

## Online Consultations with NGOs

<b>Date</b>	22 May 2023
<b>Session Title</b>	UNHCR Innovation Funds
<b>Speakers</b> ( <i>name, title</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hovig Etyemezian, Head of Innovation Service, and Erika Perez, Lead of Refugee-led Innovation Fund, Innovation Service, UNHCR.</li> <li>• Mbilizi Kalombo, Executive Director, and Mukamba January, M&amp;E Officer, Kyete Biingi Tai Nyeme (KBTN), Uganda</li> <li>• Lauren Lichtman, Head of Partnerships and Strategy, Learning Equality</li> </ul>
<b>Executive summary</b> ( <i>max 10 sentences</i> )	
<p>This session brought together some 80 participants from the NGO community, as well as speakers from UNHCR and two organizations – KBTN and Learning Equality. The purpose of this Online Consultation was to introduce the four Innovation Funds on <a href="#">digital</a>, <a href="#">data</a>, <a href="#">environment and climate action</a>, and <a href="#">refugee-led organisations</a>, taking an especially deep dive into the work of the latter, which launched last year. While the first three funds are reserved to UNHCR colleagues, the Refugee-led Innovation Fund (RLIF) is open to applications from organizations run by displaced and stateless people. Across all Funds, the Innovation Service encourages applicants to engage and partner with other stakeholders – including local and international NGOs – to design and implement projects. The meeting was also an opportunity to hear from two organizations working on projects funded through the Innovation Funds. Presentations and following discussions focused on how the Funds work, what they aim to do, and how they are strengthening the relationship between UNHCR, NGOs, and organizations led by displaced and stateless persons.</p>	
<b>Major points arising from speakers</b>	
<p><b>Presentation by UNHCR’s Innovation Service:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UNHCR’s Innovation Service was created in 2011, with the objective of facilitating a culture of innovation at UNHCR. The Service developed and runs four innovation funds on <a href="#">digital</a>, <a href="#">data</a>, <a href="#">environment and climate action</a>, and <a href="#">refugee-led innovation</a>. The first three are open to UNHCR colleagues and the Refugee-led Innovation Fund (RLIF) is open to organizations led by displaced and stateless persons.</li> <li>• The RLIF was designed with refugees and proposes a fundamental shift in humanitarian and development programming, by recognizing the important role displaced people play in this work. More specifically, it focuses on empowering organizations led by displaced and stateless persons, to design and implement their own innovative initiatives. The Innovation Service invites organizations led by displaced and stateless persons and UNHCR to work together with the NGO community to design and implement projects.</li> <li>• UNHCR currently endorses 17 RLIF projects around the world, and provides holistic support to ensure organizations led by displaced and stateless persons have what they need to design and implement innovative solutions. For the current year, <a href="#">applications</a> are open until 30 June 2023.</li> </ul> <p><b>Presentation by Kyete Biingi Tai Nyeme (KBTN):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KBTN is implementing a project in Nakivale Camp (Uganda) to encourage youth to be involved in local, sustainable agriculture, through the creation of a seed bank and exchange system.</li> <li>• Alongside UNHCR, KBTN partners with the Office of the Prime Minister – Department of Refugees, from whom they have received some land, as well as the Independent Council of Ecosystem Restoration (Australia) and several other organizations in Uganda. They regularly attend coordination meetings within Nakivale Camp to liaise with other local organizations.</li> <li>• KBTN describe their experience working with UNHCR as fruitful, helping them to standardize procedures, strengthen technical capacity, empower community members. They recommend other organizations led by displaced and stateless persons hoping to apply, focus on impact rather than visibility and engage in knowledge sharing.</li> </ul>	

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### Presentation by Learning Equality:

- Learning Equality is partnering with UNHCR's Connected Education team to implement a Data Innovation Fund project to create a tool to automate curriculum alignment. The objective is to develop machine learning algorithms to automate key parts of this process.
- Learning Equality and UNHCR have learned alongside during this process, iterating to develop this idea. Recently, they've sought to engage with practitioners across the world (with emphasis on the Global South) through a Kaggle competition. This resulted in great engagement with some extremely promising algorithms.
- Some of the benefits of the relationship with UNHCR are nimbleness and flexibility (of the organization, even while engaging with a bigger entity like UNHCR); open dialogue and sharing of experiences (learning a lot from each other during the process, accessing different spaces with different positionality); thought partnership; engage respective networks; potential for ecosystem change (via collaboration).
- Now prototyping this tool and testing it with curriculum aligners. Purpose is to test how generative AI could help to create an end-to-end automated process, as well as identify resources for future development.

### Major points arising from Q&A

- **On flexibility of funding** (e.g. can organization use this funding for operational expenses): Innovation Service hopes to be as creative and flexible as possible in this process. A reasonable budget is drawn up alongside UNHCR country offices, with the aim to facilitate the success of the project.
- **On assistance to organizations led by displaced and stateless persons:** how will they be supported, even if they are facing unexpected needs/challenges, and how will organizations be assisted to scale the projects?? Innovation Service is very flexible in adjusting project structure and outcomes. Organizations may start with an idea of what the project aims to achieve and how, but this is not a linear process and could require adjustments. We maintain frequent contact with supported organizations to ensure we can adjust as needed. On scaling, it can take very different forms depending on the project. UNHCR accompanies teams, helps them plan next steps to scale and continues working to support projects even after the initial funding period is over.
- Some participants expressed difficulty finding refugee-led partners in specific fields and locations (for instance disabilities). UNHCR highlighted the importance to engage with the local country operation and Innovation Service can also help to facilitate networking and connect organizations to others who are working in the same area.

### Follow-up/Action points

- NGOs and organizations led by displaced and stateless persons who are interested in the Innovation Funds are welcome to reach out to UNHCR field offices / country operations or local RLOs to discuss possibilities for collaboration.
- For further information about the funds, please contact:
  - Refugee-led Innovation Fund: [innovationfund@unhcr.org](mailto:innovationfund@unhcr.org)
  - Data Innovation Fund: [hqinlab@unhcr.org](mailto:hqinlab@unhcr.org)
  - Digital Innovation Fund: [hqconref@unhcr.org](mailto:hqconref@unhcr.org)
  - Environment and Climate Action Fund: [hqenvinnov@unhcr.org](mailto:hqenvinnov@unhcr.org)

### Background documents/reports/guidance

- [General information about the Innovation Funds](#)
- Detailed information about the [Refugee-led Innovation Fund](#)
- [List of current endorsed projects](#) (through all Innovation Funds)
- [Contact information for local UNHCR offices](#)

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