Global Partnerships for Humanitarian Impact and Innovation (2): Challenges and Opportunities

The Global Partnerships for Humanitarian Impact and Innovation (GPHI2) – an initiative by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) with support from Fondation Lombard Odier and IMD – aims to promote the development of innovative solutions to humanitarian challenges by harnessing the creative capacity of the private and the humanitarian sectors to respond to the needs of conflict victims. This ambitious initiative was launched at an event hosted by IMD in Lausanne that included representatives from the private sector, academia, research institutes, and leading humanitarian actors from the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and beyond. In this insights@IMD we summarize the event and explore the challenges and opportunities of innovative humanitarian partnerships.

Challenges and priority issues

The ICRC has a tradition of working with the private sector, governments and other partners to develop innovative ways to help alleviate the suffering of people affected by conflict and violence (see text box). Examples of humanitarian innovation have ranged from building better carriages to transport wounded soldiers in the 19th century to modern advances in war surgery and the use of digital communications for humanitarian work. The changing global context has given rise to new challenges and priority issues, some of which guided the working group discussions during the event. These topics, which are examined in the following section, were selected with a view to focusing the debate and creating momentum around key strategic challenges facing the ICRC and the humanitarian sector.

The ICRC in brief

Established in 1863, the ICRC is an impartial, neutral and independent organization. Its exclusively humanitarian mission – to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other violent situations and to give them assistance – is realized through its delegations in over 80 countries and in partnership with 189 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies at national and local levels. The ICRC in numbers (2013):

- 3 Nobel Prizes awarded to the ICRC during its 150-year history, with the first ever prize going to Henry Dunant, the organization’s founder.
- 110+ countries in which the ICRC provided vital assistance and protection.
- 11,784 field staff (delegates and local staff) around the world.
- 283,691 patients benefited from services at 93 ICRC-supported physical rehabilitation centers.
- 756,158 detainees visited by the ICRC, in 1,728 places of detention in 96 regions or countries.
- 1,025,536 people to whom the ICRC gave cash assistance.
- 8.2 million people for whom the ICRC provided medical and health-related services – via 326 hospitals and 560 other healthcare facilities worldwide.
- 28.7 million people reached worldwide through activities such as water trucking, construction and repair of water points, and training in basic hygiene.
humanitarian actors are constantly reacting to rapidly changing external environments and are not proactively setting the agenda. This leaves them open to disruption of the public information space in disaster or conflict zones by actors who might not be sympathetic to humanitarian interventions.

Another key issue concerns data – in an age of information overload, how can humanitarian organizations find new patterns in how to use data, and how much should they engage with others who are working with big data?

The implications for change management in a hyper-connected world were discussed in a follow-up session. The need to be inclusive and transparent, both internally with staff and externally with other stakeholders, emerged as a critical challenge related to perceived legitimacy in a hyper-connected world.

Challenge 3: Meeting the needs of conflict victims with frugal innovation

Rather than looking at adapting existing technologies to the needs of users in developing markets, these needs are now the starting point of the innovation process, leading to the development of a new kind of innovation. The working group dedicated to this challenge, moderated by Professor Charles Dhanaraj, discussed how “frugal innovations” – products and services that are aimed at contexts characterized by scarcity of capital, personnel and infrastructure – can allow humanitarian actors to better respond to beneficiaries’ needs. The discussion crystallized around a number of questions posed by the group: In which areas is the ICRC looking for innovation (see text box)? How does the organization adopt and diffuse an innovation? How does it get beneficiaries to buy in and adopt? Given the contextual difficulties in conflict zones, how does the ICRC engage stakeholders? How does it identify and disseminate problems to be solved to other potential innovators? What are the tools for frugal innovation? And how can the private sector benefit from the insights that the ICRC generates?

How frugal innovations are implemented was the focus of a follow-up working session. One key consideration is to
identify the problem or the job to be done rather than prescribing the solution. Having a structured framework or system to do this, as well as an incentive system, can push forward innovations both inside and outside the organization. In addition, it is essential to talk to anyone interested in solving social problems – social entrepreneurs, technology start-ups, local communities and non-traditional participants – to tease out other ideas and allow for unexpected partnerships to form.

**Priority issue 1: Defining and testing new partnership paradigms**

The ICRC has traditionally taken a conservative approach to partnerships beyond the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and there are numerous options that have yet to be tested by the institution, particularly with regard to partnerships with the private sector. Moderated by Professor Daina Mazutis, this working group aimed to broaden the conventional notion of partnership and explore new forms of potential collaboration with partners from the private sector. One theme that emerged was that if the ICRC wants to be regarded as a leading humanitarian organization in its relations with the private sector, then it needs to have a portfolio of strategic partnerships focused on specific ideas, tangible results and key performance indicators (KPIs) that can be widely shared and communicated. This would involve a...

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**Technical issues at the ICRC**

The ICRC works with private companies, NGOs and academic and other institutions to solve some of its numerous operational challenges. The organization is currently seeking solutions to the following technical issues:

1. Preventing contamination in the Ebola crisis: a) low-cost technologies for pasteurizing fecal matter in sealed containers; b) low-cost and long-range RFID chips to track kits distributed in Ebola centers; and c) low-cost sealed coffins.

2. Energy production and use: a) low-cost electrical stabilizers covering a large range of power for different electrical equipment; b) efficient flashlights with capacitors instead of batteries; and c) solar chargers for mobile equipment (phones, computers, etc.).

3. Materials distributed to beneficiaries: a) biodegradable and long-lasting tarpaulins; and b) blankets made of new textile products that are light, warm and comfortable.

4. Field equipment: a) a GMS thermometer with SMS alert and a thermal shock absorber for the cold chain; b) on-site production of chlorine gas for water treatment plants and monitoring the level of chlorine in the water; c) recycling damaged concrete slabs for construction; d) reliable, efficient, non-polluting and transportable incinerators; and e) 3D printing equipment for spare parts.

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**Live drawing by Benoit Pacaud from the session “Joining forces to meet the needs of people with physical disabilities”**
Innovative financing instruments, such as results-based financing and development impact bonds, could allow the organization to introduce new products and expand into new markets.

Opportunities

Despite these challenges, there remains a significant opportunity for innovative humanitarian partnerships (see insights@imd #44). Yves Daccord, Director-General of the ICRC, noted that the ICRC has long been aware that partnerships between humanitarians, businesses, philanthropists and governments are critical for saving lives, and that these partnerships are more important than ever if creative solutions to the problems facing humanitarian organizations are to be found. Peter Maurer, President of the ICRC, stated that there is no question that partnerships with the private sector are of critical importance and affirmed the organization’s commitment to seeking innovative partnerships to tackle the world’s most intractable challenges.

### Priority issue 2: Joining forces to meet the needs of people with physical disabilities

The ICRC is a leading actor in the field of physical rehabilitation in conflict and post-conflict countries. The Physical Rehabilitation Program (PRP) and its sister program the Special Fund for the Disabled (SFD) have been identified as one of the top areas for growth in the ICRC’s 2015-2018 strategy. This working group, moderated by Pascal Hundt, Head of the ICRC’s Assistance Division, focused on highlighting the challenges and potential solutions for the PRP & SFD programs (see Table 1) and exploring how new forms of collaboration could be used to further broaden their impact. A key concern is attracting enough financing for these potential solutions.

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<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Potential solutions</th>
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| Coping with increased needs. | The number of people in need of physical rehabilitation is increasing constantly, and the number of organizations supporting physical rehabilitation is decreasing. | • Widen the scope of expertise available to support implementation of activities.  
• Reinforce data collection and analysis to strengthen evidence-based decision making. |
| Strengthening autonomy. | The autonomy and capacity of partners at central level (decision makers) and service provider level need to be reinforced to work toward sustainability in the financial, managerial and technical areas. | • Develop innovative models for service delivery, including funding mechanisms.  
• Develop management tools for implementing partners to use at central and service provider levels. |
| Promoting full participation and inclusion of people with physical disabilities. | People with physical disabilities continue to face several barriers, which prevent them from participating in their societies. Disability and poverty are closely linked, and excluding people with disabilities has a cost. | • Document the socio-economic impact for beneficiaries of PRP and SFD support.  
• Increase the promotion of disability-related issues as a priority for governmental authorities. |
| Improving access to appropriate and affordable technologies. | The cost of the technologies used to provide mobility devices (prostheses, orthoses, walking aids and wheelchairs) directly influences the overall cost of services, which directly impacts the capacity of the user to access services and the capacity of the service provider to purchase the technology. | • Continue to improve polypropylene technology in order to maintain high quality and affordable services.  
• Collaborate with research/academic institutions to tackle availability of appropriate and affordable technologies. |

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### Table 1

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