



Humanitarian  
innovation fund

| **elrha**

---

# EVALUATION RESPONSE: LEARNING FROM FIVE YEARS OF ACTION

SEPTEMBER 2017

---

In 2016, Elrha commissioned an external evaluation of its Humanitarian Innovation Fund (the HIF). Five years on from the HIF's inception, this Evaluation represents a key moment for reflection on our performance.



The Evaluation, conducted by Triple Line between December 2016 and June 2017, covers the period from the launch of the HIF in early 2011 to December 2016. Its purpose is to provide accountability to our stakeholders through an independent assessment of the HIF's performance; to support learning about the effectiveness of our own processes and to contribute to our strategic development.

Elrha welcomes this opportunity for a formal review of the HIF. We believe in the importance of robust evaluation for improving how we work and helping us maximise our value to the humanitarian sector.

We have written this response to share our learning from the Evaluation and to set out the actions we will take. Our commitment is not only to learn, but to continue to improve as a result.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Elrha's VISION is of a world equipped to mitigate the negative impacts of humanitarian crises. It's MISSION is to improve humanitarian outcomes through partnership, research and innovation.

Through the [Humanitarian Innovation Fund](#), we aim to support organisations and individuals to identify, nurture and share innovative and scalable solutions to the challenges facing effective humanitarian assistance.

GBP 9.5M  
109  
INNOVATIONS

In the period covered by the Evaluation, we have committed GBP 9.5m in grants and funded a total of 109 innovations, mostly through our core grant programme. We have also awarded grants through our thematic programmes on innovation in humanitarian WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) and GBV (Gender Based Violence) and, more recently, to accelerate the Journey to Scale.

Innovation is a complex challenge, requiring more than just finance to 'succeed'. We have also provided support through targeted research and problem exploration, innovation management and partnership brokering, as well as evidence and advocacy for 'what works' in humanitarian innovation.

## INTRODUCTION

The HIF was established with funding from the UK Government (DFID) and has since been additionally funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (now Global Affairs Canada), the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO).

Our donors have enabled us to develop the programme significantly over the past five years.



Funded by  
European Union  
Civil Protection and  
Humanitarian Aid



Ministry of Foreign Affairs



This Evaluation was funded by the UK Government (DFID).

**DONOR SUPPORT**

# WHERE WE DID WELL



The HIF did an excellent job of supporting innovation through grant-making and did well at supporting it through learning and advocacy. From 2011 to end 2016, the HIF emerged as a leader in grant-making for humanitarian innovation, and provided structured finance to a variety of innovations at different stages of development along with valuable additional support, which was often indispensable to evolving innovations.



– The Humanitarian Innovation Fund  
External Evaluation, 2017. p18



- We are **proud** the Evaluation reveals our **strong performance** and **effectiveness** in supporting innovation through grant-making: that our grants to over 100 innovation projects ‘**contributed clearly to increasing humanitarian innovation in the system**’ and that several of our funded projects ‘**made notable impacts on humanitarian action and people affected.**’
- The Evaluation also recognises our **research, learning activity** and **influential advocacy** and concludes we have made ‘**substantial contributions to humanitarian innovation**’ as a result.
- We welcome the conclusion that our processes were managed both ‘**effectively and efficiently.**’
- We agree the HIF has operated with a relatively ‘**lean structure**’ to date and that more resources are necessary for us to achieve our **maximum impact.**

# WHERE WE NEED MORE FOCUS



*The Fund did not effectively engage all its grantees in learning activities, and remained limited in its ability to systematically collect, synthesize, and disseminate lessons learned from across projects to support wider humanitarian innovation practice.*

– The Humanitarian Innovation Fund  
External Evaluation, 2017. p45



- We agree with the Evaluation that ‘generating reliable evidence, supporting wider learning, and meeting expectations of large-scale change’ is something we can do more of >>> We have effectively captured some of our learning on the conditions that make for a successful innovation in our More Than Just Luck report. However, we have not yet had capacity to engage all our grantees in learning activities to systematically collect, synthesize, and disseminate lessons learned from across all our projects.
- We recognise there is limited evidence to date to assess our impact on the humanitarian system. We need to work collectively with others to address this wider challenge for all those working on innovation in our sector.
- We agree there is room for further improvement and streamlining of our application process and grant management procedures >>> We believe we can make some of our processes more efficient. Over the last six months, we have been working hard to address any inefficiencies and balance resources for a smooth experience for our grantees, while still maintaining robustness in project selection.
- The Evaluation recommends our strategy would benefit from further formalisation, rebalancing, and adjustment to a changed context >>> We wholeheartedly agree. In fact, this Evaluation is a central pillar in a planned process to review and refresh our programme for the next phase of our work. We will be formalising and sharing this later in the year.

# CHANGES WE WILL MAKE



The Evaluation sets out **seven recommendations**  
and we are committed to meeting them.

Here, we highlight what we are **already changing**  
and what we **still need to work on.**

---

# CHANGES WE WILL MAKE

1 Develop and articulate a formal strategy to guide the HIF's activity from 2018 to 2023



The Elrha team and HIF Board are developing an ambitious new strategic direction for the HIF. We are excited about exploring and testing this and sharing it publicly later this year



2 Conduct a review of the evolving humanitarian context for the HIF's activity



This strategic development process has actively engaged us in mapping emerging trends, activity and actors in humanitarian innovation. Our future strategic direction will be informed by Elrha's Global Prioritisation Exercise (GPE), which is systematically mapping global activity in research and innovation and facilitating the identification of shared priorities for further action.



3 Rebalance the HIF's grantmaking activities to continually maximise our impact



We have the skills, knowledge and evidence base to support the innovation process end-to-end. Through our grant-making we will focus on where we can maximise our impact. A rebalance with our new strategic direction will mean we will:

- Take more time to understand the problems innovation can address
- Further explore taking innovation to scale
- Proactively address the current over-emphasis on product innovation
- Encourage and enable applications from a greater diversity of humanitarian actors





# CHANGES WE WILL MAKE

## 4 Review and streamline specific aspects of the HIF's grant management processes

A period of operational review and planning, aligned to our new strategic direction, will take place between September and December 2017. This will build on significant process improvements already undertaken over recent months; for example our new Mandatory Operating Procedures for grant management.

## 5 Expand learning about innovation management to a wider community of innovation actors

The HIF is already working to build capacity in innovation management in the humanitarian sector. Our new strategic direction will include a focus on creating new tools and evidence to enable others to be successful innovators. We will actively build collaborations and work with key partners and networks to maximise dissemination.

This includes the development of a much needed innovation guide for humanitarians, funded by ECHO.

We plan to dedicate more resources to actively share learning and information in order to drive change and make humanitarian innovation more effective.

# CHANGES WE WILL MAKE

## 6 Devise and implement a purpose-built monitoring and evaluation system for the HIF

We have already established a strategic partnership with the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) to improve Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) across our programme.

- Our new strategic direction will include a new overarching M&E framework. We will specifically aim to generate new evidence to foster successful innovation in the humanitarian context. We will maximise our ability to systematically draw on and leverage learning from our evolving grants portfolio.

Improving outcomes for and collaboration with crisis-affected people are part of Elrha's Core Values and at the heart of our work.

We have established our first regional partnership with ADRRN (Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network), connecting us up to local and national NGOs working closely with disaster-affected communities in Asia and the Pacific.

## 7 Connect more with people affected and engage them in the innovation process

By taking a more context-based approach, and exploring appropriate innovation methods (for example user-centred design) we will encourage better engagement of affected populations in the innovation process itself.

- Through our reporting requirements, we will make sure our grantees connect up to the needs of emergency affected populations throughout the innovation process.

# WHAT NEXT?

“*The HIF is very relevant to humanitarian innovation requirements, and continues to offer added value and key strengths compared to other humanitarian innovation actors.*”

– The Humanitarian Innovation Fund  
External Evaluation, 2017. p41

The period 2018–2020 is an important time for us.

By the end of 2017, our new strategic direction and operational plan will be in place, responding to the Evaluation and the evolving context in which we find ourselves. We will begin to transition to a new phase of our work, one that further increases the impact of innovation in the humanitarian sector by addressing the next generation of innovation challenges.

In six months' time we will be visited by the Chair of our independent Evaluation Panel to assess our progress against the conclusions and recommendations from the Evaluation. The findings of this visit will be shared publicly to detail our progress and where further attention and work is needed.

As Elrha, we are open to continuous learning about our programmes and ways of working and constantly strive to improve.

“The three key skills underlying innovation are creativity, learning and adaptation. Many people assume the most important is creativity, but in my experience learning and the use of learning to adapt is what really drives original ideas forward. That makes this Evaluation particularly important. This deep evidence-based reflection will enable the HIF to continue its role as an *innovator of innovation*.”

– Dan McClure,  
*Chair, Humanitarian Innovation Fund Board*