

This period also saw closer collaboration with the Response Innovation Lab (RIL),[28] highlighting the value of supporting response-level innovation ecosystems convened by globally networked organisations with strong local presence and partnerships, rather than concentrating convening roles within the HIF.

Steps have also been taken to translate reports into additional languages, and the planned translation of learning products, including the AI Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), was identified as a potential way to improve accessibility. Research data across thematic portfolios noted that grantees receive support to attend key sector events, write blogs and publish academic papers to showcase their work. However, challenges in securing visas for LMIC partners travelling to London, including for the HIF Learning Exchange in September 2025 and for events delivered with the EEHF, were noted, and the location of future events should be reconsidered.

Grantees observed that convenings and communication platforms often reach international organisations more effectively than local actors. They recommended greater use of national humanitarian networks to disseminate calls and encourage wider participation. Some grantees also suggested hosting convenings in more accessible locations and providing visa support to reduce geographic barriers. At the same time, Elrha staff observed that HIF has not yet developed structured approaches for engaging local organisations in learning or convening activities outside the grant-making system.

Objective: Sharing and Learning

To explore convening, connecting, monitoring and learning.

Key findings

- The HIF has re-established momentum in its role as an innovation connector, with renewed visibility and convening influence emerging most clearly in 2025 through flagship events and thematic engagement.
- Internal convening mechanisms have created valuable spaces for learning, collaboration and relationship-building across the portfolio, with scope to strengthen consistency and continuity across thematic areas.
- External engagement remains a recognised strength, contributing to sector dialogue, agenda-setting and partnership-building, while offering further opportunities to strengthen organisational learning capture and follow-through.
- The HIF continues to generate a strong and credible body of evidence and learning products, with potential to enhance coherence, accessibility and reach, particularly for locally-based actors.
- MEAL has evolved into a more learning-oriented and supportive function, with simplified reporting and the introduction of longitudinal tracking strengthening portfolio-level understanding of innovation outcomes.

The following sections provide a review of the HIF's role as a convener and connector within the humanitarian innovation ecosystem, followed by a closer analysis of its approaches to generating and disseminating evidence and the evolution of its MEAL systems. The aim is to understand the extent to which the HIF has successfully fostered collaboration among innovation actors, facilitated the sharing of learning and improved its MEAL systems.

Convening and connecting

HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 findings	The HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 found that the HIF played an important role as a convener for innovation actors until 2020, but this was paused during COVID-19 and following budget cuts. The HIF retained good relationships with individual innovation funders, but there was still a need for a convener for the sector.
Management response	In response, Elrha committed to strengthening its role as an innovation connector and evidence-builder by promoting sector-wide coordination, supporting the integration of innovations into standards and funding pathways, and actively showcasing high-potential solutions.
Progress Nov 2022–Oct 2025	Since the evaluation, the HIF's convening activity shows renewed momentum, though a more strategic and systematised approach is still emerging.

Since the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022, the HIF has continued to convene and connect actors across the humanitarian research and innovation community. It has supported the exchange of evidence and practice, and produced reports, toolkits and other knowledge outputs.

Analysis points to in-person convenings being more effective than digital formats in building relationships, supporting learning and surfacing shared challenges. Internal convenings enable the HIF to share research products and toolkits with grantees and gather their insights – for example, to inform a portfolio-specific gap analysis. For grantees, these activities offer opportunities to connect, share experiences, and exchange practice and evidence-based insights with a wider community of innovation practitioners.

In addition to the HIF Innovation Forum hosted in February 2025, the HIF Innovation Learning Exchange held in London in October 2025 provides a further example of this approach. The two-day event brought together current and former grantees for project presentations, demonstrations of HIF tools, facilitated discussions and dedicated networking time. Notably, it was the first Innovation Learning Exchange delivered as a cross-thematic event, rather than being limited to DOAI grantees. It was widely viewed as valuable for strengthening connections across portfolios.

The HIF's TWGs also provide a valuable space for collaboration. The WASH, DOAI and GBV portfolios currently operate TWGs, which each bring together 15–20 practitioners and academics three to four times a year, primarily online since COVID-19. TWGs were described as useful forums for sharing ongoing work, contributing to thematic gap analysis and identifying potential priorities for future calls. The HIF coordinates the groups and undertakes the initial gap analysis, while TWG members advise on areas for prioritisation. Chairs are remunerated, while other members participate on a voluntary basis.

Research findings also highlighted variation in how effectively TWGs function, with the WASH TWG reported to have had stronger attendance than others. Their effectiveness appears to depend in part on the engagement and initiative of individual IMs, with some TWGs experiencing challenges related to unclear purpose, limited turnover and weak feedback loops. Wider humanitarian system changes over the period are also likely to have shaped continuity and participation across several TWGs. Despite these challenges, benefits from participation were identified, including opportunities for cross-learning and relationship-building. Participation in the DOAI TWG was also found to support access to inclusion-related funding opportunities for one grantee and enable organisations to contribute practical perspectives to group discussions.

Taken together, these examples illustrate how the HIF's internal convening approaches bring grantees together and create spaces for learning, dialogue and thematic exchange. These activities have supported relationship-building and, in some cases, helped connect innovators with actors who later contributed to project delivery.

Hosting the Humanitarian Innovation Forum in Nairobi marked an important step in re-establishing the HIF's convening role. The HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 noted that Elrha played a strong convening and external engagement role between 2011 and 2020, a trajectory disrupted by COVID-19 and subsequent post-pandemic funding constraints. This decline continued into the early part of the current reporting period, influenced by funding cuts, reduced staff capacity and a shift in organisational priorities toward operational delivery. This reduced Elrha's visibility and convening activity across the sector.

However, in 2025 the HIF took positive steps forward to rebuild its role by hosting the Humanitarian Innovation Forum.[26] A series of pre-forum online meetings explored four core themes, including localisation and power dynamics,[27] the right problems,[29] from pilot to practice,[30] and the boring revolution.[3] These discussions informed the development of provocation papers and were further developed through insight papers and blogs following the Forum. Interviewees welcomed the regional localisation of the event and noted that it provided space for humanitarian innovators to connect and share experiences (see Spotlight on the Humanitarian Innovation Forum on page 63 for more information).

Analysis found that the Forum also supported closer collaboration with other innovation funders, including the development of a proposal for a live innovation catalogue. Finally, insights from the Forum informed the development of the Futures and foresight toolkit: Integrating Futures and Foresight in the Humanitarian Sector,[31] published in September 2025 and now used by the RIL.

Another key area of convening focused on the Global Prioritisation Exercise (GPE). In 2023, a series of events were held to share GPE findings and support engagement across regional and thematic communities.[32] This included a session at Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week (HNPW) in April 2023 to present initial GPE findings and explore sector challenges related to decision-making, priority-setting, and why some crises receive more research and innovation attention than others. This was followed by three regional launch events in November 2023 that brought together more than 200 humanitarian, research and innovation actors. These activities supported cross-regional exchange and helped connect regional research and practitioner communities.

Overall, the HIF's convening role was viewed as a distinctive strength compared with more traditional funders. While interviewees suggested that this role could be further developed, doing so would benefit from a clearer articulation of system needs and priorities. In this context, the WASH thematic portfolio has afforded Elrha and the HIF leadership in this space, while the AI portfolio remains fast-moving and nascent, presenting both opportunities and risks of duplication.

Taken together, findings indicate that while convening activity continued throughout 2023–2025, clearer momentum and visibility emerged in 2025. This supported renewed evidence sharing, thematic dialogue, and relationship-building among HIF grantees and across the wider sector. However, limited post-event follow-up constrains Elrha's ability to systematically capture learning outcomes or clearly articulate its longer-term contribution to sector learning.

Since the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022, the HIF's engagement in sector fora has continued, largely driven by individual IMs and their awareness of relevant events. Participation has been constrained by staff capacity, with involvement often depending on individual initiative. Research also identified a lack of systematic mechanisms for sharing the outputs and outcomes of sector fora participation across the HIF team, alongside emerging efforts to more strategically identify priority spaces and coordinate approaches.

Participation in sector fora and support for external events has involved presenting findings from research and knowledge products, facilitating the sharing of evidence and practice, and strengthening relationships across the humanitarian innovation community. The HIF has also used its knowledge of the humanitarian innovation ecosystem to pair complementary organisations, shape intentional convening spaces and support arenas that help address innovation gaps within specific thematic portfolio areas.

At the same time, participation in external fora was viewed as an important mechanism for contributing thematic insights and engaging in wider sector discussions. For example, a joint AI session was hosted with the UK Humanitarian Innovation Hub (UKHIH) during HNPW in 2024. At the HNPW 2025, the HIF hosted a webinar focused on building inclusive humanitarian responses for people with disabilities and older people through innovation, helping to foreground inclusion within humanitarian innovation debates.[33]

Research also highlighted the HIF's recognised role in convening actors around specific solutions or problem spaces within its thematic ecosystems. One example was the International Foundation for Recovery and Development (IFRAD) validation meeting in Uganda in October 2025, where the HIF's involvement helped connect relevant actors around a shared challenge. Another example is the long-standing support to the EEHF, where funding and strategic input have helped sustain an inclusive convening space for WASH innovators, researchers and policymakers (see Spotlight on the EEHF on page 89 for more information). This support has enabled broader participation, particularly from practitioners often excluded from global technical discussions, and has facilitated evidence-sharing, gap identification and partnership-building. The EEHF has become an important platform for strengthening the humanitarian WASH ecosystem, illustrating the HIF's capacity to support convening and shape dialogue around thematic innovation priorities.

Spotlight on the Humanitarian Innovation Forum

The HIF hosted the Humanitarian Innovation Forum in Nairobi from 11–13 February 2025.[26] Funded by the FCDO and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Forum was designed as a collaborative and co-created event, bringing together innovators, funders, decision-makers and practitioners to address shared challenges shaping humanitarian innovation.

Over three days, over 100 participants explored not only what innovation is pursued, but *how* and *why*. The Forum provided space to examine transformative approaches, develop shared ambitions and build connections aimed at strengthening the impact of humanitarian innovation for people affected by crises.

The Forum was structured around four core themes:

- **Localisation and power dynamics** – Exploring how innovation ownership can shift toward local actors and communities.
- **The right problems** – Examining whether humanitarian innovation is addressing the most pressing needs of affected populations.
- **From pilot to practice** – Focusing on how innovations can move beyond proof of concept toward sustainable adoption and scale.
- **The boring revolution** – Addressing operational enablers such as compliance, procurement and data governance that shape innovation outcomes.

A distinctive feature of the Forum was its bottom-up design. A series of pre-forum online discussions informed both the overall programme and the fireside chats held during the event, and fed into the development of provocation and insight papers. Forum sessions prioritised action-oriented dialogue, supporting shared learning, relationship-building and practical exploration of how innovation can deliver impact.

In terms of participation and engagement, the Forum brought together a diverse group of participants, including local innovators (20%) alongside humanitarian organisations, funders and innovation infrastructure actors. Participant feedback indicated high levels of engagement, with overall facilitation rated at 4.87 out of 5 and session facilitation rated at 4.66 out of 5. A total of 98% of participants reported making valuable new connections that could translate into partnerships, and 91% expressed interest in involving their organisations in follow-up work.

Sessions were intentionally designed to drive action rather than discussion alone. The opening fireside chat with innovator and refugee leader Samuel Binja Cimanuka set the tone for a deeper exploration of community-led innovation models.

The regional hosting of the Forum in Nairobi, combined with its explicit focus on localisation, supported more inclusive participation and informed targeted learning and provocation activities. These reflections were further developed through insight papers and blogs following the Forum.

"Such an amazing platform, safe space and network. Elrha is leading the conversation on humanitarian innovation."

Samuel Binja Cimanuka, participant and speaker.[26]

Since the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022, Elrha has continued to produce publications and knowledge products that contribute to sector-wide learning. Sharing insights from funded grants, alongside Elrha's own research and analysis, remains central to the organisation's mission. As Elrha notes on its webpage, "these outputs range from flagship reports aimed at strengthening the humanitarian system to practical toolkits and frameworks, as well as the evidence generated by HIF grantees. Together, they form an evolving evidence base that demonstrates progress, captures learning, and highlights impact across humanitarian innovation". The Scaling series appears to have been Elrha's most prominent evidence investment since the evaluation, developing a multi-year body of work that examines the challenges, tactics and pathways involved in scaling humanitarian innovations (see Spotlight publications: Scaling series on page 65 for further details).

The HIF additionally supports external knowledge-sharing platforms, such as the NetHope AI Lighthouse, which provides tools and guidance for responsible AI use.[34] Despite these contributions, interviewees pointed to the absence of a central repository for shared resources and inconsistent tracking and follow-up. Dissemination of learning continues to rely heavily on international partners, meaning that much of the knowledge circulates primarily within UK and EU networks rather than reaching local actors who could benefit most.

Spotlight publications: Scaling series

Within this broader landscape of evidence generation, Elrha's Scaling series stands out as a particularly significant body of work. Elrha's work on publishing toolkits, reports and insights on scaling began in 2018 with the release of Too Tough to Scale? Challenges to Scaling Innovation in the Humanitarian Sector.[35] Building on this initial analysis, Elrha launched the Scaling series of learning papers, each examining specific aspects of scaling barriers and offering practical guidance.[36]

As part of this series, in September 2022, Elrha published How to Scale: Tactics to Enable the Adoption of Humanitarian Innovations[37]. This paper outlined approaches for innovators seeking to scale through adoption by other organisations and described considerations for teams working toward internal adoption across different offices or country programmes. It consolidated learning into a set of tactics and strategies relevant to different scaling contexts.

In 2024, Elrha issued the report Failure to Scale in 2024.[8] This paper was initiated due to a perception that established humanitarian innovation structures struggle to effectively support change at scale. It is a temperature check on the extent to which innovations are leading to beneficial change and investigates pathways through which this can happen more effectively.

Following the publication of the Failure to Scale report, Elrha published a six-part blog series that reflected on different perspectives on scaling humanitarian innovation. It included prevailing assumptions about scale, structural and institutional constraints, and insights from practice and country-level discussions.

The most recent contribution, released in 2025, was Adopting humanitarian innovation: Key lessons from an Adoption Challenge.[20] This report analyses key learnings from Elrha's HIF Adoption Challenge, which supported six humanitarian organisations in adopting and scaling innovations across water, sanitation, hygiene, menstrual health, nutrition and mental health sectors.

These publications informed discussions at the Humanitarian Innovation Forum 2025, where a provocation paper on the pilot to practice[30] journey encouraged participants to reflect on what scale means within the humanitarian sector. Insights from these conversations continued to shape sector thinking and were further disseminated through subsequent blogs, including Debunking scale in humanitarian innovation: Rethinking the climb.[38]

The HIF could improve its institutional knowledge and learning capabilities through more systematic documentation and consolidation of engagement and knowledge outputs. The progress columns of annual reports to the FCDO provide a broad overview of events the HIF contributes to or supports, including spotlights on specific activities. However, the review found that there is no consistently maintained central record capturing the outputs or outcomes generated through these engagements.

As a result, documentation and sharing of engagement often rely on individual staff, which can make learning from convenings and events uneven across the organisation. Similarly, the HIF also appears to lack a consolidated overview of publications and knowledge products across portfolios, and cross-portfolio learning remains largely dependent on the initiative of individual IMs.

Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL)

HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 findings	The HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 identified MEAL as one of the weaker components of the HIF. The evaluation called for clearer frameworks, consistent expectations and dedicated capacity alongside systems to track innovation trajectories beyond grant periods.
Management response	In response, Elrha committed to a substantive strengthening of its MEAL system to improve monitoring, evidence quality and learning. It expanded its MEAL team and tasked it with designing a more coherent organisational MEAL approach, beginning with the development of a system for longitudinal tracking of all grants.
Progress Nov 2022–Oct 2025	Early progress is evident in the shift from compliance-heavy reporting to a greater focus on useful, comparable evidence. Simplified reporting templates and results frameworks have begun to reduce reporting burden for grantees, whilst improving clarity on how activities lead to intended outcomes. These changes, alongside improved MEAL guidance and support to grantees and practical guidance on value for money (VfM) assessment, have started to create greater coherence in expectations and position MEAL as a learning-oriented function.

There was a deliberate shift towards a learning-orientated MEAL support function. Elrha has increasingly embedded MEAL more directly within its innovation grant-making practice. This has included clearer expectations around how grantees articulate the pathway from activities to outcomes, as well as more proactive support for grant reporting and evidence generation. New reporting templates and simplified results frameworks are intended to reduce unnecessary data capture, as well as improve the quality, usefulness and comparability of evidence across the portfolio. The MEAL team has also strengthened guidance and hands-on support to grantees,

helping them navigate reporting requirements and develop clearer narratives of change. Together, these changes indicate a shift in MEAL's role in the HIF away from a primarily compliance-oriented function toward a more learning-focused capacity that supports both grantees and Elrha at an organisational level. Several grantees noted improved clarity and support during implementation, including help in strengthening theories of change, refining MEAL plans and navigating evidence requirements.

Elrha has taken a bold and important new approach to longitudinal innovation tracking. Addressing longstanding concerns about post-grant tracking, Elrha has undertaken a substantive scoping and design process to strengthen how it understands what happens to innovation at the end of funding and beyond.[12] This represents a significant departure from previous practices, which relied almost entirely on informal, ad hoc contact led by managers or proactive grantees post-funding. Both the scoping study and internal consultations confirmed that this approach limited Elrha's ability to understand longer-term outcomes for individual solutions as well as broader portfolio-level learning.

In response, Elrha has developed a longitudinal impact tracking system that introduces a structured, stage-gated approach combining grant-closure assessment with light-touch follow-up at 18 and 36 months post-funding, appropriate for the non-linear and long-term nature of innovation journeys. Designed to be learning-oriented and resource-efficient, the new system will seek to generate clearer evidence on innovation journeys while addressing known barriers such as staff turnover, inconsistent definitions of impact and limited organisational capacity. This work reflects significant organisational progress in how Elrha approaches accountability, learning and strategic decision-making beyond individual grant lifecycles. The opportunities for future learning from this new data are enormous, with benefits for the wider humanitarian innovation ecosystem.

Elrha has improved its case study practice, complemented by portfolio-wide learning. Elrha has also made progress in developing a more standardised case-study methodology to document innovation journeys and outcomes, strengthening the consistency and usefulness of qualitative learning across the portfolio. MEAL and IM staff recognise the value that case studies offer, in particular in providing rich insights into how and why innovations develop and evolve, whilst also acknowledging the need to balance these narratives with broader, more systematic data collection. This includes portfolio-wide tracking and learning approaches that reduce reliance on highly engaged grantees and help to mitigate the risk of selection bias. Taken together, these complementary methods are intended to create a more robust, credible and useful evidence base as they become operationalised.

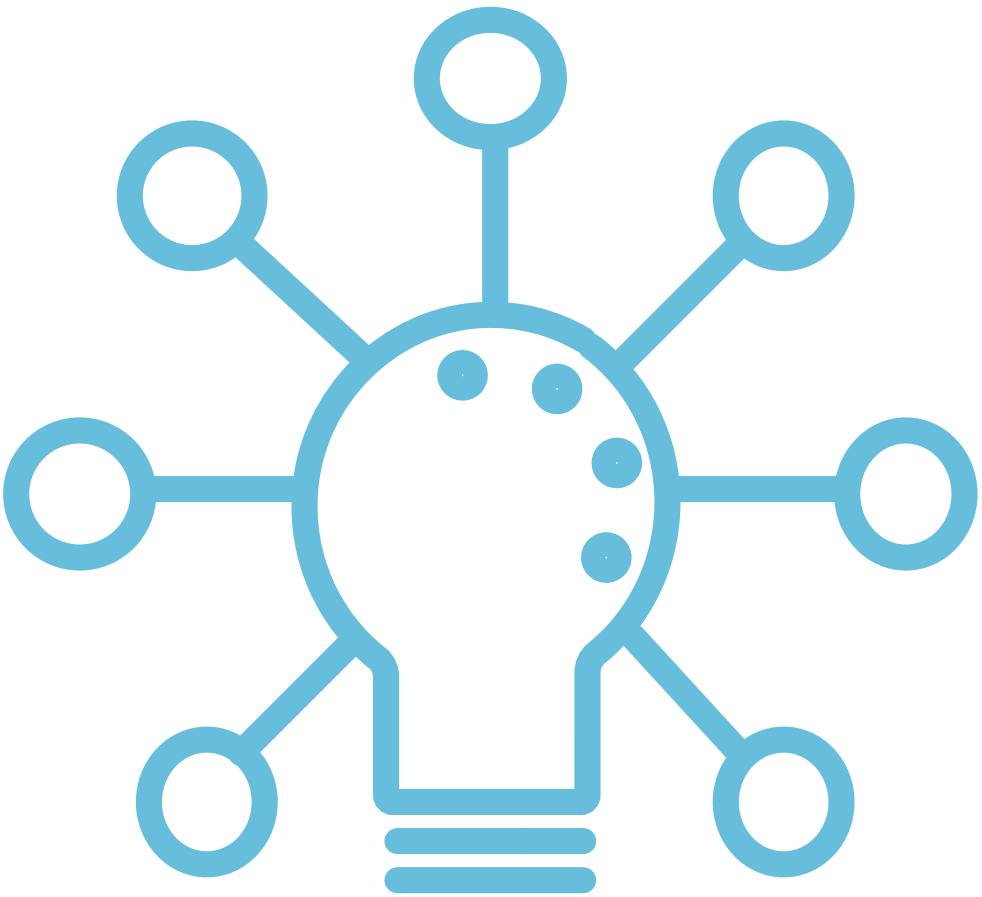
Elrha has developed a learning-informed VfM assessment for innovation. While VfM is essential for accountability, standard approaches are often poorly suited to humanitarian innovation, where learning, risk and long-term potential are integral to value. By developing a VfM framework tailored to humanitarian innovation, Elrha is responding to that important and widely shared challenge within the humanitarian sector. Rather than relying solely on narrow cost-efficiency metrics, the approach is inspired by a cost-benefit analysis to support proportionate, forward-looking judgements about potential value, including learning, risk reduction and system-level benefits. In doing so, it strengthens Elrha's ability to make more informed funding decisions, prioritise scarce resources and articulate the rationale for investing in early-stage or catalytic interventions. This serves to reinforce VfM as relevant both for individual grants, as well as the whole portfolio.

Elrha has strengthened MEAL alignment, purpose and consistency. Overall, the progress made in strengthening MEAL practice at both grant and portfolio level has been substantial and reflects a clear organisational commitment to learning, coherence and evidence use. At the same time, as Elrha continues to formalise and embed these changes, some challenges remain to be addressed.

These include:

- greater consistency of MEAL expectations across portfolios
- clearer and shared definitions (particularly around novelty, adoption and scale)
- a stronger alignment between grant-focused activities and strategic organisational goals.

Addressing these represents an important next phase of development, and will contribute to ensuring that MEAL continues to support innovation effectively whilst also generating meaningful portfolio-level and sector-wide learning.



Key findings and recommendtions

Key findings and recommendations

Many of the key findings point towards different possible directions that may be seen as divergent.

As such, the associated recommendations represent a selection of ideas and suggestions for future strategic direction and improvements in practice, but it is not necessarily intended that all recommendations should be pursued. It is noted that Elrha is already actively considering and scoping new initiatives which are likely to influence the relevance and appropriateness of many of these recommendations.

Given the current turbulence in the humanitarian sector and Elrha's own period of transition, the findings and recommendations should be interpreted through the lens of ongoing strategic choices. This approach supports Elrha in identifying which recommendations offer the greatest strategic value for its next phase of organisational development, informed by emerging long-term ambitions.

Strategic findings and recommendations

The following findings and gaps relate to what the HIF does and how it seeks to drive change.

Making explicit the HIF's logic of value creation

A recurring theme in this progress review is the absence of a clearly articulated and shared logic of how the HIF seeks to create value through its support for humanitarian innovation. The HIF's use of a staged development pipeline and the dominance of Product/Service + Process innovations in its portfolio indicate alignment with an R&D approach. But it is unclear to what extent related theories inform its worldview, and if it has considered how other disciplinary approaches might support its goals and objectives.

Recommendations

- Develop a shared organisational theory of change for humanitarian innovation that articulates how the HIF believes change happens – informed by existing disciplinary theories – and use it to guide MEAL priorities, portfolio architecture and call design.
- Design an innovation pathway based on this theory of change, and articulate how value is created at each stage. Ensure each relevant component reflects the purpose, risks and learning needs for each stage (eg, call design, application criteria, grantee support, grantee convening, learning expectations).

Finding the sweet spot for innovation

In shifting to thematic funding, the HIF rightly identified the issue of technology-driven 'solutions in search of a problem' that fail to address real needs. The HIF's problem-led approach and gap analyses have made a significant contribution to the sector. But the shift towards problem-led innovation across the WASH, GBV and DOAI portfolios has also risked pushing too far in the opposite direction, with narrowly-defined problems potentially closing down the space for transformative solutions and systems-oriented approaches. The AI portfolio demonstrates how a balance between challenge-led and solution-led approaches can be navigated, and offers potential lessons for Elrha.

Recommendation

- Explore piloting a dual-track call design that combines a clearly defined, challenge-led track with a more open, exploratory track focused on emergent, systems-oriented or highly creative solutions. This would allow Elrha to test, in a controlled way, how broader problem framing can stimulate novel approaches without losing alignment with humanitarian needs, drawing on learning from the AI portfolio.

Embedding a portfolio approach

While the HIF does not have a shared and consistent portfolio approach, it has experimented with many different ways of structuring funding calls, convening grantees, and generating and sharing learning. The HIF's current approach to portfolio management is characterised by individual, problem-led funding calls. This has resulted in collections of discrete projects that are unlikely to address the large-scale challenges faced by the sector. To increase the collective impact of the innovations supported, the HIF could articulate a clearer ambition for systems influence and the role it seeks to play in shaping the wider adoption environment. This might involve moving beyond a primary focus on individual grants toward systems-shaping strategies anchored in an explicit theory of change about how innovation adoption happens at scale.

Within such an ambition, HIF's role could evolve from its current model of supporting and convening projects to (potentially, in addition) acting as a system enabler and agenda-setter, supporting ecosystems of actors to work together toward shared transformational goals. This might include convening actors across the adoption pathway, using Elrha's evidence, learning and credibility to influence practice norms, incentives and decision-making processes that shape adoption.

Recommendations

- Develop portfolio-level strategies and accompanying roadmaps that articulate higher-level system problems, visions of the desired end-state and measurement frameworks, accompanied by a network analysis of relevant actors and connections.

- Consider integrating system mapping and actor analysis into the design of each thematic portfolio, identifying system gaps, enabling conditions and leverage points.
- Explore the feasibility of working with strategic partners to influence procurement practices, evidence standards and donor expectations that inform whether solutions are taken up by implementing organisations.
- Co-design funding calls with key actors to intentionally target an ecosystem (eg, considering shared capabilities, distinct problem spaces, standards, evidence, convening), as opposed to funding isolated projects.
- Create staff support guidance that outlines core expectations, support practices, boundaries and standards (eg, minimum touchpoints, areas of coaching, approaches to risk discussions), while retaining flexibility for contextual adaptation.

Shifting focus to the system of adoption

The HIF has made significant progress in shifting its perspective from the supply-side (the innovator) to the demand-side (the adopter), and exploring adoption in highly-challenging settings. To fully enable this shift, it will be critical to address adoption barriers at multiple levels.

At the sector level, this involves strategic work to influence procurement norms and negotiate shared evidence standards that currently fragment demand. At the organisational level, this includes navigating internal power dynamics, leadership buy-in, risk aversion and the competing incentives between field and headquarter teams. At the field level, this necessitates supporting the resource-intensive work of context-specific adaptation, ensuring solutions are culturally relevant and resilient to local operational realities like supply chain disruptions and infrastructure gaps. Addressing this requires the HIF to treat adoption not just as a technical transfer, but as a relational and political change process. At all levels, a systems perspective enables a view of the intended end-state and ensures that all capabilities, actors, connections and resources needed for success are incorporated.

Recommendations

- Create an organisation-wide adoption systems framework describing the multi-level conditions and systemic factors required for adoption and scale. This can then be used to structure funding calls, assess adoption readiness, guide grantee coaching,and shape influencing strategies.
- Develop an adoption influencing strategy, working in collaboration with other actors, such as innovation funders or global coordination/standards bodies, to address structural barriers and encourage enabling conditions.

- Embed political economy analysis into call design and grantee support to deepen influence on institutional change. This should include using tools to analyse the absorptive capacity of organisations, incentives, risk cultures, decision-making structures, and potential champions and blockers.
- Explore how to expand the adoption call matchmaking approach to help innovators access the broad mix of skills and experience, as well as connections to other actors, needed to address the different challenges along the innovation pathway.

Balancing evidence generation and scaling needs

The HIF's innovation support model is centred on evidence generation and validation as the core marker of progress, which reflects its implicit logic as a research-centred funder. However, what counts as good evidence can be contentious, and the emphasis on rigorous evidence can come at the expense of the relational and political work needed to support sustained scaling and end-to-end innovation journeys. There is an opportunity to resolve this tension by formalising the HIF's dual role: operating not only as a funder of rigorous evidence, but as a systemic enabler actively shaping the procurement, policy and partnership conditions required for long-term scale.

Recommendations

- Formalise the HIF's dual innovation identity as both evidence generator and system builder/shaper. This could include: building internal capability for system shaping by supporting staff to develop system-building skills (eg, political economy analysis, partnership brokering) and developing guidance and tools that help them to consistently balance rigorous evidence requirements with the relational, political and organisational support that innovators need to transition from validation to adoption and scale; exploring goals for different stages in innovation pathways that balance evidence rigour with system engagement and shaping; unpacking and articulating different expectations for grantees for different stages in innovation pathways; actively engaging key system actors in the learning journey across the whole portfolio more systemically to identify shared goals, disseminate learning and influence agendas; clear external branding and messaging around the HIF's identity and expanded value proposition.
- Consider introducing scaling system accompaniment plans from the early stages of innovation development that complement evidence plans and guide support beyond the grant period.

Living up to commitments

Excluding the HIF's support for CLIP, progress towards shifting the power and advancing localisation has been more limited. Qualitative interviews and grant data indicate that efforts to increase support for organisations based outside HICs have faced structural and operational constraints. These findings point to a potential tension in how the HIF defines and measures impact. Emphasis on delivery efficiency, compliance and risk management – often shaped by donor and accountability requirements – can make it more challenging to prioritise longer-term investment in local innovation capacity. Advancing localisation ambitions will therefore require continued reflection on how funding can balance short-term delivery outcomes with longer-term system and capability building goals for local actors.

Recommendations

- Develop a clear and unified localisation strategy across Elrha's innovation portfolio that includes explicit objectives, decision-making principles and minimum expectations for localisation within all grant-making streams.
- Embed these objectives into call design, assessment criteria and portfolio management practices to ensure consistency and accountability.
- Provide capacity-strengthening support alongside funding for individuals and teams from LMICs or other marginalised groups, including light-touch activities such as leadership coaching, organisational innovation readiness assessments, peer-learning alumni networks and micro-grants for organisational capability development.
- Simplify and streamline application and reporting requirements to increase accessibility for locally-led organisations. Offer tailored support and/or introduce light-touch entry points designed specifically for smaller, newer or under-resourced organisations.
- Expand multilingual access to Elrha's funding and learning materials. Provide multilingual application guidance to reduce barriers for non-English-dominant applicants, drawing on AI-enabled translation tools and human validation to manage resource constraints and ensure accuracy.
- Strengthen regional engagement and deepen relationships with local innovators through regionally based staff roles and/or strategic partnerships with trusted regional intermediaries to improve outreach, contextual understanding and ongoing accompaniment for local organisations.

Elevating and defining the HIF's leadership role

The HIF has established significant influence through its thought leadership and convening power, particularly within the WASH portfolio and through its recent work on scaling and AI guardrails. However, there is a clear opportunity to articulate and pursue a more ambitious strategic role. While widely respected for its evidence generation and convening capability, the HIF's leadership ambition is not yet clearly defined, limiting its ability to shape standards, influence donor agendas and steer sector-wide practices beyond its immediate grant-making.

By grounding its approach in a deeper analysis of the humanitarian innovation ecosystem (eg, identifying capability gaps, incentives, decision-making structures and connections between actors), Elrha can determine where it is uniquely positioned to add value. A clear statement of priority regarding its role, whether as a norm-setter, evidence steward or technical authority, would allow the HIF to sharpen its portfolio design and complement its funding with strategic efforts to shape the environment for responsible, high-impact innovation.

Recommendations

- Develop an ecosystem-informed leadership strategy that clarifies where the HIF aims to create impact, whether as a convener, evidence steward, norm-setter or thematic authority.
- Conduct an ecosystem analysis in each thematic area (WASH, AI, Scale, DOAI) to identify capability gaps, duplications, incentives, system bottlenecks/barriers and under-served actors.
- Informed by the above analysis, design leadership actions such as coordinated convenings, curated evidence synthesis, donor alignment work and strategic partnerships, learning from key successes such as the Elrha-funded EEHF.

Operational findings and recommendations

The following findings and gaps relate to the HIF's internal processes and how it operates.

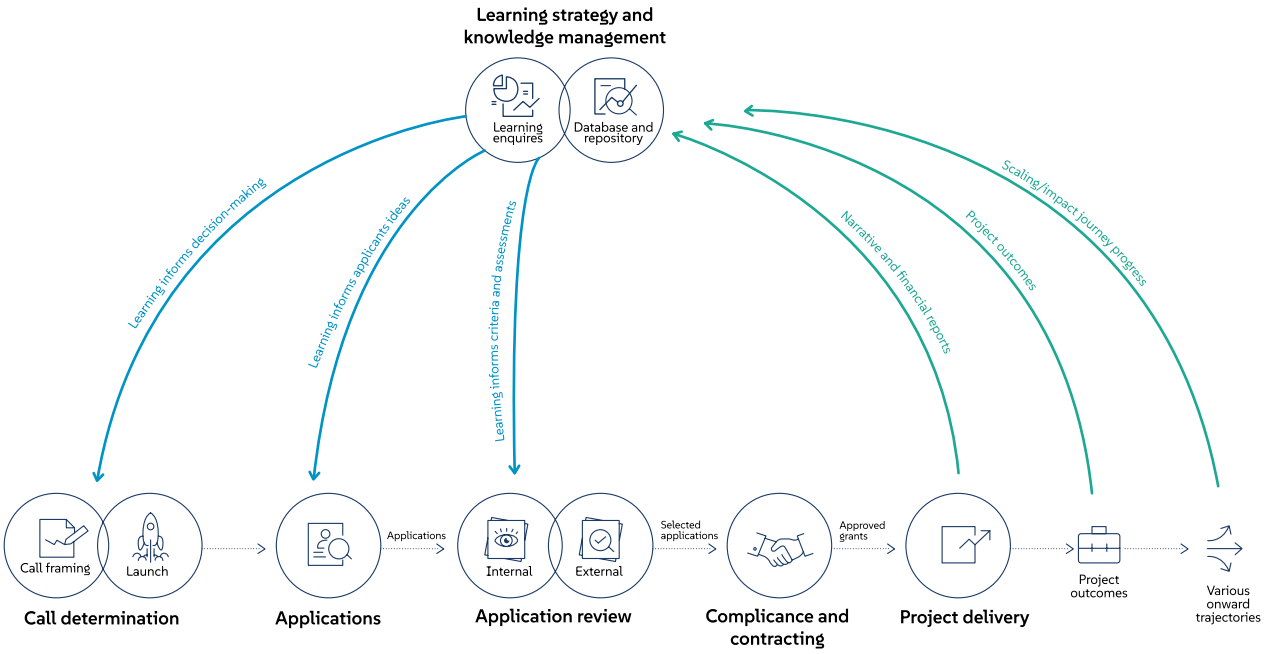
Supporting organisational learning processes

Approaches to learning from HIF processes vary, with much of the insight held informally by IMs rather than captured and shared systematically. As it stands, insights into the effectiveness of operational processes, such as the design of funding calls or the specific mechanics of decision-making, remain largely anecdotal. This reflects a combination of factors, including the absence of clearly shared learning priorities, limited mechanisms for drawing learning together and gaps in the collection of data aligned with learning questions. As a result, internal learning is not yet consistently captured in ways that can inform refinements to management approaches, limiting opportunities to drive improvements in efficiency and effectiveness.

Recommendations

- Create a structured organisational learning framework that includes learning goals for each call (informed by prior calls and strategic intent), processes for capturing staff and grantee reflections, decision logs, and brief post-call internal reviews.
- Establish intentional cross-portfolio mechanisms to synthesise learning and strengthen practice, such as quarterly cross-portfolio learning exchanges, shared innovation journey reviews and shared use of tools.

Below is a visual that demonstrates how the proposed longitudinal tracking processes could be integrated into a more holistic learning system within and between calls. This would be supported by a knowledge management infrastructure and practices (including a grant tracking repository and learning output database).



Building knowledge management infrastructure

A lack of investment in institutional knowledge management and systematic capture of strategic learning means that IMs frequently apply approaches independently, reducing opportunities for cross-portfolio alignment. The absence of a central mechanism to share practices, tools or methods developed within one portfolio means they could remain invisible to others, leading to duplicated effort and missed opportunities for learning. This creates a reliance on individual staff as the holders of institutional knowledge, making learning uneven and difficult to sustain across the organisation. There is a clear opportunity to develop more intentional internal knowledge architecture that bridges portfolio silos and enables the team to draw more consistently on collective experience through shared resources and learning assets.

Recommendations

- Develop a central knowledge management repository that stores key pieces such as strategy-related documents, call designs and rationales, portfolio histories, grantee data, case studies and tools.
- Develop a robust grant and innovation tracking system with clear staff responsibilities, building on the data collation exercise conducted as part of this research.
- Develop and implement shared templates and processes to support consistent documentation.

Operationalising key concepts

Attempts to learn within Elrha and collect relevant data are often stymied by a lack of common understanding and frameworks to analyse key concepts. Terms used frequently and considered strategically important concepts within the HIF, such as 'novelty', 'adoption', 'scale' and 'dissemination', do not have an agreed definition that can be operationalised for learning purposes. Establishing clear, operational definitions is therefore a prerequisite for coherent strategy and measurement. Improved efforts in this area could result in the creation of valuable tools and practices for the wider humanitarian sector.

Recommendations

- Develop organisational-wide operational definitions and corresponding measurement frameworks for key innovation concepts. Embed these into call design templates, MEAL guidance, reporting tools and dissemination products to coherently enable tracking of progress and reduce ambiguity for grantees and staff.
- Explore the distinction between challenge novelty and solution novelty proposed in this progress review and embed the Innovation Ambition Matrix into the design of funding calls and selection of grantees.

Defining and making visible grantee pathways

The HIF has made significant strides during this reporting period to provide opportunities for grantees to secure follow-on funding. However, lack of visibility and consistent availability of follow-on funding remain a significant operational challenge for grantees. Innovators often experience a patchwork of funding windows without a clear roadmap for progression from early-stage exploration to scale. This lack of an articulated pathway creates funding cliff-edges and results in a repeated loss of momentum. Addressing this requires explicit mapping of potential hand-offs, whether to internal scaling funds or external partners. By clarifying these transition points, Elrha can help bridge the 'valley of death' that frequently prevents successful pilots from traversing the gap to becoming sustainable solutions.

Recommendations

- Design and publish an HIF innovation pathway, mapping stages and corresponding funding opportunities, expectations, evidence thresholds and support mechanisms, and supported by existing case studies.
- Provide annual updates regarding planned funding calls, with appropriate caveats related to funding uncertainty, to better enable innovators to plan ahead.

- Work with other donors and philanthropic organisations in the humanitarian space to explore the possibility of mapping related funding opportunities and publishing joint funding plans.

Balancing agility and accountability

The HIF, and particularly the IMs, evidently have a high level of willingness to provide flexible support for grantees, recognising the challenges faced by innovators and the iterative and uncertain nature of the journey. However, these efforts are constrained by donor realities of short-term grants and budget cycles, compounded by a focus on upwards accountability and a tendency toward rigidity and compliance-centred processes. In turn, this restricts the adaptiveness and flexibility required for successful innovation. As a result, the IMs often function as a necessary buffer, absorbing the friction between the non-linear reality of innovation and the linear demands of donor reporting.

Recommendations

- Review and adapt grant management processes to allow for greater flexibility such as simplified reporting, adaptive work plans, and contingency funding allocations or changes.
- Provide guidance to staff that outlines acceptable adaptations and establishes a more consistent boundary between flexibility and compliance.
- Advocate with donors for funding windows that better align with innovation's non-linear nature and their support for more adaptive grant management processes.

Clarifying risk appetite

There is a clear gap in the explicit definition of the HIF's stance on innovation maturity and risk appetite across and within each portfolio. While the thematic areas engage with innovations at different stages of maturity, and risk appetite is articulated in some areas, a cross-organisational approach would be beneficial.

A clear definition of risk appetite would allow the HIF to consciously distribute resources between safe incremental improvements and higher-risk, transformative experiments, ensuring it meets its strategic ambition rather than drifting toward lower-risk choices by default. Standardising this approach would ensure that decisions to fund, or to stop funding, are based on a consistent organisational strategy rather than isolated judgement calls. This might include developing a formal risk framework, a maturity model with evolving measures and assessments of risk, and a structured approach to learning from failure that supports deep pivots by dedicated teams.

Recommendations

- Develop a cross-organisational risk framework and innovation maturity model that details expected risks at different stages, defines risk appetite, and provides guidance for IMs to discuss risk with grantees, donors and partners.
- Provide staff with tools to assess and discuss risk with grantees throughout the course of a grant, including risk-related learning mechanisms such as reflective notes, mid-grant pivot points or post-failure reviews.

Strengthening the monitoring of dissemination activities

Elrha invests in a wide range of learning products, grantee conference attendance, and other activities to increase the awareness of evidence and influence uptake of innovations. As there is currently no systematic approach for tracking how these resources are accessed, used or taken-up, Elrha has limited visibility into the influence and practical value of its dissemination work.

Establishing a simple, centralised system for monitoring dissemination (eg, standardised analytics, brief follow-up surveys for conference attendance or an evidence-of-use tracking method) would enable Elrha to understand which products drive engagement, which audiences they reach, and how they contribute to decision-making and adoption. Any such approach would need to be proportionate to the scale and purpose of dissemination grants, considering light-touch methods where feasible. Over time, a more deliberate dissemination monitoring framework would also strengthen Elrha's ability to demonstrate its sector influence, refine future influencing and communications strategies, and ensure that learning products are consistently aligned with audience needs.

Recommendations

- Establish a systematic approach for tracking the reach, use and influence of HIF learning products and sector-facing grant outputs.
- Introduce standard analytics dashboards, standard data collection (eg, follow-up surveys for event participation) and simple mechanisms for capturing evidence-of-use.
- Use the resulting data to refine dissemination strategies, strengthen the HIF's influencing strategies and ensure learning products meet audience needs.

Maintaining relationships with past grantees

Across portfolios, the HIF's relationships with past grantees remain largely informal, variable and dependent on individual IMs, resulting in uneven continuity of support and missed opportunities to harness long-term learning. The HIF increasingly reconnects with former grantees for dissemination products, adoption challenges or thematic convenings. However, this engagement is not embedded in a structured relationship-management approach, nor does it consistently prioritise understanding how innovations evolve beyond the grant period.

The absence of a systematic mechanism for maintaining ongoing relationships limits the HIF's visibility of innovation trajectories and weakens its ability to broker connections that could enable adoption or scale. It also risks creating a transactional dynamic in which contact centres on data requests rather than sustained accompaniment or strategic ecosystem-building. A clearer approach to post-grant relationship management would strengthen the HIF's influence, deepen its understanding of the innovation lifecycle and amplify the long-term impact of its investments.

Recommendations

- Leverage the proposed post-grant innovation tracking framework for managing grantee relationships as well as monitoring. Use it to explore emerging needs and opportunities and broker connections.
- Introduce a centralised grantee relationship tracker/database, using a lightweight CRM-style tool to record key contacts, milestones, adoption developments and follow-up actions. This ensures continuity despite staff turnover and enables cross-portfolio visibility.
- Establish a grantee alumni network or community of practice, centred around annual fora or a virtual network. This will allow former grantees to share progress, seek peer support, identify partnerships, and connect with donors or standards bodies facilitated by Elrha.
- Integrate post-grant relationship-building into innovation management roles by clarifying expectations for IMs to maintain relationships with former grantees. This would be supported by time allocation, guidance and internal recognition of this work as critical to achieving adoption and system influence.

Deep dives

Deep dive: WASH portfolio

Elrha's work on WASH innovation has been part of its foundation as an organisation since it was identified early on as a humanitarian theme ripe for new ideas and problem-solving attention.

Critically, Elrha recognised that the WASH space was populated with motivated actors keen to increase their impact as well as emerging new technologies that presented the possibility of more sophisticated and effective solutions. It also recognised that there were important problems which greatly threatened the lives and eroded the dignity of people affected by crises. These created positive conditions for exploring and testing new approaches and solutions. Whilst primarily an advisory and call design body, Elrha's WASH TWG has played an important bridging role between HIF-funded innovation and wider sector practice. It has acted as a space where evidence, emerging solutions, and operational challenges can be discussed and fed into Global WASH Cluster conversations, thereby strengthening the pathway from portfolio learning to broader system-level influence.

WASH is a broad and vital humanitarian problem space, incorporating access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene for people affected by humanitarian crises. It is in part challenging because it operates at the intersection of complex infrastructure (or the lack thereof), fragile contexts, changing climate, human behaviour and urgent life-threatening need. This complexity has necessitated an adaptive approach to innovation by Elrha – testing solutions, learning, connecting and convening actors simultaneously. Elrha has directed WASH grant-funding in different ways, and throughout this has fostered collaboration between researchers and practitioners to drive evidence-based approaches.

This deep dive into the WASH thematic innovation portfolio uses the Elrha 4D framework (Define, Develop, Distil and Drive) to explore and explain its progress and practice choices.[39]

1. Define

The WASH portfolio has been intentionally problem-led in its design. This approach has been structured largely around a rigorous gap analysis of humanitarian WASH practice, first produced in 2013[40] and then updated in 2021.[41] Both involved a document review, practitioner consultations and problem-exploration work to identify where existing tools and approaches were consistently falling short. The analyses were used to determine a shortlist of problems for directing innovation efforts towards, via grant-funding. In doing so, Elrha noted the interrelated and arbitrary lines of these determinations of problems but used this approach to support the development of more cogent applications.

The problem-led approach has been shared to inform broader practice. Elrha leveraged its investment in problem-directed innovation into a methodology, which was published to support others to use it. The Exploring Problems to Find Innovation Opportunities approach[42] encourages humanitarian practitioners to use innovation-familiar tools to develop rich, mixed methods insights to "identify opportunities where innovation could address real problems identified by the people who experience them". This approach has been applied by Elrha through its WASH Challenge briefings, as part of funding calls, eg, on handwashing,[6] surface water drainage[43] and sanitation in dense settlements.[44] These challenge briefings distil field evidence, practitioner insight and community perspectives into clearly articulated problem statements, which practitioners have been invited to respond to with applications for grants.

Elrha works closely with external experts to shape the portfolio. The gap analyses have been complemented by the expertise and insights of an Elrha-recruited TWG of WASH practitioners.[44] They have largely used these analyses to determine the priorities for the framing of grant funding calls. Early calls focused on priorities identified in the gap analysis, including handwashing (2016)[6], surface water drainage (2016)43, household water filters (2017)[45] and menstrual health management (2019). [46] The later call on incontinence management (2019)[47] was led more by the WASH TWG as an under-served and under-recognition problem area. This also reflected an increasing organisational strategic lens of inclusion of marginalised groups.

Elrha brought WASH innovation and research together to advance critical problem spaces. These funding calls were followed by a call designed specifically to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, which largely involved public health-related research and innovation projects, with some crossover into the WASH sector. More recently, Elrha undertook a global consultation to explore the intersection between WASH, climate change and public health. It concluded that there is an urgent need for climate-resilient WASH solutions that both tackle immediate vulnerabilities and build community resilience against future climate shocks. It also identified 11 priorities with the intention of guiding the humanitarian sector's WASH response[48].

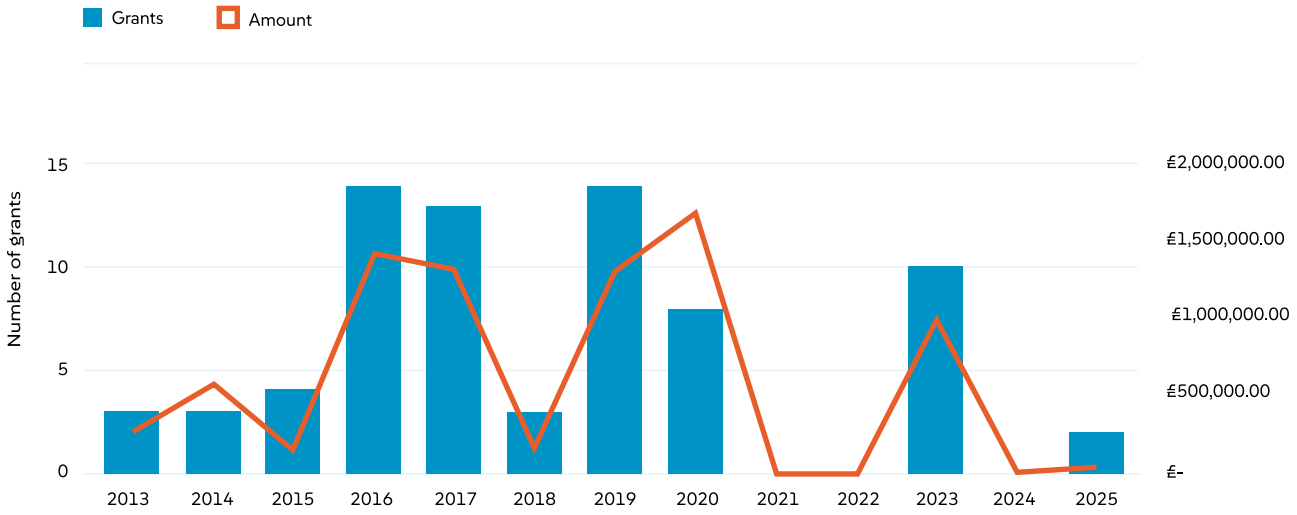
Our data supports the findings of the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022 that this problem-led, expert-informed approach has been a significant contribution of Elrha's to the humanitarian sector. The WASH portfolio has focused on validated problem spaces with clear sectoral relevance in order to frame how it directs its innovation funding.

2. Develop

From a solid footing of problem identification and understanding, Elrha's WASH portfolio has used Innovation Challenge calls and other grant-making mechanisms to support solutions along the innovation journey. These solutions included problem recognition and potential solution searching, piloting and testing solutions in labs and real-world contexts, and funding the integration of tested solutions within operational humanitarian organisations.

Since 2013	12 WASH-specific Innovation Challenges	47 solutions funded (with 38% receiving more than one grant)	74 grants disbursed, totalling £7,921,666 in value
Since HIF Evaluation 2019–2022	Five WASH-specific Innovation Challenges	Three new solutions funded; seven solutions receiving follow-up grants	12 grants disbursed, totalling £1,035,595 in value

Total number of WASH grants (n=74) and funding (n=£8m), per year



Top five supported WASH innovations

Innovation	Lead organisation/s	Number of grants	Total funding
Oxfam Handwashing Station	Oxfam	2	£541,888
Surprise Soap: Hidden Incentives for Handwashing	Save the Children; London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine	2	£511,954
Supertowel: Antimicrobial Towel	Real Relief; Stanford University	4	£393,396
Safe Water for Refugees: Water Quality and Child Health	MSF Netherlands; Dahdaleh Institute for Global Health Research	3	£356,905
Cocoon: Safe Spaces for Managing Menstruation	YLabs	1	£327,875

Below are some key challenges and ways in which Elrha has responded across its WASH innovation portfolio.

Elrha has provided support across the lifecycle of innovation for some promising WASH solutions. Elrha recognises that developing viable WASH solutions and generating supporting evidence can take many years – before even considering the multi-year challenge of adapting or deploying solutions into different contexts/organisations. In offering funding for challenges, evidence generation, and then scaling or adoption, Elrha has made real attempts at offering solutions a structured funding pathway. Consequently, it has supported some promising WASH innovations with multi-year technical iterations, field trials, and other forms of evidence generation and dissemination by supporting them to navigate their journey call-to-call.

Connecting grantees to each other – and to the wider humanitarian ecosystem – is an important part of its portfolio management. Elrha has connected grantees together, particularly within specific problem-frames, and created spaces for them to learn from one another. It provided funding for grantees to attend conferences and the EEHF event. It also provided funding in recent years to the EEHF directly in order to extend its programme to include an innovation showcase day. Its WASH Innovation Catalogues (produced in 2019 and updated in 2020)[15] and Adoption Challenge offer the potential for pathways for WASH innovators to connect with humanitarian implementing organisations (NGOs and agencies) that may then adopt and scale solutions.

Producing high-quality knowledge outputs contribute to the collective intelligence of the humanitarian WASH space. Elrha has invested considerably in outputs such as WASH problem analyses, the WASH Innovation Catalogue and WASH Challenges. These may act as connective tissue across the WASH portfolio, providing critical, verified tools/sources which support others to navigate and access this space as well as contribute to wider, shared knowledge.

3. Distil

A central function of Elrha's WASH portfolio has been to translate learning into accessible, practical resources and evidence for the wider sector.[49] In addition to the problem analyses already described above, below are key ways that Elrha has contributed to distilling in the humanitarian innovation WASH space.

Elrha has created innovation catalogues that summarise and provide accessible innovation project overviews. The WASH Innovation Catalogues (2019 and updated in 2020)[15] offer curated, practitioner-accessible sources of funded innovations, including what problem they address, where they've been tested and what kind of adoption they're ready for. These catalogues are unique in the sector and highlight solutions actively looking for partnership, either to test at large scale, or to adopt and integrate into new contexts. They also present an important opportunity to make the case for WASH innovation and highlight Elrha's substantial investment in this space. The support from the Global WASH Cluster in this initiative is a demonstration of the importance of Elrha's ongoing relationship with this body. It's also an important way that Elrha distils its efforts into wider spaces, leveraging this enormous network and professional credibility.

Elrha shares methodological and operational guidance to improve the volume and quality of innovation. Since its inception, Elrha has produced and widely shared tools and guidance that support humanitarian innovation as a practice. In particular, the Humanitarian Innovation Guide provides process guidance on defining problems, designing, testing and scaling innovations, and offers WASH case studies throughout to support its understanding and applicability. In producing detailed handbooks for both the WASH Evidence Challenge (2019)[50] and the WASH Adoption Challenge (2021),[51] Elrha sets out a clear description of the problem and accompanies this with criteria and expectations for teams. By doing so, Elrha offers detailed how-to guidance for rigorous practice. The WASH Evidence Challenge highlights gaps in WASH evidence needs and provides funding that is targeted at generating "robust research studies that generate practical, comparative evidence around HIF-funded WASH innovations".

Elrha has identified and addressed shared structural barriers to innovation progress. It has recognised that for product innovations in its WASH portfolio, barriers to uptake and adoption are built into the processes and policies set out within humanitarian organisations. It produced a report that explored how procurement policies, relationships and practices can impede (or enhance) scaling of solutions humanitarian WASH innovations.[52]

Across these different activities and products, Elrha has placed an emphasis on distilling solutions and knowledge, as well as usability:

- Complex study findings are translated into key messages positioned for action (such as when and where to use, and the consideration of trade-offs).
- Innovation summaries are brought together to support potential partnership uptake.
- Evidence generation is incentivised in a targeted and high-rigour approach.

4. Drive

Elrha normalises problem-driven, evidence-oriented innovation. By consistently requiring a strong definition of a problem, inclusive engagement of users and a clear learning plan, Elrha has helped build expectations of what WASH innovation looks like in the humanitarian space. This has been strengthened with practice guidance aimed at a wider audience than its grantees (or applicants) alone.

It tackles systemic barriers to scale. Since its inception, a key lesson for Elrha has been the range and number of barriers to impact that solutions face when scaling, or even progressing, beyond the pilot stage. With this in mind, Elrha has strongly driven evidence generation as a key part of its support to innovations. The Too Tough to Scale? report[35] and subsequent Scaling series[36] unpack a number of barriers to scaling innovations, many of which are highly relevant to WASH (eg, fragmentation of demand across different implementing organisations, and risk-adverse and rigid procurement processes).

Elrha puts partnership at the centre to drive adoption. The design of specific funding calls such as the WASH Adoption Challenge[51] recognises the need to go beyond evidence to drive solutions into the broader sector. It directly funded implementing agencies to trial Elrha-funded and tested WASH innovations in active humanitarian programmes, with the expectation that successful solutions will be sustained. Critically, it published its learnings, highlighting the various different factors at play that require attention, including security considerations, language and cultural barriers, and the broad resource needs. In doing so, it shares a potentially replicable approach that other funders may consider.

It shapes forward-looking agendas. Through the climate-change WASH research and innovation agenda, Elrha convened researchers, practitioners and policymakers to set sector-wide priorities, positioning innovation as a key lever for climate-resilient WASH systems in crises. In this way, Elrha is bringing different stakeholder groups together to explore the potential action and alignment of priorities around emerging challenges, and position innovation as central to a necessary response.

Elrha connects humanitarian actors via different mechanisms. Elrha plays a central convening role in humanitarian WASH by bringing together innovators, researchers, practitioners and policymakers around clearly defined problem areas and shared evidence needs. Through mechanisms like the WASH Innovation Challenges, the WASH Innovation Catalogue and the EEHF,[14] it creates spaces where operational realities, research insights and new solutions are explored together.

In addition, Elrha staff are frequently invited to participate in an advisory capacity across the sector (eg, through contributing to research, speaking at conferences and facilitating workshops). This helps to extend Elrha's influence into wider knowledge-sharing domains, likely informing innovation and other thematic practice. Together, this convening power helps align innovation with real-world demand, match potential partnerships for adoption and disseminate promising WASH solutions across the wider humanitarian system.

Spotlight on the EEHF[14]

The EEHF is an annual event that provides a rare and valued opportunity to bring together WASH innovators, researchers and policymakers. They discuss and explore the latest research and most promising humanitarian WASH innovations, as well as related practice.

Scheduled intentionally straight after the Global WASH Cluster annual meeting, the EEHF benefits from the presence of senior technical leads, donors, NGOs and UN agencies already convened for coordination processes. This timing allows the Forum to act as a bridge between coordination and innovation, ensuring that emerging research and promising innovations are discussed within the same ecosystem that sets global WASH priorities and technical standards.

The EEHF brings actors together around four core objectives:

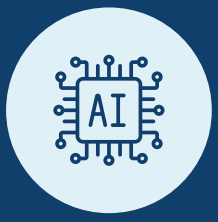
- share new research and learning from humanitarian WASH programmes
- discuss new approaches and innovations that would benefit populations affected by or at-risk of humanitarian crises
- identify research gaps and generate research questions at a practice, policy and research level for humanitarian WASH
- build new partnerships with donors, practitioners and researchers.

Elrha has played a pivotal role in the EEHF's growth, inclusivity and continuity. Funding and strategic support from Elrha have helped the event remain accessible to a wider range of perspectives, particularly those often excluded from global technical conversations.

Elrha's funding has:

- allowed researchers from LMICs to participate
- enabled many WASH innovations to showcase their evidence to targeted and relevant audiences
- strengthened the evidence and innovation culture more broadly within the humanitarian WASH space.

The EEHF has become a crucial platform for strengthening the humanitarian WASH ecosystem, and Elrha's stewardship has been fundamental to its continued relevance and reach. This reflects Elrha's strategic choice and capability to act as a key convener, shaping the direction of humanitarian WASH innovation research, practice and policy.



Deep dive: AI portfolio

AI promises to reshape the way humanitarian organisations and communities anticipate, prepare for and respond to crises.

Given the scale, complexity and growth of unmet humanitarian needs, this is too important to leave to chance. By launching an AI-focused thematic portfolio in 2023, Elrha acted to explore AI's underutilised potential through experimentation centred on evidence-led learning that recognised both the opportunities and the risks.

Following consultations with a range of actors in the sector, in 2023, Elrha (working with the UKHIH) launched its first challenge focused on the rapidly emerging opportunities presented by AI.[53] This began with an AI for Humanitarians funding call with the selection of ten grantee teams from a diverse range of humanitarian organisations. This was followed up by a funding call which enabled three of the teams to test and begin developing their resulting concepts.

1. Define

Elrha has framed its AI portfolio by exploring the real-world problems in humanitarian response that AI could help address, and where is it unsuitable or too risky? This problem-led approach was central to the AI Learning Journey, which regularly convened humanitarian practitioner grantees with experts that included technologists and data ethicists. They interrogated AI's potential to think critically and address identified problems as part of a guided learning journey. The AI Learning Journey explored barriers such as data scarcity, bias in training datasets and ethical risks, as well as built foundational knowledge around key components of AI such as large language models (LLMs).

Participants identified common problem areas such as:

- handling large volumes of unstructured, multilingual or incomplete data
- analysing complex data patterns to inform anticipatory action
- supporting decision-makers with faster and trusted situational insight
- reducing manual burdens on field teams through lightweight automation.

This framing and carefully designed process influenced how participants approached solution design. Participants became more reflective and cautious in their use of AI, with greater attention to ethical risks, data limitations and the potential impacts on people living in humanitarian contexts – for some, changing their ideas significantly. The Learning Journey encouraged critical judgement

about when AI was appropriate, and when alternative or more human-centred approaches were needed, rather than defaulting to technological solutions.

A synthesis of the grantees' learning was produced which highlighted both technical and non-technical considerations.

These included:

- the foundational importance of consistent and high-quality data and its governance
- uncertainty about when and whether AI adds value compared to traditional methods
- structural risks to communities around exclusion, privacy and algorithmic bias.

Elrha used this learning to inform the design of the subsequent grantee support and non-financial support, leading to the contracting of technical expert partners to provide significant direct technical mentorship.

By designing this call based on building capabilities and knowledge relevant to specific problems, Elrha ensured that subsequent grant applications were grounded in real-world problems seen through an ethics lens, rather than AI-driven enthusiasm and opportunism.

2. Develop

Elrha has so far invested in three solutions for this nascent thematic portfolio as a result of its AI for Humanitarians: Further Development Grant call, with a total of £330,122. All three have been selected intentionally, as they were not community-facing, and instead were directed at organisational or systemic-internal facing solutions which presented fewer ethical risks.

Since 2024	1 Learning Journey	10 solutions developed	13 grants disbursed, totalling £380,122

Top three supported AI innovations

Innovation	Lead organisation	Number of grants	Total funding
Artificial Intelligence Needs Assessment Assistant (AINAA): AI-Powered Needs Assessments	International Medical Corps	2	£75,000
EpiAI: Improving Response to Disease Outbreaks in Humanitarian Settings	Epicentre	2	£75,000
Optimizing Aid Supply Chain with Local Insights	IFRAD	2	£75,000

Rather than rushing pilot development into a six-month grant window, the emphasis was on responsible exploration, enabling teams to deepen their understanding of their AI-enabled solution's feasibility and generate potentially validating evidence. This included practice undertaken by grantees such as testing AI-enabled tools in controlled, internal settings with humans in the loop. This allowed teams to assess performance, trust and decision-support value before any consideration of broader deployment or community-facing use. Central to this was adherence to clear ethical guidelines, ensuring that validation and ethics were coupled strongly together (see Spotlight on Elrha's ethical guidance for AI innovations).

As a new technical area for Elrha, it recognised the need to provide grantees with technical expertise in the form of structured mentorships throughout the grant period, and contracted DFS to fulfil this.[54]

3. Distil

A key strength of Elrha's AI portfolio is its commitment to creating clear, actionable learning outputs. Insights from the Learning Journey were synthesised into an accessible learning output aimed at supporting the broader humanitarian community.[55] This will be followed by a similar output reflecting the further development-funded solutions. The learning materials are also being developed into a freely accessible MOOC aimed at scaling this knowledge-building opportunity within the wider humanitarian sector. The ethical guidance produced may also contribute to an expanding practice-centred knowledge base in the wider humanitarian sector (see Spotlight on Elrha's ethical guidance for AI innovations).

Spotlight on Elrha's ethical guidance for AI innovations[53]

As part of its AI Challenge, Elrha developed a work-in-progress set of ethical guidelines for humanitarian AI, drawing on UN, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and EU Artificial Intelligence Act standards. Included in the Humanitarian AI Further Development Call Handbook, these guidelines supported proposed AI solutions to be safe, fair and human-centred.

This guidance helps to position Elrha as a sector leader on humanitarian AI innovation, offering a practical, responsible framework for humanitarian actors navigating AI's rapid expansion and exciting potential.

Guiding principles (summarised)

Elrha requires all AI projects to demonstrate:

- that they do no harm and offer clear added value over non-AI alternatives
- privacy, safety and strong data governance
- bias mitigation and fairness
- human oversight and explainability
- inclusive and participatory design
- coordination with existing initiatives to avoid duplication.

The guidance also clearly sets out the AI use cases and contexts which Elrha currently excludes from the funding opportunity due to their level of presented risk. In doing so, it highlights the significant need for addressing the evolving gap in safeguards for humanitarian AI innovation in the wider sector.

4. Drive

Elrha's work has focused on enabling the humanitarian system to benefit from AI responsibly. This has involved contributing to shaping norms, strengthening capacity and building confidence within the sector.

The research data has highlighted that Elrha has played a trusted sense-maker role by helping organisations navigate hype, assess feasibility and make informed decisions about integrating AI. Elrha's leadership in responsible AI is likely to be helping shape sector expectations around ethics, transparency and risk mitigation.

Building from this clear foundation, Elrha (through the leadership of the UKHIH) has invested in the NetHope AI Lighthouse[30]. Recognising that limited pilots cannot transform systems alone, Elrha's provision of funding to this complementary initiative will strengthen sector-wide capability, shared learning and responsible practice. This partnership is likely to accelerate cross-sectoral experimentation and build the (urgently needed) collective foundations needed for responsible and scalable humanitarian AI.

Elrha's early work in humanitarian AI has revealed a clear opportunity for the organisation to play a more confident sector leadership role in a rapidly evolving, important opportunity space which lacks key cross-sectoral capabilities. Elrha has a unique position in the sector to leverage its credibility in evidence generation, responsible innovation and problem-led approach for the benefit of an important, potentially sector-shifting opportunity. The development of the MOOC signals a shift in this direction as Elrha tests scaling its influence in this important space beyond funded cohorts and directly strengthens sector-wide capability.

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Annex

Research matrix

Objectives	Key questions	Sub-questions
HIF Evolution To understand what the HIF has funded, and how and why this has evolved over time. This will include exploring the types of innovations funded and what was new about them, as well as the degree to which the HIF has developed a portfolio approach.	1. What has the HIF funded? This is mostly a descriptive review of the HIF portfolio from its start and since the last evaluation to identify changes and recent trends in the portfolio.	a. How many innovations has the HIF supported? b. What is the breakdown of HIF-supported innovations by type? c. What is the breakdown of HIF-supported innovations by thematic area (WASH, DOAI, AI, Scale)? d. How many grants have been made by thematic area (WASH, DOAI, AI, Scale) and for what amounts? e. How did the HIF support these innovations? f. How many innovations have been supported by more than one HIF grant? g. What is the breakdown of HIF-supported grants by stage of journey? h. What key trends can be identified since the last evaluation in the distribution and type of support provided by the HIF? i. How, if at all, has HIF funding been able to respond to the changing contexts and conditions of grantees?
	2. To what extent has the HIF developed a portfolio that is greater than the sum of its parts?	a. To what extent have funding decisions been guided by an intention to build a portfolio of projects? b. To what extent have grantees been given opportunities to meet each other, learn from each other, and build longer-term collaborations and/or a community of practice? c. To what extent have insights and learning from different grants been synthesised and used as a body of knowledge for advocacy or other purposes? d. How does this vary by area (WASH, DOAI, Al and Scale)?

	3. What was new about the innovations funded by the HIF?	a. What do HIF grants reveal about how novelty is demonstrated in the portfolio as a whole? b. What is the breakdown of HIF-supported grants by degree of novelty?
Innovation Journeys To explore the trajectories of the innovations funded. The progress update will seek to understand what happened to HIF innovations after the end of funding and the extent to which attempts to promote their adoption were successful.	4. What happened to HIF innovations after the end of funding?	a. What are post-grant tracking and contacting practices? b. What does the HIF know about innovations post-grant closing, and how much data is available? c. Where are the gaps in information, and why? d. How does data availability and practice vary by thematic area (WASH, DOAI, Al and Scale)?
	5. How successful were the HIF's attempts to promote the adoption of innovations?	a. How appropriate were the HIF's efforts to support dissemination (notably dissemination grants)? b. What is known about the reach and use of dissemination products? c. How appropriate were the HIF's efforts to support adoption (notably adoption challenges)? d. How many HIF innovations have been adopted, and how did this vary by theme, type of crisis and any other trends? e. What other approaches could be integrated by the HIF to support the adoption of innovations in standards setting and donor decision-making processes?
Living Up to Commitments To reflect on HIF support of commitments to shifting the power and localisation.	6. To what extent has the HIF supported commitments to shifting the power and localisation?	a. What is the breakdown of HIF-supported grants by location and type of organisation? b. What intentional efforts have been made to make funding mechanisms more accessible to organisations from the Global South and local organisations? c. What intentional efforts have been made outside of the grant-making function to support organisations from the Global South and local organisations?

Sharing and Learning To explore convening, connecting, monitoring and learning. This will offer insights into the role played in convening and connecting innovation actors, sharing learning and generating internal learning.	7. What role has the HIF played to convene and connect humanitarian innovation actors (among themselves and within the broader humanitarian system)?	a. What activities have been undertaken to convene and connect humanitarian innovation actors among themselves and with the broader humanitarian system? b. What were the different purposes of these activities and what role was Elrha playing? c. Can any specific examples of strong, HIF-facilitated relationships be identified from these activities?
	8. What steps has Elrha taken to strengthen its MEAL system as recommended by the HIF Evaluation 2019–2022?	
Cross cutting Recommendations and lessons learned	9. What recommendations can Elrha, generally, take forward from this progress update?	a. Which, if any, good practices and lessons learned can be identified?

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