



GPC Protection Lab Scoping Project

Strategic Framework for a Protection-oriented Innovation Lab:
Holding Innovation to Account for Improved Protection Outcomes

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Background

Overview

This document represents the core output for the GPC Protection Lab Scoping Study. The project was undertaken in order to identify whether a Protection-oriented Innovation Lab might enhance the Global Protection Cluster's capacity to help address key protection challenges, and if so, what potential models such a Lab might take at the Global Protection Cluster.

Building on the results of the Gap Analysis conducted in the first phase of this project, we conclude that, firstly, there are innovation approaches that can play an important role in more effectively delivering on protection; and secondly, that an innovation Lab *can* be a viable and effective way to manage innovation for the purpose of improving protection outcomes in the context of humanitarian operations, if certain functions are adopted for the lab, and certain criteria are met.

We therefore recommend that a Protection-oriented Innovation Lab (referred to throughout as "Protection Lab" or "the Lab") be established, and that the purpose of this lab be to enhance the Global Protection Cluster's capacities in effectively delivering on its mandated functions with a view to achieving better protection outcomes. Namely:

- To develop and advocate policy and guidance;
- To provide technical assistance to the field;
- To build capacity of protection practitioners;
- To coordinate members and stakeholders through the Protection Cluster.

This document provides a preliminary Strategic Framework for such a Protection Lab. It represents a first step in leveraging relevant innovation approaches in the service of improved protection for affected people.

It consists of four elements:

- A Background section, where the results of the Gap Analysis are reviewed and methodology for mapping out the solutions space and designing the propositions are discussed.
- An orientation to "innovation" and the emergence of "innovation labs" in the humanitarian sector.
- The core elements of the Strategic Framework, which consist of the Goal of the Lab, identification of Primary Users, the Lab's Core Functions, and the Capabilities required to deliver on those Functions.
- A Feasibility Assessment, which consists of a discussion on Recommendations for Next Steps

Strategic frameworks are essential tools for developing initiatives that can reach internal goals and achieve external impact, and serve as a fundamental resource for decision-making and management. The framework here is intended to clarify the direction for a Protection Lab initiative, and to indicate key areas of attention for the GPC to address in order to operationalize the Lab envisioned here.

As such, it helps set the broad vision and mission of a proposed Protection Lab enterprise by identifying core functions, indicating capabilities to innovation to serve them and laying out both the conditions and objectives needed for achieving these.

A Challenge-Driven Approach

The Gap Analysis conducted in the previous phase of this project identified three core Challenge Areas that characterize experiences in delivering humanitarian protection:

- Challenges associated with generating timely, relevant, and actionable information, and with moving that knowledge to action in the design of context-relevant protection programs and strategies;
- Challenges associated with practicing protection in the contemporary humanitarian environment, particularly around localizing protection and difficulties stemming from the use of remote-based management practices in insecure environments; and
- Challenges associated with mobilizing tools and resources for improved protection outcomes, particularly those stemming from obstacles to aligning local needs with thematic approaches, and difficulties encountered in effective coordination among cluster actors.

In the context of these broad challenge areas, we worked to identify how each one manifested in relationship to each of GPC's mandated function (policy and guidance, technical assistance, capacity building and coordination), which was then articulated in terms of either a *barrier* or *gap*.

For the Solutions Mapping exercise, each such element was then assessed to:

- Rank that problem according to the criteria (“Is it urgent, consequential, interconnected with other challenges, and/or central to the GPC's mandated functions?”),
- Unpack the “nature” of the problem (i.e. “Is it *knowledge-based, process and practice-based, skills and expertise-oriented, tools-based, political in nature, and/or administrative in nature?*”),
- Identify solutions needed to solve the problem, discerning whether this requires innovation approaches or not.

Finally, this enabled us to propose *possible* innovation practices to address the barrier or gap that—if carefully adapted to the practice of humanitarian protection—might help achieve better protection outcomes.

This process allowed us to identify three key areas which represent central, cross-cutting, and enduring challenges to practicing protection in the contemporary humanitarian landscape *that must be addressed if outcomes are to be improved, and that might effectively be addressed through innovation practices*: (1) Localizing Protection, (2) Remote-based Management, and (3) Coordination of Protection Clusters

Two of these areas—**Localizing Protection** and **Remote-based Management**—are *operational* in nature (i.e. they are discrete areas of practice whereby protection actors can harness innovation in a targeted and tactical manner) and one challenge—**to support effective coordination of Protection Clusters**—is *systemic* in nature (i.e. an area that would require changes to the structure, organization, and/or policies within the wider humanitarian system in order to generate a significant improvement).

These consequential and *innovation-relevant* areas serve as the core functions of the proposed innovation lab and help to hone in on the role that such a lab might play (and for whom) and the kinds of core capacities the lab must offer to deliver on its core functions. Finally, we used this preliminary architecture to scope out the resources required to run the Lab and built a series of recommendations based on these findings.

On Innovation

The process described above was conducted against the backdrop of current innovation practice in the humanitarian sector, as will the work of any Protection Lab that might ultimately be established. Therefore, this section of the document provides an introduction to innovation in the humanitarian sector, and offers an orientation to thinking about innovation labs, based on research conducted by the team and experience with humanitarian innovation labs in a variety of operational environments.

Understanding humanitarian innovation

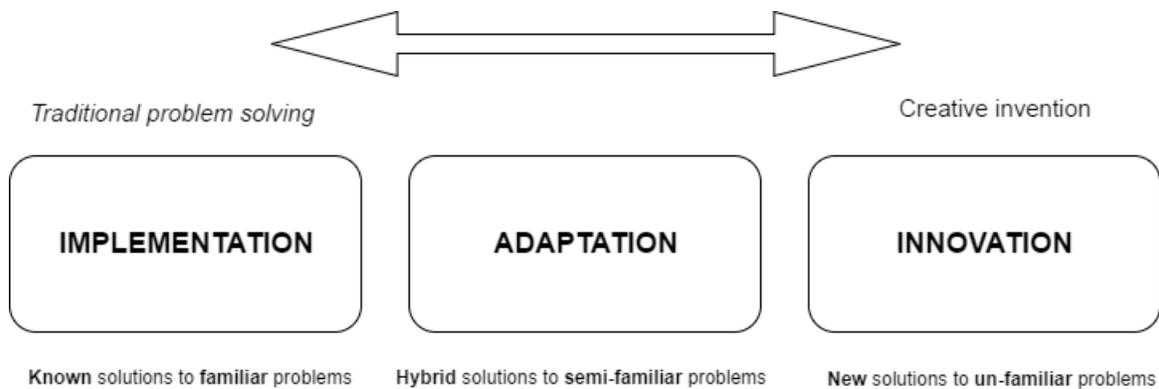
The field of “humanitarian innovation” is very new, dating back as a formal recognized practice only to about 2009, when ALNAP established the first working group and research study on the topic.

As such, the use of the term “innovation” in the sector has “lacked conceptual clarity, leading to misuse, overuse, and the risk that it may become hollow rhetoric....It remains poorly understood in some humanitarian circles and its meaning and value remain contested.”¹ This has resulted in a situation where the term is used widely but its meaning varies, which can often confuse discussions and efforts to cooperate.

How we define what counts as innovation will shape what a potential GPC Protection Lab “does” and “doesn’t” do. It will be helpful, therefore, to land at an agreed and workable definition as well as an understanding of how “innovation” happens—i.e. a clearly defined set of practices, processes, and conditions that enable innovative solutions to be crafted.

We find the following definition helpful:

*Innovation is the application of **new solutions** to **unfamiliar problems**.²*



The takeaways, for this definition of the term, are the following:

- **Innovation is fundamentally about problem-solving.** The definition here suggests it is comprised of a *kind of solution* that solves a *type of problem*. I.e. the degree to which the solution is “novel” (or creative) and the degree to which the problem is “unfamiliar.”

Problem solving ranges from “traditional” implementation to creative invention. We might start by *implementation*, or the process of applying known solutions (a kind of solution) to familiar problems (a type of problem). In moving toward innovation on the spectrum (where creativity and design approaches take wing), we also see a good deal of *adaptation*, or the process of *adapting* hybrid solutions (a second kind of solution) to semi-familiar problems (a

¹ Betts and Bloom, 2015 pg. 5.

² Miller and Rudnick, 2012, pg. 21.

second type of problem). Innovation, at the far end, is the application of new solutions (a third kind of solution) to unfamiliar problems (a third type of problem).

- **Innovative solutions come in all shapes and sizes.** According to a seminal 2009 ALNAP study on humanitarian innovation, “Innovations are dynamic processes which focus on the creation and implementation of new or improved *products and services, processes, positions, and paradigms.*” Innovation can create value (efficiency, effectiveness, quality) through:
 - what is offered (product and service innovations),
 - how that offering is created and delivered (process innovations),
 - where the innovation is targeted and delivered (position innovation), and
 - the underlying mental models that govern our approach (paradigm innovations).

In other words, innovative solutions can be products, but they can also be new ways of doing things (such as new processes, practices, or techniques).

- **Third, this usage is deliberately not anchored in technology**, and is therefore equally open to any new means to solve problems, technological or otherwise. Technology is a big part of successful innovation. Technology, however, is not innovation, although it often drives it by providing the enabling conditions and the vehicle through which products, services, processes, positionings and paradigm shifts can be imagined, produced, and delivered. For example, advances in information communication technologies allow people all over the world—regardless of geographical proximity—to collaborate, in real time, on humanitarian issues, while the democratization of production is offering up a rich environment for “hacking” together and rapidly testing solutions on site, in places like Nepal, Rwanda, and Liberia.

How does innovation happen?

While innovation is often associated with sparks of creativity or lone geniuses, for many decades, entrepreneurs, scientists, businesses and other organizations have been pursuing innovation in a deliberate and disciplined way.... Getting from a good idea to a global impact is rarely a direct and linear process – instead it demands distinct phases of activity, each with different requirements in terms of skills, resources and partnerships.³

Experience shows that innovation is often far more about methods and motivation than mavericks and magic.⁴

In the same way that technology is not the same thing as innovation, neither is creativity. The above quotes suggest that innovation is a result of deliberate processes and approaches employed for the purpose of turning existing conditions into preferred ones, not just something that happens when you put smart and creative people together and hope for the best.

But how, exactly, should this be done?

A core assumption here is that while “there is no set formula for what an innovation team or lab looks like, works on or delivers...there is enough experience to know which approaches are more likely to work, what the pitfalls are, and what mistakes are best avoided.”⁵ There are a number of identifiable strategies to manage and foster innovation, whether that means encouraging new business models or developing, testing, and deploying new technologies to meet operational needs.

³ Ramalingam and Bound, 2016.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ben Ramalingam and Kirsten Bound, “Innovation for International Development: Navigating the Paths and Pitfalls,” (Nesta UK: 2016)

According to a recent NESTA study, humanitarian and development organizations are adopting formal innovation strategies and hiring innovation change management leadership. These organizations are also embracing bottom-up experimentation and promoting practices to cultivate innovative mindsets across departments and teams. They are establishing semi-autonomous units, teams, lab spaces that apply rigorous design methods to the development of novel products, services, and processes.⁶

In sum, innovation practices and management approaches vary greatly. There is no widely-accepted lexicon and/or taxonomy of practices, especially for this practice in the humanitarian sector, though there are common features (or steps) to productive innovation processes (in the same way that good research across different disciplines shares common features, despite differences in theory, data, methods of analysis, and content).

Enter Innovation Labs

Innovation Labs—one strategy among a growing toolkit of innovation management practices—have been positioned as a way to exploit innovation practices. There are a number of important findings that emerge from scanning these practices.

First is that even **the term “Lab” is contested**. While UNICEF, for example, defines its labs as “open, collaborative incubation accelerators that bring business, universities, governments and civil society together to create sustainable solutions to the most pressing challenges facing children and youth,” other experts and researchers might also include working units, networks, and centers as part of the conversation.

Second, innovation Labs come in **many shapes and sizes**, and the operationalization of the Lab (the form it takes and functions it prioritizes) depends highly on local context and the mission and goals of the host organization.

Some Labs can be physical spaces, for example the kinds of collaborative spaces that UNICEF has set up over the years. But other “labs,” like the ones run by UNHCRs Innovation unit, are more about creating virtual (and physical) networks through platforms that connect problem holders (humanitarian field staff, local business, or affected communities) with the tools and resources needed to build and test potential solutions around thematic initiatives, like energy, information management, shelter, and education. UNHCR also uses its UNHCR Ideas platform to invite users to contribute ideas to specific problem sets.

Finally, the **roles** that innovation teams, units, labs play in delivering on innovation are also varied. An IBM guide to innovation teams and labs (the core document used to establish and guide the UNHCR Innovation team) outlines the following role types that innovation labs play in public and social innovation. Importantly, Lab initiatives can play more than one role, however usually there is a strong focus on one or two roles.

An innovation lab, for example, might fulfill a “laboratory” role, charged with the development of new technologies, products or programs. It might instead fulfill an “advisory” role, whereby a small group of actors work to convene stakeholders to set agendas around innovation opportunity areas and emerging practices. It might fulfill a “liaison” or “network” role, reaching out to designated communities and actors outside of the traditional sector—for example to the private sector—to pull in the requisite inter-disciplinary expertise needed to solve complex and messy problems.

This range of meanings, forms, and roles of “labs” as an innovation management solution provide us with a degree of flexibility as we consider options for managing innovation for protection.

⁶ Ramalingam and Bound, 2016.

The Strategic Framework

Working with Strategic Frameworks

Strategic frameworks are essential tools for developing initiatives that can reach internal goals and achieve external impact. They help clarify where we want to go, how we can best get there, and are a fundamental resource for decision-making and management as we navigate through changing contexts, and through time. Strategic frameworks can be high-level frameworks, setting the broad vision and mission of an enterprise, and laying out objectives for achieving these. Or, they can be more tactical in nature, striving to align methods and resources in the service of achieving impact goals.

In developing strategic frameworks for innovation labs and other impact-driven initiatives, we use the following elements:

- **Impact Goal** – a clear and brief statement of the specific external impact you wish to create through your process, service, or products, towards which all other elements in the strategic framework are oriented. A good goal statement is expressed in terms of the change in conditions we wish to make. The Impact Goal functions as the “north star” of the strategic framework.
- **Target Users and User Needs** – an identification and prioritization of the specific kinds of actors to be served, and the particular needs they encounter, and that must be resolved or addressed, a) in the effort to achieve the Goal, and b) in order to work deliberately towards delivering real value to users. Identifying target users and their needs helps clarify, guide, and prioritize the selection of functions. Many different kinds of users can likely benefit from the services offered or the functions performed, etc. But setting out to be useful to everyone (e.g. “the entire humanitarian and innovation ecosystem”) can lead to a lack of focus, and therefore deliver a lack of value. Identifying key pin-points for specific users, and addressing these well, however, will build reputation and can often translate into broader value across a system.
- **Core Functions** – the central purpose, and the tasks through which this must be performed, in order to address the priority needs of the target users, deliver value, and achieve the impact goal. Because there are many pathways to addressing complex challenges, choices will need to be made about which ones to take on and develop. Ensuring these are aligned with the Impact Goal as well as to key user needs is essential to be effective. The Core Functions help set parameters around, and direction for the approaches and activities to be conducted, and both define the service and its value to users.
- **Core Capabilities**— Capabilities are defined as the ability, power, or facility to perform certain tasks. Just as the core functions must be clearly aligned with the Impact Goal, so too must the capabilities—that is, the innovation approaches that the lab can conduct - be clearly aligned with the core functions.⁷
- **Required Resources** – the range of assets, both material and otherwise (such as skills, relationships, political support, etc.), that are needed in order for the above to function effectively.

⁷It is expected that the range of innovation approaches employed to deliver the key functions of the lab may evolve over time in response to, and keeping pace with, new challenges, opportunities, and developments.

The Elements

1. The Goal of the Protection Lab

*To employ **innovation** as a means for achieving for improved **protection outcomes** by enhancing **GPC's effectiveness** in humanitarian emergencies.*

This goal statement has three crucial elements which are linked by an implicit theory of change: a stance on innovation, a commitment to local impact, and a role for the GPC.

First, innovation is not taken up here as an end in itself. As such, innovation is not the *objective* of the Protection Lab but rather the means by which to achieve positive impact for affected populations. There is an argument to be made that suggests that we are *only interested in innovation to the extent that it helps us deliver on improved protection outcomes*.

Second is a commitment to protection outcomes as *local impacts*. There is an existing theory of change that by delivering GPC's mandated activities, improved protection outcomes will be achieved for affected people. Our research has indicated that this theory is not necessarily substantiated in practice. It is our observation that this is part due to an orientation that focuses on policy fulfillment, often at the expense of local impact. By explicitly asserting, in the goal statement, that the mandated activities must lead to positive protection outcomes for affected people, it becomes possible to exercise this as a central criterion when prioritizing activities, selecting approaches, and evaluating performance and impact.

Finally, by referencing GPC's effectiveness, we indicate a set of parameters within which to focus, and judge, the innovation efforts of the Lab. There are many challenges and problems in delivering protection programming, and therefore many kinds of innovation that could be imagined to address them. But as discussed above, when innovation is employed in the service of achieving impacts in a specific area, a clear framework empowers, rather than hinders, innovation for impact.

This goal ensure that the Lab will be impact driven, and *demand* led, with protection outcomes at the center of its mandate. In this way, the protection lab will stand in contrast to others in the sector which are often supply-driven.

2. Primary Users for the Protection Lab

At this initial stage in framework development, the primary users of the protection innovation lab are envisioned to be *humanitarian practitioners who are responsible for the development and/or implementation of protection programming and activities*.

This category intentionally encompasses a wide range of actors, serving different kinds of roles, and having a range of different responsibilities in relationship to protection programming in humanitarian contexts. Some users maybe front-line technical officers, working directly with affected people in the provision of protection assistance. Others may have managerial or administrative roles, responsible for coordinating and overseeing operations or teams in affected communities, or global partnerships. Still others may be remotely based managers, directing and coordinating assistance from a distant geographical location. They may include existing GPC stakeholders, for example individuals and organizations associated with Protection Cluster / Protection Working Groups.

However, irrespective of these distinctions, our preliminary research suggests *they are all impacted in their work by three core Challenge Areas that characterize experiences in delivering humanitarian protection*:

- Challenges associated with generating timely, relevant, and actionable information, and with moving that knowledge to action in the design of context-relevant protection programs and strategies;
- Challenges associated with practicing protection in the contemporary humanitarian environment, particularly around localizing protection and difficulties stemming from the use of remote-based management practices in insecure environments; and
- Challenges associated with mobilizing tools and resources for improved protection outcomes, particularly those stemming from obstacles to aligning local needs with thematic approaches, and difficulties encountered in effective coordination among cluster actors.⁸

There will be a wide range of roles associated with the Lab, such as secondary users, beneficiaries, experts, partners, and so on. In addition, because of its emphasis on inter-disciplinary and multi-sector approaches, the Lab will be a place (or initiative) where diverse partnerships can be built around innovation activities, and therefore may naturally draw in users outside of traditional protection work.

However, the needs and challenges of the primary users will help to initially determine and focus the Core Functions of the Lab.⁹

3. Core Functions of the Protection Lab

We have organized the core functions of the lab around the three key challenge areas that characterize experiences in delivering humanitarian protection for the primary user group.

These functions represent the purpose of the lab, and the tasks through which this must be performed in order to meet the needs of the target users, deliver value to them, and to achieve the impact goal of the lab.

Function 1: *To Localize Protection*

Ensuring that protection is localized—that it is locally relevant, meaningful, and sustainable—requires knowledge about local sociocultural systems. Such information, when generated with a view to the development and implementation of programs that are both locally tailored, but also policy-directed, is an essential element for achieving successful protection programs from the point of view of local impact, as well as program and policy objectives. Localization also refers to a shift in roles and responsibilities between international and local actors that compels us to reconsider the way our local partnerships are designed, composed, conducted and evaluated (and towards what ends).

The function of Localizing Protection at The Protection Lab is to develop, or otherwise adapt and align protection programs, projects, and partnerships to the local context, from the point of view of affected people and local experience.

To fulfill this Core Function, the Protection Lab will leverage innovation for generating local knowledge, applying this knowledge to the design of protection solutions, and fostering new, more equitable and meaningful relationships between international and local actors.

⁸ This was captured and articulated in a Gap Analysis output.

⁹ It is important to note that the needs of primary users of the lab may evolve over time, just as the nature of the primary user group may also evolve. Whether this must reflect in a shift in the core functions of the lab is a question that can only be addressed in response to such changes themselves.

Indicative Scenario

In Iraq, existing practices and approaches to humanitarian response have in some cases undermined social cohesion between Iraqi IDPs, Syrian refugees, and urban host communities. This causes challenges for implementing protection as resentment, tensions, hostility and frustration grows between communities and manifests into violence between these communities. There is a dearth of evidence on what works and how when it comes to understanding and developing social cohesion programming for protection, and local perspectives (and actors) are often left out of this process, creating significant knowledge gaps for adapting programming to context. Additionally, humanitarian actors do not have the time and resources to work on this challenge in house.

In such a scenario, a Protection Lab can support protection practitioners in the development of locally grounded, locally accountable, and innovative programming on social cohesion in urban environments:

- The Lab can support protection actors in **identifying mission-critical knowledge gaps**, and in employing innovative approaches for **generating the needed knowledge** through a range of innovative and inclusive approaches to data generation, such as: peer-to-peer research; Local Strategies Research (LSR); exploratory stakeholder mapping activities; and through the use of emerging techniques for participant video story-telling¹⁰ and sentiment analysis (of social media exhaust, for example).
- The Lab can host and support processes for **applying local knowledge** in the design of protection solutions, for example by leveraging Strategic and Evidence-based Design (EBD) methods, and user-centered and participatory design approaches.
- The Lab can employ approaches for **fostering new partnerships and relationships** between local and international actors in support of collaborative approaches to humanitarian response, such as service design, and emerging approaches to meaningful partnerships; by convening multi-stakeholder initiatives between “traditional” protection actors and unlikely allies (such as local entrepreneurs and volunteer technology groups) through hosting hub-based social innovation practices; deploying multi-functional and inter-disciplinary project teams; tapping into grassroots technologies and local networks and systems; and mobilizing culturally-relevant incubator program resources for growing and sustaining locally-driven collaborative problem solving models.

Function 2: To support effective Remote-based Management practices

Remote management for humanitarian action is an approach whereby the operational responsibilities of aid agencies is transferred to national and local employees in order to provide relief in situations where access to disaster-affected populations is limited. This is usually done through national and local field workers, subcontracted intermediaries, and through the application of new technologies to monitor and evaluate implementation.

¹⁰ A type of user-generated content (UGC).

The function of supporting effective Remote-based Management Practices at The Protection Lab is to identify and mitigate emerging challenges associated with this practice for both remote managers, and local staff and partners.

To fulfill this Core Function, the Protection Lab will leverage innovation to support both country teams and remote managers in: identifying and addressing critical information, process, and practice gaps; creating solutions for generating and sharing mission-critical protection information; and, supporting local actors in managing the risks associated with their role in Remote-based Management scenarios.

Indicative Scenario

Humanitarian operations in Somalia often rely on remote-based management practices to deliver on protection. In such contexts, international agencies are kept “at arm’s length” from the populations they serve, often operating out of national satellite offices or regional offices in Nairobi, Kenya. This practice is associated with reduced contextual intelligence for monitoring programming and assuring quality control, shifts operational risk to local actors who are unequipped to deal with this risk, and the phenomenon of bunkerization, or the social distancing of protection actors from the communities and populations they serve.

A Protection Lab can support protection practitioners in addressing critical challenges in remote-based management practices in the following ways:

- The Lab can support both local staff and remote managers in **diagnosing and addressing critical barriers** or gaps in their specific remote-based management arrangement that may be inhibiting safe or effective program implementation (for example through conducting an “RBM audit”, or using approaches to cooperative risk management).
- The lab can help protection practitioners **identify mission-critical information gaps**, and bring together innovative ways for **generating and sharing actionable intelligence** needed to fill those gaps. (I.e. through the use of new information communication technologies and data analysis practices for improved contextual intelligence – for example by employing remote sensing tools for documenting human rights abuse, aerial and submersive robotics for surveillance of damaged locations and monitoring critical infrastructure, or social media sentiment analysis and mobile survey tools for rumor tracking in fragile contexts.)
- The Lab can support and host processes for applying local knowledge in the design of remote-based protection solutions that **empower local actors to mitigate risk** through more targeted, meaningful, and effective capacity building programs. This might include employing Strategic and Evidence-based Design (EBD) and Cooperative Risk Management approaches alongside innovative, modular, on-the-job training programs that leverage augmented & virtual reality technologies (AR/VR), low bandwidth mobile-based tools, and digital collaboration tools for high-fidelity simulated learning environments.

Function 3: To support effective Coordination of Protection Clusters

Coordination is the organization of different elements of a complex body or system so as to enable them to work together efficiently.¹¹ In the humanitarian system, the Clusters perform critical

¹¹ Oxford English Dictionary, 2015.

coordination roles ranging from *communication* (sharing information and using this information to plan and implement activities), *alignment* (where organizations agree to potentially adjust their own activities in order to create a more effective, multi-agency response), and *collaboration* (where organizations will coordinate to fill gaps based on common objectives and priorities and share resources to achieve them).¹² Facilitating more effective Cluster coordination in operational environments is essential for ensuring that Clusters can meet the explicitly identified protection needs of local populations.

The function of supporting effective Coordination of Protection Clusters at The Protection Lab is to ensure that the coordination practices, tools, and mechanisms employed by Clusters bring practical value to relevant protection actors and stakeholder organizations, so the coordination needs of protection actor are better served.

To fulfill this Core Function, the Protection Lab will leverage innovation to: facilitate the adaptation or design of Protection Cluster practices, processes, tools, and mechanisms to more effectively serve the needs of relevant Cluster stakeholders; to support information management; and to improve and facilitate strategic and meaningful inclusion and participation between international and local actors and between traditional and non-traditional protection actors.

Indicative Scenario

In Myanmar, the Protection Working Group struggles to bring together relevant protection actors for effectively engaging on matters of protection. The composition of the cluster does not reflect well the range of actors needed to come together at the national and local level to deliver on protection outcomes. Information sharing on protection is limited because the costs of participating (sharing information) outweigh the benefits of doing so. This situation has resulted in limited information sharing, strategic misalignment between resources and protection needs, and the emergence of alternative coordination platforms and fora working on protection issues. We have observed that while protection actors are charged with “improving” the state of affairs between the Cluster and its member stakeholders, the requisite tools, processes, and expertise for this task are not available for protection cluster leadership.

A Protection Lab can support protection practitioners in the customization of the Protection Cluster mechanism, and the tools and practices used to support it, to better meet the needs of its member organizations and, ultimately, mobilize resources for delivering on improved protection outcomes.

- The Lab can support and host user-centered and participatory design processes for adapting or designing protection coordination services, **practices, processes, tools, and mechanisms** by using Strategic and Evidence-based Design (EBD), and Service Design approaches.
- The Lab can support Clusters in the **development of country strategies** by facilitating evidence-based design processes crafted for this purpose.

¹² Knox-Clarke, 2015.

4. Core Capabilities of a Protection Lab

A capability is defined as the ability, power, or facility to perform certain tasks.

In this section, we describe some key capabilities that the Lab will need to have, if it is to deliver the functions described above.

We start with some assumptions about the critical capabilities an innovation lab must bring together to foster and support innovation for improved outcomes. Just as there are common features to any productive innovation effort, there are basic capabilities that any innovation lab must have. Crucially however, when considered in the special context of protection programming, there are additional capabilities that will be needed in order to conduct innovation in a responsible manner in fragile contexts and with vulnerable people.

Here we propose a number of indicative practices and approaches the Lab might take in this regard, and resources and tools the Lab might bring together in fulfillment of the required capabilities, in order to initiate discussion on this essential element of the strategic framework. We note that as this is a first foray into innovation for protection purposes, it will be important to assess potential practices and approaches for their relevance and appropriateness for acute operational environments, and for protection-oriented work more specifically.

With this caveat in mind, we share here what we think are essential Core Capabilities the Lab must bring together in order to effectively, and ethically, mobilize innovation as a means for Localizing Protection, more effective Remote-based Management, and improved Coordination of Protection Clusters.

A. The Lab must be equipped and able to properly Scope and Prioritize Problematics.

Successful innovation labs don't work on every problem that comes through the door (if there is a door). Instead, they have to be equipped to make the distinction between "good" innovation projects and projects or problematics that are better served elsewhere. "Good" projects, generally, are those that are relevant (in this case, to matters of protection), aligned with the mission and core values of the Lab initiative, consequential enough to bring value to stakeholders, and achievable (i.e. not impossible).

A Strategic Framework is a tool and resource for guiding such decisions over time, and through changing contexts. This helps establish a project pipeline that both delivers impact *and* helps develop and fine tune the Lab as a service offering. Additionally, without the proper investment in human resources and tools and processes (a set of project criteria, for example) for vetting and prioritizing projects, this can become overwhelming for Lab staff.

B. The Lab must be equipped and able to Source and Generate Relevant Knowledge.

For innovation to support improved protection outcomes for affected people, the Lab will need to be able to identify, locate, acquire, generate, share and mobilize relevant and actionable information in ways that are useful to, and usable by, key users of the Lab.

In protection work, this means (among other things) being able to source information around the protection needs of vulnerable populations in active operational environments in near-real time. GPC stakeholders (INGOs, UN agencies, local partners) should be willing to facilitate the sharing of (often-times) sensitive information such as case management data, incident reports, and geo-spatial data with the Lab so that its residents and staff are equipped with accurate, timely, granular, and useful information for innovating solutions to protection problems.

In some cases, this will require the Lab to bring together the requisite inter-disciplinary expertise, or to leverage a network of technical specialists for advising on and refining initial assessments and project proposals, for example. In other cases, the Lab will need to have in place the appropriate protocols and data security and management permissions for managing real-time operational intelligence.

Additionally, the Lab must be able to mobilize resources to support researchers and practitioners in the *generation* of protection-relevant, locally-derived, and context-relevant knowledge. For innovation to achieve real impact, it must be knowledge-driven, therefore the capacity to source and generate knowledge is essential. This will mean that the Lab should also be able to—when and where appropriate—provide logistical support and administrative arrangements for field research to be conducted.

In some cases, this may require the ability to generate and analyze mobile population survey data, satellite imagery, and/or call-data record and social media meta data. The Lab might harness crowdsourcing techniques for scraping and mining open- and publicly-available intelligence resources. In other cases, it may involve using more qualitative methods such as information from focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and field observations, as informed by a Local Strategies Research approach.

Whatever the case may be, the Lab will need to be equipped with the appropriate processes and tools so that the *right* kinds of knowledge can be generated to advance the project in question. As indicated in the Gap Analysis, use- and user-blind data generation has undermined both the applicability and usability of data in protection work. For information to be a usable and useful resource, it must both be aligned with the practical needs of those who will use it, the particular uses to which it will be put, and it must be relevant to the impact outcomes to be achieved so that what is generated ends up being fit for purpose.

C. The Lab must be equipped and able to Move Knowledge to Action for the design of solutions.

Having mission-critical knowledge and information to hand is essential for any programming or innovation initiative. However, knowledge does not apply itself,¹³ and findings are not the same thing as solutions. Therefore, a process or method is needed for turning knowledge into findings, findings into insights, insights into propositions, and finally, propositions into solutions. What is required is a *design process*.

Yet, the Gap Analysis revealed that while planning is a central activity in the practice of protection, there is neither a requirement nor method for the *design* of protection programming. This is both a central, cross-cutting, and highly consequential gap in the practice of protection, and a central requirement at the heart of all three core functions proposed for The Lab.

As Miller and Rudnick explain in the *Framework Document for Evidence-Based Design on Reintegration*:

A Design Approach is indicated in two kinds of situations:

- **When we need to adapt existing solutions to new situations.** Implementing existing programs in new locations, including ones that have been subjected to evidence-based assessments, always requires a degree of adaptation....Determining the what and how of adaptation requires identifying evidence from the local context that can provide guidance on

¹³ Miller and Rudnick, 2012, pg. 2.

changes needed, as well as a process for using evidence in the design of strategic action.

- **When we need to do more than adapt.** We need to innovate. Implementing policy goals in local contexts that vary markedly from one another requires some alignment between general guidelines and particular contexts in order to be locally effective. Sometimes achieving that alignment requires entirely new approaches and new ideas. When we need to innovate around reintegration programming, a design approach provides a way of ensuring that new ideas are appropriate to, and grounded in, local realities.

For protection actors to make use of information to shape, guide, justify, or falsify plans for action meant to address the protection needs of affected people, they must be equipped with a design process and set of tools and techniques for applying contextually-relevant knowledge for the design of protection programs. A protection-oriented innovation lab might leverage Strategic and Evidence-based Program Design approaches, User-linked and Participatory Design practices, and/or Stage-gate project management and Agile Design for this purpose.

Whatever the approach, the Lab will also need financial and human resources and administrative and management support (i.e. the “space to work on program design) as well as incentives and criteria aligned with impact focused design (and not just policy fulfillment). The Lab will need to bring together multi-functional project teams and inter-disciplinary expertise for support high-intensity engagement and collaborative problem solving throughout the project lifecycle.

D. The Lab must be equipped and able to Build and Field Test solutions.

Whether solutions being developed in the Lab are cutting edge technologies and products, improved protection services and interventions, or innovative policies and strategies, the Lab must be able to mobilize resources for these solutions to be prototyped in the Lab and pilot tested in the field.

Partly, this is about resourcing the Lab with the right tools and technologies for work to be conducted in the Lab. When it comes to systems software and product-based innovations, for example, the Lab might leverage advancements in digital fabrication technologies and information management software to foster rapid, onsite-prototyping for more affordable and timely development and iteration of minimum viable products (MVPs), prototypes, and pilot projects or programs. This of course requires bringing material resources and tools together with a *process* to guide prototyping.

The Lab must also have the financial and political resources required for supporting field-based pilots. A GPC-powered innovation initiative might, for example, leverage the field presence and logistical capabilities of its member organizations to support residents and Lab staff in gaining access to field sites. In protection work, this may often involve negotiating access with host governments and local partners (gatekeepers who can significantly influence uptake of the innovation) to ensure that pilots can be implemented and tested with end users (those who interface directly with the innovation and whose behavior must change in order for the innovation to deliver its value) and beneficiaries (those who benefit directly from the innovation, whether this is humanitarian staff or affected populations) in operational environments.¹⁴

With regard to humanitarian innovation (generally speaking) and on matters of protection (more specifically), there remains a lack of attention in innovation practice to the ethical issues raised by innovations that involve affected people. We observe that an increase in risk-taking is currently occurring without the doctrine required to manage this risk. We therefore recommend that the GPC

¹⁴ Research suggests that regular contact and communication between the innovation team and the organizational leadership (both of the host agency as well as that of partner organizations and other relevant stakeholders) is essential for garnering buy-in and support needed to incorporate the innovation initiative’s agenda into other administrative priorities and ensure the credibility required for building relationships with key stakeholders that might play an enabling or key gate keeper role.

take a central role in the development of a risk management framework for experimentation in operational humanitarian environments for developing the sufficient safeguards for vulnerable people who may be affected by an innovation process. Such a framework is needed to be in place before innovators can test pilots in the field.

E. The Lab must be equipped and able to Harvest and Apply Learning.

There are major gaps in the evidence-base around humanitarian and protection-oriented innovation. The sector as a whole suffers from a lack of understanding of innovation and how it might be applied to protection work, a dearth of research and evidence-based policy design on experimentation in operational environments, high burden of proof for innovation pilots, and poor information sharing and learning across contexts and over time within organizations.

This has greatly limited the transformative potential of innovation in a sector where performance mechanisms are built on the idea of improving existing practice and meeting standards which are inherently conservative, and where questioning existing practices and norms can sometimes lead to conflict between the innovative periphery and traditional core of organizational processes.

For the Protection Lab to deliver on improved protection outcomes for affected populations, it must leverage tools and processes for harvesting evidence (the currency of humanitarian innovation) for wider learning on innovation for humanitarian protection so that demonstrably successful solutions—often new and unfamiliar to traditional actors—can be more easily approachable for protection leadership.

Additionally, the Lab—itself a pilot initiative—must have the ability to monitor its own programs and services to ensure quality control in a range of operational environments. This lab will be the first of its kind. Such a highly-visible and heavily-resourced protection-specific innovation initiative has not yet emerged in the humanitarian sector, and the Lab will want to relentlessly leverage stakeholder feedback and real-time assessments for data-driven, transparent, and evidence-based decisions around resource allocation and strategic positioning.

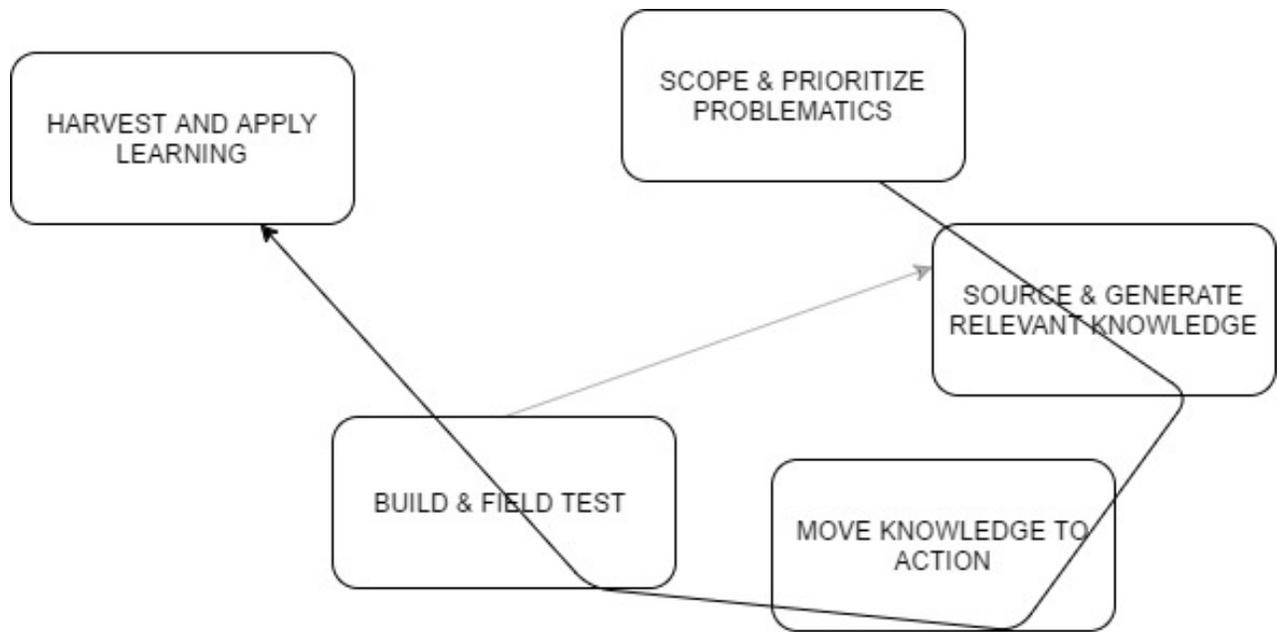
With these two objectives in mind, the Lab will therefore have to invest in the dedicated human resources, processes, and tools (at the programmatic *and* project-levels) to make sure it can learn from failure, celebrate and share its successes, and effectively broker knowledge for advancing the science and practice of protection innovation. This will be critical to ensure buy-in among partner organizations.

An innovation cycle

While there is no agreed upon formula as to what constitutes an innovation “lab,” what an innovation team looks like, works on, or delivers, there is enough experience to know which approaches are likely to work, based on observations on how innovation has been managed and fostered in the sector. And while innovation itself is conducted by an iterative process, there a generally-accepted and agreed on sequence of events—a cycle and set of features—through which innovation happens.

We can refer to this process as the Innovation Life Cycle.

This cycle is pictured below, overlaid with the Core Capabilities to give clarity to how a protection-oriented Lab might support innovation throughout the project lifecycle. In other words, this diagram illustrates the innovation cycle as a process supported by the Core Capabilities of the Protection Lab.



Feasibility Assessment

This Framework represents a first step in leveraging relevant innovation approaches in the service of improved protection for affected people.

In the discussion above, we have provided an orientation to the emergence of innovation in the humanitarian sector and how labs specifically might manage and support innovative solutions to protection challenges that have surfaced in our research. We have proposed a goal statement, which sets a target for a stance on innovation, a commitment to local impact, and a role for the GPC. We have proposed a set of core functions for a protection-oriented innovation lab to be oriented around and core capacities the Lab must have in place in order to deliver on these functions.

At this juncture, we turn our attention to the discussion of whether an innovation lab is a feasible and effective way to manage such innovation for meeting protection needs.

To make this assessment, it will be helpful to identify some of the resources required to establish and run a Protection Lab, and discuss what the next steps might be to design and deliver it. The Global Protection Cluster will then be in a position to reflect on its ability and interest in advancing the initiative.

Recommendations and Next Steps

Here we make a series of Recommendations around priority action areas that need to be in place to help create or ensure the conditions needed for designing and building the Protection Lab, and offer an outline of Next Steps required to get the Lab off the ground. What follows is a potential agenda for the work ahead.

Step 1: Aligning aims and assessing capabilities

The Global Protection Cluster should review this report and reflect on what an innovation initiative will mean for the platform and its partners. It will be critical that the GPC is able to think through the relationship of the innovation initiative to its strategic orientation, in terms of governance, management, decisions around funding processes, and how—from an operational perspective—the Lab is going to engage with and compliment the GPC's existing work plan (where there is intersection).

We have noted two areas, in particular, that warrant attention:

- **First, there is a need to discern between policy fulfillment and local impact.** There is an existing theory of change that by delivering GPC's mandated activities, improved protection outcomes will be achieved for affected people. Our research has indicated that this theory is not necessarily substantiated in practice. It is our observation that this is part due to an orientation that focuses on policy fulfillment, often at the expense of local impact. Assuming that the former can result in the latter by default leads to programming plans and activities that can miss the mark where local protection needs are concerned. Discerning between the two as separate kinds of objectives, and requiring programming activities to show clear alignment with one or the other, can help ensure improved effectiveness in both cases. This will be important for both the selection and direction of innovation activities.
- **Second, there is a need to create and integrate a strategic position on innovation for protection.** *There is currently no position established in the humanitarian sector on the role of innovation in achieving protection outcomes.* What should be role of innovation, where protection is concerned? We find that this situation presents an opportunity to develop a strategic position on Innovation for Protection, and necessitates that the GPC integrate this position into its existing 2017-19 Strategy. If this is done, it will be a tool to guide the

development of the Protection Lab, and establish the Lab's position vis-a-vis the Global Protection Cluster.

We feel that it is also important for the insights and guidance here to be examined, validated, and/or adapted by the GPC. The core functions of the Lab here have been designed to resonate with the mandated core functions of the GPC and thus we expect considerable overlap, alignment, and synergy. However, it may be the case that additional external factors need to be accounted for in order to determine if and how the Lab might deliver value to the GPC in its mission to support affected populations.

We'll need to properly assess the resources and institutional support for the initiative before going forward to understand where an innovation team could create impact, with whom, and how. What kinds of expertise does the GPC and its stakeholders currently possess that might be deployed? What kinds of existing partnerships and political support can be leveraged?

A Strategic workshop that brings together the GPC with the Innovation Scoping Protect team can help navigate this situation and bring clarity as to how best to translate the insights delivered here into an effective work plan for Phase II.

Step 2: Designing the Lab

With clarity and direction from a Strategic Workshop, Phase II of the work—where the Lab's services and programs are designed—can begin.

A protection-oriented innovation lab—like the one proposed in this Framework—needs to be *designed* systematically and strategically to meet the explicit needs of the intended users of such a lab. Phase II of the initiative should therefore support conducting field-based, comparative research and user-centered service design.

In Phase II, we expect to learn more about how each Core Function can best be performed to serve the practical needs of the primary target users—humanitarian practitioners who are responsible for the development and implementation of protection programming and activities—when it comes to localizing protection and supporting more effective remote-based management and coordination for protection. This will require triangulating between (1) the core mandated areas of the GPC¹⁵ and the relationship between the Lab and the GPC, (2) the Core Functions of the Lab, and (3) the needs of the primary user groups across a range of operational environments.

Determining the needs of primary users of the Lab will require additional field work in order to develop User Profiles and Personas and articulate and test User Pathways and Use Case Scenarios. These Use Cases can illustrate how users learn about, engage, navigate, participate, and exit the Lab and therefore help us customize the services and programs of the lab to meet user needs and respond to environmental constraints. Given that the GPC provides support to more than thirty field operations, it will be important to incorporate a healthy cross section of operational environments to inform the case studies.

We suggest working from the list generated by the Site Selection Criteria, which includes Myanmar, the whole of Syria Operation, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Iraq.

Learning from the field research and insights from proposition building will be used to complete a Service Blueprint of the Protection Lab.

¹⁵ To develop and advocate policy and guidance; to provide technical assistance to the field; to build capacity of protection practitioners; to coordinate members and stakeholders through the Protection Cluster.

Step 3: Resourcing the Lab

With the Service Blueprint in hand, Step 3 will be to appropriately resource the Lab, specifying and acquiring the requisite **financial and material resources**, landing operational **partnerships**, identifying the right **leadership** to manage the initiative, and acquiring a **team** to staff and support the Labs operations.

Managing innovation is hard work. It takes real investment and dedicated leadership. Size, skillset, dynamic, and culture of the staff, as well as specific recruitment and staff development strategies are extremely important.

For example, UNHCR, ICRC, and UNICEF invest heavily in dedicated staff committed to driving innovation. UNHCR Innovation employs 13 full time staff across leadership, engagement, management, administrative, and technical divisions to support its five Core Function areas. ICRC's Innovation Initiative employs five full time staff supported by 14 ICRC employees from other divisions. The UNICEF Kosovo Lab employs 12 people that support its daily programs and activities, including Lab leads, project officers, administration, software development, design, M&E, communications, etc.

Teams should have interdisciplinary experience. Research on humanitarian innovation suggests that there are a number of core competency areas germane to this work:

- **Humanitarian Response:** Any innovation lab seeking to improve outcomes for affected people in humanitarian emergency situations should make use of expertise around topics like humanitarian coordination, operational knowledge of humanitarian logistics and security, information management, sector-based expertise, and accountability and ethics, for example. Protection-oriented innovation will of course need to draw from protection-specific areas of practice.
- **Innovation Management:** Innovation Labs can bring together expertise to manage the innovation process, leveraging knowledge in domains such as design thinking, agile design, organizational behavior, human-centered design, and entrepreneurial competencies like finance, business development, etc.
- **Technical Sciences and Engineering:** Disciplines of practices stemming from engineering, mathematics, geographic information science, data science, network science, and computer programming (to name but a few) are increasingly relevant in matters of humanitarian response in today's digital, interconnected, and information society.
- **Social Sciences:** The social sciences—fields such as international relations, development studies, anthropology, ethnography, social-psychology—are also indispensable in the practices of designing and delivering on complex systems innovation where matters of culture, economics, and technology interact with people.
- **Creative Industries (the arts):** Successful humanitarian innovation initiatives have made explicit use of practices and fields that center around the interpretation and creation of knowledge and culture such as studio design, multi-media story-telling, architectural design, graphic design, mixed media, industrial design, etc.

When thinking about the kinds of human resources that will staff the lab and support its activities, it will be helpful to think about drawing from the kinds of competency areas discussed here. This may require seeking out not only humanitarian and protection actors who are innovative, but “innovation” actors who have the potential to become humanitarians. The GPC may need to draw from new networks and unfamiliar candidate pools to resource and support the Lab.

The Protection Lab will need to start building out a network of practitioners so that it can—strategically—leverage the comparative advantage of future partners stemming from academia, the private sector, the creative industries, and other sectors who have been “left out” of the protection conversation.

Step 4: Finalizing Lab Tools, Processes, and Frameworks

When the Lab is properly resourced the final step will be to finalize the tools, processes, and frameworks needed to deliver on protection-oriented innovation. There are three sets of tools and processes that need to be in place for the Lab to deliver on its core functions and mission: (1) Innovation for protection tools and processes; (2) monitoring, evaluation, and learning frameworks; and (3) a research agenda on Local Strategies for Protection.

Innovation for protection tools and processes

We have identified, first, that there are a number of innovation practices suitable to meet the challenges surfaced in the Gap Analysis. We have talked about Strategic and Evidence-based Design, Service Design, User-Centered Design, Stage Gate project management and Agile Design, and Network and Hub-based Social Innovation models.

During Step 4 it will be time to finalize the development of these approaches, methods, and tools so that the staff can manage and support the Lab and users (innovation residents, for example) can get on with innovating.

We have noted previously that there is a need to develop a set of adaptation criteria for adapting innovation practices to humanitarian protection work. Existing innovation approaches in the humanitarian sector are drawn from social innovation and development contexts, if not directly from the private sector. *While it is clear that there is potential for innovation to deliver on more effective protection outcomes, it is not conclusive whether or not certain innovation practices are relevant and appropriate for acute operational environments and for protection-oriented work specifically.* Criteria, or guidelines, that can help practitioners and innovators figure out *what* needs to be adapted, *why*, and *how*, for a given context, will be important for ensuring effective and ethical solutions.

Additionally, there is need for a risk mitigation framework for leveraging innovation for protection outcomes in operational environments. While the proliferation of emerging technologies and increasing interest in the transformative potential of innovation generates significant opportunities for improving the effectiveness of humanitarian response, we observe that an increase in risk-taking among practitioners and innovators is currently occurring without the doctrine required to manage this risk. This threatens the wellbeing of both practitioners and vulnerable people alike.

We therefore recommend that the GPC take a central role in the development of a risk management framework for experimentation in operational humanitarian environments which includes sufficient safeguards for vulnerable people, who may be affected by an innovation process and information communication technologies, to guide the strategic and operational elements of the work done by the Protection Lab.

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning frameworks

This is also the time to develop tools and processes for administrative and operational activities, and program management.

The Lab—itself a pilot initiative—must have the ability to monitor its own programs and services to ensure quality control in a range of operational environments. This Lab will be the first of its kind. Such a highly-visible and heavily-resourced protection-specific innovation initiative has not yet emerged in the humanitarian sector, and the Lab will want to relentlessly leverage stakeholder feedback and real-time assessments for data-driven, transparent, and evidence-based decisions around resource allocation and strategic positioning.

The Lab initiative will therefore have to invest in the dedicated human resources, processes, and tools (at the programmatic *and* project-levels) to make sure it can learn from failure, celebrate and

share its successes, and effectively broker knowledge for advancing the science and practice of protection innovation. This will be critical to ensure buy-in among partner organizations.

Local Strategies for Protection

Finally, when it comes to protection-work more specifically, we have noted the need to establish a research agenda on Local Strategies for Protection to complement and support the work of the Lab. There is a general need in the sector for sociocultural research into local understandings of and every-day strategies for protection, and a specific need for such research to support the Localization function proposed the Protection Lab. It is essential that at least some of this work be strategically oriented (i.e. developed with a view to application in protection policy and program design and innovation processes), and that research approaches specializing social and cultural systems outside of conflict studies be included.

Concluding remarks

There is a great deal of energy around innovation labs right now. New actors in public sectors are eager to explore whether innovation can help them find their competitive edge in an increasingly competitive donor marketplace. The humanitarian sector especially has seen an explosion of innovation initiatives, funds, conferences, and networks, and has become a key element in the current of humanitarian reform agenda. To seize upon this energy can create a real opportunity for protection work, not only to do things in a new way, but also to bring new value to the most affected people.

In order for a protection innovation lab to fulfill its potential on this score, it requires us to build conditions, and create measures, that enable us to hold innovation to account. This means investing upfront on strategic development, to ensure coherent and clear answers to fundamental questions about the purpose, people, and impact such a protection lab will serve, and the ways in which innovation can, and cannot, help accomplish this. It also means grappling with the real and consequential issues surrounding how partnerships are formed and fostered, between whom, with what consequences, in the context of humanitarian response.

In our view, innovation is most meaningful when it is put in the service of achieving better outcomes in the world. The Global Protection Cluster is now poised to take such a stance with the Protection Lab.

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