

Research Report

SEED, SCALE, STRUCTURE: How International Organizations Shape Innovation

Tina C. Ambos and Katherine Tatarinov, GSEM University of Geneva

June 2019

With cases from:





Contents

Introduction	3
Research Methodology: Six Case Studies	4
Does Innovation Need Formal Organizational Structures?	5
How Innovation Structures Emerge.....	6
Innovation Roles in IOs	7
The Organizational Innovation Journey.....	8
Common Challenges	11
Looking Forward and at the Ecosystem.....	13
Cases	15
International Trade Center (ITC): The ITC Innovation Lab	15
Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS): The Office of Innovation at UNAIDS	20
The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP): The UNDP Innovation Facility	24
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA): The UNFPA Innovation Fund	28
The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR): UNHCR’s Innovation Service.....	33
World Food Programme (WFP): WFP Innovation Accelerator	38





Introduction

Last year the UN Secretary General, António Guterres, made a call to action: “Beginning at the top, we must all – from headquarters to the country level – engage proactively with technology pioneers, innovators, policymakers and users.”¹ But what is the reality of this kind of engagement in practice?

We have already seen many waves of UN reform, but some organizations remain averse to risk, stuck in old ways of working, internally siloed and politicized. Is there reason to believe the systems are changing now? The findings strongly advocate that change is happening. Out of the 63 UN entities that participated in the Chief Executive Board’s Third UN-wide Innovation Capacity Mapping (2019), 24 had an innovation strategy formulated, an increase of 7 from 2018; and the number was set to grow to 46 by 2020. Furthermore, there were 25 entities with an innovation unit established, up by 8 compared to 2018. Importantly, 15 new dedicated units were expected to be opened by 2020.² It seems that the combination of the Secretariat’s push from the top and the power of bottom-up initiatives ([see our previous report](#)) is showing fruitful results and paving the way for how International Organizations can embrace innovation and find new means for addressing the Sustainable Development Goals.

It is easy to implement new organizational structures on paper, but transforming processes and cultures to make innovation really work is a different challenge. Thus, it is key to not only take a snapshot of new structures and ways of organizing, but to understand how they affect the entire organization in facilitating innovation and supporting frontline work overtime. The development of internal innovation structures to match the unique missions of organizations is best reflected as an iterative learning journey.

All organizations featured in this report went through a journey of moving from experiments at the periphery of the organization towards fundamentally changing the way the entire organization functions. But this journey is never a straight line and there is no “one-size-fits-all.” For decades, private sector organizations have experimented with different solutions for organizing innovation, from venture funds, to scouting units, to spin-outs. But it is often not clear what the benefits and drawbacks of these different approaches are – and which are best suited to which specific type of organization.

The main challenge with embedding innovation is that it often goes against the nature of the organizational culture when we look at project-oriented organizations.³ Unsurprisingly, many International Organizations (IOs) are overwhelmed with the question “where to start” and “how to prioritize” their innovation efforts. Our research set out to provide some answers to these questions and shed light on the different approaches of “organizational structures for innovation” currently used by IOs. By drawing on six case studies of organizations that have pioneered innovation, in very different ways, we show how it is possible to kick-start innovation work. We also reveal the pre-requisites and enablers of these approaches and portray the “Organizational Innovation Journey.”

¹ UN Secretary General’s Strategy on New Technologies. September 2018.

² 3rd UNIN and CEB Innovation Capacity Mapping, 2019.

³ <https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/innovation-at-undp-from-weekend-sport-to-daily-practice/#page-top>



This research shows that innovation structures can be characterized by how they emerge, the roles they play, and the patterns in the journey from seeding the ideas and scaling, experimenting and sourcing, towards stabilizing their identity and strategy within their respective organizations.

1. **Innovation Structures Emerge** from different stimuli in the organization and take different forms. Whether they formalize or allow for a volunteer-based structure is highly context dependent particularly as related to organization size, global distribution, and innovation focus. But eventually a combination of strong core team plus executive support is crucial to kick-starting an innovation structure.
2. **Innovation Roles in IOs** often vary and are multi-faceted. Our research identified roles that vary between formal vs informal organizing, as well as on the level of centralized vs dispersed innovation leadership. All organizations oscillate on the spectrum between being hands-on with the innovation and facilitating innovation in the organization.
3. **The Organizational Innovation Journey** consists of three main phases: seeding, scaling, and structuring; but this journey is not linear – it is a cyclical path that is repeated continuously as the innovation structure aims to define its identity and role within the organization.

Research Methodology: Six Case Studies

This research examines the organizational innovation journeys of IOs, with a mix of established and growing innovation structures, who function in fundamentally different ways, yet share a similar trajectory. While we engaged with a larger group of IOs who prioritize innovation to generate our insights, we then narrowed our sample to six cases (UNDP, UNHCR, WFP, UNFPA, ITC, and UNAIDS) which are presented in this report. UNDP, UNHCR, and UNFPA have older structures and years of experience designing, testing, and reiterating the most effective organizational approaches to innovation. ITC's Innovation Lab, launched at the end of 2014, uses quite a different structure as it is volunteer-based but has also witnessed significant change in the culture of the organization since its founding. WFP's Innovation Accelerator, while established more recently (2015), has already nurtured and scaled many key innovative projects across the world. And finally, UNAIDS' Office of Innovation, launched in 2018, has already made significant progress in defining its role within the organization and helping to facilitate innovation. Exploring this diverse sample has enabled us to identify cross-cutting themes that comprise the challenges and best practices of IO innovation structures through the various phases of the innovation journey.

Our research draws from interviews with key staff members within each of these innovation offices as well as from three workshops conducted with more than 60 participants across 13 IOs. Insights from these primary interviews supported findings that are publically available on these IO websites and other channels.



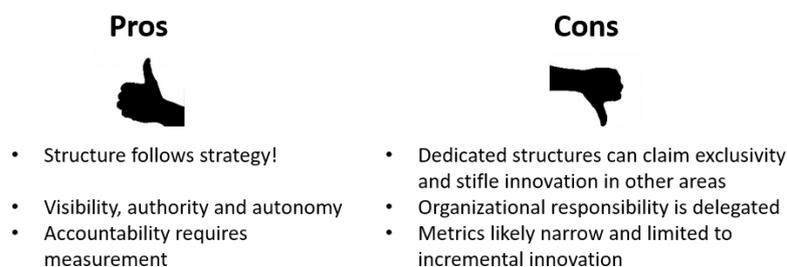
Does Innovation Need Formal Organizational Structures?

Innovation does not necessarily need structure. Often formalizing innovation is indeed the first step to killing it. Treading carefully when developing such a structure is imperative to avoiding the creation of so-called ivory towers and idea vaults. Despite the enormous push towards putting innovation on top of the executive agenda and many efforts to organize innovation in UN agencies, “having no innovation office” does not equal “having no innovation.” Many highly innovative organizations never formalized it – in fact a desirable state is to have innovation embedded in every job description. As Corinne Momal-Vanian, Director of Conference Management at the UN Office in Geneva, explains innovation in her division, “There had to be structure because there had to be someone who would give innovation visibility. But the team is not a team that necessarily carries out innovative projects. The point is more to find what is happening in the world and communicate its relevancy to the staff. And more and more now, is to help be a source of inspiration for innovators, providing methodology and acting as a base of ideation for people.”

Ceteris paribus, there are some obvious “Pros” and “Cons” for organizing innovation in formal structures. The most important argument «pro» is that structure and strategy should always be aligned. So, if innovation is high on the strategic agenda, it should also be visible in the structure. This is mirrored in the push towards innovation from the Secretary General and the numerous activities, panels, and new entities that have been started such as the UN Innovation Network and the High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation.⁴

Having an organizational unit dedicated to innovation certainly gives visibility and empowers the people in charge. The downside is that it often conveys the impression that innovation is (exclusively) done in this unit and others are not concerned or responsible. While measuring innovation results and creating metrics is always a challenge, formalization is the only way to create accountability and an environment of “working-for-outcomes.” But all innovation metrics are likely to be limited and mostly only fit to assess incremental and not disruptive kinds of innovation. As so often, the best solutions are probably found in the middle ground - with some formalized elements sitting beside structures that are less narrow and stagnant. There is no black-and-white here, but it is important to be conscious of the implications of formalizing innovation, so it can be used selectively for the best effect.

Figure 1: Pros and Cons of Organizing Innovation



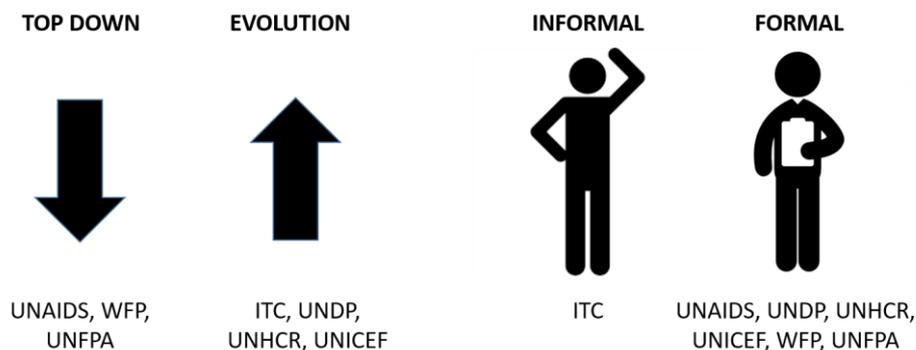
⁴ <https://www.uninnovation.network/>; <https://digitalcooperation.org/>

How Innovation Structures Emerge

Our in-depth study of six cases, showed that innovation structures have evolved differently: some were predominantly **driven from the top** while others emerged in an **evolutionary fashion**, either through the passionate bottom-up push of teams or individual innovation champions. Many started out as **volunteer labs**, with only ITC maintaining such a structure over a longer period of time as others have moved towards **formal innovation roles**, where innovation becomes part of the job description and actual positions are dedicated to innovation, such as the small teams that have emerged at UNHCR, UNDP, and WFP where facilitating innovation is in the job description of those individuals. Some innovation structures take advantage of both volunteer and formalized roles, such as UNFPA, which has a core inter-divisional team but also innovation champions throughout the organization that participate in decision making. Rotational models also exist, such as at the International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s iLab, where the Innovation Unit is composed by a core unit consisting of an Innovation Chief and an Innovation Officer and the rest of the team is formed by flexible and rotational staff, having a 1-year full time assignment.

The two most recently launched innovation offices in our case studies were established through an executive mandate, reflecting an increasing prioritization of innovation across the entire IO system (WFP, 2015, and UNAIDS, 2018). Older innovation offices were created largely by a bottom-up process, often driven by the initiative of one or two key staff members. Executive support followed the establishment of these organic offices and now all six of the organizations we analyzed have strong top-down support for their offices of innovation. This analysis shows that different approaches can lead to thriving innovative spaces.

Figure 2: The Emergence and Formalization of Innovation Structures

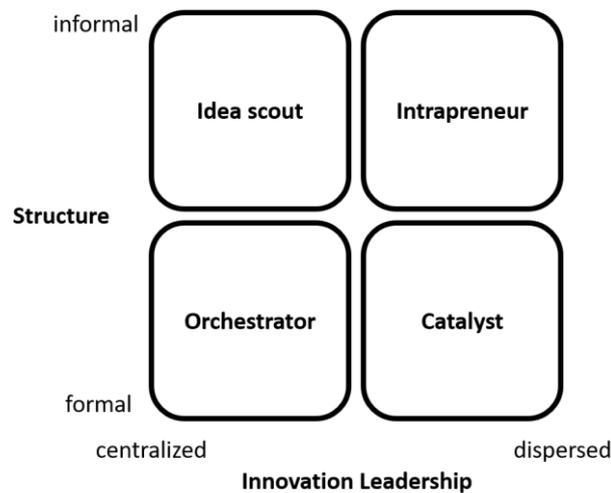


Only ITC among the six innovation offices analyzed has a volunteer-based staffing structure. In the past year, ITC has worked to allow 50% of two staff members' time to be dedicated to working with the Innovation Lab, but the Lab has no fully-funded full time staff. The other six organizations currently have dedicated staffing resources for their innovation offices (even if some were established by volunteers at launch). Innovation staff sizes range from four (UNAIDS) to over thirty (WFP).

Innovation Roles in IOs

This research identified the key organizing principles and patterns emerging from IOs as they move along their organizational innovation journeys. Organizational solutions for innovation can be both formal and informal; while the innovation leadership can be centralized within the HQ in a team or dispersed throughout the country offices of an organization. In every organization, innovation is complex and multi-faceted, so Innovators or Units may play multiple of these roles, but it is important to be conscious of their different enabling criteria and strengths.

Figure 3: Innovation Roles



Orchestrator: With formal structure and centralized innovation leadership, orchestrators are clearly defined innovation spaces in organizations. These are usually focused on exploitation and enhancing the efficiency of an existing system or platform. Orchestrators are found in large organizations that were historically strong in innovation, such as UNICEF or UNHRC. But also some of the newer, top-down implemented units, such as UNAIDS Office of Innovation or the WFP Accelerator largely follow this principle. For Orchestrators to work effectively there needs to be a critical mass and organizational priority for innovation. These are usually embraced in HQ and endorsed at the highest level. To succeed, Orchestrators need to develop the technical competence and be able to connect their skills and capabilities to the rest of the organizations.

Catalyst: With formal structure but strongly embedded in distributed country offices, Catalysts build on community-driven innovation ecosystems. A clear advantage is the local responsiveness and adaptability of Catalysts as they are close to the country contexts. Often catalysts encourage the usage of existing assets, rather than developing from scratch and retain strong ties with the communities. To allow the effective work of Catalysts, organizations must allow bottom-up knowledge transfer from country offices to HQ, but also the ability to connect and collaborate laterally. This is a key success factor, but also a major challenge for



many organizations that do not have lateral processes in place. UNDP's Innovation lab approach largely corresponds to this role.

Idea Scout: As an informal role (without a formal mandate) with centralized innovation leadership, Idea Scouts are (groups of) people who act as champions and knowledge brokers for the organization. Within broadly defined contours, Idea Scouts, identify and promote innovation drawing on ideas from within the organization or external actors. An advantage of this role is the flexibility and the focus on exploration and creativity. The challenge of this approach is that Idea Scouts have to gain legitimacy and demonstrate that they have the capacity to understand the pain points of the peripheral parts of the organizations. Examples are ITC and UNFPA.

Intrapreneur: An informal role with decentralized innovation leadership, the intrapreneurial model relies on bottom-up initiatives from dispersed parts of the organization. Organizations with this role rely predominantly on community-driven innovation systems in their different country units. As Intrapreneurs discuss and ideate informally, strong and consensus-driven innovation culture is a prerequisite. The organization also needs to allow intrapreneurial ideas to break through the silos and hierarchies. Due to these prerequisites, this currently is a rare model for organizing innovations in IOs, but our [previous research](#) has identified many powerful intrapreneurial initiatives across organizations that lead by example. The way that UNDP's Innovation efforts started out as globally dispersed innovation labs originating with the idea of a regional knowledge manager would be characterized as fitting into the Intrapreneur role.

The Organizational Innovation Journey

It is clear that there is no “best way” to organize innovation, as organizations differ in their missions, their cultures, their histories, and their organizational needs and priorities. It is also important to note that each organization is at a different stage of its organizational innovation journey – and it is very likely that the current solutions and approaches will continue to evolve. Despite these vastly different structures and stages, each organization in our sample has followed a similar journey in the set up and operations of their innovation team and the development of the strategy. This journey reflects the evolution of the organizational innovation system as it seeks to renew and transform itself to remain relevant in our rapidly globalizing world.

Phase I: Seeding

In this first phase, structures are established as a response to the need for prioritizing innovation and working towards a more innovative culture. Often such a structure begins as a small team with direct reporting lines to upper management. Founders of the WFP Innovation Accelerator described the importance of having someone who is knowledgeable about the inner workings and processes of the organization as a founding member of the structure. This pattern was visible in all the six case studies with several founding member having close to 20 years of experience in the organization. This team is given the task of being a focal point for innovation and offering support and training to approach problems more creatively with more focus on designing with and for the end user.



In this phase, while permeation of innovative methods across the organization is the ultimate goal, often innovation teams are overly ambitious in their objectives at the beginning, resulting in several failures or stretching of capacities. For example, UNHCR's Innovation Service had to re-focus its strategy and limit its scope after over stretching capabilities in the beginning of its existence.

Phase II: Scaling

Once the structure has been officially created, it starts to define its identity within the organization and receives stronger support from the management. Phase II opens up as the stage where experimentation, begins. For some organizations, this meant experimenting with new ways of addressing Innovation – such as the thematic labs approach at UNHCR. For other organizations, this meant internationalizing and scaling successful ways of working towards innovation, such as at UNDP. For ITC this meant establishing the activities and creating a physical lab space. For WFP, this also meant starting to source ideas from field offices. Experimentation means that not everything that was tried during this phase was successful, but it was used as a stepping stone for learning - to further define the role of the innovation structure and test the strategic boundaries of what could work within that specific organization.

Scaling often involves looking at innovative projects in the field to show the potential of innovation. Field-based technical assistance exposes the need for additional financing for the most promising projects. With the exception of ITC, each IO in our sample has established a financing mechanism for innovation within a few years of its founding. UNDP's fund was launched two years after the establishment of its innovation office, and it has since invested in 140 projects around the world. UNICEF's Venture Fund has already made 58 investments. UNHCR opened its fund in 2018 as a designated budget for supporting its most promising innovative projects, and the team is currently working on scaling 11 projects in their pipeline. WFP's Innovation Accelerator was established as a funding mechanism from its beginning. UNAIDS ran an Innovation Drive immediately after its Office of Innovation launched to collect applications for funding, and has already selected three projects to receive dedicated financial and technical support.

Promoting partnerships and investing resources in identifying ideal partners and developing partner relationships has become a key priority across much of the international system as traditional funding begins to dry up. Partnership is in itself a funding innovation, and therefore is an important aspect of what innovation offices do. For example, UNDP's 2017-2018 year in review report, released in September 2018, details how 100% of innovative initiatives supported by the Innovation Facility are now run through partnerships.⁵ One of the key selection criteria for applicants to UNFPA's Call for Proposals is a clearly defined external partner.

⁵ UNDP, "Moon Shots & Puddle Jumps - Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals," <<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/development-impact/undp-innovation-facility-year-in-review.html>>



Phase III: Structuring

In this third phase, the experts within the centralized service unit begin to offer direct assistance across other parts of the organization. Armed with experience, toolkits, and dedicated staff time, the team consults on specific field-based projects. This field experience begins to prove why innovation is much more than an exciting new technology and requires innovative processes and models just as it requires innovative tools. During this phase, innovation offices seek to be organizationally embedded in different parts of the organization.

A key part of this third phase is organizations clearly now making the distinction between “doing innovation” and “facilitating innovation.” All of the innovation structures aim to move from being those experimenters working on the fringe to the ones that are using their experience and expertise to facilitate the transformation of the ways of working within that organization. None of the structures see “doing” innovation as their main task in this third step – they all act as “facilitators.” Still, some work more hands-on than others. For example, WFP could be seen as the most hands-on facilitator as it sends team members in the field to help country offices deploy new initiatives. UNHCR and UNICEF still work more hands-on when focusing on specific frontier technology as well.

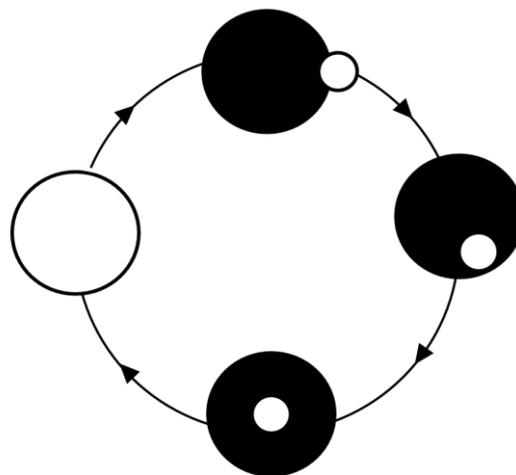
This phase reflects Phase I’s goal of helping the organization as a whole understand and apply the principles of innovation. However, research and training in this phase is based on the experience gained from the previous phases, offering “best practices” to field offices and field staff from years of testing and scaling projects. Most of the IOs in our sample offer some type of support platform: blogs, articles, videos, and reports that highlight key learnings. Communication continues to play a crucial role in bridging the activities of the innovation structure to the everyday job of someone within the organization. The third phase is about being able to slow down and learn from all the experiences and integrate those into a holistic innovation strategy and correctly defined innovation portfolio.

The Cycle of Focus

While these patterns of organizational innovation journeys are found across all organizations featured in this report, their development is not linear. Many processes are iterative, and in particular the scaling phase includes trial-and-error and feedback loops. On a meta-level, however, we find that all organizations follow a trajectory, where innovation structures (formally or informally) start at the periphery of the organization. At the beginning, the approaches and culture of these units are usually mismatched with the overall objectives and the culture of the organizations. Slowly, innovation structures move towards the center of the organization – not necessarily physically, but by aligning with the strategy and the mainstream thinking. Ideally, in a later stage, innovation becomes fully embedded in the organization and in every job description and task. In this ideal state, innovation structures would become completely redundant as they are fully embraced by the organization. This means, that innovation objectives become an inherent part of the strategy, the processes and the culture and are reflected in every job description. In theory this would result in the redundancy of the innovation structure’s role, but by acting as a boundary spanner to bring in relevant ideas from outside the organization, in, and by identifying the future potential for the

organization, innovation never ends. Through this identification, the innovation structure will develop a new focus with the potential for disruption, such as AI or machine learning, which will again first be nurtured at the periphery of the organization, researched, and molded to the needs of the organization, before the innovation team moves towards communicating the potential and slowly facilitating permeating of the new way of work throughout the organization. An example of an organization that is moving through such cycles is UNHCR who have refocused their Innovation Service on several streams, one of which is AI. Enabling the organization to be proactive rather than reactive through data driven decision-making is a task which will again take a full cycle to become the mode d'être and be embraced in the way of working of everyone within the organization.

Figure 4: Cyclical Journey of Innovation



Common Challenges

Key challenges lie in each phase of the innovation journey, but learning from organizations who have already moved on to the next phase can showcase solutions and best practices and often shared failures to be learned from.

In Phase I, when starting out and defining innovation, it is crucial to map the current processes of what is already happening in the organization. We see that many structures started with surveying the organization, such as UNAIDS to understand the gaps and sentiments towards innovation. What UNAIDS found, for example, was that there were many misconceptions around what innovation means for the organization.

In Phase II, innovation structures start to define their strategic role and identity more clearly. Often this is an iterative process where best practices are developed. This phase coupled with managing growth results in organizational challenges such as harnessing resources from the top for experiments as well as allowing for “fail-fast” processes. While resources are necessary, they can also cause tensions within the organization, particularly from middle managers who do not align with the longer term vision of the innovation goals. This type of cultural resistance to the innovation structure can be mitigated through communication of activities, making innovation more accessible for everyone in the organization by

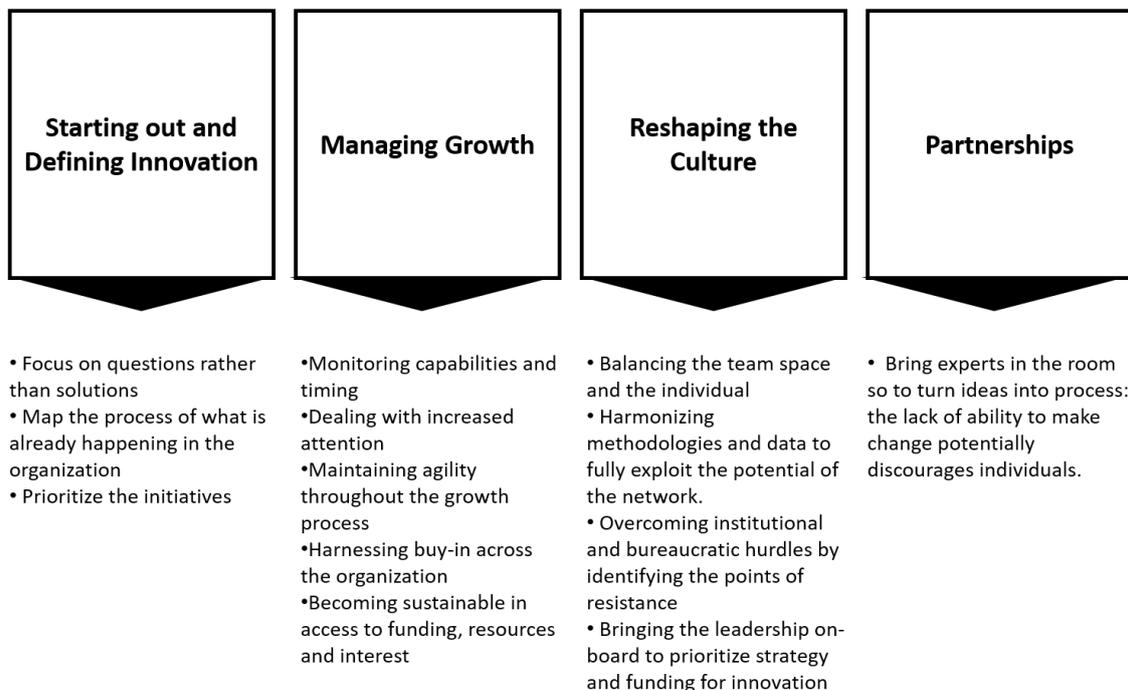


avoiding technical jargon and showing that innovation does not mean only technology and new gadgets but rather that innovation can be done by anyone.

Phase III, Structuring, is not without its own challenges. To stabilize the work of innovation units within the structure, it is key that they are seen as legitimate and value-adding by all parts of the organization. In particular headquarter-based teams dealing with a globally dispersed organization need to carefully fine-tune their interventions. For example, training programmes such as UNHCR’s Fellowship allows for greater distribution of knowledge to the field offices. UNDP’s labs and traveling core innovation facility team is another way to have a pollination of ideas across the globally dispersed network. And WFP’s Innovation Accelerator’s focus on scaling initiatives usually sends a member of its team to the field location to help with the implementation of a new initiative for up to 6 months.

Throughout these three phases, defining the metrics we use to measure and communicate about success is crucial. As Benjamin Kumpf, currently Head of Innovation at Department for International Development (DFID) and formerly UNDP Innovation Facility lead, explained, “We need to improve how we define success as well as unintended consequences for the innovations from early through scaling phases. We also need to further specify what success looks like regarding change management: what does it mean exactly to create a culture change or an enabling environment? What would be incentives for innovation that are comparatively stronger than behavioral drivers (which are often implicit and linked to traditional ways of career progression)?” Innovation should always be seen as a portfolio which is contextually based on the needs of the organization. From there, communicating about outcomes effectively and correctly will be key to bringing the rest of the organization on board and changing mindsets.

Figure 5: Key Challenges to Organizing Innovation





Looking Forward and at the Ecosystem

The last decade (and in particular the last few years) has shown the “ecosystem effect” of innovation structures: the more there are, the more will be created. Innovation is becoming more than a buzzword within IOs. It is moving towards becoming a pillar of strategic planning and resource allocation across the international system. And it is becoming a shared language.

This common vernacular exists, for example, in the “Principles of Innovation” – a manifesto of nine principles originally developed by UNICEF and ascribed to by four other IOs in our sample: UNDP, UNHCR, UNFPA and the WFP. These principles were endorsed at the CEB meeting in 2015 with the intent on helping the development community implement innovative solutions for their problems; they serve to rally IOs behind a “best practice” standard for innovation efforts. Beyond the IOs in our sample, a host of other international institutions have embraced the principles, including USAID, the Gates Foundation, EOSG Global Pulse, WHO, HRP, OCHA, SIDA, IKEA Foundation, and the UN Foundation. The principles are as follows:⁶

1. Design with the user
2. Understand the existing ecosystem
3. Design for scale
4. Build for sustainability
5. Be data driven
6. Use open source
7. Reuse and improve
8. Do no harm
9. Be collaborative

As IOs embed these principles into their operations, they can leverage the shared values – in particular the 9th principle to be collaborative -- to forge more significant partnerships across organizations to accomplish similar goals. The majority of IOs featured in this report are now focused on a structuring phase, concerned with scaling and growing the impact of their work. This phase involves figuring out new ways in which successful projects can be deployed – and even how solutions can be used in other organizational contexts. Highly successful and scalable projects can and should become shared resources across IOs but so should the conversation around the difficulties, the failures, and the shared challenges. Doing so will break historic silos that have existed between large IOs for decades. The new era is collaborative, and innovation structures are helping to bring about this change towards a new ecosystem of innovation.

⁶ UNICEF, “What We Do,” < <https://www.unicef.org/innovation/what-we-do>>; UNDP, “Principles of Innovation,” < <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/development-impact/innovation/principles-of-innovation.html>>



i2i Hub: For Innovation and Intrapreneurship

The i2i Hub seeks to:

- act as a catalyst for innovation in International Organizations through research and training
- connect innovators from different organizations, including private and public sector
- spur and disseminate research and ideas to create impact
- be a place for eye-to-eye (i2i) exchange of knowledge



gsem-innovation@unige.ch

<https://www.unige.ch/gsem/en/research/centers/i2i/>



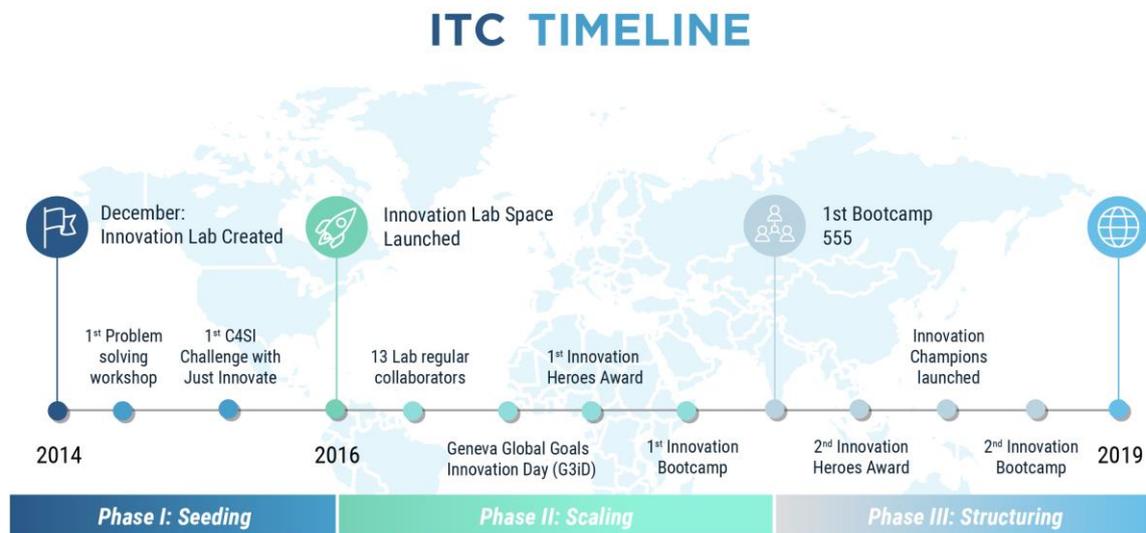
Cases

International Trade Center (ITC): The ITC Innovation Lab

Under the joint mandate of development of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the International Trade Centre (ITC) was established in 1964 as the joint agency of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations.⁷ It is the only international agency fully dedicated to supporting the internationalization of MSMEs with a focus on expanding trade opportunities and the aim of fostering sustainable and inclusive development.⁸ Under the vision of Good Trade, ITC's mission is to enhance inclusive and sustainable growth and development in developing countries, especially least developed countries, and countries with economies in transition through improving the international competitiveness of MSMEs.

ITC is structured into the offices of the Executive Director and the Deputy Executive Director, and four divisions: (Division of Programme Support; Division of Country Programmes; Division of Market Development; Division of Enterprises and Institutions.⁹ The Executive Director reports to Secretary-General of the UNCTAD and the Director-General of the WTO.¹⁰ ITC has around 315 employees with 85 nationalities,¹¹ the smallest of the organizations in our case studies in terms of people.

The Organizational Innovation Journey



⁷ http://www.intracen.org/uploadedFiles/intracen.org/Content/About_ITC/Corporate_Documents/Annual-Report-2017-web.pdf

⁸ http://www.intracen.org/uploadedFiles/intracen.org/Content/About_ITC/Corporate_Documents/Strategic_Plan/Strategic_plan_2018-21-web.pdf

⁹ <http://www.intracen.org/itc/about/how-itc-works/itc-structure/>

¹⁰ <http://www.intracen.org/itc/about/how-itc-works/itc-structure/>

¹¹ http://www.intracen.org/uploadedFiles/intracen.org/Content/About_ITC/Corporate_Documents/ITC_Infographics-AR2016-2pg-web.pdf

Phase I: Seeding

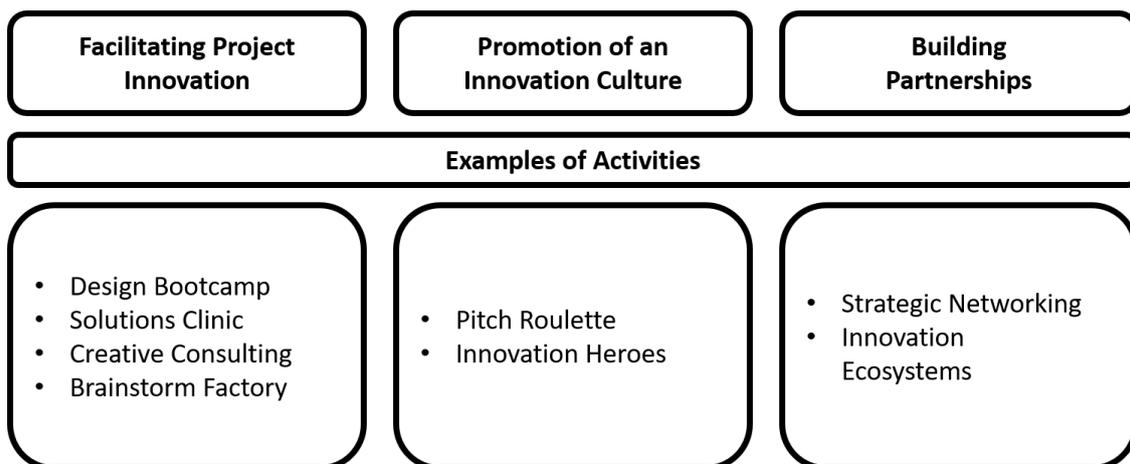
The idea of innovation became a popular topic around ITC in 2014 and the birth of the ITC innovation lab was a natural step given the nature of ITC’s work and culture. A small group within ITC gathered and brainstormed ideas around how to integrate innovation into ITC’s daily work. The idea was that there is a need in the system for incentives for thinking outside the box. The small group consisted of 3 people: Viviane Marcelino and Raimund Moser, Advisers at the Office of the Director - Division of Country Programmes, and Raphaël Dard, Head of the SME Trade Academy – Division of Market Development. With the growing momentum and interest in innovation, the ITC Innovation Lab was created under the mission of unleashing the full potential of creativity and innovation. It was positioned under the Division of Country Programmes in the Office of the Director. The group met once a week (a tradition that would continue), and did most of the Innovation Lab work in their free time on top of their regular positions.

This first phase was devoted to exploring the needs and building up the momentum for innovation. During this time, the lab hosted its first Problem solving workshop and its first C4SI Challenge with Just Innovate.

Phase II: Scaling

In 2016, the Innovation Lab officially launched a physical space and obtained funding from the ITC trust fund. This phase was to test a full service offering. There was again strong top down support for renewal and experimentation. The ITC Innovation lab was an ecosystem which not only provided people in ITC with the space, tools, but also supported them to be creative and innovative in their daily work.

The ITC’s Innovation lab was a formalized unit; however, its uniqueness came from the nature of its operation. It ran activities purely on a voluntary basis in all three following domains:



These three domains worked hand in hand to make transformational changes across ITC with the goal of becoming the innovation champion in the organization.



During this time, the members of ITC's Innovation Lab were key in creating and shaping the Geneva Global Goals Innovation Day (G3ID). To speed up the accomplishment of the SDGs, this event brought together the Geneva ecosystem in a different, more dynamic and collaborative format of co-creation factories and cross-org workshops. The idea flowed directly from the movement towards innovation in the International Organizations. This was highly seen as a first win for the Lab as it effectively showed that, "Innovation and collaboration could radically accelerate the SDGs," Adriana De Oro – Lab member - described. There were about 50 organizations which participated in the solutions fair and four streams of workshops called co-creation factory. The volunteers also showed that they were able to organize such an event, on top of also performing well in their roles in the organization.

In 2017, ITC published its Strategic Plan for the period 2018-2021. 'Trade Routes to Sustainable and Inclusive Development' was the product of an extensive consultative process involving internal workshops with ITC staff, an online survey of all stakeholders and discussions with country partners and funders. This strategic plan was complemented by ITC's belief in constant innovation and creativity to respond to demand. ITC's capability to be nimble, adaptable and innovative in a fast-changing global environment to make its work more competitive.

Also during this incubation phase, the Innovation Lab hosted its first Innovation Bootcamp and first Innovation Heroes award. The Bootcamp was hosted in October 2017 and included five initiatives from within ITC. The Innovation Heroes award was developed as an annual event aimed at showcasing ITC's innovative practices and innovators both within the organization as well as to the ecosystem.

Due to exponential synergy created by the lab, the following results were achieved in 2017:

- 1000 people learned about innovation in trade
- One pilot was co-created with donors and partners
- Internal process improvements were triggered
- 200 people improved their capacity to innovate
- Six projects, innovation initiatives, incubated
- Initiatives across the house boosted with innovation lab inputs

The ITC innovation lab also identified a formula for growing innovation – a combination of 1) Manpower, 2) Funding and 3) Knowledge management system.

Phase III: Structuring

From the beginning of 2018 to mid-2019, the Innovation Lab continued to reinforce and position itself as a facilitator of Innovation in the organization. It was growing bigger and needed to deliver more in terms of its impact on the internal culture.

In 2018, the lab hosted its Second Innovation Bootcamp, the Second Innovation Heroes award, ITC Bootcamp 555 and the launch of the Innovation Champions. Bootcamp 555 was a way for ITC Innovation Lab to introduce its employees to the agile method of Human Centered Design through a Five-day Sprint



with Five teams. This event was run in collaboration with SparksWorks, a local innovation consulting company.

The Innovation Champions was an initiative to make innovation more accessible at ITC. As Katie Schlinder, ITC Innovation Lab volunteer and Associate Programme Officer at ITC, and Elena Mayer-Besting, Project Manager and Associate Programme Officer, wrote, “From the beginning, our vision of innovation was built around the idea that innovation comes from within all of us and that innovation must not be delegated to a small group of similar people ‘who are into innovation.’ Yet, the Innovation Lab kept attracting similar types of people: primarily young, junior, female, creative-types, who are comfortable with post-its and modular furniture.” To overcome this challenge, the lab tried to engage senior colleagues and tap into existing internal expertise. The team decided they, “needed credible champions of innovation, who could show tangible positive results of innovation, who could influence others to believe in fresh thinking and new ways of working; and who would be able to provide us with the expertise to become a more effective innovation lab.”¹² So the Innovation Champions programme was launched in August 2018 to engage advisers, idea generators and influencers for innovation within the organization. Champions would either act as advisors to new projects (Shakers) or be active in innovating new projects/processes (Makers). Five inter-disciplinary Innovation Champions were chosen in the first year, each with a focal point within the Innovation Lab.

The Innovation Lab kept working further towards incorporating innovation into the corporate strategy team. This would include adding Key Performance Indicators, such as measuring the number of innovations in house, into the operational plan of the organization. It showed that the work that the Lab was doing has been a source of inspiration in house. In 2019, after creating a three years strategy, and an operational plan, the funding from the Trust fund was increased as a proof of the validation in-house.

Other initiatives included innovation sprints and panels such the Sprint for Self Reliance, an 8-hour sprint workshop in which twenty selected participants generated, developed and presented digital solutions to develop market-based livelihoods for vulnerable migrants and forcibly displaced communities with a special focus on the MENA region. The winners were announced during the panel discussion the following day.

The lab would also be hosting the Third edition of the Innovation Heroes awards. Awards to be given this year included “The Natural Innovation of the Year,” “The Ecosystem Builder of the Year,” and “The Innovation of the Year.”

Challenges

After over four years of running the volunteer-based innovation lab, ITC had seen some significant changes in the mindset towards innovation. Not only had the headquarters in Geneva allocated an entire Innovation Lab space for workshops and trainings, but the leadership at the top was becoming increasingly supportive of the innovation team.

¹² <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/beyond-buzzword-holiday-inspiration-katherine-katie-schlinder/>



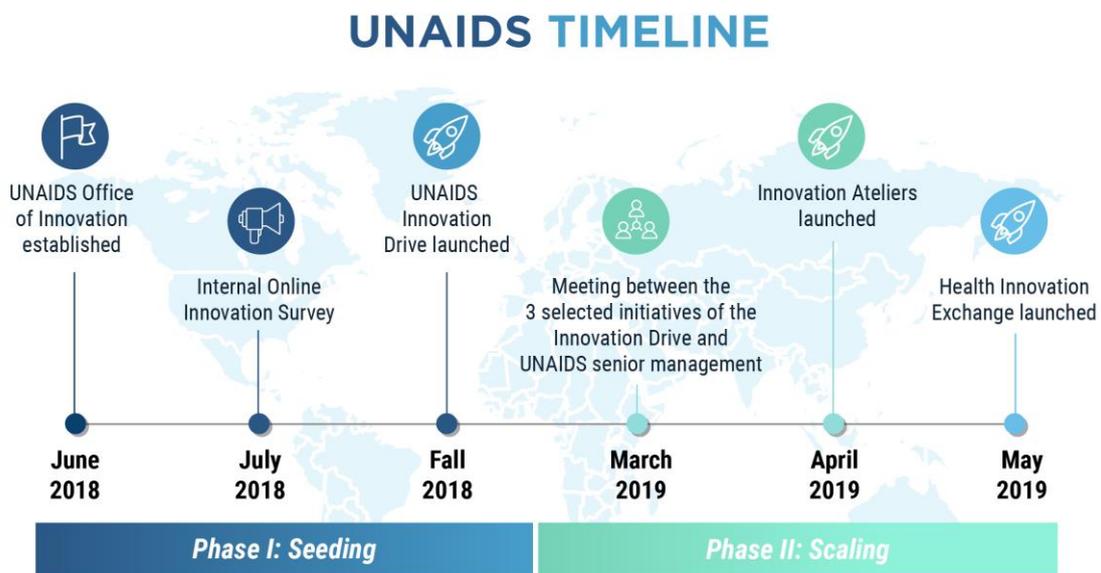
That said, there were some challenges that the team was still facing in 2018. First, there was a perceived growing resistance against the Lab from some people in the organisation. This led to a reflection inside the Lab about the sources of this resistance and how could the Lab communicate better its results and impact.

The other challenge was that the volunteer-based structure created a strain on the ownership and resources. People who wanted to dedicate more time to innovation had to balance their current responsibilities and roles at the same time. While this had benefits, in that it meant that innovation was never centralized or formalized as in some other organizations, it also resulted in a lack of time and manpower when needed. In the spring of 2019, more resources were allocated to the lab and two of the members had 50% of their time mandated to the lab, particularly for monitoring and evaluation, ecosystem building, communication and events. As Adriana described, “The challenge regarding creating even a 50% mandated position meant that people believe you will now be taking on the whole innovation work – whereas the goal was still to have everyone in the organization doing innovation as part of their role.” Because of this, Adriana described that the organization was not questioning the nature of volunteers and would maintain that structure. “We do not want to have ‘innovation people’ and ‘non-innovation people,’” Adriana explained. By summer 2019, there were eleven other volunteers also part of the lab. These were fluid, meaning that they would come and go and the structure was horizontal, with everyone consulted on strategic decisions. There was excitement in the lab at the added resources and the potential for expanding the scope of their activities.

Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS): The Office of Innovation at UNAIDS

UNAIDS, the first and only cosponsored joint programme of the UN system, was established in 1994 through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) resolution to “undertake a joint and co-sponsored United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS on the basis of co-ownership, collaborative planning and execution, and an equitable sharing of responsibility.” UNAIDS consists of eleven Cosponsors: UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO, UNESCO, the World Bank, UNODC, ILO, WFP, UNHCR and UN Women. The mission of UNAIDS is to be an innovative partnership that leads and inspires the world for achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. The number of employees was about 675 in 2018 and the goal was to maintain capacity in the field, with the field-to-Headquarters ratio at 70:30.¹³

The Organizational Innovation Journey



In June 2018, the third annual forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development was held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. The forum heightened a demand for Innovation both inside and outside of the United Nations. UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, also called for innovation in support of the Sustainable Development Goals and started creating innovation labs, including in his office. The Chief Executive Board (CEB) meeting in April 2018 included a session on innovation, underlining the need for the UN system to focus on innovation and examining building blocks for success in it for UN entities. One of the aspects introduced was that organizations with a dedicated innovation unit generally deliver better results in this area.

¹³ http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/20180606_UNAIDS_PCB42_HR_update_EN.pdf

Phase I: Seeding

The UNAIDS Office of Innovation was established directly under the Executive Director in June 2018. Its mission is summarized by four key words – *Identify, Incubate, Accelerate* and *Amplify*, innovations towards reaching the SDGs and ending AIDS. The belief was that for innovation to happen, the organization needs strong top-level support, but bottom-up innovation also needs to be enabled and supported.

The team consists of four and a half staff led by Pradeep Kakkattil who has nineteen years of experience at UNAIDS and served as Director of Programme Partnerships before he took on the new role of Director of Innovation. Elina Viitanemi, a founding member of the team, had nearly ten years of experience at UNAIDS in various positions related to Global Fund Affairs, Partnerships and Fundraising.

Pradeep Kakkattil emphasized the importance of creating an innovation ecosystem within UNAIDS: “Innovation is doing things differently to have higher impact. The Office of Innovation will act as a centralized group dedicated to fostering innovation culture and to supporting ideas scale up by providing appropriate tools. Technology can be bought but the culture cannot be bought.”

For the first six months in 2018, the Office of Innovation had USD 100K from core funding, plus some non-core support for specific projects. One of the first actions of the newly established Innovation Office, in July 2018, was to conduct an online Innovation Survey among UNAIDS employees to gauge how innovation was perceived within the organization and to find out challenges and opportunities for innovation. The response rate was high with one-third of employees (208) from across regions and staff categories responding. Results showed that nearly 80% of staff felt that innovative thinking was already required in their work and the organization had a great tone at the top encouraging innovation while weaknesses included lack of resources such as in funding and staffing and lack of effective systems to make ideas happen. Three key recommendations resulted from the findings: 1) invest in building a culture of innovation; 2) encourage, incentivise, invest for innovation; and 3) staff recognition and enablers.

Based on these findings, the Office of Innovation undertook a two-pronged approach: focusing on the one hand on the innovation culture and ecosystem at UNAIDS to create an environment allowing innovation to flourish; and on the other, on fast-tracking specific innovative initiatives for the AIDS response. This followed quickly with the development of the Inn-Conversation series, a WhatsApp Group for communicating about innovation internally, and the C4SI Student Innovation Challenge, to source ideas.

Phase II: Scaling

For UNAIDS Office of Innovation, the promotion of an internal innovative mindset is as important as fostering external innovation. In this context, UNAIDS two main initiatives, the Innovation Drive 2018 and the Health Innovation Exchange addressed both internal and external innovation. UNAIDS *Innovation Drive 2018* initiated in the Fall of 2018 was a call for proposals across UNAIDS to submit innovative initiatives that would then have the potential to be funded and supported by the Office of Innovation up to \$10,000 USD. Proposals could be on programmatic innovations (including technology, financing, data, community, policy etc.) for the HIV response as well as organizational innovations (including systems, IT,



communications, management, HR etc.) for UNAIDS as an organization. Nineteen initiatives were submitted by employees to the team and three initiatives were selected, with a fourth one recognized with a special mention (See **Appendix 3** for evaluation criteria).¹⁴

In the spring 2019, the three winners met the top management (Executive Director Michael Sidibe, Deputy Directors Gunilla Carlsson and Shannon Hader) and the top management highlighted their belief in the initiatives and encouraged the Innovation Office to continue their efforts in fostering an internal innovative mindset also among country offices. This would be enabled by following a de-centralized approach towards innovation, with the support of a platform that would stimulate staff from the different country offices to present and scale their ideas. During the meeting, emphasis was also put to the need by UNAIDS to engage more the so called “digital natives,” consisting in youth population for which technology is part of their everyday life. In order to leverage the youth population who is closely connected to technology and share UNAIDS-, HIV/AIDS and public health issues-related information, the deployment of digital communication methods such as selfie videos, cartoons or Instagram influencers were discussed. According to Pradeep Kakkattil, taking into account the youth perspective is fundamental to getting away from the UN traditional mindset and approach towards current challenges.

During the first months of 2019, the UNAIDS Office of Innovation decided that its role needed to more closely match the mandate and history of the organization. The Office of Innovation leadership identified advocacy, rights and connections to governments and policy actors as the organization’s strengths. To this end, the Office of Innovation shifted its strategic role in the AIDS response - to becoming a platform and connector: firstly, by identifying innovations that could potentially deliver large-scale impact in the AIDS and UHC sphere and secondly, by connecting the innovators with the country needs and policy makers that have the tools and power to enable transformation and get funding solutions from private investors.

In this context, during the World Health Assembly, which took place in May 2019, the Office of Innovation launched the Health Innovation Exchange, a three-day event that gave “the opportunity to innovators to connect with decision-makers, investors, communities, IOs and implementers” that are potentially game-changers in the SDG3-related sphere. It included high-level panels and roundtable discussions. As Pradeep Kakkattil explained, “When you have multiple stakeholders working together, the solutions are much smarter, much better. You tap into the wisdom of the crowd.”

Part of the Health Innovation Exchange launch involved an Innovation Marketplace to showcase innovative health initiatives both to inspire and connect. A call for innovations was sent out through the UNAIDS network resulting in almost 100 submitted initiatives. Twenty-three initiatives were selected related to the fields of HIV, TB, health systems and digital health. These initiatives were ranked according to five criteria:

1. **Innovation:** The solution must clearly be an innovation, i.e. an invention or a clearly improved product/service;

¹⁴ These initiatives included: 1) Maloza - Let’s talk about sex (a set of culturally-sensitive and age-appropriated games on sexual and reproductive health); 2) Crypto mining for HIV (raising money for the HIV response though by harnessing the processing resource of UNAIDS staff, partner and supporter computers to mine cryptocurrency when not otherwise in use); 3) A mobile app to empower key population (a platform to provide coordinated real-time information, adherence support and linkage to prevention and related services for key populations in Nigeria).



2. **Values:** The solution promotes the realization of the right to health, freedom from stigma and discrimination gender equality and other human rights norms and principles in its design and intended impact;
3. **Potential for impact:** The solution should have the potential to deliver positive health and rights outcomes;
4. **Feasibility:** The solution should have clear potential for successful implementation in a sustainable manner;
5. **Usability:** The solution should demonstrate evidence of ease of use, replicability and durability.

The Health Innovation Exchange would also mark the launch of the UNAIDS Health Innovation Exchange website which would act as the virtual component of the platform with the aim to continue fostering connections and interactions once the physical event was finished. The event was largely seen as a success for UNAIDS Office of Innovation with over 2000 participants including 52 country ministers. According to the result of a survey conducted during the event, the average rate of satisfaction was around 4.5/5.

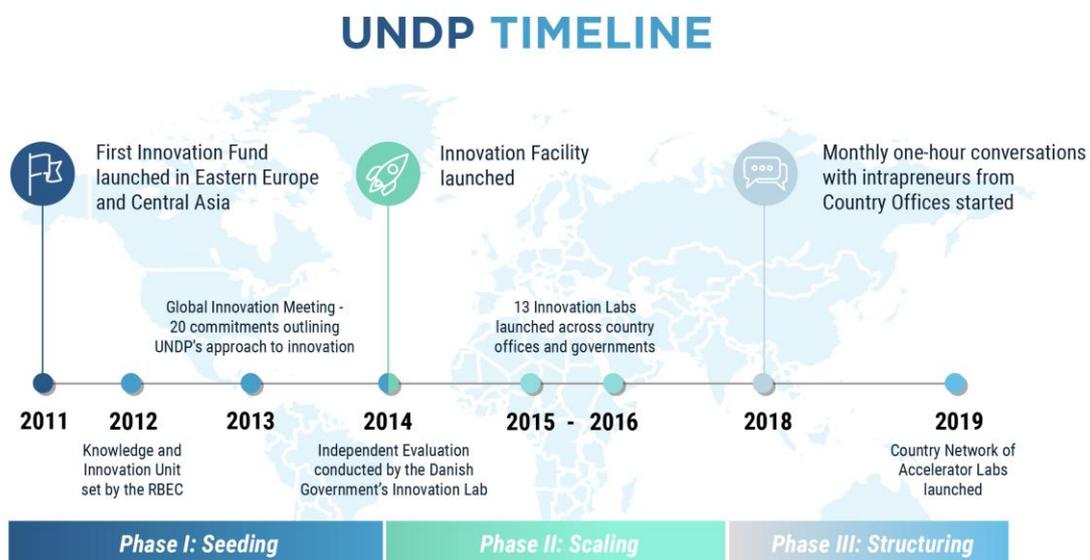
Current Challenges and Looking Ahead

Given its recent founding, the UNAIDS Office of Innovation was still largely in the experimentation phase. Future steps the team was planning to take included identifying countries and conducting a health situation assessment from a team of external experts. This would enable the team to understand each countries' challenges and address these in the most efficient way. Other goals included developing a strategy enabling the team to work systematically with the network of innovators as well as to develop a partnership and fundraising strategy. The key for now was to keep up the momentum gathered from the Launch of the Health Innovation Exchange. Once the physical event was over and the website was live, UNAIDS Office of Innovation still had an important strategic question to decide about its future. Should we focus on only being the connector and allow the market forces to decide which innovations should go to scale or should we take an active role in allocating resources and accelerating initiatives we believe in?

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP): The UNDP Innovation Facility

The mandate of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is: “To help countries achieve the eradication of poverty, and the reduction of inequalities and exclusion. We help countries to develop policies, leadership skills, partnering abilities, institutional capabilities and build resilience in order to sustain development results.”¹⁵ With an annual budget of USD 5.2 billion and over 6,000 staff worldwide, UNDP is a giant among UN agencies¹⁶. UNDP’s focus areas include protecting the planet, preventing conflict, driving gender equality, and eliminating poverty. Strong partnerships are critical to achieving these broad agendas; thus, UNDP works closely with international finance institutions, private sector organizations, foundations, and civil society organizations to recognize its goals.

The Organizational Innovation Journey



Phase I: Seeding

Innovation in UNDP began to take formal shape in Eastern Europe in 2011. A regional knowledge management advisor identified the need for UNDP to upgrade its programmatic toolbox and ways of working to better achieve the UNDP mission. This advisor communicated well internally, created important new partnerships with external innovators and created a positive buzz around innovation. He was particularly enabled by the regional context of middle income countries and by the leadership who provided him freedom and funding to start advancing innovation with and through Country Offices. UNDP’s first small innovation fund was launched in 2011 in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. This first phase really

¹⁵ UNDP, ‘About Us,’ <<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/about-us.html>>

¹⁶ <https://annualreport.undp.org/>



saw driven internal champions working on innovation, often in their free time on weekends. The main challenges included a lack of dedicated support from the top leadership of UNDP and often within Country Offices, the challenge to carve out time and to find the most strategic opportunities to do things differently.

In 2012, this regional context led UNDP's Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (RBEC) to set up a knowledge and innovation unit to design a new generation of development services that would support increasingly sophisticated national governments and help tackle these complex, intertwined challenges. This regional innovation unit designed and tested different approaches and tools ranging from behavioural insights, data science and user-centred design, to alternative methods of policymaking processes, and service delivery. Using the 'learning-by-doing' principle, the unit created a lab-like, experimental space where public servants, citizens, and external resources could come together to reframe issues and test novel approaches to pressing social issues. In 2013, UNDP RBEC organized and hosted an inaugural Global Innovation meeting in Budva, Montenegro, and resulted in a set of twenty commitments along with an emerging innovation framework that outlined UNDP's approach to innovation. Effectively this led to the regional model being copied in other locations. The main question UNDP was trying to answer with the labs was how to make this new way of working stick within the organization and among partners.

In 2014, UNDP RBEC commissioned an independent evaluation conducted by MindLab, the Danish Government's innovation lab. The evaluation found that early adopter countries of UNDP's innovation agenda in the ECIS region benefited from new partnerships and access to a new generation of development services, programme and policy resources, and skills. FutureGov, a design studio from London, had similar conclusions in its evaluation of UNDP's innovation work in Armenia. MindLab also found that innovative approaches helped change UNDP's organizational culture. These changes included a design of the first corporate innovation curricula for UNDP staff; integration of innovation as a tool for better risk management in the new UNDP Strategic plan; amending the corporate rules of procurement to enable use of challenge prizes as a standard business procedure; and a corporate endorsement of the innovation framework that emerged from the ECIS region's experiences. New partnerships around innovation, such as with Nesta, led to further evolution of innovation toolkits, but often these were not efficiently used as staff often did not immediately see how additional tools can augment work in UNDP's programme cycles and policy work.

Phase II: Scaling

The official Innovation Facility, based in the Bureau of Policy and Programme Support, started in 2014. The idea was to put innovation on a global level and was initially pushed by the director of knowledge management. The Government of Denmark along with co-investment from UNDP core resources provided funding for country-level experiments. UNDP invested in a de-centralized team of seven staff (innovation advisors) to offer technical and financial support on innovative initiatives across UNDP's global footprint. Two were based in Headquarters and the others operating from Regional Hubs in direct support of Country



Offices and external partners. The success of many of these initiatives within country level offices enabled the innovation team to gain greater managerial support over time.

The goal of the Facility in its early days was to listen to and learn from field staff and then work together to design and implement new solutions to tough problems. Initially, the Facility provided innovation champions in UNDP country offices and funded innovative initiatives that 1) supported citizen engagement, 2) provided strategic planning services to governments, and 3) established innovation spaces. The Facility also convened several innovation conferences to review and learn from successful initiatives.

Between 2015 and 2016, the Facility supported the establishment of thirteen innovation labs (seven in UNDP country offices, and six in governments). The Facility also increased its focus on implementing projects through partnerships. As of September 2018, all projects within the UNDP Innovation Facility were implemented through partnerships; approximately 40% of initiatives partner with both governments and private sector. To date, 140 initiatives across 87 countries received investment through UNDP's fund, and 23 projects are currently in the UNDP support pipeline.

Phase III: Structuring

The change of leadership in 2017 brought further support for the Innovation Facility and allowed the team to start asking larger questions regarding alternative finance, improving metrics for measuring change, and the role of data. As Benjamin Kumpf, former head of Innovation Facility for UNDP, explains, "UNDP's new Strategic Plan puts a significant emphasis on innovation and Achim Steiner sends clear signals to the organization and its partners: UNDP is changing."¹⁷

Since March 2018, Achim Steiner convenes monthly one-hour conversations with intrapreneurs from UNDP Country Offices. These virtual discussions aim at inspiring new ways of working across offices and cultivating innovation in the organization. Benjamin Kumpf explained, "In the complex process of transforming organizations, this signal from the top bears more significance than the first impression might suggest. This dedicated push from the top is necessary. Over the past years, the UNDP Innovation Facility invested in a largely bottom-up and inside-out driven approach to instill innovation in the organization."

Innovation has become a significant focus for UNDP's 2018-2021 strategic plan, with the Facility contributing to policy change and the creation of new service lines and financial instruments within UNDP. The Facility has published multiple articles and toolkits to help UNDP staff understand the principles of innovation, including the importance of design thinking, designing for scale and sustainability, and measuring outcomes rather than outputs through data collected in ways that do no harm to users. The Facility currently provides technical support, training, research, and funding to country offices and initiatives through regional teams based in Addis Ababa, Amman, Bangkok, Istanbul, New York, and Panama.

UNDP's next phase of innovation is focused on scaling new approaches. In January 2019, UNDP launched a Country Network of Accelerator Labs corresponding to the scaling mechanism throughout the organization.

¹⁷ <https://medium.com/@UNDP/bottom-up-top-down-and-outside-in-cultivating-innovation-at-undp-7d4935c56f9c>



The main launch-partners were Germany and Qatar which provided a strong financial support for initial strategic investment.

Beyond the first generation of labs established between 2015 and 2016, the Accelerator Lab network is setting up new labs in 60 different countries (34 in Africa, 10 in Asia, 10 in the Middle East and Northern Africa, 7 in Latin America, and 6 in Eastern Europe and Central Asia). The countries were selected according to different factors, such as the UNDP office readiness in the country, the government's demand as well as the innovation ecosystem in the country.

Challenges and Looking forward

One of the key challenges for UNDP over the course of its innovation journey has been the metrics used to measure both the impact of innovation initiatives as well as the internal transformation impact on the organization. "Our team contributes to UNDP's corporate transformative efforts. We map UNDP's innovation journey and the value proposition of the Facility by analyzing the input in the Results-Oriented Annual Report (ROAR) from 135 Country Offices. The Facility further reports in the Integrated Resources and Results Framework (IRRF) of UNDP's Strategic Plan.¹⁸" The Innovation Portfolio framework that was developed through the years of experience in innovation allowed for a better fit of initiatives to the true goals of the organization and the SDGs. Finding the balance between incremental and radical innovation investment in the portfolio model is something that had often troubled the Innovation Facility. The question frequently asked is, "How many successes do we need to make it the new normal?"

Through the strategy towards the new Accelerator Labs, UNDP aims at addressing the existing gap between the current practice to solve the social, environmental and economic challenges we are facing and the risks (climate change, the 4th Industrial Revolution, rapid urbanization, the rise of inequalities, and multipolarity) that the exponential changing world we are living in is generating. By adopting such a strategy, the ambitious goal of contextualizing successful innovative solutions to other countries and regions, with an increased share of solutions targeted to the most marginalized around the world seems to become possible. As UNDP Administrator, Achim Steiner, explains: "While all nations are committed to the SDGs, time is of the essence. With its global presence and as a trusted partner to development actors, UNDP sees these Labs as a catalyst for a next generation of development solutions, emerging from within the countries we serve."

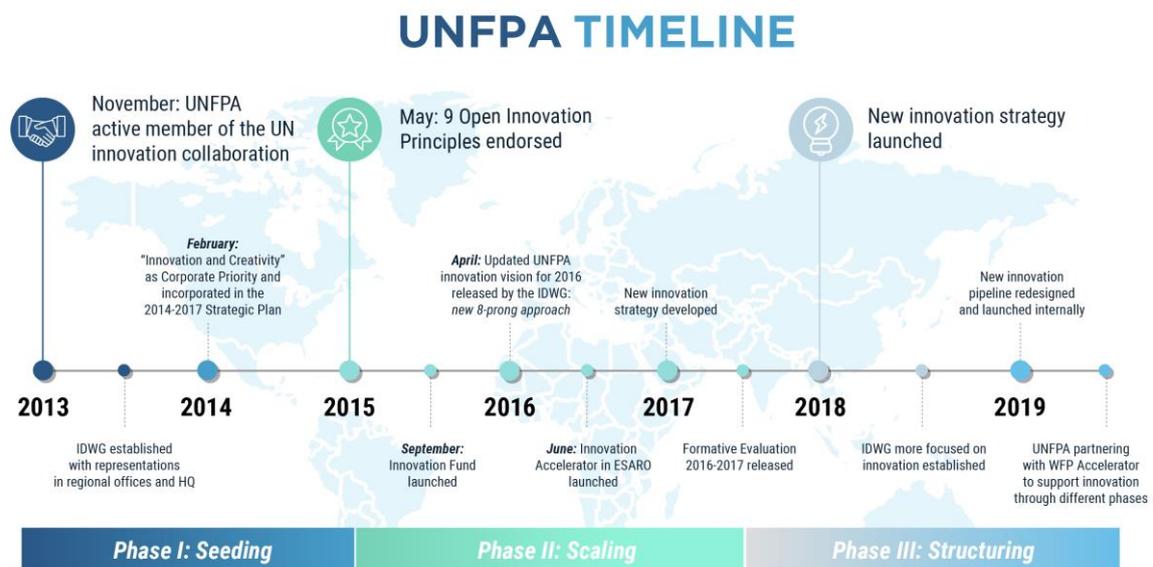
To this end, it becomes clear that the activities of the Accelerator Labs will be mainly determined at the country level and both collaboration and network learning will be key for success. The labs are a high risk endeavor that will depend of whether the organization can fully learn from its experience. This third phase for UNDP is also full of promise and opportunity for the organization to learn from its own experiments and combine the strategic thinkers in the country offices with the working people doing innovation all under the umbrella of a fully supportive and understanding leadership.

¹⁸ <https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/innovation-metrics-for-human-development-what-have-we-learned/>

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA): The UNFPA Innovation Fund

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is the UN agency for sexual and reproductive health. Established in 1969, UNFPA’s mission is “to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person’s potential is fulfilled.” The organization’s headquarters are in New York. UNFPA has six regional, three sub-regional, six liaison and 122 field offices.¹⁹ The operating budget was 1 billion USD in 2018.

The Organizational Innovation Journey



Phase I: Seeding

At UNFPA, innovation became a topic of discussion in 2013 when the organization started to address and explore innovation through corporate approaches. One year later, “innovation and creativity” became a corporate priority and incorporated in the 2014-2017 Strategic Plan, which views innovation “as a key element to becoming a more adaptable, flexible and nimble organization.”²⁰

The UNFPA Innovation Fund, established in 2014 as an Innovation Inter-Divisional Working Group (IDWG) with an initial contribution from the Government of Denmark, aimed to generate a cultural shift within UNFPA and to motivate staff to generate and implement innovative ideas for women. It has two main streams: culture and projects. About 80 percent of the projects are geared towards UNFPA’s programme priorities. The remaining 20 percent focus on organizational effectiveness and culture change.

¹⁹ <https://www.unfpa.org/worldwide>

²⁰ Evaluation report, p.13.



In 2015, in the context of the Joint Meeting of the Executives Boards of the six UN agencies, programmes and funds (UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP, UNOPS, WFP and UN-Women) leading humanitarian action, leaders highlighted the potential of innovation (in terms of solutions, products and approaches) to achieve their respective mission. “We must not forget that the people we serve must always remain at the center of everything we do. Innovation is one of the means through which we can achieve a greater impact in that mission,” stated former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon. In the same year, UNFPA endorsed the nine UN Open Innovation Principles, a set of principles guiding the work on innovation pursued by multiple organizations.

Phase II: Scaling

With innovation being recognized intrinsic to the organization’s processes and programmes, in 2015, the newly-established IDWG delivered the “Updated Vision of Innovation at UNFPA for the Period 2015-2017.” UNFPA’s new eight-prong approach²¹ represented the shift to a more systemic approach to innovation within the organization.

The IDWG’s Innovation Fund issued five open internal calls of proposals through 2017. In total, 67 field offices (of 121 UNFPA offices) submitted proposals to be supported. A total of 30 projects were awarded financial support during these five rounds.

At the same time, the organization was keen to assess and learn what was working and not working as well on innovation, and hence conducted a formative evaluation on innovation during 2016-2017. The purpose was to conduct an evidence-based, highly consultative and participative formative evaluation of the UNFPA Innovation Initiative, including a mid-term evaluation of the Innovation Fund. The scope of analysis included the Innovation Fund’s performance (with a view towards improvement); the links between the Innovation Fund and the Innovation Initiative (inclusive of other innovation activities within UNFPA); the links between the Innovation Initiative and mainstreaming innovation in UNFPA; and how other UN agencies approach and implement innovation for comparative analysis to generate insights.

Key recommendations from UNFPA’s formative evaluation on innovation included:

- UNFPA should make critical strategic decisions in order to frame the foundations for its corporate approach to innovation (areas, internal and external positioning, forms and stages of innovations)
- The Innovation Fund should evolve from the current internal 360-degrees experimental fund focusing on creativity and on nurturing a culture of innovation, to a selective, co-funding based, leverage-driven mechanism focusing on solutions aimed at solving the core problems UNFPA has decided to innovate for

²¹ UNFPA’s new eight-prongs approach: 1) Establish a “Go-To” group on innovation, 2) empower UNFPAS’s staff to innovate, 3) communicate innovation internally and externally, 4) promote new partnerships, 5) manage and promote risk-taking, 6) create physical spaces/innovation Lab, 7) demonstrate results, and 8) mobilize resources/promote innovative financing.²¹



- Readjust the innovation model towards a more outward-looking approach based on partnerships
- Activate a functional feedback exchange mechanism between the Innovation Initiative and relevant UNFPA business units
- Develop a learning-for-impact framework

Overall, the evaluation found that the Innovation Initiative and the Innovation Fund have helped position innovation and generate drive for UNFPA to motivate innovation at all levels, creating awareness and jump-starting the process toward nurturing a culture of innovation. It has also lifted the profile of innovation in the corporate UNFPA agenda.

Phase III: Structuring

In 2017, a new innovation strategy was developed following the key recommendations, as well as to coincide with the development and start of the organization's new Strategic Plan 2018-2021. The revised Strategy was presented and endorsed by UNFPA's Executive Committee, then launched at a side event co-organized with Denmark and Finland, which also featured partners' work on innovation on the margins of the September 2017 Executive Board. The timing was opportune as it paved the way for a launch and roll-out for the Strategy to coincide with the inauguration of the new Strategic Plan 2018-2021.

Launched in 2018, the revised Innovation Strategy articulated the way forward for a new second phase, building on UNFPA's experiences during its first two phases of innovation (2013-2017) and the findings from a formative evaluation on innovation conducted in 2017. The revised Strategy channels and consolidates efforts towards: (1) creating and sourcing new innovations to address longstanding programmatic bottlenecks; (2) scaling up proven and successful innovations; (3) partnering with innovators from the public and private sectors, and (4) institutionalizing a culture of innovation within UNFPA. It identifies four thematic areas for immediate action: (1) mHealth for adolescents and youth; (2) last mile SRH commodities; (3) data for development; and (4) innovative financing.



With the launch of the revised Innovation Strategy in 2018, the Innovation Portfolio took a more purposeful approach to supporting projects aligned with its four thematic priorities and key actions. This third phase of innovation has consolidated relevant experiences from the first two phases, brought more technical



rigor and support toward innovative programming, established a learning agenda, and established a systematic process for sourcing and supporting promising innovations through a pipeline and mainstreaming in thematic areas. As Sylvia Wong, Innovation Lead at UNFPA pointed out, “Our vision for the future of innovation is to find and test that “sweet spot” between our core programming and the promising or future-forward solutions, not yet dreamed nor tried – that today’s innovations will eventually become part and parcel of everything we need to do to reach more women, girls, and young people tomorrow.”

Moreover, to respond to the new direction of UNFPA’s Innovation Initiative, a more focused IDWG was established in 2018 to strengthen the work of the Innovation Initiative, support the implementation of different components of the Innovation Strategy, and provide more efficient mentorship, substantive guidance, and monitoring support to innovation projects and activities at the various levels of the organization. The composition of a more focused IDWG also reflects UNFPA’s innovation priorities. In this way, the IDWG can be positioned to provide thematic guidance and strengthen technical linkages in these areas with other innovation activities supported by UNFPA. This innovation community serves as the “go to” hub within UNFPA to support: a culture of innovation; a stronger orientation toward learning, monitoring, scaling and evaluating for impact; communities of practice; communications; and new partnerships in the innovation ecosystem.

Led by the Innovation Secretariat and with the involvement of the IDWG, the new innovation pipeline was redesigned and launched internally in 2019 as part of the organization’s portfolio approach to constantly source and support innovations throughout different stages. It follows a five stage process: (1) identifying bottlenecks (e.g., identifying the challenge and pain points to be solved); (2) calling for innovations; (3) curating and selecting the most promising; (4) conducting a design sprint; and (5) learning, failing fast or transitioning to scale.

Committed to strengthening capacity and supporting a culture of innovation to do things differently, UNFPA is partnering with WFP’s Innovation Accelerator to support these teams through a design sprint. Selected teams can participate in a boot camp and design sprint to learn and apply innovative approaches to problem solving and access mentorship from industry leaders in design thinking, technology, marketing and communications, and the start-up world. Promising concepts and teams would then access catalytic seed support to rapidly test and iterate their innovations in 2019. By the end of the process, a set of teams and solutions will have gone through this innovation cycle, with promising ones poised toward ongoing implementation and scaling in 2020. To take the priorities of the strategy forward, the UNFPA Innovation Portfolio has taken a purposeful approach in the following ways:

- **Aligning investments to the four thematic priorities**, thereby strengthening our innovation narrative on consolidated results in these areas, and their contributions to our corporate transformative goals;



- **Diversifying our portfolio** by balancing big signature initiatives to create “global goods” and smaller ventures for testing and iterating new solutions and approaches through a revamped innovation pipeline; and
- **Contributing to a stronger UN innovation ecosystem** through partnering with other sister agencies, and contributing expertise and experience to the UN Innovation Network (UNIN).

UNFPA has come a long way since the work on innovation was started at the end of 2013. It has embraced innovation as a corporate priority that is absolutely essential to tip the balance in favor of women, girls, and young people’s sexual and reproductive health. Based on its learning, UNFPA has adopted the following approach to innovation: “to inclusively create and scale-up data-driven, sustainable and open solutions that accelerate the achievement of transformative results in the lives of women, adolescents and youth.”

Current Challenges and Looking Ahead

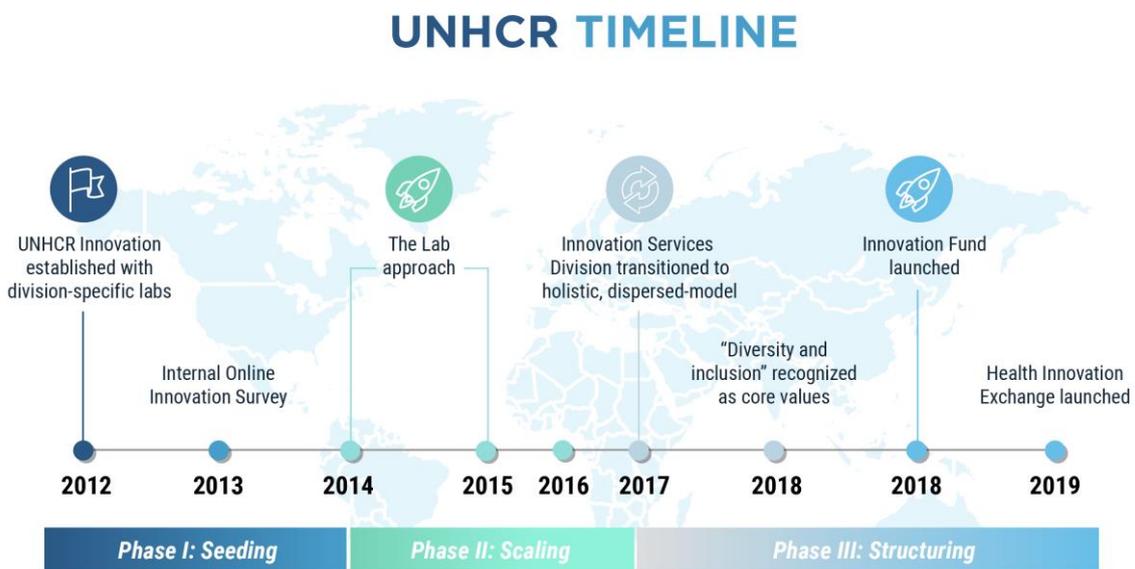
UNFPA Innovation Fund benefited from a broad engagement of UNFPA staff which proposed and pursued a range of activities during its first phase. Many innovations addressed the substantive aspects of the mandate, such as data, adolescents and youth, sexual and reproductive health, gender equality and women’s empowerment, as well as humanitarian action. Several initiatives also focused on processes and structures. This inclusive approach to taking up innovative ideas has helped to broaden UNFPA staff engagement and advance the culture of innovation in the organization, but it also meant that the efforts to drive innovation were wide and thinly spread.

As UNFPA moves towards the newly developed strategy, the engagement with other UN organizations such as WFP’s Innovation Accelerator and UNHCR’s Fellowship Programme, are promising steps on the journey towards developing a more cohesive approach to innovation in the UN System and reducing redundancies while taking advantage of the experience and expertise created by sister organizations.

The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR): UNHCR’s Innovation Service

The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) deploys nearly USD 4.5 million of member state contributions and private donations around the globe.²² More than 15,000 staff drive UNHCR’s mandate, which is “to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees” by “saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people.” UNHCR’s more than 900 partnerships “underpin UNHCR’s engagement in inter-agency fora and processes, where mutual understanding and strong alliances help ensure that refugees, IDPs and stateless persons are adequately prioritized.”²³

The Organizational Innovation Journey



Phase I: Seeding

The Innovation Service (initially called the Innovation Unit) was established as an inter-divisional unit in 2012. At that time, the former UNHCR’s High Commissioner, current UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, was interested in creating a space that could capture, harness and reward innovation within the organization. A small team was established with the aim of better understanding the sense of innovation at UNHCR and how innovation could be spread to the entire organization. The team consisted of four people including Chris Earney, who had been a Programme Officer at UNHCR for six years, and Olivier Delarue, who was previously the Head of International Corporate Partnerships and IKEA Foundation partnership founder and manager. The Innovation Service originally fundraised for its activities but over

²² <http://reporting.unhcr.org/financial>

²³ <https://www.unhcr.org/partnerships.html>



the course of its existence at UNHCR, the Innovation Service also began receiving core funding from the organization and investments from governments such as Belgium and Luxembourg.

The Innovation Service has gone through multiple evolutions as the team's understanding of innovation and its role in the organization has changed. If this were to be broken up into phases, the first phase, from 2012 to 2014, of the strategy, was painted very broadly and ambitiously with many goals set, including: funding and supporting innovation projects, a coordination group, thematically focused innovation "labs," private sector partnerships, a UNHCR Innovation Fellows network, and field centers for innovation. But the capacity of the team was stretched and not everything could be accomplished at once. By not being able to accomplish everything the team wanted to do right away gave the team its "first taste of failure," described Chris Earney, Deputy, of UNHCR's Innovation Service. Chris explains the development of the strategy into one that would start to shape the direction of UNHCR's Innovation Service:

From there, the founding members of what would eventually become the UNHCR Innovation Unit reworked the roadmap to adopt a more organically flowing one geared towards understanding what innovation in UNHCR truly meant. As with all innovation initiatives, they wanted to understand what the real challenges for driving innovation into all corners of the organization actually were. They started working closely with field operations in Southeast Ethiopia and the Middle East, in which the initiative's efforts mainly focused on working on innovative projects that the working group and field operations came up with, most of which failed. At the same time, the team started to put other structures in place, which included the Innovation Fellowship, a project-focused initiative that emphasized the value of a single innovator within an organization that has always been innovating, but not necessarily fostering it.

The Innovation Fellowship Programme focused on building UNHCR staff/affiliate's innovation skills and competencies in addition to supporting them to facilitate innovation with colleagues, partners, and refugees in their own operations and divisions. Over the course of the year, Innovation Fellows learn and use innovation methods, tools, and embed new approaches to complex organizational problems. They focus on problem-solving, ideation, and experimenting solutions to real-life challenges in the field or at Headquarters. They are the organization's ambassadors for innovation and lasting positive change.

The Fellowship is grounded in the idea that to have sustainable innovation you need to focus on mindset change and culture – to make innovation more accessible. "We believe the only way to achieve this is to change individual behaviors at all levels of the organization," explained Lauren Parater, Innovation Officer (Strategic Communications) at the Innovation Service. The programme encourages continuous learning, challenging assumptions, and perspectives, the value of collaboration and openness for failure and risk-taking. It is a mindset that leads staff to question if there is a better way of working, communicating, and thinking.



Phase II: Scaling

In the first phase, the focus of Innovation Service sought to invest in private sector partnerships and new collaborations that were primarily product or project focused. The objective was to learn from the private sector and bring new skills and knowledge into UNHCR's structure. In the second phase, this approach led to the creation of thematic Innovation Labs and strong partnerships with the Vodafone Foundation, the UPS Foundation, the IKEA Foundation and others. The objective of the labs was to identify thematic challenges within the organization that needed an innovation focus. Initially, the Innovation Services team managed various innovation labs that were connected to specific divisions within UNHCR (for example, the Learn Lab – a joint venture of the Innovation team and the Education unit). Such an approach enabled the Innovation Service team to establish in-depth relationships with other units in the organization. As Chris explains:

This was an attempt at emphasizing both the project-driven and partnership-focused framework of the UNHCR Innovation Unit at the time, and it came out of the need to address the larger communication problem within UNHCR within in-house units, especially as it pertains to how people perceived UNHCR Innovation's role. There was initially a lack of collaboration between in-house units and the Innovation Unit at the time, as there was a perception that UNHCR Innovation was competing with other in-house units, as opposed to providing grounds for support.

But challenges arose with the lab model as the labs were too product centered and single minded on their particular thematic topic. Multiple challenges became hard to address and labs became siloed resulting in the strategy moving away from the lab approach by the end of 2016.²⁴

Phase III: Structuring

By 2017, UNHCR's Innovation Service moved towards a more holistic model to support the organization (a systemic and multifunctional approach). This included changing the name from "Innovation Unit" to today's "Innovation Service," which was a signal that a director level individual had been employed to lead the team, but also showcased the role of team as a service for UNHCR staff to support innovation in the field and at Headquarters and to change the narrative around who gets to innovate in UNHCR. The aim was to nurture innovation already present within the various divisions, operations and teams that make up UNHCR.

This third phase saw a push towards interdisciplinary teams working together on innovation as the Innovation Service switched focus from innovative products to innovative people. It was no longer only about the ideas, but about further strengthening the process of innovation. Such a model enabled the organization to better understand the complexity of the challenges they were facing and how these challenges were linked/interacted with each other. While the Innovation Service team remained strong

²⁴ <https://medium.com/unhcr-innovation-service/our-innovation-labs-are-dead-long-live-innovation-865268675185>



and has a dedicated office at headquarters in Geneva, the team equally focused on equipping field staff and offices to understand and apply innovation principles independently.

In 2018, UNHCR Innovation continued the transformation process started in 2017. Pivotal to this transformation has been recognizing and embracing “diversity and inclusion” as core values and area of work. In this context of change, 2019 can be considered as a cornerstone year for UNHCR Innovation Service. To this end, UNHCR identified three strategic priorities for current and future work.

- *Competency and capacity building* - In order to make innovation sustainable, it is necessary to ensure inclusiveness and diversity in the process: “We will step up efforts to foster an inclusive working environment and a respectful workplace where innovative thought is encouraged, and diversity is valued as a strong asset.”
- *Transformation for scale* – It is important to understand what is working and why in order to scale such approaches and ways of working to different parts of the organization: “Transformational changes are needed from within our bureaucracies to scale up, to scale out, to increase value in what we’re doing, to scale the process of scaling, to make innovations more successful for more people.”
- *Future thinking* – Our world is in a continuous process of change. UNHCR recognizes the need to take action and invest now for challenges that can emerge in the coming years and decades. In this way the organization would place itself in a better position in order to face future challenges and crises in the most efficient way possible: “Whilst we can’t predict the future, we can prepare for it – by ensuring that our organization can be agile and flexible enough to creatively respond to the possibilities that might arise.

Currently, the Innovation Service’s team (composed of thirteen people across three offices – Geneva, Budapest, and Nairobi with one more being hired in Panama) work both to build competencies and innovation skillsets, as well as strengthening innovation efforts in HQ related functions, such as HR, finance and administration. The Service supports UNHCR operations based on the defined challenge. Assistance can be provided for capacity building on innovation methodologies, to supporting experimentation as well as to capturing promising practices on innovation. Initiatives the team is working on cover focus areas such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, innovating around institutional challenges, connecting refugee populations, public-interest communication, and communicating with communities - all with a focus on changing behaviors or mindsets for how the organization solves problems.

The Innovation Service also opened the second iteration of UNHCR’s Innovation Fund of 1 million USD. The objective of the Fund is to provide a safe budgetary space for colleagues to experiment with new ideas and test assumptions around a project within their team. Beyond financing and ideation support, the Fund also provided mentorship and community building capabilities to those teams involved. Contributions needed to fit into the four thematic areas of: data and artificial intelligence; inclusive intelligence; simulation and modeling; and storytelling and culture. The Innovation Fund also took a team approach, where diverse teams were necessary to apply.



The Innovation Service prioritizes thought leadership across innovation in IOs, publishing several articles a month highlighting learnings from innovation processes, projects, and efforts across UNHCR's global footprint. Communication has been an essential tool enabling innovation to flourish and to change behaviors and mindsets. As Lauren Parater, explains "The team is also experimenting with public interest communication as their main means of communication, which applies a science-driven framework and approach to better understand UNHCR's function in the humanitarian field, drive innovation more quickly, and create behavioral and cultural change. To date, a big part of the innovative work UNHCR is pursuing is based on communication. For example, in the past couple of years, through techniques such as storytelling, a lot of efforts have been put in challenging master narratives around innovation (e.g. that innovation is not just about technology and male individuals) and refugees." A key principle behind the team is that everyone is a communicator and has a role to play in influencing how the organization communicates and shares stories of innovation.

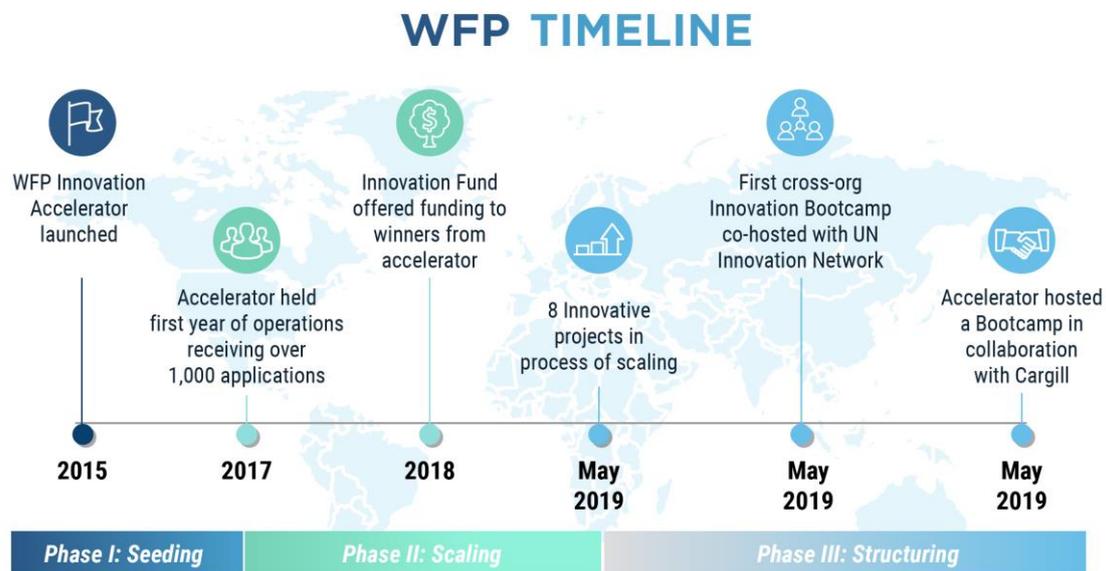
Challenges and looking forward

The evolution of the Innovation Service team at UNHCR is one characterized by constant creation, testing, and experimentation - focusing on how to best create value for the organization and refugees. UNHCR has been a champion of learning from mistakes and consistently reiterating solutions to ensure they are effective across the organization. Some of the key success factors that have affected the stability of the team include hiring people from outside the organization and creating an identity that is very much a part of UNHCR but keen to challenge the status quo. Some of the key challenges that the team has faced involved creating a broader understanding of innovation and how the Innovation Service could help facilitate change in the organization. There have been few "short-term" wins in the process but after over seven years in existence the Innovation Service has seen that long-term vision is key and many of the seeds planted through initiatives such as the Innovation Fellowship Programme are showing visible effects on the organization.

World Food Programme (WFP): WFP Innovation Accelerator

World Food Programme (WFP) is the leading humanitarian organization saving lives and changing lives, delivering food assistance in emergencies and working with communities to improve nutrition and build resilience, as a part of the United Nations. WFP assists over 86 million people in around 83 countries each year, and is funded entirely by voluntary donations. In 2018, WFP raised a record US \$7.2 billion, and has more than 17,000 staff worldwide. The agency has a robust corporate partnership strategy and works closely with other UN agencies, private partners, NGOs, and governments to deliver food aid and implement policies around effective and sustainable development.

The Organizational Innovation Journey



Phase I: Seeding

WFP launched its Innovation Accelerator in 2015 “as a platform to identify new ideas and approaches and nurture them into global solutions.”²⁵ The initial goals were to strengthen an innovative culture throughout WFP, and to forge better connections with private, public, and academic sectors. There was initial support from both the Executive level as well as from within the operational arm of the organization. The Accelerator started as a small team of five people including Bernhard Kowatsch, Head of Business Innovation at WFP for five years before founding the Accelerator, and Hila Cohen, who has a high-tech law background and three years’ experience as a Project Manager and Communication Consultant at WFP prior to the Accelerator. As Hila explained, “It was important that we had a diversified team which included one or two people who knew the organization and diverse internal processes and also team members with an

²⁵ WFP Innovation Accelerator Annual Report 2018

entrepreneurial background, as implementing innovation is a craft. The key is to have people who can do anything.”

Hila shared that, “We had to do everything at the beginning. Including finding an office.” The goal was to find a city with a sound ecosystem of good universities, big companies, while also being accessible. With initial funding from the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the German Federal Foreign Office and the State of Bavaria, the Accelerator established its headquarters in Munich in large part due to the city’s strategic location as a tech center with a strong innovation ecosystem. The WFP Innovation Accelerator is a part of the Innovation & Change Management Division, which is based at WFP’s global headquarters in Rome.

The Accelerator created a ‘five pillar’ structure to push innovative ideas through to implementation:

1. Thought leadership to share learnings across the international organization ecosystem and beyond on successful innovations;
2. Innovation sourcing through online applications (for-profit start-ups, NGO start-ups, companies/NGOs/UN, WFP team), active sourcing (targeted startup outreach), and innovation challenges dedicated to WFP innovation challenges as well as challenges with external partners) to source creative ideas across the globe;
3. Innovation bootcamps to develop some of the most promising ideas;
4. Sprint programs to execute the developed ideas;
5. Innovation fund to scale the best ideas across WFP’s areas of work.

Phase II: Scaling

The Accelerator has received over 4,000 innovation applications since its inception, including 1,700 in 2018. The innovations supported by the Accelerator for scaling reached over 763,000 people directly in 2018 – a nearly 107 percent increase from 2017. Over USD 35 million was raised to support the same projects²⁶. In 2018, the Accelerator hosted five bootcamps in Munich and brought in over 100 international organizations, including UN agencies, start-ups, foundations and corporates including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Singularity University, XPrize, Cargill, German Aerospace Center (DLR), UnternehmerTUM, USAID and DFID Innovation teams.

Part of the WFP Accelerator’s goal is to bridge the gap between the worlds of startups and humanitarian aid. As part of solving the challenge of bringing these together, WFP’s Innovation Accelerator launched either innovation hubs or identified regions of focus in Tanzania, Lebanon and Kenya in 2017, in order to create spaces for testing and iterating projects in the field.

Phase III: Structuring

Projects are selected on the basis of six evaluation criteria: the level of innovation, the potential impact the idea could have if it is scaled, the strength of the team, the presence of any methods that potentially

²⁶ WFP Innovation Accelerator Annual Report 2018



allow scaling, to what extent the project fits WFP's corporate strategy, and if the project is generally inclusive. As Hila explained, "Ideas need to be core to WFP work."

For ideas that successfully passed through the innovation sourcing phase, the Accelerator holds five-day "Innovation Bootcamps" to refine the project ideas and match the context to the reality on the ground, especially if the idea came from outside of WFP. WFP has also brought in private sector experts to advise and coach attendees.

Selected teams may advance to a 3-6 month Sprint Programme, which enables projects to prepare to receive and implement funding. In such programmes, selected teams were asked to apply human-centered design and lean startup methodologies, two of WFP's innovation principles. Chosen teams from this programme receive up to USD 100K in funding, as well as the opportunity to work directly with WFP staff to implement the initiative on the ground, and reach a proof of concept or develop prototypes ready for implementation. Teams receive financial support, guidance and space to bring their solutions to life, and access to WFP's global network of partners and resources. As Hila explained, "The goal was to take these innovations and make them operational for WFP."

A passion and focus for the Accelerator from the beginning has been the use of frontier technologies to support innovation. The WFP Innovation team, however, has stressed this as a reminder that not every innovation has to be 'high-tech' – technology and innovation are different concepts, and in many of the locations where WFP works, high-technology solutions are not always practical. Currently, the Accelerator team counts more than 30 people, with a mix of a private sector startup background or having worked in innovation teams of private sector entities and a mix of team members with on-the-ground humanitarian field experience, including fostering innovation in developing countries.

As of spring 2019, the Accelerator was in process of scaling eight innovative projects through three main channels:

1. By embedding the initiatives into WFP core processes;
2. By scaling country to country through WFP field offices;
3. Through tapping into 'innovation hubs'.

All three methods have involved on-the-ground collaborations with various stakeholders, tapping into WFP's passion for implementing innovation through partnerships. Scale-up and WFP Country Office and Divisional buy-in were key activities for the Accelerator. Bernhard told us, "Scale is why we exist." But often this was also the more difficult part of the work. As Hila explained, "We thought innovation would scale automatically but it does not work that way. Each context is different." The Accelerator has worked in the field with WFP Country Offices to localize the initiatives and operationalize them to the specific needs. As Hila describes, "The exit for us is either when the innovation is adopted at the corporate level, is spun off, or becomes funded."



The eight scale-up projects to date include:

- *Building Blocks*: deployment of blockchain to make cash transfers faster, cheaper and more secure.
- *Farm to Market Alliance*: making markets work better for smallholder farmers by partnering with different stakeholders.
- *H2Grow*: soilless hydroponic solutions in emergency and development contexts.
- *Scope Coda*: seeking to bring a data revolution to improve the nutritional and health outcomes.
- *EMPACT (formerly Tech for Food)*: connecting young adults affected by conflict to income opportunities in the global digital economy.
- *Dalili*: tool supporting WFP cash-based transfers by providing all key retail information to recipients.
- *ShareTheMeal*: enabling donation with few taps on the smartphone.
- *Post-Harvest Losses (PHL)*: enabling farming families to drastically reduce post-harvest losses.

In total, over USD 69 million was raised by the eight initiatives scaled through the Accelerator. By spring 2019, the Accelerator had hosted 120 teams and 16 bootcamps (with 8-12 teams per bootcamp and 3-4 people per team). Total number of applications received over the lifetime of the Accelerator by spring 2019 was over 4,000, including internal and external applications.

The fourth pillar of the Accelerator, thought leadership, focuses on assisting WFP staff to integrate concepts of human-centered design (design and test starting with the end user) and lean startup (iterative experimentation) into their regular work streams. The goal is to identify and leverage game-changing trends for products or services through collaborations (e.g. Singularity University, XPrize, Initiative for Applied Artificial Intelligence, Google Launchpad, etc.). The Accelerator regularly publishes blogs and articles around topics relevant to the innovative design process and disruptive innovations regarding solutions for ending global hunger.

In March 2019, the Accelerator co-hosted with UN Innovation Network the first interagency Innovation Bootcamp. The bootcamp brought together teams from eleven different UN Entities for a weeklong bootcamp in the Accelerator's office in Munich. Each team was mentored throughout the process by an expert from within the Accelerator, and the week culminated with a high-energy three-minute pitch from each team. The goal was to catalyze projects across the UN through training and networking. The event not only showcased the Accelerator's expertise as a host of Bootcamps and Sprint events, but also highlighted the potential for the Accelerator to leverage its knowledge to help the UN ecosystem achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).²⁷

²⁷ <https://innovation.wfp.org/blog/how-un-innovation-network-seeks-acceleratesdgs-innovation>



Challenges and looking forward

While many innovation structures can often be challenged by the rules of any organization, the Innovation Accelerator saw the structures and processes of the WFP not as something that needed to be circumvented, but rather something that could be used to achieve their collective goals, especially the shared purpose of tackling SDG2 - Zero Hunger. As Hila explains, “First, we are part of the organization. That means that you need to talk to all the units to get buy-in. For this, you must stay patient and optimistic and explain exactly ‘the what’ and ‘the why.’ People need to see the value you are bringing to the organization and how your model fits the organization’s greater goals.” The team strongly believed in showing their results at all activity levels: bootcamp level, project level, innovation challenge level. The goal for the Accelerator was to continue reinforcing its position as an innovation facilitator within the World Food Programme through showcasing their results and bridging the divide to start partnering with other organizations, using their innovation expertise to help the greater UN ecosystem achieve the SDGs.



About the Authors

Tina C. Ambos is Professor of International Management and the Director of the Institute of Management at the Geneva School of Economics and Management (GSEM) of the University of Geneva, Switzerland. She is also the Academic Director of the International Organizations MBA (www.iomba.ch). Her research and teaching interests include global strategic management and innovation in the context of multinational corporations, technology start-ups as well as international organizations. Her work is regularly published in the top academic as well as practitioner journals. Tina collaborates with several international organizations and shares her research insights in executive trainings and as a speaker.

Katherine Tatarinov is Research/Teaching Assistant and PhD candidate at the Geneva School of Economics and Management (GSEM) of the University of Geneva. A former IT consultant and freelance writer, Katherine's research interests are digital transformation, social innovation, and entrepreneurship. She has published many Teaching Cases focusing on Information Systems Management and Digital Transformation.

Thank you to our team for their invaluable and tireless efforts on this research, particularly Lisa Canova, Melissa Da Eun Baek, and Sylvia Somerville.
