The 2014 Humanitarian Innovation Conference was envisaged as a shared platform through which a range of actors from across the humanitarian ecosystem could come together to participate in thought-provoking dialogue and debate. The group that convened in Oxford on the 19th and 20th July 2014 – comprising over 200 diverse representatives from across the humanitarian community – surpassed these expectations. From the beginning, the tone of the conference was one of collaborative dialogue and purposeful debate, as conversations and panels sparked innumerable ideas, connections and discussions.

The event brought together people from different sectors – including governments, international organizations, NGOs, businesses, community-based organizations and universities – who might not often have the opportunity to engage in productive conversation and dialogue with each other. Participants sought to explore and better understand the emerging roles of new partnerships, technology, and the private sector in humanitarian aid. There was an evident commitment from participants to integrate the idea of ‘innovation’ as an accepted methodology for adaptation and change in the field. We appreciated the high quality panel presentations, but also the invigorating conversations which led to the formation of a new network, drawn together with the goal of transforming humanitarian challenges into sustainable opportunities.

One of the most promising outcomes of the conference was a critical recognition of our need to better engage with communities that are affected by crisis, particularly refugees and forced migrants. There was commitment and buy-in across panels and participants that such innovative engagement needs to be done better. Innovation is not born only in tech labs and multi-national corporations, but happens at the grassroots level – and if we are able to build on the skills, talents, and resources of people in affected communities who are already innovating in their daily lives, there are potential for gains for everybody.
One of the most inspiring highlights of the conference was the keynote address by Ntakamaze Nziyonvira on Sunday morning. As a Congolese refugee in Uganda, and with limited access to formal education, Ntakamaze’s work with his community-based organisation in Uganda, and his full scholarship to study engineering in the United States, are only the beginning of his story. His address was an extraordinary testament to the potential of refugees and displaced populations to build their own lives, particularly when given the opportunity to receive education and training, develop business skills, and receive support for entrepreneurship. In his address, Ntakamaze also emphasised the potential contributions that communities affected by crisis and displacement can offer to the diverse and influential humanitarian community.

Despite the success of the Humanitarian Innovation Conference, we must recognise that this is only a starting point. ‘Innovation’ is often about connecting people, ideas, and resources that already exist. One of the most important goals of the conference was to create a network of people and organisations that can draw upon the collective capacities offered by a diverse humanitarian sector. During the conference, participants began building the foundations of this network through dynamic conversations and open idea-sharing, and we want to thank the many people who travelled from around the world to take part in these exciting beginnings. But what truly matters is what we do now, going forward, and the ways in which we are able to harness these networks and insights from the conference to make meaningful, systemic change in the humanitarian system.

**Missed the Conference? Get caught up here!**

**Download** a copy of the conference programme:

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https://www.flickr.com/photos/refugeestudiescentre/sets/72157646090580303/

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#HIP2014 PARTICIPANTS

The Humanitarian Innovation Conference hosted over 200 participants on 19 & 20 July 2014, with individuals and organisations from over 21 countries attending.

#HIP2014 SUPPORTERS

The 2014 Humanitarian Innovation Conference would not have been possible without the support of a number of individuals and organizations. We are especially grateful to Stephanie and Hunter Hunt who have funded and nurtured the Humanitarian Innovation Project since its inception. We have also benefited from the support of our two main institutional partners, UNHCR and OCHA, who have contributed in a range of ways to making both our work and this conference possible. We have received contributions from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the International Studies Centre, and the Oxford Department of International Development, to assist with the running of the conference. We also thank the entire Humanitarian Innovation Project (HIP) team – in Oxford and Uganda – as well as our colleagues at the Refugee Studies Centre.
#HIP2014: NEXT STEPS

Special Publication: Forced Migration Review ‘Refugees & Innovation’ Issue
A special supplementary edition of Forced Migration Review on "Refugee Innovation" will be published in September 2014. The issue will feature articles by #HIP2014 speakers and contributors, including the Deputy High Commissioner of UNHCR, the Norwegian Refugee Council, and Stanford University. This special supplement is funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Workshop: ‘Ethics and Principles for Humanitarian Innovation’
The idea for this Oxford-based workshop emerged from discussions at #HIP2014 and the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) roundtable session on Transformation Through Innovation. The purpose of the workshop will be to review existing standards and codes of conduct in humanitarian innovation, as well as other sources of relevant ethical standards, including from the medical profession, with a review to developing an ethical framework as an output of the WHS in 2016. The workshop will aim to convene humanitarian practitioners, innovation experts, applied moral philosophers, and experts on medical ethics.

On the Horizon: #HIP2015
Check back at our website and sign up for our newsletter (http://www.oxhip.org/contact/) to learn about new developments related to a HIP 2015 event.

#HIP2014 Related News & Blogs

- Scidev.net: ‘Call to bring refugee innovation into humanitarian work’ http://www.scidev.net/global/innovation/news/refugee-innovation-humanitarian-work.html
Conference Keynotes & Plenary Panels

The conference opened with a welcome from Professor Alexander Betts, director of the Humanitarian Innovation Project and incoming director of the Refugee Studies Centre. The audience watched an opening video ‘Introduction to Humanitarian Innovation’. Professor Betts then introduced Alexander Aleinikoff, the Deputy High Commissioner of UNHCR, describing him as an ‘ideal keynote speaker’ due to the ways in which he has ‘embraced innovation... [and] embraced the idea of self-reliance and empowering refugees.’

As the first keynote speaker of the conference, Alexander Aleinikoff spoke frankly about the role and challenges of innovation, particularly within the UN system and his own organisation, the UNHCR. He offered a clear role for academics, policymakers and activists as ‘disruptive’ innovators within a ‘stodgy, sclerotic’ system, and emphasised the imperative within humanitarian organisations to become ‘innovation ready’ by fostering a strong culture of support for innovation, in which people are given sufficient time, resources, and support to reach out for ideas and change.

Following the Deputy High-Commissioner’s remarks, the first plenary panel session, ‘Humanitarian Innovation and the United Nations’ was chaired by Alexander Betts and included panellists Lesley Bourns from United Nations OCHA, Stuart Campo from the UNICEF Innovation Unit, Annalisa Conte from WFP and Olivier Delarue of UNHCR Innovation. The panellists discussed the challenges of bringing an innovative ‘culture’ into the existing structures of the UN organisations, while at the same time reconciling this institutional agenda with the imperative that innovation is first and foremost for the people in need of assistance. Olivier Delarue described the UNHCR Innovation team’s efforts to capture and encourage innovation both within and outside of the broader organisation. Critically, these innovations must be informed by a “human-centred design” approach, which begins with field-based challenges and works toward solutions in incremental but unceasing steps. Stuart Campo described barriers to innovation in UN organisations as being rooted in both ‘behavioural’ and ‘structural’ concerns, and rooted in a “fear to take risks”. He emphasised the important role innovation labs serve, operating outside traditional institutional structures as a “safe space to innovate” and insulated from the fear of failure. Annalisa Conte explained innovation as ‘part of the DNA’ of the WFP, a necessary part of the work they must do and the people they must reach with assistance. She described each individual WFP country office as a ‘lab’ for innovation in its own right, and the role of regional bureaus and headquarters to support and scale-up these innovations. Lesley Bourns described organisational understanding of innovation within UN OCHA as divided between two tracks. In the policy section of the organisation, innovation tends to focus on systems level challenges and field operational change, whereas within agency itself, innovation is needed around intra-communication and information sharing. To this end, OCHA has worked to develop tools, such as humanitarian kiosks, to improve both capacities.
Ntakamaze Nziyonvira gave the second keynote address on the Sunday morning of the conference. A refugee from Democratic Republic of Congo, Ntakamaze is the founder of a youth-led community organisation, CIYOTA and is a former HIP refugee research assistant in Uganda. In his address, he encouraged those in humanitarian organisations to understand that refugees ‘also try to innovate and solve the problems by ourselves’. Ntakamaze emphasized that the only viable solution for long-term humanitarian crises is to ‘draw upon untapped resources by building upon the refugees’ own skills and aspirations’ and suggested focusing attempts to develop the educational and entrepreneurial capacities of refugee communities through appropriate programmes and advocacy for better government policies.

Ntakamaze’s keynote address was followed by the second plenary panel session of the conference, which convened a discussion around the topic of ‘investing in innovation’, focusing on the ways in which donors, private sector actors, and organisations can better mobilise resources for innovation and change. Chaired by Neil Buhne of the UNDP, panel members included Per Heggenes from IKEA Foundation, Joanna Macrae from the Department for International Development (DFID), Kim Scriven of the Humanitarian Innovation Fund, and Julia Stewart-David from the European Commission. Per Heggenes began the discussion by of adopting a portfolio approach to investing in innovation, describing the critical shift from something being an interesting invention to something that is genuinely transformative to the humanitarian space. A portfolio approach creates a need for open space for exploration and risk, but also creates the follow-up need to crowd-invest around a few big problems – the reason why DFID has decided to focus on the specific areas of cash diffusion, WaSH, and education in emergencies. Joanna also stressed the utmost importance of high quality evidence around any innovation, saying that if you don’t invest in collecting this evidence, then the original investment was a ‘waste of money’. Kim Scriven echoed the point that objective and independent evidence serves a vital role in supporting innovation, noting that any funding must ensure that the skills and resources are available to build this evidence base. He also emphasised the role of the funder in developing a better understanding of the processes of innovation in order to better identify and support the
different stages of the process, during which different types of resources are needed. Julia Stewart-David focused on the kinds of resources available to the humanitarian sector, which stretch beyond cash to also include collaborative efforts to collectively identify problems and collaboratively support solutions.

The last plenary session of the conference, chaired by Pamela Hartigan from the Skoll Centre focused on new approaches to private sector engagement in the humanitarian sector. Pamela Hartigan opened the panel around a discussion of social entrepreneurship, saying that ‘all entrepreneurship should be social entrepreneurship’ and describing poverty as a constant humanitarian crisis.

The group, which included fellow panellists Sasha Chanoff of RefugeePoint and Nick Martlew of Crisis Action, engaged in discussions centred around strategies to improve humanitarian response, including how to combine innovation, opportunity and resourcefulness to address root causes and create systemic change (rather than symptoms). Sasha pointed to emerging trends in the UN system and elsewhere that demonstrate a new phase of receptivity to innovation and openness to partnership and collaboration with outside actors. At the end of the panel discussion, focus shifted to thinking about ways to improve processes within the humanitarian system, based on resources and knowledge already in place, emphasising the importance of events such as the HIP2014 conference which can serve as a platform to connect and share ideas.
Emerging Themes

Definitions and Frameworks for Humanitarian Innovation

While current debate has begun to document examples of ad hoc innovation in practice, there is a need to develop a common language and greater conceptual clarity as a starting point for moving forward in the dialogue and debate. Discussion and reflection are needed on definitions of ‘humanitarian innovation’ as well as appropriate analytical frameworks for understanding the boundaries and scope of the concept. These topics were at the forefront of discussions in the parallel panel on ‘Rethinking Humanitarian Innovation Theory’, in which speakers identified key challenges in the innovation process preventing the effective ‘scaling up’ of innovative programming and pilots, and highlighted the need for structured decision-making based on careful evaluation and application of results for programmes. A new research project at the Centre for Research in Innovation Management has reviewed the extensive literature on innovation management from 1910, analysing thousands of interviews about the theory and practice of innovation to offer a ‘contingency’ approach with which to navigate disparate innovation models. The panel on ‘Ethics for Humanitarian Innovation’ addressed issues around the ‘everyday moralities’ of humanitarian innovation and complicated questions of power asymmetry in humanitarian assistance, particularly in the context of the changing nature of protection. The concept of ‘ethical competence’ was presented as an idea, originally from the medical field, which has the potential to inform humanitarian work by defining a stronger ethical consciousness and emphasising the need for innovation to deal with ethical questions.

Improving Organizational Responses

As a range of best practices for innovation have emerged both within and across organizations, major UN organizations, humanitarian NGOs, innovation units, and academics are developing new ideas and partnerships, adapting organizational processes, fostering new partnerships, building innovation labs, and developing new funding mechanisms for innovation. The World Humanitarian Summit Roundtable convened a group of members from the ‘Transformation through Innovation’ thematic team for the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit, which will take place in Istanbul in 2016. This roundtable served as a space to gain a better understanding of the WHS process and especially the work of the ‘Transformation Through Innovation’ thematic group, and to seek input and ideas from the audience. Some of the main debates focused on what kinds of outputs the summits could and should produce, and how best to integrate the perspectives of affected communities. It touched upon the need for metrics and measures for innovation, as well as the challenges of developing ethical standards and codes of conduct. Concerns around the long-term accountability and lack of
adequate impact assessments were echoed by speakers in a panel on ‘Refugee Innovation in Africa’, reaffirming the importance of longitudinal data that demonstrates impact not just one year but five or ten years after a project is implemented.

A joint panel between Stanford University, Ennead Architects, and UNHCR convened to discuss approaches to building a comprehensive approach to design for refugee settlements. This discussion focused on the potential generated by the creative merging of disciplines and expertise to develop planning and design tools that consider a vast range of the needs and aspects of settlements - community, water access, culture, etc. Throughout the humanitarian sector, similar interdisciplinary partnerships have proven crucial to improving organisational responses for humanitarian assistance. Similarly, a panel exploring partnerships specifically within the UN system was convened to discuss the ways in which both established and emerging collaborations among UN agencies has been at the forefront of change. Speakers from WFP discussed partnerships with private sector actors to develop a digital system for food assistance – one with the potential for massive scaling, both within WFP and across other UN agencies. RapidFTR, a UNICEF project that uses smart phones to digitalise family tracing in emergency situations, provided another example of collaborative creation, in this case between the Volunteer Technical community, academia, and private sector. Speakers in several sessions acknowledged a need to create an ‘open-source’ atmosphere within the humanitarian system, and to develop flexible ways of sourcing funding and grants that foster innovation as well as the sharing of these innovative outcomes.  

A panel convened by Deloitte outlined the work of their Humanitarian Innovation Programme, and their experience of supporting the work of Atrocity Watch and IOM. The speakers offered an opportunity to reflect on the role of the private sector in humanitarian innovation as a key element to improving the responses and capacities of traditional humanitarian organisations.

The UNHCR Innovation team-led interactive workshop on human-centred design and prototyping also emphasised the overarching need for a paradigm shift in how UN and humanitarian agencies interact with non-traditional actors, while simultaneously improving approaches to focus on innovation with (rather than for) refugee communities. Workshop convenors asked participants to list the needs, assets, and challenges faced by refugees and develop prototype solutions to specific issues using human-centred design principles.

“Bottom-up” Approaches to Innovation

Some of the most inspiring and challenging discussions that took place at the conference revolved around calls to foster the skills, talents, and aspirations of so-called “beneficiary populations”. Speakers from UN organisations, NGOs, academia, and refugee communities championed approaches that privilege the recognition of the skills, talents and capacities of affected communities. Several speakers made reference to the growing evidence around refugee livelihoods that point to the active and
often independent engagement of affected communities in entrepreneurial and income-generating activities.

A HIP-convened panel on ‘Refugee Economies in Uganda’ sought to explore empirical evidence around the economic life of refugees, challenging widely accepted myths that frequently portray refugees as an economic burden on the host state. Presentations by Congolese refugees who conducted research on refugee livelihoods focused on the positive, but often unacknowledged, contributions of refugees to their local communities, while also highlighting the need for further comparative analysis to better understand refugees’ broader contributions to the global economy. Similar findings surfaced in other panels throughout the conference, such as a discussion around examples of bottom-up innovation in the Za’atari refugee camp in the ‘Pioneering New Approaches with Humanitarian Organisations’ panel, with speakers emphasising the ways in which refugee camps are connected and networked within host communities. Meanwhile, discussions within the ‘Entrepreneurship and Humanitarian Response’ panel sought to identify the institutional and organisational barriers present in refugee camps that stymy refugees’ entrepreneurial opportunities, and identified existing strategies around promoting and supporting things such as ‘indigenous innovation’.

Focusing on a different geographical context, the panel convened by the Forced Migration Innovation Project at Southern Methodist University explored bottom-up approaches and solutions to the livelihood challenges faced by resettled refugees in the United States, emphasising the complexity introduced by the multiple cultural perspectives of actors involved and proposing innovative solutions to mitigate these factors and establish common ground.

Meanwhile, speakers on the ‘Facilitating Innovation’ panel drew attention to the need for organisations to engage with affected communities in order to encourage and draw upon ‘bottom-up’ innovation, rather than focusing solely on agency-driven approaches which neglect communities’ existing capacities. Panellists addressed the crucial role of mechanisms for ‘innovation facilitation’ such as innovation ‘spaces’ and ‘labs’ where networks and capabilities can intersect to build, test, and (critically) measure innovative solutions. Some approaches to fostering greater bottom-up engagement with communities were offered by speakers in the ‘Community Building and Participatory Methods’ panel, which discussed the ways in which action research can provide a model in which collaboration, transparency, and the iterative refinement of actions become norms for establishing partnerships with communities. Examples of some collaborative grassroots efforts were discussed in the ‘Bottom-up Approaches to Health Innovation’ panel, with speakers highlighting ways in which grassroots organisations can develop new innovations to promote community health. Examples included an empowerment-focused programme to improve interpersonal relationships between
health workers and traditional birth attendants, and a grassroots initiative to adapt tools of western psychological interventions to a local context based on community understandings of Syrian refugee mental health issues in Jordan.

**New Directions within Humanitarian Work**

New products and processes are continuously emerging and changing within the humanitarian sector. Speakers sought to identify current best practices and cutting edge technologies in areas such as health, education, water and sanitation, cash transfers, and information and data sharing, among others, that are transforming the humanitarian landscape.

Panel members in the ‘New Frontiers in Humanitarian Practice’ panel argued for the need to increase collaborations with humanitarian engineering experts as a way to encourage synergies and expand thinking about socially minded outcomes. A proposal was also put forward for a professional institution for disaster relief personnel, which could help to further define professional ethics and standards in humanitarianism by developing specialised humanitarian professionals.

Speakers on the ‘Forced Migration and Innovation: Emerging work at Georgetown University’ panel proposed a new concept to measure and model localised threats and forced migration in ‘menacing context’ scenarios, suggesting that examining situations in terms of menacing context will help bridge the gap between social scientists and computational scientists by enabling qualitative concepts such as ‘perception of threat’ to be understood as quantitative variables. The potential of RAPTOR, a large Georgetown University database of societal, political, and biomedical documents as a source of modelling, was explored through a recent attempt to distil the essential ontological categories of forced displacement and migration in Somalia. Speakers also discussed the collaboration of researchers and scientists from different disciplines in the context of this case study, proposing the concept of “developmental project” as a way to understand how scientists might collaborate across disciplinary boundaries.

There were also many panels and speakers that explored developments specific to a vast array of issues such as education, sustainability, cash transfer programmes, private sector collaboration, data management and data systems, with technology and technology capacity running as a common thread throughout.

The panel on ‘Adapting Business Models and Pedagogy to Profitably Take Advantage of Online Learning’ considered new directions taking place in the provision of education. Noting the failure of MOOCs and other online learning platforms to deliver substantial results, the panel identified the needs for new pedagogical approaches and business models to ensure that learning is appropriate and relevant, drawing upon empirical evidence from a pilot project in which refugees create educational content for other refugees.
Speakers on the ‘Energy and the Environment’ panel considered a variety of challenges pertaining to the design and implementation of sustainable energy technologies in low resource settings, including innovations such as Li-ion batteries which can provide potential, low-cost solutions for energy challenges. However, panel members also emphasised the imperative of establishing participatory approaches to design of local energy solutions, citing evidence that collaborations that include communities and local NGOs are able to better account for the social needs and local practices of ‘end-users’.

Speakers convened on the ‘Cash and Innovation’ panel explored the persistent challenges that have vexed cash transfer programmes over the past decade and discussed innovative solutions such as Cash Atlas, an interactive cash transfer mapping project that promises to increase information sharing and coordination among cash transfer programmes. Panel members discussed examples of cash innovations such as M-Pesa in Kenya to analyse how mechanisms of cash transfers can orientate the viability and efficiency of social transfer programmes, and the role that technologies like mobile money can play.

A panel titled ‘Private Technology and the Public Good’ featured a discussion around IOM’s growing private sector partnerships, drawing upon its Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), a system of tools used to monitor human mobility and needs throughout each phase of a humanitarian crisis. A panel convened by the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative team focused on the challenges and opportunities of humanitarian applications of remote sensing technology, which attempts to meet the humanitarian field’s need for appropriate, needs-based maps and programmes. Speakers described the current global data inequity as a key human rights challenge, and called for better training for humanitarian personnel in the professional use of remote sensing and other data-based technology to avoid inappropriate application of new technologies.

Discussions within the ‘Media in Humanitarian Innovation’ panel focused on the ways that very different understanding of innovation as a concept circulate within the humanitarian community, which in turn define their use or engagement of technologies in humanitarian emergencies. Speakers also touched upon the difficulties in using big data collected through social networks and social media due to capacity limitations of analysis and efficient use. Similar issues also emerged in the panel addressing ‘Inclusive ICT for Humanitarian Work’, where speakers considered existing barriers to the rollout of skills and technological access that continue to limit community participation and inclusion in ICT programmes. The important role of healthy information ecosystems was emphasised as a source of information and facilitating communication effectively enables populations to participate in their own recovery.
Looking Ahead

The emerging trend of ‘humanitarian innovation’ has captured the minds and practices of humanitarian actors across the globe. Over the two-day conference, participants worked to develop a common language and a collective understanding of the role of humanitarian innovation in improving responses in emergencies, protracted crisis and post-conflict recovery. Panels and audiences debated the emergence of best practices of innovation within and across organizations and sectors, and reflected on ways to more effectively include affected communities in current innovation models. Despite the widespread enthusiasm for new ideas and cutting-edge innovations, a critical and reflective approach was prevalent, serving as a thread which weaved throughout panel discussions and into informal conversations.

We hope that the relationships and networks fostered at the conference continue to grow and develop into a collective resource for individuals and organisations to draw upon for ideas, collaborations and support.

We also look forward to keeping you up to date on our activities and events at the Humanitarian Innovation Project in Oxford. Please check in with us at our website (http://www.oxhip.org/) – and stay tuned for information and news about #HIP2015!

Sincerely,

The Humanitarian Innovation Project Team

Recent & Forthcoming HIP Publications

Humanitarian Innovation: The State of the Art
Available soon: http://www.oxhip.org/publications/

Refugee Economies: Rethinking Popular Assumptions
Alexander Betts et al (2014), Humanitarian Innovation Project
http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/refugeeconomies

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