INNOVATION ROUND TABLE

"What's New in Innovation?" – How to foster Innovation in Humanitarian Response and Disaster Management: Perspectives from Lead-Actors"

Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC)
Rue Joseph-II, 79 - 1049 Brussels

15 January 2014, Brussels

"SUMMARY"

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1 ROUND TABLE BACKGROUND

At the invitation of the European Commission's Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (DG ECHO), 20 participants gathered in Brussels for a half day round table to discuss promotion of innovation in humanitarian aid and disaster management. The Round Table brought together a cocktail of expertise from NGOs, EU Member States, private sector, UN, academia and European Commission services that cover innovation from various dimensions.

The purpose of the Round Table was to begin to establish connections between DG ECHO and others thinking and working around innovation, as an initial step in taking forward ECHO's own reflections on the issue of how innovation can be fostered in support of a quality response in humanitarian aid and disaster management. One aim was to give participants an opportunity to hear from each other what aspects others were working on in order to create a dynamic for shared experience beyond organisational boundaries.

The meeting was framed in such a way as to explore different ways to address innovation and to capturing its potential as a 'change-agent'.

The agenda was set around three main areas to explore:

- Three dimensions of innovation: products; processes; and social innovation

- Sharing experience and lessons: What are the common factors for success and the challenges in fostering the innovation process?

- Adding value: identifying gaps and prioritisation on innovation in humanitarian response and disaster management.

2   SESSIONS AND KEY ISSUES ADDRESSED

2.1   WELCOME SPEECH

Ms **Florika Fink-Hooijer**, Director of Directorate for "Strategy, Policy and International Cooperation" in DG ECHO, welcomed participants and highlighted innovation as a key element of the EU's 2020 agenda and research programmes, but also as an emerging topic in the sectors of humanitarian response and disaster management.

> **KEY MESSAGES:**
>
> - Innovation can address the longer-term challenges of increasing risks and increase efficiency of our aid delivery system.
> - Innovation helps us be better prepared and to perform better, as can be seen in the forward-looking strategies and investments in new technologies and 'cutting edge' innovations in the EU's civil protection domain.
> - ECHO wants to stimulate discussion on innovation not only in the frame of technological development, but also with references to new approaches, applications and shift in mind-sets evolving from social changes.
> - No one actor, regardless of size or of mandate, can hope to do everything, therefore ECHO would like to help foster a network in order to encourage knowledge sharing and learning from each other.

2.2 HOW DO WE INNOVATE? A REVIEW OF WHERE THE "GOOD IDEAS" COME FROM

The presentations on innovation from two perspectives provided a starting point to discussions. They helped to define what innovation process is and how it can be applied in humanitarian action and disaster management.

The first presentation, given by **Bror Salmelin**, Advisor on Innovation Systems in Director General for Communication Networks, Content and Technology (DG CONNECT) of the European Commission, focused on the 'Open Innovation' framework. Bror Salmelin sought to answer the question on how to create an organisational culture which promotes innovation by, for example, supporting open and "organic" systems and linking-up and interacting with other actors. He addressed the importance of including the user in the innovation process from the very beginning and to carrying out tests and experiments in the 'real world' setting as early as possible.

The second presentation was given by **Kim Scriven**, manager of the Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF), in which he familiarized the participants with the work that the HIF has been doing, in particular, the new Fund for WASH innovation. The presentation offered a critical observation on the current innovation debate; it is a 'hot topic' in the sector, but it also forms part of a bigger discussion on changes happening in the humanitarian system. Kim Scriven reflected on the HIF's main lessons learned in their work with the innovation projects: 1) collaboration: the most successful projects included collaboration with different actors; 2) ethics and principles: the inclusion of beneficiaries in the innovation process and need for new ethical principles; 3) failure and risk: organisations tend to be risk averse and not open to talk about failure; and 4) avoiding 'pilot-itis': not all 'innovative' ideas should result in pilot projects.

The presenters' key messages, summarised in Figure 1, introduced the participants to some aspects that we should think of while exploring the subject of innovation in humanitarian response and disaster management. These also served as the reference points throughout the round table.
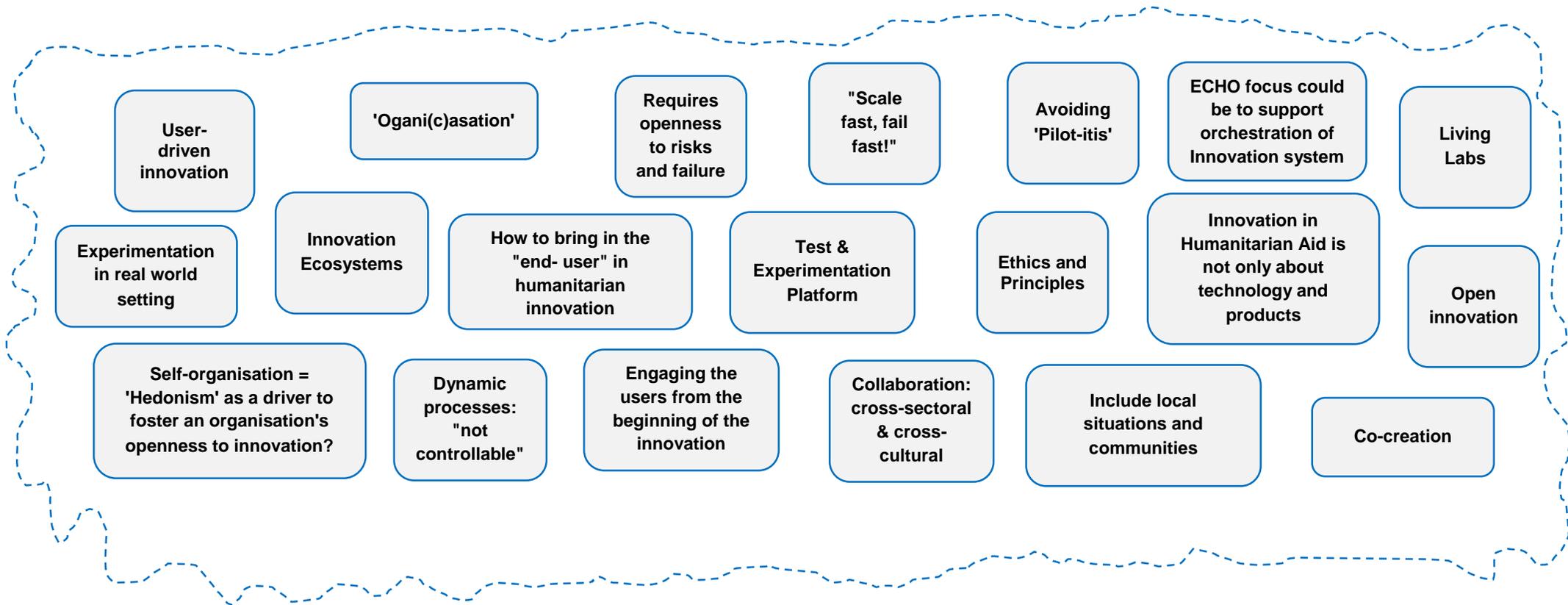

Figure 1: Key words from Bror Salmelin and Kim Scriven's presentations

2.3   THREE INNOVATION DIMENSIONS: PRODUCTS; PROCESSES; AND SOCIAL INNOVATION – COMMON FACTORS FOR SUCCESS AND CHALLENGES?

Several participants talked about specific examples of innovation projects or their work on innovation, with an invitation from DG ECHO to focus on the innovative elements and lessons to be shared. The Table 1 below provides brief summary information on these cases of innovation in action. Those with an interest in knowing more are encouraged to follow links outlined in greater detail in the accompanying document: 'Innovation: Links and Resources'.

TABLE 1: INNOVATION SHOW-CASES MATRIX

ORGANISATION/PROJECT	INNOVATION PROJECT: WHAT & WHY	LESSONS LEARNED
Emergency.lu **Speakers:** Marianne Donven; Benjamin Hourte	- To improve connectivity for humanitarian actors through cooperation among the public, private and non-profit actors - Initiated on the back of a major disaster (Haiti) with strong Ministerial support - Based on gap analysis - directly responding to the needs - Presents a 'process innovation': finding new ways on how to use already existent technology - So far deployed in South Sudan, Venezuela, Mali, Nepal, Philippines	- Public-private partnership: example of "user-driven innovation" with private sector filling in the gaps - Opportunity to further incorporate ICT in humanitarian action; e.g. bring connectivity to the communities (communication as a basic right) - Sustainability ensured through public sector support and market activities ~ seen as a global public good
MSF Sweden / MSF OC Brussels **Speakers**: David Veldeman; Robin Vincent - Smith	'Innovation Project': takes on challenges from the MSF operations and looks for solutions - Applies a long term perspective by analysing a problem through 3 steps: - Reframe a problem: discuss a problem with different stakeholders from public, private and civil sectors - Create a solution - Present findings to concerned MSF operational centre, which decides on further actions - Project example: Improvement of medical data collection; Cold-chain vaccines	- Advocate for a better reflection on the problem before prototyping a solution - Can we apply "Fail fast, scale fast" principle in an emergency context? How to decide and who decides whether to go ahead with an innovation or to wait/test/pilot it first? - Training and Innovation: new ideas' delivery and their testing through humanitarian actors' preparatory actions/special training programmes - Ethical considerations: MSF has established an ethical committee to oversee innovation development and application - Trust and convincing the problem owner

OCHA **Speaker**: Daniel Gilman	▪ Develop a strategic framework to bring innovation up front in OCHA's work; ▪ Examples of innovation: ○ 1) IT programme to develop standardised language to be used in the humanitarian sector - innovation within OCHA; 2) Digital communication network, which allows for emergency mapping through the usage of cellular phone coverage; 3) 'Empowering affected communities': gather a portfolio of field innovation projects to create a space for their funding (e.g. Humanitarian Hot Line for IDPs in camps in Darfur); 4) Support development of innovations within communities, as a service to communities (local solutions to expressed local needs)	▪ What does humanitarian innovation look like? ▪ Ethical framework in the innovation process: what are the principles and how to operationalize the ethical framework? ▪ How to get innovations when there is no market drive (humanitarian sector: a small sector without large resources)? ▪ Need for a wider incubator innovation within the communities themselves
Joint Research Centre (JRC), European Commission **Speaker**: Tom De Groeve	▪ Index for Risk Management – InfoRM; tries to identify the countries at a high risk of humanitarian crises that are more likely to require international assistance. ▪ Different organisations expressed similar needs at the same time - the JRC took a role of bringing different actors together and stimulating collaboration on finding a solution	▪ Innovation by "accident" and "the time seems right": seize the opportunity of innovation occurring by accident and seize the 'right' moment, i.e. environment which is supportive to innovation ▪ Groups of people and networks behind them encouraging innovation are most important ▪ An example of bridging problems through innovative partnership: how science and humanitarian community are working together to reach a shared goal
UNHCR **Speaker**: Christopher Earney	▪ UNHCR Innovation team - answer the questions on how to foster innovation that is already on-going and how to bring it to the humanitarian sector? ▪ Project example: Refugee housing unit = built on partnership: 15 companies, 3 universities and UNHCR deployed to address the global challenge of refugee housing. The product was successfully prototyped.	▪ Break down silos "people to people" through stimulating a culture of innovation and establishment of a self-sufficient unit (i.e. Innovation team) as a coordinator ▪ Field adaptability = Innovation. Locally adapted solutions. ▪ Refugee housing unit project / innovation project can support a broader reflection within an organization on how it does its work in general ▪ Space and time for meaningful conversation on desirable change

		▪ Scale up; think ahead for possible implementation problems and organisational challenges (e.g. procurement rules)
Department for Geoinformatics, University of Salzburg **Speaker**: Peter Zeil	▪ Innovation very present in science - aim to go beyond existing knowledge ▪ Academia can instigate innovations and create partnership and biotopes for innovations ▪ Focus on spatial analysis and application	▪ Openness to new ideas ▪ People need to get involved in the innovation projects ▪ Partnership is the key ▪ Pressure because of "suffering" / needs

WFP
 	
Speaker: Annalisa Conte
	▪ Innovation in WFP - a mainstreamed approach to ensure operations are relevant, efficient and effective at three levels:
	  o Technical (how to do better what we already do? Development of new tools)
	  o Programmatic (what are the new approaches to provide more effective solutions?)
	  o Paradigm shift (transform the way an organisation does its work)
	▪ Examples of innovation:
	  o Common delivery of multi stakeholder assistance
	  o Capacity to adapt response (e.g. easily move from one transfer to another)
	  o Bottom-up approach and local responses (solutions coming from the community and households; e.g. agriculture value chain for nutrition project)
		▪ Driven by needs and external forces and internal drive to do better
		▪ How to meet needs at scale: pilots are not enough
		▪ Think of broader changes in the business process while reflecting on the programmatic strategies
		▪ Demonstrating adaptability of an organisation

Action against hunger UK – ACF UK
 	
Speaker: Saul Guerrero
	▪ Points to reflect on:
	  o How to stimulate development of innovative ideas? Example of 'Aha!' moment when Plumpy nut was created. What kind of setting can support this and how to generate it?
	  o How to create a system that can take an innovative idea to the next levels – development and scale up?	

Discussion points:
- Money important, but not enough
- Link investment, policy, influence & operations

- How?: sometimes quick and blunt decisions, with authority to take risk. Pragmatism, courage and foresight.
- Manage risk collectively? (Pool-it in some 'grey areas')
- Why?: innovation key to humanitarian assistance linked to resilience, disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation
- Who?: "Interoperability" (learn from other areas). Challenge of how to plan ahead and see who is doing what.

The Figure 2 below presents a summary of common factors and challenges, which emerged from the discussion around the seven show-cases.

Action

- How to go from ideas to actions/ implementations
- Need people that "make it happen"
- Scale up pilots projects
- Invest in defining problem before jumping to 'best' solutions

Flexibility

- Mix long term strategic plans and spontaneity
- Need for both 'thinkers' and 'doers'

Drivers

- Organic/needs & society led
- Identify sector specific drivers
- New 'cool' innovations/ technologies as drivers?
- Vision / drive in leadership

Risk taking

- Cultural differences within organizations
- How to work with risk in the public sector
- Be open for mistakes and failures

Common factors for success and challenges

Connecting people

- Involve all stakeholders in the process
- Private Public Partnership
- Empower communities

Trust and Openness

- Listen and learn from others (cross-disciplines/sectors)
- Information flow and information intelligence
- Ethical dilemmas

Navigating uncertainty

- Support space for innovations to problems that are still unknown
- Be open to change and new approaches for innovation in the future
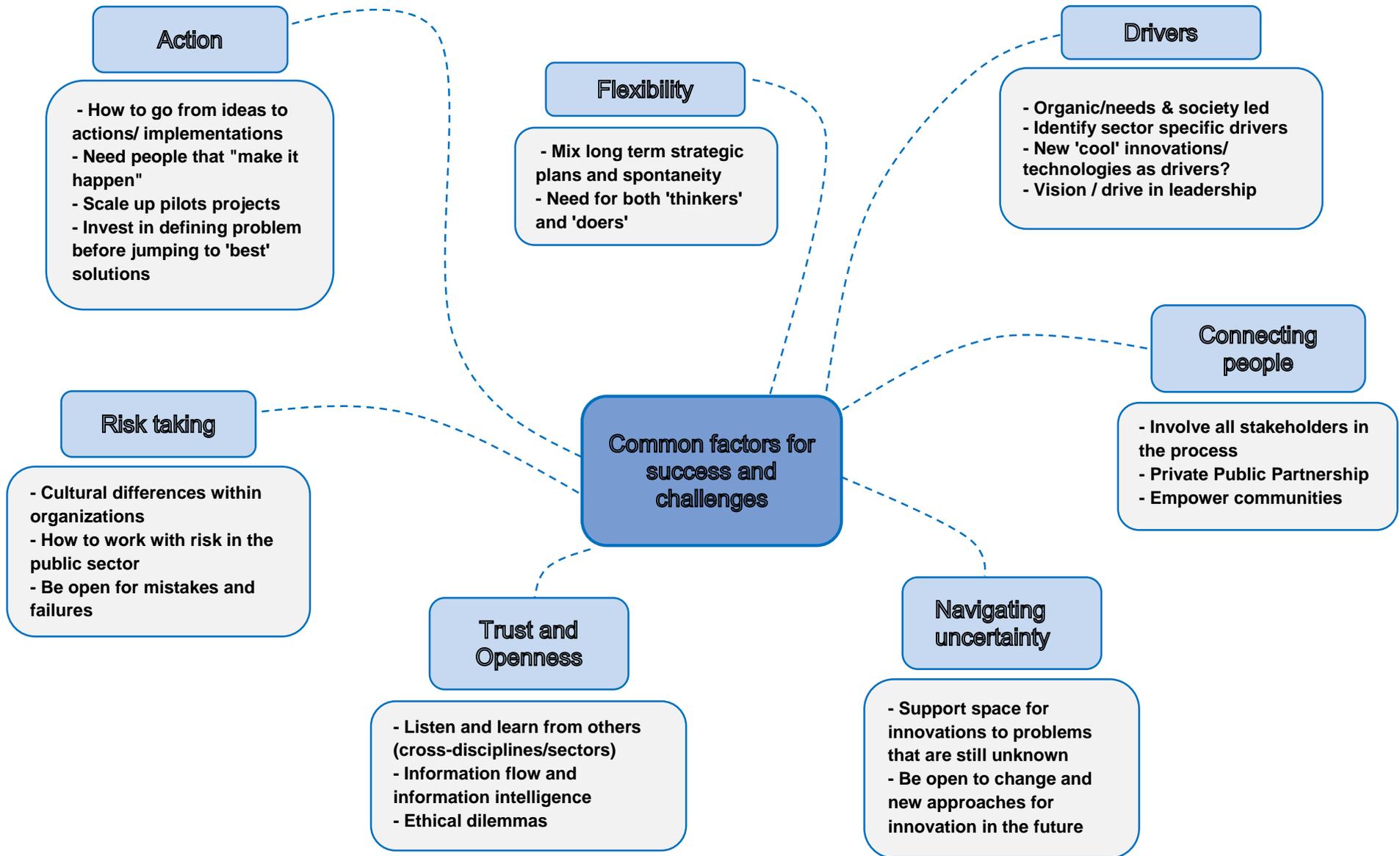
Figure 2: Summary of the common factors for success and challenges in the innovation process

2.4 FOSTERING INNOVATION – IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

The last session presented a learning platform for ECHO and a knowledge-exchange from the innovation expertise gathered in the room. The participants randomly divided into 4 different groups, each hosted by one ECHO participant. In two-rounds of energetic discussion, each group individually addressed the two questions below and came up with 2 – 3 key recommendations/reflections/possible action steps per question. The questions discussed were:

1. What should be the key strategic considerations and priorities in fostering innovation in humanitarian aid and disaster management?

2. How can we identify, support and manage successful innovations in practice?

The recommendation points were brought back to the whole group who together reviewed where there were similar or inter-linked points. This outcome is presented in the Figure 3 bellow: yellow boxes represent points for question one and blue boxes represent points for question two.

Three main general themes seemed to emerge from this group learning exchange:

1) Create an environment that supports and encourage innovation – allocate resources in processes that can lead to innovations

2) Create a participatory platform for all stakeholders, built on a common vision and trust

3) Use a 'trial and error approach' and strengthen evidence-based decision making (including successes that 'make the case' for innovative approaches, but also openness to sharing learning from failure).
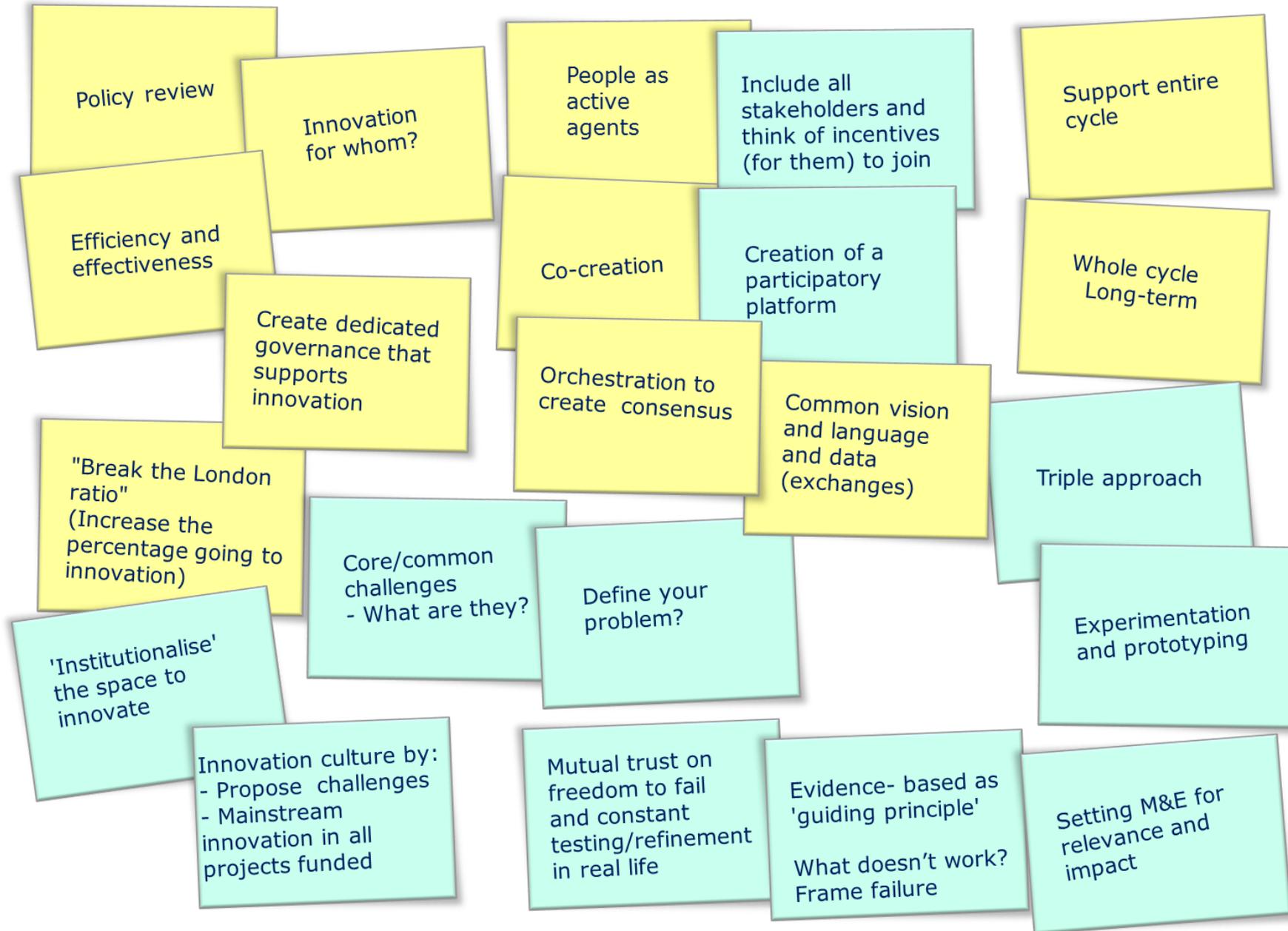
Policy review

Innovation for whom?

People as active agents

Include all stakeholders and think of incentives (for them) to join

Support entire cycle

Efficiency and effectiveness

Co-creation

Creation of a participatory platform

Whole cycle Long-term

Create dedicated governance that supports innovation

Orchestration to create consensus

Common vision and language and data (exchanges)

Triple approach

"Break the London ratio" (Increase the percentage going to innovation)

Core/common challenges - What are they?

Define your problem?

Experimentation and prototyping

'Institutionalise' the space to innovate

Innovation culture by: - Propose challenges - Mainstream innovation in all projects funded

Mutual trust on freedom to fail and constant testing/refinement in real life

Evidence- based as 'guiding principle'

What doesn't work? Frame failure

Setting M&E for relevance and impact

Figure 3: Recommendation points from different groups' discussions, as part of the 'Fostering Innovation' session   13

2.5   WRAP – UP

The Round table provided an opportunity for establishment of a network of key actors working on innovation in humanitarian aid and disaster management. ECHO and the invited partners intend to build on and further expand this network. Held discussions will help ECHO to reflect on how to support innovation of relevance to humanitarian action, which will also be shared with the participants for their feedback. These early reflections may serve as an input for the participants' common work and identification of priorities in innovation within the humanitarian sector in the future.

A number of organisations and participants, including ECHO, need some further reflection on the rich exchange from the Round Table, but commit to keeping linked-up. Further suggestions welcome.

Thank you!

SOME EMERGING SUGGESTIONS FOR FOLLOW-UP

- Positive sense of collective gain to continued collaboration and emerging network on innovation in humanitarian aid and disaster management: further reflections on how? Clear interest to host or to establish suitable 'virtual' platform (hub), so as to allow for broader exchange of what already exists or is being developed

- Proposal of an opportunity for a further face to face meeting point (on humanitarian innovation) around the planned Oxford Innovation Project conference in the UK (July 2014)

- Possibility to look further into 'common' problem definition to which innovation solution could be explored

- Invitation to proactively share updates on projects, lessons, organisational developments, success & failure with others in the network

- Open invitation by MSF to visit their Brussels humanitarian simulation training and innovation centre 'Espace Bruno Corbé' (EBC)

- Suggestion for considering an 'innovation' "jam/camp" on identified theme

- Spread the word – share with other 'innovators' and enrich the cocktail of expertise and perspectives.

ANNEX

Round table agenda

"What's New in Innovation?" - How to foster Innovation in Humanitarian Response and Disaster Management: Perspectives from Lead-Actors

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10:15 – 10:30   *Registration and welcoming coffee*

10:30 – 10:45   **Welcome and Introduction**

Florika Fink-Hooijer, Director, "Strategy, Policy and International Co-operation", Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (DG ECHO)

The opening session will highlight the objectives of the Round Table and introduce the three dimensions of innovation: products, processes and social innovation.

10:45 – 11:15   **HOW DO WE INNOVATE? A review of where the "Good Ideas" come from.**

Bror Salmelin, Advisor Innovation Systems, Director General for Communication Networks, Content and Technology (DG CONNECT), European Commission

Kim Scriven, Manager, Humanitarian Innovation Fund

The session will include presentations on innovation from two perspectives. It will provide a starting point to our further discussions helping to define what innovation is and how it applies in humanitarian action and disaster management.

11:15 – 12:45   **THREE INNOVATION DIMENSIONS: products; processes; and social innovation – common factors for success and challenges?**

There will be an opportunity for a number of participants to show-case concrete examples of innovation. The debate will revolve around sharing of experience and lessons learned with an aim to address a broader question on opportunities and risk factors in the innovation process.

12:45 – 13:45   Lunch (standing buffet)

13:45 – 15:15   **FOSTERING INNOVATION – in Humanitarian Response and Disaster Management**

Discussion will focus on the innovation horizon as applied to humanitarian response and disaster management, identifying gaps and exploring future directions and possible priorities.

15:15 – 15: 30   **Wrap-up and Next Steps**