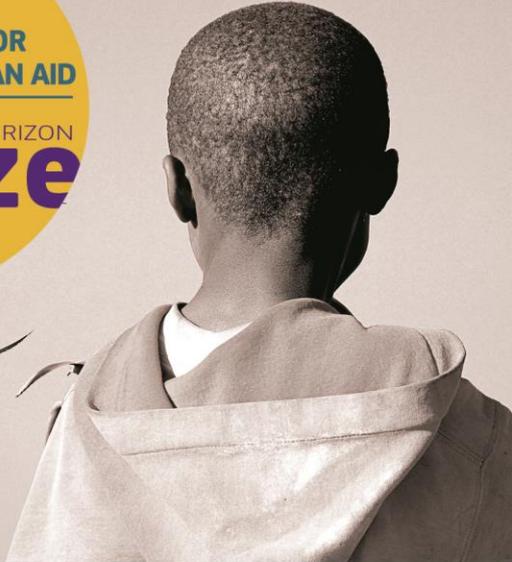




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MINUTES OF THE ROUNDTABLE ON HIGH TECH FOR HUMANITARIAN AID

AMMAN, JORDAN, 18 APRIL 2018



Following the launch of the innovation prize of the European Innovation Council on ['Affordable High-Tech for Humanitarian Aid'](#) (the 'Prize'), the European Commission's Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD) and Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) organised a roundtable on High Tech for Humanitarian Aid in Amman on 18 April 2018. The roundtable brought together about 20 participants from different sectors, mainly local humanitarian actors and representatives of the research and scientific communities. It allowed to present the Prize to Jordan stakeholders, as well as discuss their potential role and participation in this initiative.

1. INTRODUCTION AND PRESENTATIONS

Dr. Khaled Elshuraydeh, Secretary General of the Higher Council for Science and Technology (HCST), opened the roundtable by insisting on the importance of frugal innovation to improve the delivery of humanitarian assistance. He recalled the main characteristics of the Prize, which sets the context for the discussion.

Maria Cristina Russo, Director for International Cooperation at DG RTD, referred to the Horizon 2020 programme - the biggest multilateral research and innovation programme in the world and its international dimension - Horizon 2020 is open to participation from across the world. She briefly explained the [rules of contest](#) of the Prize and the importance to present and discuss this initiative in countries / regions where humanitarian innovation could play an important role. She underlined that the Prize aims to support the development of high tech based solutions but that solutions only based on ICT or digital applications are not in scope.

Claudia Amaral, Head of the Amman Regional Office of DG ECHO, stressed the role that innovation and new technologies can play to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian response. She welcomed the launch of the Prize. She added a word of caution on the impact of the use of new technologies: humanitarian innovation must be guided by ethical standards and principles, and be consistent with the 'do no harm' principle. Claudia Amaral described the very challenging regional humanitarian context, highlighting notably the Syrian conflict and its dramatic consequences in terms of civilian casualties, violation of IHL, massive displacements, targeting of civilian infrastructures and related difficulty to provide humanitarian assistance; living conditions of Syrian refugees in neighbourhood countries continue to deteriorate. The humanitarian community faces huge challenges, notably in terms of access to affected populations, the safety of the aid workers, and the often prevailing difficulty to carry-out accurate needs assessments inside Syria and elsewhere. In Jordan, for instance, DG ECHO's intervention focuses principally on sectors such as protection, health, cash-assistance and winterization. She concluded by stating that in this regional complex humanitarian context, there is scope for new, creative solutions - if well contextualized and in support of quality programming - and the establishment of new partnerships.

Ibrahim Faza, Project manager at [ShamalStart](#), presented his project. It aims at creating job opportunities for Syrian and Jordanian communities by supporting entrepreneurship and the development of the private sector in the north of Jordan (Irbid and Mafraq), a region highly impacted by the Syrian crisis where a considerable percentage of the refugee population is settled. It supports local entrepreneurs with innovative, high-potential ideas in manufacturing and services, to move from innovation to commercialisation. It provides trainings and mentorship, organises business bootcamps and supports the most promising projects through a 6-month incubation programme and the provision of seed financing. It also gives access to a FabLab, a small-scale manufacturing facility to develop prototypes. Since November 2016 the initiative has supported around 85 start-ups and created some 200 high-skilled jobs.

2. DISCUSSION

The second part of the roundtable was devoted to an exchange with the audience. Dr. Omar Amawi, Director of International Cooperation at HCST, moderated the debate. In his introduction, he referred to an initiative successfully launched 10 years ago with the support of the European Union: the establishment of a technology transfer network to bridge science and business in Jordan. He also underlined the well-developed and dynamic scientific and academic sector of his country.

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Main messages from the participants:

- Partnerships between the public and private sectors to develop frugal, innovative solutions for humanitarian aid should be at the centre of the Prize. Participants called for a strong engagement of businesses in this initiative.
- Involvement of beneficiaries / affected populations is essential for inclusive innovation. They should be the cornerstone of any multi-stakeholder collaboration around humanitarian innovation and the development of frugal solutions for humanitarian aid. The award criteria of the Prize duly reflect the importance of such needs-based, bottom up approach.
- The focus of the Prize on those in a most vulnerable situation, notably taking age and gender into consideration as well as an increased collaboration across sectors involved in the humanitarian aid context was welcomed.
- The importance to use technologies to increase energy efficiency was stressed by several participants, for example for water management systems.
- The Crown Prince Foundation referred to two of its initiatives to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship in Jordan: 1. its university supporting Jordanian youth's pursuit of vocational, technical and applied education and entrepreneurship and 2. the creation of a FabLab to promote collaboration between innovators.
- Complementarities with other initiatives to fund humanitarian innovation should be sought, for example between the Prize and the initiative launched by the U.S. Agency for International Development, the UK Department for International Development, and Grand Challenges Canada: [Creating Hope in Conflict: A Humanitarian Grand Challenge](#); as well as between the Prize and the [UNICEF Innovation Fund](#).
- Although not being in scope of the Prize, different examples of application of digital technologies to humanitarian aid were given such as:
 - The use of blockchain technology for increasing the efficiency of cash-based assistance, for facilitating the collaboration between humanitarian actors and for enabling digital identification;
 - The use of technology in mobile education systems (EdTech).

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

- The innovation prize on 'Affordable High-Tech for Humanitarian Aid' is a strong lever to encourage and support humanitarian innovation and the engagement of a wider range of stakeholders in humanitarian context. Supporting the development of a multidisciplinary community of innovators around the Prize remains central.
- Humanitarian innovation should be developed in close cooperation between the humanitarian sector, the scientific and research community and the private sector. Engaging the local private sector more broadly should be the priority of any future awareness raising activity around this initiative.
- The humanitarian sector should clearly define its priority needs in terms of innovation. Researchers could focus on these humanitarian challenges and contribute to the development of solutions; in Jordan, the HCST's data base of researchers could support matchmaking needs with research and innovation capabilities.

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4. NEXT STEPS

- Participants are invited to share the information of the Prize among local networks in Jordan.
- Engaging with other stakeholders in Jordan (notably the private sector) will allow to enlarging the community of multidisciplinary innovators around the prize. The European Commission and stakeholders interested to engage in this initiative are invited to seize any opportunity that may arise in the near future.