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# **Humanitarian innovation and refugee protection**

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## List of abbreviations

DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
HIP	Humanitarian Innovation Project
NGO	non-governmental organisation

# 1 Introduction

The global governance of humanitarianism has historically been state-centric (Barnett and Weiss 2011). When people are displaced by conflict, repression or natural disaster, the assumption is that the only viable response is led and coordinated by donor governments, based largely on a logic of charity. When a crisis breaks out, the humanitarian system – as an international analogue to the domestic welfare state – kicks in, and vulnerable people receive access to protection. The global refugee regime, for example, based around the role of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), enables states to collectively act to provide protection to people fleeing across international borders (Betts et al 2012). This predominantly state-led and state-coordinated response is crucial and saves lives. However, by itself, it has limitations.

First, it can be *inefficient*: humanitarian organisations may resort to the products, processes, and approaches that they have used in the past, even when they may not be the most efficient or effective available. Second, it can lead to *dependency*: the logic of charity underlying humanitarian response sometimes leads people to be caught in a situation of long-term reliance on international support. This can undermine people’s autonomy, depriving them of opportunities to use their skills, entrepreneurship, and creativity to help themselves and be a benefit to their host communities. Third, it can be *unsustainable*: long-term humanitarian assistance represents a drain on increasingly finite humanitarian budgets.

These challenges apply across the humanitarian system. However, they are starkly illustrated within so-called protracted refugee situations, in which refugees find themselves in an intractable state of limbo for more than five years, frequently confined to refugee camps in which they have no right to work and limited freedom of movement (Crisp 2003; Loescher et al 2008). Over half of the world’s refugees today live in such situations. When you speak to refugees, one of the most dominant responses is that they want the right to work, earn a livelihood, and move freely. And yet the dominant humanitarian model tends to crowd-out opportunities for refugees to receive protection in sustainable ways that build upon their skills and talents. Part of this is a problem of host government regulation but part of it stems from the perception of refugees as an inevitable burden rather than a potential benefit to host communities.

In response to these challenges, this paper puts forward an alternative vision based on the role of ‘humanitarian innovation’. It understands innovation not as novelty or invention but as the adaptation of products or processes to a particular context. It is based on the recognition that there may be alternative, untapped solutions and solution-holders ‘out there’ that can provide new and better ways to approach the different sectors that comprise humanitarianism – water, sanitation, nutrition, communications, livelihoods, shelter, and health, for example. Furthermore, it is based on the recognition that sometimes private actors – including refugees themselves and businesses at the local, national and global levels – may offer creative and sustainable alternatives to state-led humanitarian dependency.

This ‘innovation turn’ is beginning to emerge across the UN system. UNICEF has been pioneering in establishing an Innovation Unit within its headquarters in New York, and a number of Innovation Labs, beginning in Kosovo, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. These labs have worked on developing and adapting technologies such as birth registration systems and

provided opportunities for youth empowerment through mentoring and nurturing social entrepreneurship and business development. UN Global Pulse was created in 2009 to harness innovation for the world's vulnerable, with a particular focus on what they call "real-time data". Most recently in 2012, UNHCR has created an initiative called UNHCR Innovation based at its headquarters in Geneva, and is working to develop methodologies to pilot, prototype and iterate alternative responses to refugee protection.

In addition to providing new ideas for products and processes, humanitarian innovation has the potential to 'crowd in' rather than 'crowd out' private sector initiative – at local, national and global levels. The international humanitarian regime has too often had an instinctive antipathy for the private sector, and historically, it is striking how little humanitarian actors attempted to engage the private sector. Across different areas of global governance, it has generally been assumed that the primary motivations for private sector involvement would be either philanthropy or corporate social responsibility. Innovation offers an alternative – and arguably more compelling – motive for private sector engagement in the humanitarian world. If a product can be piloted with refugee populations, then it may have the potential to be scaled for the bottom 2 billion who live on less than \$2 per day, and potentially lead to reverse innovation to an even broader market. That logic of scalability creates a compelling – and hitherto neglected – motive for private sector investment in humanitarianism in ways that may simultaneously address challenges of inefficiency, dependency, and unsustainability.

This paper explores the potential of humanitarian innovation to transform core elements of the global governance of humanitarianism in general and refugee protection in particular. It proceeds in three broad sections. First, it gives a background to the work of UNHCR and the way in which the organisation is gradually incorporating a role for the private sector and innovation into its work. Second, it explains what innovation is and how and why it is relevant to refugee protection. Third, it sets out a vision for humanitarian innovation within the refugee context based on integrating a 'looking inwards' approach that builds upon refugees own ideas and agency and a 'looking outwards' approach that seeks to identify outside partners and solution-holders whose products, processes and mentorship might nurture and incubate innovation emerging at the local and national levels.

## **2 Refugees, UNHCR and the private sector**

The modern refugee regime was created in the aftermath of the Second World War. It is based firstly upon the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, which defines who a refugee is and the rights to which he or she is entitled, and secondly UNHCR, which was created to work with states to ensure protection and solutions for refugees. Throughout most of its history, this regime has been conceived to be predominantly state-centric and state-led. Of course, humanitarian response relies upon a range of non-governmental organisation (NGO) implementing partners but the funding and core humanitarian response is driven by states.

Initially, the refugee regime was conceived mainly to play a legal and capacity-building role in ensuring that governments would meet their core international legal obligations towards refugees. Over time, however, the role of UNHCR has changed. Since the 1980s, it has played

a growing role in refugee care and maintenance, playing a humanitarian function in protecting vulnerable people who have crossed international borders (Loescher 2001). This has transformed UNHCR's role into one that includes the provision of protection and assistance within refugee camps and settlements. In theory, refugee responses should proceed relatively quickly from emergency response to protection to durable solutions, and refugees should obtain repatriation, resettlement or local integration in a timely manner. In practice, however, this rarely happens, and many refugees remain in refugee camps for many years with few opportunities for work, education or mobility.

Support for refugees who remain in camps and settlements is almost exclusively provided by donor governments that pool resources through UNHCR to reallocate to a range of NGO implementing partners. This model – effectively the international analogue to the domestic welfare state – often leads to inefficiency, dependency and unsustainability. It is a response that is premised upon a range of assumptions. It presumes that refugee protection is inevitably a public good, rather like street lighting, which only offers collective benefits and so requires collective action in order to ensure its provision. This in turn is premised upon the idea that refugees are a burden for host states and communities, imposing a cost to be shared, rather than being a possible source of opportunity and benefit to host societies and economies. The logic that follows from these assumptions is that refugees' assistance needs can only be met by the state sector rather than the private sector, and addressed within a humanitarian rather than a development paradigm. Table 1 simplistically highlights the basis of this reconceptualisation from state-sector to private sector, from dependency to empowerment, from humanitarianism to development, from public good to private good, and from seeing refugees as burden to seeing them as benefit.

'Old Way'	'New Way'
State Sector	Private sector
Dependency	Empowerment
Humanitarianism	Development
Public Good	Private Good
Refugees as Burden	Refugees as Benefit

**Table 1:** The paradigm shift in refugee protection

How far has UNHCR gone so far towards embracing the paradigm shift described in Table 1? At various points in its history, UNHCR has recognised that long-term encampment and dependency are problematic for both refugees and states, and has attempted to reconceive refugee protection within a 'development' logic rather than an exclusively 'humanitarian' logic (Crisp 2001; Gorman 1987, 1993; Mattner 2008; Betts 2009). It has, for example, tried to develop partnerships with the World Bank and UNDP to facilitate refugees' self-reliance or local integration based on integrated service provision alongside national host populations, and based on enabling refugees to have access to land and livelihoods opportunities (De Vriese 2006; Dryden-Paterson and Hovil 2004; Horst 2006; Jacobsen 2002, 2006; Kaiser 2006; Lautze 1997; Meyer 2006). However, such responses have often broken down because they have relied upon state backing to succeed. Donor governments have been reluctant to channel their development budgets into refugee protection, and host states, without significant donor backing, have been reluctant to recognise the benefits of self-reliance and local integration (Betts 2004; 2008; 2009).

Yet, arguably, one important missing link in this development-based approach to refugee protection has been the role of the private sector. If, rather than relying on donor governments to support self-sufficiency, innovative and market-based approaches to protection could be found, then these might provide a viable basis on which to reconceive refugee assistance as a developmental rather than an exclusively humanitarian challenge. Even without needing to advocate for permanent local integration, a role for the private sector may allow a shift from dependency to self-sufficiency, and the means to fold refugees into the mainstream of society rather than leave them isolated within camps.

There is a growing literature on global governance and the private sector (Biersteker and Hall 2002; Brown and Woods 2008; Cutler et al 1999; Fuchs 2005; Ruggie 2005; Clapp 2009; Faulkner 2005; Levy and Newell 2005; May 2006; Sell 2003; Haufler 2006) and yet it has largely neglected to consider the role of the private sector within humanitarian governance, let alone the refugee regime. Ironically, in its early years, the UNHCR relied almost exclusively on private sector funding, using a grant from the Ford Foundation to provide assistance to refugees in Europe during the 1950s (Loescher 2001). Yet it is only since the early 2000s, that the potential of the private sector has been explicitly recognised by UNHCR. As well as serving as a source of funding, private sector actors have increasingly become engaged partners, working collaboratively with UNHCR to develop ideas and policies.

UNHCR's engagement with the private sector has gone through three phases during the 2000s: i) philanthropy, ii) corporate social responsibility (CSR) and now iii) innovation. First, and with limited success, it sought to encourage donations from the private sector by creating a Private Sector Fund Raising Unit in 2006. Second, with contributions initially low, it developed much more engaged – and CSR-focused – fundraising strategy based on a new Corporate and Foundation Partnerships Unit at its headquarters in Geneva. In 2009, for example, UNHCR raised around \$50m in private sector contributions from companies including Nike, Merck, BP, Motorola Foundation, and All Nippon Airways, for example (Betts, Loescher, Milner 2011). It also attracted in-kind contributions with, for example, Skype developing UNHCR's internal communications on a pro bono basis. Firms were prepared to contribute to UNHCR largely on the basis of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, wishing to be associated with a humanitarian brand, and sometimes working on particular projects.

Finally, since 2010 UNHCR's private sector work has moved towards innovation. As part of the 'modernisation' remit of the Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees, the Office began to establish public-private partnerships to offer sources of expertise and innovation in areas such as digital media and engineering. In 2012 it created a new section called UNHCR Innovation, focusing on three areas of activity: live (relating to emergency response), work (relating to livelihoods), and link (relating to communications). In each of these areas, UNHCR Innovation is seeking to identify ways in which it can identify particular 'field challenges' and respond to these by piloting and scaling new alternative solutions, which may be drawn from within existing UNHCR practices or from outside actors, including the private sector.

The first major focus of UNHCR Innovation has been based on a \$110m grant from the IKEA Foundation, focusing on the Dolo Ado refugee camps in Ethiopia. This grant is being used to develop 'model refugee camps' within which alternative products and processes are being piloted and evaluated. The initiative has plans to expand the scope of its work to Kenya and

Uganda, as well as to create a ‘virtual space’ within the organisation within which ‘good practices’ can be captured and scaled. However, there is recognition that this work needs to be built on partnerships, not only with the private sector but also academic institutions in order to provide a conceptual and knowledge base. UNHCR Innovation has thereby developed a partnership with Stanford University to work on camp design and with Oxford University – through our Humanitarian Innovation Project (HIP) – to contribute to the conceptual development of the initiative and its work on livelihoods. The question is how should such an initiative proceed? What potential do innovation, technology, and the private sector have for transforming refugee protection and assistance?

### 3 The role of innovation

Innovation may trigger thoughts of invention, technological research and development, however more recent definitions of innovation encompass the importance of social interaction and “iterative and interactive models” (Tuomi 2002). Capturing feedback from a range of sources enables the development of ideas and innovative solutions. Innovation requires thinking outside of the box and collaboration with new and unexpected stakeholders.

Innovation in this sense is used broadly across the private sector as a method of survival, providing firms with a competitive advantage. However, as shown by UNHCR Innovation, it is not only the private sector that is looking to innovation for improvements in efficiency and effectiveness. Other examples include the Humanitarian Innovation Fund, which is providing grants for innovative project ideas. Similarly Oxfam runs its own internal innovation competition for staff in its countries of operation, aiming to find answers to water and sanitation challenges. Work by ALNAP (The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Partnership) suggests that for ‘transformational learning’ to take place in humanitarian organisations, dedication to innovation is required. A recognised definition within the sector describes innovations as “dynamic processes which focus on the creation and implementation of new or improved products and services, processes, positions and paradigms” (Ramalingam et al 2009).

Innovation draws from these notions of learning lessons from one another and collaborating to iterate ideas. The innovation process takes a well-defined problem, looks for inspiration to solve the problem, then pilots, tests and iterates, thus finding a solution that can be scaled for wider benefits. Innovation is not about creating novelty but rather identifying better ways in which problems can be matched with the most appropriate available solutions. This thinking helps to shape and change the way we may normally conceive solutions.

HIP explores trends in innovation for the humanitarian sector and makes a practical contribution to informing how the role of innovation can be enhanced – leading to a paradigm shift in policy and practice. Below we take a closer look at the role of innovation in humanitarian assistance, firstly in an emergency response and then in protracted refugee situations.

## **Emergency response**

An emergency response is triggered by unexpected sudden events, slow-onset crisis, man-made conflicts or natural disasters. Regardless of the trigger, affected populations are forced to leave their homes, towns and countries, seeking refuge in safer areas where livelihoods have not been disrupted and basic services are available. In 2011, 62 million people were considered in need of assistance following a crisis, and in 2012 this number is growing (Poole et al 2012).

Challenges that face refugees, humanitarian agencies and host states in an emergency, span across all sectors that comprise humanitarianism and are further complicated by the chaotic and complex ecosystem of an emergency. Challenges range from limited availability of communication systems where infrastructure is broken, to a lack of access to enough water for large populations in compact spaces.

Across all sectors there are untapped opportunities for the private sector and others outside the usual arena, to offer practical solutions to some of these key challenges. The Haiti earthquake in January 2010 proved some innovative concepts for the communication challenges faced by the humanitarian agency and internally displaced people. In the hours following the earthquake Haiti's Radio One host, Carcel Pedre, committed to keep the radio running despite the risks inside the damaged building. Carcel started sharing information over the radio, web and social networks, when mobile networks were damaged. Sharing information about access to aid and offering an internet phone service to the public. Other social media network platforms were used to share information about missing people and report up to date information from communities; building a sense of community and hope to those affected (Pedre 2012).

Access to information is key in an emergency. The multinational network systems company, Cisco, provides technical expertise and networking equipment to humanitarian agencies in an emergency crisis. The specialised Cisco 'tactical operations' unit has supported emergencies in the US, Haiti and more recently in Dadaab refugee camp, Kenya. Working with the charities Nethope and Inveneo in getting improved communications systems in place for NGOs means that agencies have better access to information and communications between one another, therefore resulting in a faster response to the refugees than has previously been possible (Nethope 2012).

In order to tackle the issue of having appropriate and readily available water and sanitation solutions for large populations, Oxfam regularly works with its private sector suppliers to design new products. Large water tanks, easy to transport and construct, durable drilling rigs and other bespoke equipment is then available at short notice for rapid deployment in an emergency, better meeting the demands of large displaced communities than traditional off-the-shelf products.

Informal innovations are also prominent in communities during an emergency, sowing the seeds for self-reliance and livelihoods. Many internally displaced people in Haiti used the distributed plastic sheets from agencies to innovate designs for the façade of their resurrected businesses. Windows and decorative shapes were cut into the sheets that constructed the walls and roofs of their cafes and shops.

The examples above show some of the potential that can be found when we look beyond the humanitarian sector itself for innovative answers to these pressing issues. The declared period of an ‘emergency response’ is not the only place that can benefit from these types of innovations. People will continue live in a camp or ‘temporary’ conditions for long periods of time and innovation has an important role to play here for different challenges faced by protracted refugee situations.

### **Protracted refugee situations**

One of the major difficulties UNHCR faces in prolonged displacement is diminished donor interest in supporting these long-term refugees. As refugee situations become protracted, levels of international relief are normally largely reduced or entirely cut off. Currently, six million refugees globally are trapped in “intractable state of limbo” (UNHCR 2004) and spend many years with very little access to their human rights and socio-economic opportunities.

Given the daunting scale of protracted displacement and reducing financial commitment from donors, in recent years the UN refugee agency has been increasingly promoting refugees’ livelihoods and ‘self-reliance’ as a means to unlock the situations of prolonged exile. However, the interventions aimed at supporting refugee livelihoods and self-reliance have often been conceived in an unsustainable manner. There are a range of livelihoods projects for refugees but they tend to be deprived of adequate resources to capitalise on refugees’ skills and aspirations and, more importantly, are very often divorced from sustainable market-based opportunities.

In the search of measures for enabling sustainable livelihoods of refugees, an innovative solution may well be presented by the private sector – including small firms set up by refugees to multi-national global companies. In recent years some insightful ideas have been introduced by the private sector to create livelihood opportunities for refugees in protracted situations. For instance, Samasource, a US-based social enterprise, has pioneered a business model known as ‘microwork’ or ‘virtual work’ – a way of breaking down digital projects into small tasks and outsourcing these tasks to individual workers through the internet. Using this model the company has trained refugees in Dadaab refugee camp, Kenya, with basic computer skills and enabled them to do digital works for profitable firms in Silicon Valley. With this unique model that provides a transnational bridge between refugees in the South and global corporations, a large number of refugees have been connected to market-based livelihood opportunities.

Innovative ideas to promote the livelihoods of refugees in prolonged exile can emanate not only from global companies with better access to resources but also from local small-scale enterprises. For instance, at the grassroots level, refugee entrepreneurs can form collectives to enhance their ability to market their product at higher prices or develop means to finance small-scale businesses. At the national level, local business people, who have a good knowledge of both opportunities and constraints in local markets, can generate market-based livelihood solutions for refugees, as presented in the following section of this paper.

## 4 Looking inwards

HIP has two main research tracks: 'looking inwards' and 'looking outwards'. In this section we focus on 'looking inwards', in particular at how refugees engage with markets, technology and the private sector in ways that enhance their own welfare and protection.

Contrary to the widespread image of 'passive victims', in reality, refugees actively participate in markets, take advantage of technology, and play an important role in the private sector. Nowadays, it is common to see refugees masterfully using modern technology. Refugees in the global South often have access to a mobile phone and other types of electronic gadgets. Some of them go to internet cafes regularly and use emails and Skype to enhance their access to financial assets and economic opportunities (see Duale 2011; Omata 2011). When refugees' right to work and move freely in the host country are respected, they have usually been able to use their own skills, resources and creativity to participate in markets and to formulate their own businesses in the private sector (see De Vriese 2006; Hovil 2007; Campbell 2005).

As an initial pilot study of the HIP, we conducted fieldwork in Kampala, the Ugandan capital, between July and August 2012. The central aim of the research looked at the livelihoods strategies of urban refugees in Kampala and their engagement with local markets and the private sector. Uganda allows refugees to work, move relatively freely within the country and live among the local communities. Unlike many of its neighbours, which encamp refugees, the Ugandan government promotes the self-reliance of refugees; this means that rather than limiting responses to refugees to humanitarian relief, a space is open for a development-based approach to refugee assistance. With this progressive policy, coupled with its relative stability, as of 2012, Uganda hosts approximately 200,000 refugees from diverse nationalities, and nearly 25 per cent of them reside in Kampala despite little support from refugee-assisting agencies (UNHCR 2012).

With very limited access to humanitarian assistance, refugees in Kampala are making a living on their own by employing a variety of economic activities. The majority of refugees are self-employed and have built their own livelihoods on market demands in Uganda, their country of origin or even sub-region. For instance, a large number of Congolese refugees are involved in informal small-scale trading of used clothing, accessories and food in the local markets. A considerable number of refugees have constructed their businesses on demands in their mother country. One of the refugee interviewees from Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been buying plastic items such as jerry cans, water tanks, buckets, and basins in Kampala and exporting them to retail sellers in DRC through his trade networks. Several refugees work as business brokers between Uganda and their country of origin. An Eritrean male refugee, for example, has been achieving good commission by bringing together Eritrean second-hand car sellers with Indian and Pakistan car dealers in Kampala. Importantly, these refugee brokers are creating business opportunities for both their country of origin and of asylum by linking demands with supply between two different markets (Omata 2012).

In Kampala, refugees are deeply involved in the local private sector through their livelihood activities. Besides a large number of petty traders in the informal sector, there are also successful refugee entrepreneurs with formally registered businesses. For instance, there are many refugee enterprises owned by Somali in Kisenyi, an area where large numbers of Somali people concentrate in Kampala. Research with the Somali community in Kisenyi highlights

families running small businesses that include mini-supermarkets there. One such shop stocks a wide range of supplies including rice, canned food, ice cream, soap, and cosmetic goods, which are purchased from Ugandan merchants. It is formally registered with the local municipality, and employs four Somali refugees and two Ugandan nationals. Given their multiple contributions to the host economy, these successful refugee entrepreneurs are particularly important actors in Kampala's private sector (Omata 2012).

Refugees can also be linked to markets and the private sector through innovative initiatives by local companies. For instance, an engineer at Makerere University, Uganda's largest university, has founded a firm called Technology for Tomorrow. This private company employs both Ugandans and refugees to produce an environmentally-friendly sanitary pad – the Makapad – and sells them to UNHCR to be distributed in refugee settlements in Uganda. Previously, these sanitary pads for refugees were imported from China to Uganda. By producing them with local natural materials in Uganda, however, the company has succeeded in developing biodegradable sanitary pads and also making employment for both locals and refugees. According to the founder, the company produced 270,000 sanitary pads in 2011 and is currently hiring 242 employees, of which 40 are refugees. These employees, regardless of whether they are locals or refugees, are receiving about 200 USD as their monthly salary. Technology for Tomorrow is now aspiring to make the MakaPad as a commercially viable product and to scale up the business by exploring the national market.

As the examples from Uganda illustrate, refugees do engage with local markets and the business sector with multiple roles. Table 2 summarises the four potential roles which refugees can play in relation to the private sector: beneficiary, employee, entrepreneur and customer. Importantly, each of these roles requires certain conditions that are enabled or constrained by legal, financial, social and human factors. In the humanitarian regime, refugees have been predominantly treated as beneficiaries of charity, and thus their role in the private sector has been often limited to recipients of goods that are financed by donor states (Ramalingam et al. 2009). Such an approach largely relies on continuous funding from the donor community, thereby lacking sustainability and inducing dependency in refugees.

However, when the enabling conditions are met, refugees are capable of playing a more active role in the private sector. In Kampala, numerous self-settled refugees are involved in the business sector as entrepreneurs and some of them are making considerable contributions to the host economy. With its promotion of self-reliance for refugees, Uganda provides a relatively conducive environment for refugees equipped with entrepreneurial ideas and financial capitals to embark on their own enterprise. In the model presented by Technology for Tomorrow, refugees are engaging with the private sector as employees. When sanitary pads were distributed to refugees as humanitarian aid, refugees were merely beneficiaries of these free products. Nevertheless, by employing refugees as manufacturers of products, Technology for Tomorrow has exemplified a way of facilitating refugees' engagement with markets and the private sector.

The four roles in Table 2 are not mutually exclusive but viewing refugees only as beneficiaries of charity consequently misses a number of contributions refugees can make by participating in the markets. As the founder of Technology for Tomorrow aspires, the commercial success of

the MakaPad will likely create more refugee employees. Ideally, with earned income, these refugee employees will become future entrepreneurs and/or consumers who can offer multiple benefits for the private sector in the host country.

		Conditions enabling and constraining refugees to engage in each role			
		Legal	Financial	Social	Human
<b>Roles of refugees</b>	<b>Beneficiary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>acknowledgement of existence and needs</li> <li>recognition of refugee status</li> <li>right to own currency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>support from donors</li> <li>donation or charity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>relationships with donor agency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>knowledge of local language</li> </ul>
	<b>Employee</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>right to work</li> <li>freedom of movement</li> <li>access to work-related documents (i.e. work permit)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>relationship with locals (e.g. discrimination, xenophobia and competition)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>literacy</li> <li>ability to labour</li> <li>good health</li> <li>basic business knowledge</li> <li>knowledge of local language</li> </ul>
	<b>Entrepreneur</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>right to work</li> <li>right to rent land &amp; shop</li> <li>access to work-related documents (i.e. business license)</li> <li>freedom of movement</li> <li>right to own property</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>access to finance (start-up capital &amp; investment)</li> <li>saving facility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>relationship with locals (e.g. discrimination, xenophobia and competition)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>literacy</li> <li>ability to labour</li> <li>good health</li> <li>business ideas &amp; strategies</li> <li>business management skills</li> <li>knowledge of local language</li> </ul>
	<b>Customer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>freedom of movement</li> <li>right to own currency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>access to cash</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>market-based social networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>knowledge of local language</li> </ul>

**Table 2:** Potential roles of refugees in relation to the private sector and market

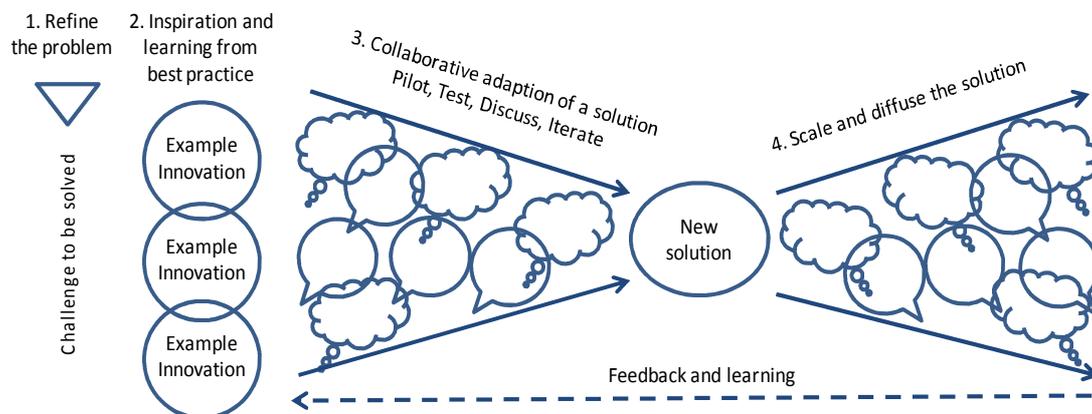
## 5 Looking outwards

The examples given from our Uganda pilot study are localised initiatives, demonstrating models and technologies that may be adapted, iterated and diffused elsewhere. For example, Technology for Tomorrow might itself introduce new products to supply other demands in the market or the same model might be replicated in other countries. Alternatively, Technology for Tomorrow may serve as a source of inspiration for alternative ways to tackle new problems found in other contexts and offer lessons of best practice.

On the other hand, the field challenges and experiences of refugees in Uganda, for example, have the potential to be complemented by drawing upon ‘outside’ solutions, best practices, and related partners drawn from elsewhere. HIP aims to couple our research on the ground by looking ‘outwards’ to identify and capture potentially relevant examples of innovation from across sectors, disciplines and countries. By mapping these examples of innovation that have the potential to inspire new ideas or be scaled for improvements in refugee assistance, the aim is to create a springboard for the ‘new way’ of perceiving refugee protection.

There is a huge amount going on ‘out there’ in terms of untapped humanitarian practice and private sector innovation with potential relevance to the humanitarian context, and yet potential solutions and partners are often missed because of an information gap. No single consolidated database exists for humanitarian solutions. By capturing and consolidating examples from the ‘outside’ which have potential for expansion or new application in humanitarian assistance, a humanitarian innovation database, for example, might enable sources of inspiration for solutions to specific field challenges.

This wider database of products, processes, and related partners has an important role to play within the innovation process that can be applied to specific field challenges. A schematic of the innovation process is shown below, with key iterative stages and feedback and learning informing each step along the way. Below we explore the value of each step, and the role that sources of outside inspiration and best practice can play at each stage.



**Figure 1:** Schematic showing the innovation process

### 1. Refine the problem

Recognition of a humanitarian challenge or problem in the first instance is crucial if an optimised solution is to be found. Interpretations of humanitarian problems can be biased towards those with pre-conceived solutions, or may be shaped by perspectives which are disconnected with the context and influenced by what is already on offer. The innovation process will help to refine a problem statement in order to present a well-defined and unbiased challenge to be solved.

### 2. Inspiration and learning from best practice

Once a challenge has been defined, new ideas for solving the problem can be inspired by outside examples and shaped by learning from the best and worst practices. It is here that we

focus our work initially in looking outwards for inspiration and lessons. Looking outwards involves capturing those innovative examples; extracted from local communities, the private sector, humanitarian and development agencies, governments and academia. These are real solutions to problems commonly found within the sub-sectors of humanitarianism, problems that face communities and refugees day-to-day. Each of these examples has a story to tell and lesson to learn from, and importantly, potential for adaptation in a new context. Three examples of solutions that inspire change and innovation are illustrated in the boxes, contributing to stage 2 in the innovation process.

**Box 1: ColaLife**

ColaLife is a charity working to “leverage Coca-Cola’s distribution channels to carry so-called social products—oral rehydration solution (ORS), zinc supplements, water purification tablets—that last mile” (Marshall, 2012). The method of using The Coca-Cola Company supply chain to distribute basic healthcare products to remote locations was piloted in Zambia and lessons are being learnt to take forward and scale up the operation. ColaLife collaborates with the sub-contracted companies that distribute Coca-Cola. It trains local traders then links them to the wholesalers of the products. ColaLife is also planning to work on building local manufacturing capacity for the products. This innovative idea makes use of the private sector at a multinational and a local level. The concept could inspire other similar collaborations with existing supply chains, or methods of stimulating local business to be tried and tested in a refugee context.

**Box 2: Communications collaboration**

An innovative communications collaboration project between Ushandi, Samasource, Frontline SMS and CrowdFlower was initiated following the earthquake that struck Haiti on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2010 (Mission4636, online 2012). A free-phone number was set-up for the effected population to communicate their needs. Local volunteers were used to map out the needs, prioritise the information and pass it on to responding aid agencies. This initiative demonstrated how mobile networks can be leveraged for powerful crowd sourcing of information when it is most vital. There are many innovations in mobile communications that lessons can be taken from to inform scaling of these ideas to new areas, not only in emergency responses.

**Box 3: The Maker Faire Africa**

The Maker Faire Africa is an event for craftsmen, artisans, scientists and anyone else with great ideas to showcase designs and products, “collaborate and create” (Maker Faire Africa, online 2012). The event was inspired by Maker Faires’ in the US which bring together creative and resourceful designs. Makers have the opportunity to network and discuss how to scale their ideas to the next level. One example from Maker Faire Africa 2010 is of a group of designers in Kenya who built a business crafting and painting cow bones into jewellery and kitchenware (Schwartz, 2010). Sharing ideas in this collaborative way could be scaled to other locations (currently only in Nairobi, Kenya) and adapted to offer funding or skills development around individual products and processes.

By analysing the inputs required for each example innovation and how it got to where it is, we can build a deeper understanding of the methods through which innovations such as these can be developed.

Innovation is occurring among humanitarian actors and ‘under the radar’ in communities, but these inspirational innovations are not being captured or shared. The Humanitarian Innovation Project will travel outwards and systematically bring examples inwards to inform a newly defined and innovative method of best practice.

### **3. Collaborative adaption of a solution**

By making this information and analysis on each example widely available through the innovation process we will generate a dialogue in adapting the examples in order to specifically meet the needs of a refined humanitarian challenge. The innovation process will contribute to practical steps forward for transforming these examples into opportunities for new ways of working. The collaborative adaptation of the solution takes place both through the dialogue and its role alongside practically piloting and evaluating the product or process.

### **4. Scale and diffuse the solution**

Once optimised solutions have been defined, we will seek methods to scale them to wider markets. Through the diffusion of these solutions, benefits can then also be realised for communities outside of the refugee context, highlighting the positive contribution to the host state and society.

Interaction and collaboration are an important part of successful innovation. Examples of innovation alone will not create change. Contributions from communities, humanitarians, the private sector and academia are required to break down the typical boundaries that currently restrict innovative solutions. Stimulating a dialogue and action around the iteration of ideas, pilots and diffusion of solutions, will enable the ‘new ways’ of working to have a greater impact on sustained community livelihoods. Looking outwards at inspirations and best practices will help to identify potential partners we can work with on this journey, learning and seeking solutions from areas not yet explored.

## **6 Refugee innovation centres**

The ethos behind the ‘looking inwards’ and ‘looking outwards’ tracks of research was developed with the intention of bringing the two together in practice. By recognising refugees’ own engagement with innovation, technology, and the private sector, we hope to be able to identify opportunities to build upon and support refugees from the grassroots level upwards. Field challenges and refugees’ own resilience, livelihoods, and self-protection strategies may represent opportunities to connect to external partners and solution-holders in mutually beneficial and sustainable ways. The connection between local challenges and opportunities, on the one hand, and global solutions and partners may take place in either physical or virtual spaces. Most challenges will have unique features and problems that will need to be understood at the local level, but innovation in context has the potential to be complemented by capturing outside sources of inspiration and potential partners.

The idea of ‘Refugee Innovation Centres’ – in urban or rural locations – may offer a physical space within which refugees could receive access to microcredit, vocational training, mentorship, support with social innovation, business development, and the incubation of

innovative ideas, alongside the national host populations, for example. Such centres could serve as both incubators for entrepreneurship as well as spaces from which to pilot, evaluate, iterate, and prototype particular products and process innovations, on either a for-profit or a non-profit basis. They would provide a physical space within which the innovation process described above can take place. The idea builds upon precedents such as the ‘iHub’ in Nairobi, Social Innovation Camps, or UNICEF’s Kosovo lab, within which young people in particular have received access to training, mentorship and funding to develop social innovation projects. Such structures could be located in urban or rural areas, and refugees could in turn be encouraged to become mentors and share skills with other refugees.

In addition to physical ‘centres’, the matching of field challenges with outside solutions within the innovation process may also take place in less geographically defined ways. One key challenge is to build a methodology that can enable particular humanitarian innovations to be piloted and evaluated, and competing outside solutions to be competitively assessed, enabling the best solutions for a particular context to be identified and made available. Developing this kind of methodology represents a new departure for social science research, requiring innovative approaches like field experiments and experimental design to be used to establish the conditions under which particular products and processes have particular outcomes.

## 7 Conclusion

There is no inevitability to seeing refugees as passive, humanitarian subjects. As human beings with talents, skills and aspirations their presence represents an opportunity as much as a challenge. At the emergency response phase, the challenges created across the sub-sectors of humanitarianism provide a huge range of possibilities to adapt and develop products and processes that can improve response. Within protracted refugee situations, the long-term ‘warehousing’ of refugees in camps, usually without any right to work or freedom of movement, represents an unnecessary human tragedy (Smith 2004). Given access to training, mentorship, microcredit, and livelihoods, refugees can be empowered to be a benefit rather than a burden to host communities.

Innovation, technology, and the private sector are not a panacea for refugee crises. States still have an important role. Donor governments, working through international organisations, are crucial to provide a safety net to millions of people fleeing desperate situations. But market-based opportunities at the local, national and international levels may offer ways to complement and build upon this minimum safety net, by offering economic and social opportunities to refugees, nationals and even multinational corporations.

Of course the scope for refugee livelihoods and entrepreneurship is ultimately subject to the regulatory environment in host states of first asylum. However, even where there are constraints, innovation may be possible through creating opportunities for micro-work within camps. Moreover, if the benefits of innovation can be demonstrated in countries with more positive regulatory environments, such as Uganda, then other countries may start to recognise the economic benefits of empowering refugees, and begin to gradually embrace self-reliance strategies that move beyond encampment.

The shift from a purely state-centric ‘old way’ of approaching humanitarianism to a ‘new way’ that embraces innovation, technology and the private sector will inevitably pose risks as well as opportunities. It must be based on careful oversight by international organisations such as UNHCR to ensure that it does not compromise core protection standards and does not lead to exploitation. However, done well, it holds the potential to fundamentally transform the products and processes involved in emergency response and to begin to overcome the worst human consequences of protracted refugee situations and long-term humanitarian dependency, while simultaneously benefiting the economy of host states.

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