

CREATING
HOPE
IN CONFLICT:

A HUMANITARIAN
GRAND CHALLENGE

INNOVATION ADOPTION STRATEGY 2023-2028

DECEMBER 2023



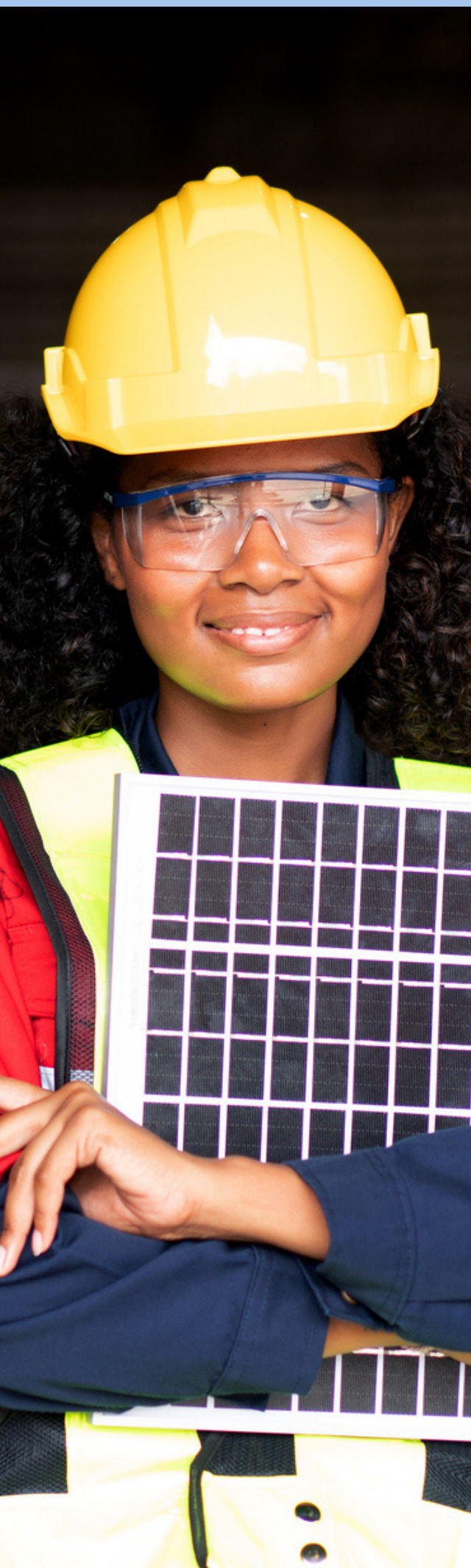
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As we completed the first Humanitarian Grand Challenge (HGC) five-year strategy, we began identifying lessons learned and aspirations for broadening the impact of our work. Over the past half-decade, humanitarian needs have only increased due to natural disasters and conflict, so this strategy focusses on ways to both accelerate and broaden the reach of HGC innovations.

The multiple compounding factors that impede adoption of humanitarian innovations have been well documented in the literature. The challenges of power dynamics, perverse incentives, risk aversion, resource shortages, and trust gaps have been confirmed in the interviews that informed development of this strategy. Innovation adoption beyond the scope of initial grant agreements is occurring and can be accelerated. Conversations with leading humanitarian practitioners and innovation supporters have identified some areas of enthusiasm for adopting HGC-funded innovations. HGC can speed up adoption and scaling by replicating proven partnership-building tactics deployed by the HGC itself, other innovation support platforms in the ecosystem, and other Grand Challenges Canada (GCC) programs: this is despite the fact that the conflict-affected contexts that HGC focuses on add to the difficulty of the HGC innovation uptake.

While HGC desires a systematic approach to partnerships, the specific barriers to innovation adoption vary among and within the 20 organizations that dominate global humanitarian aid. This strategy predominantly focuses on aid agency collaboration, as these agencies are preferred partners of innovators. Private-sector and government partners are also included – both featured more prominently in GCC's Public and Private Sector Scale and Sustainability Strategies.

While major (i.e., multi-agency and/or multi-country full-scale) adoption is the highest ambition of HGC, real-life use of innovations is a major success in itself

and is already happening for many Transition to Scale (TTS) stage innovations.¹ HGC's humanitarian innovation platform peers consider success to include what others might consider less lofty outcomes, such as a field pilot or additional funding secured by innovators. HGC has shown success across multiple indicators, and there is potential for even greater achievements. HGC's peers conveyed great eagerness to further collaborate.

The HGC 2023-2028 Innovation Adoption Strategy has three elements:

- The first centers around a supply-driven, responsive, and systematic collaboration with potential adoption partners.
- The second represents an expansion of focus beyond supplying a portfolio of innovations towards better responding to demand by helping aid agencies to adapt and remove the process, procurement, and political barriers to change.
- The third strategic direction centers around improved Knowledge Management and Translation (KMT) activities, persuading public- and private-sector entities of the impact of innovations, as well as using events and publications to inform and influence the humanitarian system.

Each of the three elements will require additional financial and human resources.

This strategy is designed to increase the adoption rate of the innovations HGC supports in order to maximize their opportunity to scale and sustainability, and to improve the humanitarian system.



Photo Source: Altech

¹ Uptake and/or adoption efforts have been underway for CHIC-funded innovators such as: Field Ready, Nuru, Energy Peace Partners, Sehat Kahani, Rainmaker, White Helmets, and Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team.

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GLOSSARY

ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
CHIC	Creating Hope in Conflict: A Humanitarian Grand Challenge
CRM	Customer Relationship Management (software)
Elrha	Enhanced Learning & Research for Humanitarian Assistance (Humanitarian Innovation Fund)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
GCC	Grand Challenges Canada
GSMA	Global System for Mobile Communications Association
HGC	Humanitarian Grand Challenge
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross
INGC	International Non-Governmental Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KMT	Knowledge Management and Translation
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
M4H	Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation (a GSMA program)
MAP	Medicine for All People
NEAR	Network for Empowered Aid Response
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA	(United Nations) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
TTS	Transition to Scale
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
WHO	(United Nations) World Health Organization

OVERVIEW

Since its inception in 2018, the Humanitarian Grand Challenge (HGC) has supported 76 innovations, 20 of which are at the Transition to Scale (TTS) stage. Many of these innovations are currently being implemented and adopted to address pressing humanitarian challenges. The leadership of HGC in Canada is committed to further promoting the adoption of these innovations to maximize their impact. This strategy, building on the initial five-year HGC plan, has been developed to guide the program forward towards achieving this objective.

Developed with the assistance of [Humanitarian Associates](#), this strategy is based on a thorough analysis of internal and public literature, as well as consultations with 31 key stakeholders, including input and feedback from innovators from conflict-affected settings, as well as members of the GCC's Programs Advisory Council and GCC's Board of Directors.

BACKGROUND

Over the last decade, the humanitarian sector has been increasing investment in innovation, for example, through the establishment of innovation funds, incubators, and accelerators, as well as the establishment of innovation units within larger humanitarian agencies. Despite ongoing efforts and increased investments to expand adoption of innovations across the sector, many promising and potentially transformative innovations have been unable to reach their full potential within a sector that struggles with several barriers to adoption, including limited or poor incentives to change established ways of working.²

Many of the well-documented barriers to the uptake of humanitarian innovation have been confirmed through key informant interviews conducted to inform this strategy. Challenges such as insufficient dedicated and flexible innovation funding to test solutions in complex crises, the need to work with innovation champions within large humanitarian agencies, complex procurement requirements and other bureaucratic challenges, high evidence thresholds, challenging regulatory environments, a fragmented social innovation ecosystem, and over-dependence of the humanitarian system on global north-based organizations are some of the biggest barriers to adoption and scale of innovations. A full 80% of international humanitarian funding flows to or through 20 aid agencies. Many of these organizations are highly decentralized and have hierarchically complex structures, making some more like a federation of independent entities. Importantly, these challenges vary significantly between and within aid agencies and in various contexts. Agency decentralization and complexity means tailored approaches, which take more time and effort, are needed to overcome barriers to innovation uptake in the humanitarian sector.

Such challenges necessitate an innovation adoption strategy that prioritizes:

- Deeper engagements and more collaborative partnerships with key humanitarian agencies,
- Collaboration with potential innovation adopters to address barriers to innovation adoption, as well as to provide additional flexible funding tools to address adoption barriers and enable more promising innovations to progress towards scale and increased adoption, and
- Increased knowledge management efforts to showcase the value and impact of adopting promising innovations.

This strategy primarily targets eight humanitarian agencies – selected based on relevance, importance, and the presence of trust-based relationships – as Tier-1 priority. While focusing primarily on Tier-1 agencies, we will stay engaged with and concentrate on a number of local networks and organizations in the countries of focus, as well as interact with others from Tier-2 agencies as necessary. This innovation adoption strategy builds on existing trust-based relationships, ensures prompt response to inquiries, facilitates easy communication to fill the fragmentation gap, tracks regular engagements, and cultivates relationships at every

² Elrha. (2018) 'Too Tough to Scale? Challenges to Scaling Innovation in the Humanitarian Sector.' Elrha: London.

opportunity, including through events. Noting the power imbalance in the humanitarian system, HGC will use its influence to promote equitable partnerships and relationships between adopting partners and local innovators.

Innovators usually require partnerships for field testing, sometimes for support in monitoring, evaluation or innovation design, and often as clients. Key groups of partners are:

- Large aid agencies: international non-government organizations (INGOs), Red Cross, United Nations (UN) agencies, and humanitarian cluster coordinators
- Local humanitarian organizations and networks
- Communities with unmet needs
- Private-sector companies
- Governments.

Innovators who are reaching people with a high level of unmet needs commonly seek adoption via partners from larger agencies (category #1 above) because aid delivery in these contexts is by agencies receiving, or managing the flow of, the significant majority of international humanitarian funding. In contrast, local organizations supported by HGC at scale are both for-profit and non-profit organizations delivering products and services directly to category #3.

The category #1 aid agencies – relying on third-party donations – are very sensitive to reputational risks and associate new ways of working with an increased likelihood of failure, which could, in turn, affect their ability to fund-raise. This sensitivity impedes the adoption of innovations, especially local innovation. We will work to shift the aid agencies' thinking by pointing out the risks of not adapting and the hazards of maintaining the inequitable status quo, as well as by leveraging other tools, such as Catalytic Grants. We also will use diplomacy and collaborative advocacy to help shift perspectives and are directing our efforts on three areas, outlined in the following sections.



Photo Source: Hala Systems

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1:

SUPPLY-DRIVEN AID AGENCY COLLABORATION AND MATCHMAKING

During the course of this five-year strategy, we will expand on our 2018-2022 efforts to promote the use of ready-to-adopt innovations within the humanitarian ecosystem. The likely path for innovators to achieve widespread adoption of their innovations is through partnering with one or more of the 20 aid agencies that dominate the humanitarian sector and engaging with other actors, including local networks and organizations that may be able to adopt the innovations. These agencies represent the most relevant potential adoption partners. [Appendix 1](#) features a curated list of top aid agencies and local networks, excluding those less pertinent to our HGC work. The private sector and governments also represent important potential partners. Both are featured here, and also more prominently in GCC's Public and Private Sector Scale and Sustainability Strategies.

During the interviews (see [Appendix 2](#)) that, with a review of the literature ([Appendix 3](#)), informed development of this strategy, various formal partnership opportunities were raised: UNHCR Iraq reported that a formal endorsement by UNHCR Innovation would help advance pilots, while the U.K.'s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and Elrha spoke highly of Elrha's technical working groups as ways to increase the rate of adoption. We are adopting a strategy that prioritizes collaboration and engagement, and incorporates some elements of formality, such as Memorandums of Understanding, where necessary.

Recognizing the power dynamics in the humanitarian system, HGC will use its influence to promote equitable partnerships and relationships between INGOs and local innovators.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

1. We will meet and collaborate with the Tier-I aid agencies and networks that represent local humanitarian organizations to discuss their challenges, focus areas for our calls for proposals, suitable innovations to address their needs, field testing opportunities, barriers to adopting innovation, and ways to collaborate on research and publications.
2. We will increase the number and quality of the innovation pitch events, primarily targeting Tier-I aid agencies, and also engage other actors, including local networks and organizations that may be able to adopt innovations.
3. We will facilitate matchmaking by connecting aid agencies and private-sector companies seeking solutions with relevant innovators before, during, and after funding. For example, we will explore using NeedsList software to organize these matches.
4. We will systematize our approach to engaging with potential adopters by leveraging our existing relationships in the sector and using customer-relationship-management (CRM) software to keep a record of contacts that may prove to be good fits later, if not immediately. We will actively participate in relevant networks and work closely with groups representing humanitarian agencies. Events will include private-sector forums, such as the World Economic Forum, the United Nations Global Compact, and the Humanitarian Network and Partnership Week to present partnership ideas to their members. Groups include the Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR) Network, ICVA, the START Network, the Canadian Humanitarian Response Network, the U.K.'s Disasters Emergency Committee, and the U.S. InterAction Humanitarian Group. We will raise the profile and create demand for adoption locally and internationally.
5. Where necessary, HGC will also leverage Catalytic Grants as a tool to address bottlenecks that hinder innovation adoption within an interested aid agency.
6. Where data identify potential benefits from more formal relationships, we will seek to establish formal arrangements, such as MOUs, to sustain partnerships over longer periods of time.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2:

A DEMAND-DRIVEN APPROACH

In this strategic direction, we will expand the range of our key activities from supplying a portfolio of innovations, as discussed in Strategic Direction I, to also catalyzing demand for these innovations early on in the innovation selection process. We will collaborate with potential innovation adopters so they can address their internal procurement, process, and political barriers to innovation adoption.

Activities will encompass proactive close collaboration with aid agencies. Areas of focus will include understanding these organizations' priorities, the humanitarian challenges they face, and the internal challenges to adopting innovations. We will use our increased understanding of aid agencies' challenges and priorities to adapt what we do to maximize the potential for innovation uptake, and we will use Catalytic Grants to incent supportive organizational adaptations.

In the short term, we will focus our efforts on eight Tier-I agencies, and a local network and organization, selected based on relevance, importance, and the presence of trust-based relationships.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

1. We will identify alignment between HGC and potential adopting agencies' challenge statements before selection of the innovations to better tailor our approaches.
2. We will promote and provide catalytic or TTS funding to aid agencies to incentivize and support the uptake and implementation of innovations. This may include funding internal initiatives at aid agencies to adapt their programming and procurement processes.
3. We will explore various funding arrangements with Tier-I partners, including but not limited to, joint funding calls and smart partnerships. Additional human resources may be required due to the level of effort needed.
4. We will seek backing from HGC's bilateral donors to publicly endorse and incentivize the use of innovations through their other funding mechanisms and their convening power in the humanitarian community.
5. Recognizing the growing awareness of the role of the climate crisis in driving humanitarian needs, we will highlight the importance of innovations that mitigate climate change. Numerous HGC innovations, particularly those in the energy sector and those incorporating local manufacturing or local repairs, align well with the increasing interest of both aid agencies and donors in climate-relevant innovations. We will persist in illustrating how localization and local manufacturing enhances equity, improves the speed and effectiveness of humanitarian action, and addresses climate change.
6. In the medium term, we will pursue innovations that address highly specific problems identified by aid agencies.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3:

MEASURING IMPACT AND KNOWLEDGE DISSEMINATION

This strategic direction will ensure that the effects of the first two strategic directions are measured; that new knowledge is produced, analyzed, and used to inform the humanitarian ecosystem; and that the results are leveraged to raise the profile of HGC-supported innovations in the sector. To foster innovation adoption in the humanitarian sector, we will adapt our monitoring and evaluation efforts to better appeal to potential innovation adopters. We will produce impact-focused documents for each TTS innovation and track progress using success indicators defined below. By partnering with private-sector entities and Tier-I aid agencies on research and learning, we will prioritize themes such as local manufacturing, climate-sensitive innovations, and gender equity. We will use events for partnership-building and advocacy, collaborating with peer innovation funding platforms (e.g., management4health (M4H) and Elrha) to host roundtable events and promote innovation uptake. Additionally, we will develop an efficient advisory service for aid agencies seeking guidance on innovations and partnerships. Lastly, we will engage in dialogue with donors to encourage political and financial support for innovations, urging government donors to facilitate the adoption of ready-to-scale innovations.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

1. We will adapt our current monitoring and evaluation efforts, which primarily focus on donor obligations and internal needs, to better speak to potential partners and innovation adopters and to the needs of innovators. For each TTS innovation, we will produce concise and comprehensive knowledge products that demonstrate their innovation, impact to date, and future scale and sustainability pathways. These impact-focused documents will be produced towards the end of the individual innovations' funding periods and used as a communications tool to improve results of other innovations. We will also track progress against this strategy through a set of success indicators outlined below.
2. We will partner with potential uptake partners on research and learning to advance innovation within the agency(ies) and enhance CHIC's reputation as a thought leader. Prioritizing themes such as local manufacturing, climate-sensitive innovations, and innovations that reduce gender inequity, we will approach private-sector entities and Tier-I aid agencies to establish research partnerships and to produce and promote shared publications at events.
3. We will use events as a partnership-building tool and platform for advocacy goals, collaborating with peer innovation funding platforms. We will host roundtable events at key private-sector and humanitarian gatherings, inviting keynote speakers and forging connections among innovators, humanitarians, and private-sector entities.
4. We will develop an efficient system to offer innovation guidance, ensuring timely responses to inquiries. This advisory service will enable aid agencies to seamlessly obtain insights and advice on various topics, such as innovations and partnerships to facilitate the adoption of innovations.
5. We will engage in dialogue with donors, encouraging them to signal their support for innovations through political and financial backing. We will urge government donors to support innovations through funding and endorsement, and to motivate the aid agencies that they fund to adopt ready-to-scale innovations.
6. We will collaborate closely with other innovation funding platforms, and leverage the Global Prioritization Exercise led by Elrha, for improved coordination, joint research and learning, and joint advocacy work to inform and influence the humanitarian sector.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Adoption typically refers to the uptake and use of an innovation in humanitarian aid delivery. Evidence of adoption can include small-scale or larger field uses, external investments, HGC-funded use or paying customers, expanded pilots, beta testing, through to post-launch use. Based on the research conducted, four indicators will be used to measure the adoption of individual innovations at the TTS stage:

ASSUMPTIONS:

- The **THEMATIC FOCUS** indicator assumes that more field tests result in a better understanding of an innovation's strengths and weaknesses, allowing adjustments/improvements that increase the chances of innovation success, and a wider appreciation of an innovation's benefits by aid agencies, increasing the likelihood of uptake and use.
- The **GEOGRAPHY** indicator assumes that testing in different national and subnational contexts improves learning, helps innovation refinement, and widens awareness of the innovation. A broader geographic spread means greater potential for uptake.
- The **USERS** indicator assumes that more aid agencies are testing an innovation, and the testing shows success, confidence in the innovation and so awareness of it will increase, improving the likelihood of uptake and use.
- The **FINANCING** indicator assumes that more stakeholders being financially invested in an innovation improves the uptake potential.

Indicator	Level 1 success (1-5 years)	Level 2 success (6 to 10 years)	Level 3 success (May take 10+ years)
Thematic Focus	One field test within the original thematic scope	Field testing beyond the scope of the original theme	Multiple field tests beyond the scope of the initial theme
Geography	Field testing at one location in the same region or country	Field testing at more than one location in the same region or country	Field testing in other locations outside the initial country
Users	One humanitarian aid agency, private-sector entity, or government using the innovation	Two relevant aid agencies or governments using the innovation	More than two relevant aid agencies or governments using the innovation
Financing	A donor or investor other than CHIC providing financial support \geq 50% of CHIC funding	More than one donor or investor providing financial support that collectively is more than the original CHIC funding and sufficient for expansion of the innovation to new locations	More than one donor or investor providing financial support that collectively exceeds the original CHIC funding and is sufficient for expansion of use to new locations

An innovation can achieve varying maximum success levels, with Level 3 being the pinnacle outcome only reachable by achieving real-life paid use. At a program level, success indicators should focus on the percentage of innovations reaching each success level. The majority of TTS stage innovations should reach success level 1. We will disaggregate data for equity-seeking innovator groups, such as women-led innovators and locally-owned innovators. Given that innovation adoption can take over 10 years, we will adopt realistic success goals and timelines. Interim indicators to evaluate progress include:

1. Number of innovations adopted at each of Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3
2. Level of engagement with the Tier-I aid agencies and the number of presentations delivered³
3. Number of MOUs signed⁴
4. Number of events convened (including lunch+learns, pitch events) for Tier-I agencies,⁵ with a desire to have a balance of events in the global north and south⁶
5. Number of times that Catalytic Grants/TTS funding is used to promote uptake of innovations⁷
6. Number of matchmaking connections made between innovators and other stakeholders.⁸

HGC will review progress against these indicators and report results to its governance bodies on an annual basis.

³ Theory of Change: Engagement of staff increases their knowledge and reduces the trust gap, both increasing the likelihood of innovation uptake.

⁴ Theory of Change: MOUs are a strong indicator of an aid agency's enthusiasm to partner.

⁵ Theory of Change: Events present meaningful opportunities to form partnerships, especially if roundtables are hosted.

⁶ Theory of Change: Events are used for roundtable meetings between innovators and aid agencies or private-sector entities. These meetings will build trust, increase knowledge of innovations, and increase the likelihood of field testing or innovation purchase.

⁷ Theory of Change: Field testing is a desired outcome in itself and a stepping stone to improved innovations and real-life widespread use.

⁸ Theory of Change: If aid agencies are aware of innovations, they can apply for TTS and Catalytic funds, increasing the frequency of field testing.

APPENDIX 1: PRIORITY AID AGENCIES⁹

We are focusing our main efforts on what we believe to be the top eight humanitarian agencies, a network and a local organization based on their relevance, importance, and the degree to which we have a trust-based relationship with them. Within Tier 1, the agencies are listed generally in the order that we believe will allow us to best increase adoption of innovations to have the largest impact. The secondary or Tier-2 agencies are listed alphabetically for convenience.

TIER 1 AID AGENCIES: IMMEDIATE PARTNERSHIP PRIORITIES

1. UNICEF (originally the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund)
2. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) (Doctors Without Borders)
3. OCHA
4. IFRC Solferino Academy
5. Canadian Red Cross
6. Plan Canada
7. World Health Organization
8. UNHCR
9. NEAR Network (Network for Empowered Aid Response)
10. ICVA (International Council of Voluntary Agencies, an NGO Humanitarian Hub)

TIER 2 AID AGENCIES: SECONDARY PARTNERSHIP PRIORITIES

1. ACF International (Action contre la faim)
2. American Red Cross
3. Australian Red Cross
4. British Red Cross
5. CARE
6. Catholic Relief Services
7. Danish Refugee Council
8. French Red Cross
9. H4H (Human for Human Organization)
10. International Committee of the Red Cross
11. International Federation of the Red Cross (ones other than national Red Crosses listed above)
12. International Rescue Committee
13. Mercy Corps
14. Norwegian Refugee Council
15. Oxfam International
16. Plan International
17. Save the Children International
18. START Network (formerly Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies (CBHA) hosted by Save the Children UK)
19. United Nations Relief and Works Agency
20. World Food Programme (UN WFP)
21. World Health Organization (the rest of)
22. World Vision

⁹ Source: Humanitarian Outcomes Humanitarian Organization Database, filtered for annual spending over US\$200m in 2020, 2021, or 2022, curated to remove those with low or no humanitarian focus (e.g., United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Medicine for All People (MAP), etc.)

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEWEES

1. Louise Agersnap, Head World Health Organization Innovation Hub
2. Fawad Akbari, Grand Challenges Canada
3. Zainah Alsamman, Grand Challenges Canada
4. Anonymous, Financial Advisor, \$10B U.S Financial Services Firm
5. Elizabeth (Elsa) Assefa, Grand Challenges Canada
6. Marine Buissonnière, Grand Challenges Canada
7. Ian Burbidge, Head of Systems Innovation and Change, START Network
8. Nan Buzard, Head of Innovation at ICRC
9. Deepika Devadas, Grand Challenges Canada
10. Nachiket Deval, Grand Challenges Canada
11. Adetunji Eleso, Grand Challenges Canada
12. Kristoffer Gandrup-Marino, Chief of Innovation at UNICEF
13. Ivan Gayton, Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team
14. Leeat Gellis, Grand Challenges Canada
15. Kristen Gelsdorf, University of Virginia
16. Farouq Habib, the White Helmets
17. Christopher Hoffman, HumanityLink/Elrha
18. Ben Holt, Head of Technology Innovation and Foresight, IFRC Solferino Academy
19. Sashidhar Jonnalagedda, SurgiBox
20. Kathy Kalafatides, MSF Transformation
21. Andrej Kirn, World Economic Forum
22. Aarathi Krishnan, UNDP (United Nations Development Programme)
23. Nick Leader, FCDO
24. James Thuch Madhier, CEO, Rainmaker Enterprise
25. Guy Peggram, Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation at GSMA
26. Dave Raymond, Content Marketing Specialist
27. Lillie Rosen, former Innovation Advisor, Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance, USAID
28. Christian Seelos, Director Global Innovation for Impact Lab; Distinguished Fellow, Stanford University
29. David Trevino, Médecins Sans Frontières
30. Maxime Vielle, Response Innovation Labs
31. Ahava Zarembski, former CEO, Sunbuckets

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