



Global Alliance for Humanitarian Innovation

Update on Progress since the World Humanitarian Summit

This paper was prepared by:¹

elrha

Executive Summary:

Innovation enables the humanitarian system to do more, for more people, at a lower cost. But innovation too often occurs in silos, meaning work is replicated, learning isn't shared, and successful approaches aren't widely adopted.

The Global Alliance for Humanitarian Innovation (GAHI) is a network comprised of governmental actors, knowledge institutes, businesses and humanitarian organizations, which aims to limit duplication and ensure multiplication of impact across the sector.

To deliver on this ambition, the GAHI brings together a unique combination of resources, expertise and capabilities in order to connect, mobilize, and amplify the work of its members. The GAHI will connect by matching problems to people that might solve them, mobilize social, intellectual, and financial resources, and amplify by sharing knowledge of what works.

Following its launch at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, an Interim Director has been appointed and a consultation process has identified key thematic priorities, as well as strategic and operational challenges. This update is largely informed by the resulting GAHI Stakeholder Consultation Report, published in May 2017.² Self-reports from the Platform for Action, Commitments and Transformation (PACT) were used in addition.

Highlights of achievements

The GAHI was initially launched at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), and in late 2016, Elrha was chosen to set up and facilitate the GAHI Secretariat. Funding for an initial two-year pilot phase has since been finalized, with four donors – UK DFID, Netherlands MFA, Danish MFA and Australia DFAT – contributing a total of £1.2 million. An Interim Director was appointed in March 2017.

The GAHI Stakeholder Consultation Report, published in May 2017, is a

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² Global Alliance for Humanitarian Innovation (2017) 'Stakeholder Consultation Report'. Available at: <http://www.thegahi.org/downloads/GAHI-Stakeholder-Consultation-Report-summary-020517.pdf>

significant step forward in establishing the GAHI's priorities for the next two years. The report draws on a stakeholder scoping exercise conducted between December 2016 and February 2017 to establish the strategic functions that the GAHI might perform, its thematic priorities, and potential ways of working.

The Stakeholder Consultation Report identified the following six priorities for the GAHI:

1. To enable members to develop shared understanding around what works and what doesn't in humanitarian innovation management.
2. To facilitate, support, and enable Alliance members to work together on critical humanitarian issues where innovation can play a role.
3. To provide a relationship-building and brokering mechanism for deepening the engagement of private sector organisations in humanitarian innovation efforts.
4. To build bridges to national and local innovation networks to play a greater role in humanitarian innovation.
5. To advocate greater and more flexible and patient finance and budgetary flexibility.
6. To proactively address the institutional blockages to effective innovation through advocacy and thought leadership.

Another key piece of work – part funded by the GAHI – is the commissioning of a global mapping of innovation and innovation actors through Elrha's Global Prioritization Exercise,³ which will be completed in July 2017. This is part of a global effort to make visible the range of global investments, capacity and activity in humanitarian research and innovation, and to identify shared priorities for investment and innovation.

The main barriers/ challenges to progress

The rise of the idea of innovation in the humanitarian system has been rapid; one response to a widening gap in humanitarian financing that has accentuated the need for aid that is more effective and more efficient. Today, many organisations in the humanitarian sector take an innovation-focused approach and have dedicated innovation teams. But this growth within organisations has also led to fragmentation and duplication of efforts across the sector.

"Networks cannot solve wicked problems in isolation from the big players... They can, however, bring the players to solve problems in ways that might change the system in the future."

GAHI stakeholder

The initial recommendation to establish the GAHI was based on the notion that the current innovation ecosystem is not functioning as it should. Many GAHI members have extensive but undocumented and unshared experiences of working on innovation efforts in specific contexts. Furthermore, many of the humanitarian challenges that might benefit from innovation – such as

³ Elrha (2017) 'Global Prioritisation Exercise'. See: <http://www.elrha.org/gpe/>

increasing the self-reliance of refugees, pandemic preparedness and education in crises – require a more collaborative and joined-up approach.

GAHI members are also increasingly looking at the potential opportunities offered by cutting-edge new technologies (e.g. drones, 3D printing), data-driven innovations and new approaches to humanitarian financing, among other areas. Improving the sharing of knowledge and experience gained would be of huge benefit in ensuring successful approaches can be adopted and scaled up, and failures are not replicated.

The World Humanitarian Summit gave space and authority for the creation of a global network that would work to address these critical gaps in capacity and relationships, and create a more supportive and enabling environment for innovation efforts that help to realise humanitarian objectives. But the WHS didn't define how the GAHI should be operationalised. Although the Summit resulted in commitments to fund the initiative and over 30 organisations signed up as members, the challenge of the first 12 months was to turn good intentions into a practical reality.

Once the decision was made for Elrha to host the GAHI Secretariat, an Interim Steering Group was convened by Elrha to take the initiative forward, including representatives from OCHA and the four donors. In mid-2016, negotiations began on a number of key documents necessary to lay the foundations for the Secretariat, and after significant discussion and debate, these were signed off in November 2016. Once the foundational documents were agreed, contracts were signed with the four donors and recruitment began for the GAHI Director.

With so many innovation initiatives around the world, the GAHI's success will depend on its ability to identify and maintain a distinctive niche for its work and contribution during its initial two-year pilot phase. The Stakeholder Consultation Report points towards a role that is more focused on effective and robust learning and collaboration processes, rather than looking at specific themes, and one that promotes ongoing dialogue between different initiatives from around the world as a "network of networks". But if it's to achieve its ambition, there will be a further challenge to maintain predictable and sufficient resourcing.

"GAHI can help the humanitarian system work better with local actors, by expanding the kinds of actors that are involved. Local and national innovation specialists are present in just about every country in the world, and GAHI should be tapping these networks as an important and sustainable source of expertise."

GAHI stakeholder

Measuring progress

In the Stakeholder Consultation Report all respondents were clear that there was a need for urgent action from the GAHI to "get back the momentum" a year after the World Humanitarian Summit.

Although the GAHI is currently only in the early stages of developing its strategic and operational plan, the need for solid benchmarks is recognized. As one respondent commented: "GAHI needs to plan for concrete outputs from day one – not just minutes or reports for its meetings, but specific indicators for success in terms of how well it contributes to stated objectives and roles of the network."

The priorities and recommendations for next steps identified by the Stakeholder Consultation Report can be used to measure progress over the next 12 months.

Highlights of good practices

Although the nature of progress to date on establishing the GAHI is such that the self-reports are unable to point towards significant examples of good practice that could advance the initiative, a number of the reports reiterate commitments to ensuring its success.

Among these, Malteser International has committed “to promote lessons learned, best practice and evidence based innovation through the Global Alliance for Humanitarian Innovation”, WFP has committed to support the GAHI “to connect, mobilise and amplify humanitarian innovations”, and World Vision has committed to the GAHI as “a key mechanism for prioritizing innovation and ensuring that it is an integral part of the new humanitarian business model.”

Furthermore, UNHCR has reiterated its support to enable and create “a shared space for the development, use, and scaling-up of innovative tools, approaches, and partnerships” and stated in its next steps that it will “[mainstream] innovation throughout the organization and with partners, strengthen GHL and GAHI capacities.” Medair also restated its support for the GAHI “as a means for prioritising, scaling up and adopting innovative solutions as a central tenant of a new humanitarian business model” and reported that it has “identified a dedicated staff member to be responsible for Medair’s engagement with GAHI.”

These commitments to address the challenges for humanitarian innovation are aligned with the six priorities identified for the GAHI in the Stakeholder Consultation Report.

Recommendations

As well as the priority areas previously identified, the Stakeholder Consultation Report provided the following immediate recommendations for the GAHI, to strengthen the initiative and take it forward:

1. Establish a diverse secretariat with broad and global reach.
2. Sharpen the strategic rationale and objectives for the GAHI.
3. Develop governance, strategy and operational principles for the GAHI.
4. Establish the Steering Committee terms of reference and membership.
5. Develop a draft workplan for the first two years to share with members for planning the range and sequence of activities.
6. Develop a communications and marketing plan.

About this paper

All stakeholders who made commitments at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in support of advancing the Agenda for Humanity were invited to self-report on their progress in 2016 through the Platform for Action, Commitments and Transformation (PACT) (agendaforhumanity.org). The information provided through the self-reporting is publicly available and forms the basis, along with other relevant analysis, of the annual synthesis report. The annual synthesis report will be prepared by OCHA and will highlight trends in progress, achievements and gaps that need more attention as stakeholders collectively work toward advancing the 24 transformations in the Agenda for Humanity. In keeping with the multi-stakeholder spirit of the WHS, OCHA invited partners to prepare short analytical papers that analyze and assess self-reporting in the PACT, or provide an update on progress on initiatives launched at the World Humanitarian Summit. The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations Secretariat.