GAHI

Summary of Lessons Learned
December 2019

Content

Foreword

The report was commissioned by EIrha. Dr. Unni Karunakara, professor at Yale University, was appointed as a Chair of the exercise. Elisabeth Fosseli Olsen, Head of Innovation at KPMGs International Development Advisory Services, was selected to conduct the review.

We would like to thank all the people who have taken their time contributing with their honest views, experiences and insights to this report. We hope that the report will be useful in accelerating the innovation efforts within the humanitarian system in the near future.

Abbreviations

DFID	Department for international Development
GAHI	Global Alliance for Humanitarian Innovation
ISG	Interim Steering Group
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
RIL	The Response Innovation Lab
Save UK	Save the Children UK
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit

Introduction to the Summary Report

Background

The Global Alliance of Humanitarian Innovation (GAHI) was launched at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in Istanbul in June 2016. The overall aim was to address the innovation needs in the sector that could not be effectively tackled by individual actors and organisations working on their own. Unfortunately, GAHI never achieved its full ambition of the initiating partners and was closed down in May 2019. This report presents the main lessons learned from GAHI's life cycle - from its initial conceptual phase until the discontinuation of the organisation.

The Global Alliance of Humanitarian Innovation was launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in June 2016. The recommendation to form the alliance was based on the notion that the innovation ecosystem was not functioning as it should.[1] GAHI's unique contribution was said to address the innovation needs in the sector that could not be effectively tackled by individual actors and organisations working on their own. In the summary from the WHS, GAHI was highlighted as an actor that could match problems with the people that might solve them. The Alliance was intended to mobilize social, intellectual, and financial resources, as well as sharing knowledge of what works.[2]

GAHI was launched with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) as one of the main initiators, together with other representatives from the ecosystem that together constituted the initial working group. When GAHI was launched, it was supported by 40 founding members (see Annex 4) and was promised a two-year pilot funding, provided by the ministries of foreign affairs of Australia, the Netherlands, Denmark and the UK Department for International Development.

The GAHI concept was relevant for the stakeholders within the humanitarian innovation ecosystem. Donors, organisations, innovators and fieldworkers saw a need for a platform for collaboration where learning could be done, failures could be shared, and where people together could join forces for enabling scaling of successful innovative solutions. GAHI did, however, not become the alliance that the initiators aimed for.

Scope of Study

This is a summary of the GAHI Lessons Learned Report. The overall aim of the Lessons Learned exercise was to identify GAHI's lessons learned from the period of conceptual development prior to the WHS, to the contracting of the host for the alliance, establishment of a Secretariat, and finally, the discontinuation of the Alliance. The purpose was to analyse and draw out specific findings as to the progress GAHI made during its operations, and why GAHI did not deliver on the initial ambitions as set out at the WHS.

The Terms of Reference emphasised that the exercise shall explore both the *internal work* and relationships set up to deliver and support GAHI's strategy, but also review *the wider political system* which the GAHI wanted to influence and add value to. In accordance with the ToR, the review will in particular consider arrangements, achievements and challenges of the The original GAHI vision; Preparation and set-up; Financing arrangements; Hosting arrangements; Governance; Positioning and political engagement; Leadership; Strategy and Delivery.

Methodology

The review was based on a desk review and in-depth conversations with key informants, consisting of stakeholders that were suggested by Elrha and GAHI's previous Executive Director. A draft report was sent to the Interim Steering Group, the former Executive Director and Elrha for clarifications and review. This process turned out to be very useful for the review, as it also provided further data and information of relevance for the further analysis. A draft report was presented for the Interim Steering Group (ISG), Elrha and the former Executive Director in London, 8th of November. The final report has included comments from this presentation.

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[1] GAHI Stakeholder Consultation Report 2017

[2] https://www.agendaforhumanity.org/initiatives/3854

Lessons Learned from the GAHI's Life Cycle

The main findings and lessons learned from GAHI's life cycle are summarized below.

Finding 1: A mismatch between GAHI's overall design and its given mandate to deliver on the ground

✓ The GAHI vision was to achieve higher humanitarian impact and efficiency through innovation. Ultimately the GAHI wanted to enable the humanitarian system to do more, for more people, at a lower cost.

✓ GAHI was *a needed, and an ambitious initiative*. The initiative had a clear vision and distinct goals, however, when launched, it became clear that the initiators' ambitions for the Alliance was disproportionate in relation to the resources and timelines available for implementing the concept on the ground.

✓ New, ambitious concepts should be designed and implemented in an agile manner, as this enable a project design that is continuously adjusted and changed as a result of trying and failing during the set-up phase.

Finding 2: GAHI was launched without clear plans for operationalisation

✓ GAHI was launched without a clear plan for *operationalisation*, which in turn resulted in a protracted and challenging administrative set-up phase, and consequently a lack of delivering activities in accordance to the expected progress schedule.

✓ It is difficult to see how the initiators and donors envisioned that GAHI would reach its initial goals and outputs without a clear plan for setting up the Alliance itself. There were in particular three key factors that were missing right from the start: 1) An agreement with the host organisation, 2) funding agreements (as the negotiation of a host organisation was not completed), and 3) recruitment of an Executive Director of the Secretariat.

✓ GAHI was also launched without a clear structure for decision-making. An Interim Steering Group was established when GAHI was launched, however, it was lacking a clear chair role.

✓ In particular two incidents seem to have disturbed the initial start-up phase of GAHI. Firstly, OCHA, which had been leading the process of conceptualising GAHI, was starting to pull back from GAHI due to budget cuts right after the WHS, although they were still involved in the ISG. Secondly, simultaneously to the OCHA withdrawal, several of the key representatives from the donors where changing their positions within their respective ministries.

Finding 3: Challenges in positioning GAHI within the system

✓ The set-up phase of GAHI was *crowded*. The UK NGO EIrha was first contracted to host GAHI and to set up the Alliance. After approximately a year, the Executive Director of GAHI was recruited and during this shift of management, some significant variances in the donors' and the Executive Director's visions for the Alliance became apparent, which in turn increased the administrative work for all involved in GAHI

✓ The main disagreements between the donors and The Executive Director's plan were related to the placement of the Secretariat and the hosting agreement with Save the Children UK. The funding donors were aiming for a UK based secretariat within the NGO-system, while the Executive Director wanted a global Secretariat that was preferably hosted within the UN system.

Finding 4: Lack of strategic continuity

✓ EIrha was commissioned by the ISG to conduct the initial strategic work for the Alliance and the GAHI Secretariat continued this work a year later on. The strategic thinking of GAHI became a bit crowded, as too many actors with too many directions and diverging opinions were involved.

✓ It would probably have been more efficient if either Elrha or the Secretariat had the whole responsibility for setting up and implementing the strategy work for GAHI. There were too many actors with diverging opinions. Ideally, the Secretariat should be responsible for the Strategy work of its Alliance.

Finding 5: A Governance structure that was never operationalised

✓ When GAHI's Secretariat was finally up and running, the planned governance structure was never operationalised, the lines of communication and decision making became unclear, which resulted in difficult working relations between the donors and the Executive Director.

✓ The missing governance structure resulted in two major weaknesses for GAHI: Firstly, there was no longer any accountability between the Secretariat, the host organisation and the donors, and secondly, the communication between the donors, the Secretariat and its members was correspondingly deteriorated.

Finding 6: The Members were not prioritized

✓ The two year timeline of the GAHI project was more or less spent solely on setting up the administration of GAHI, although activities towards its members were carried out, these were consistently down-prioritized.

✓ At the initial phase of GAHI, however, there were strong efforts in implementing member-driven activities that were in accordance with the GAHI strategy. The initiative of setting up a project related to the working stream *Education Cannot Wait,* is one example. After a while, it became clear that the project did not manage to deliver on its plans and strategies. The project was not moving forward, and at the end, it was shredded.

✓ The Secretariat's ambition was to establish a niche where GAHI could be the convenor for collaborating on scaling. There were in particular two types of activities that were prioritized by GAHI in their final six months of operation; 1) producing reports, and 2) organising events. It is unclear if these activities were decided by the members, but it seems like the Secretariat was choosing the activities, while the members were asked to *engage* in specific activities.

Finding 7: A new initiative may fail, but the need for the initiative prevails

✓ GAHI was closed down in May 2019 as the initial funding donors did not want to prolong the pilot funding. GAHI's closure happened more or less at the same time as the Secretariat staff were finally in place and could start working on activities and outputs.

✓ Several stakeholders claim that the Secretariat never was given the chance to proof itself. The staff never got the chance to realise their strategy and displaying their relevance and GAHI's contribution to improving the innovation ecosystem. On the other hand, this review also shows that too many mistakes had taken place in GAHI's life cycle, where the initial mistakes of GAHI's design and lack of plans for operationalisation cumulatively led to the next errors. The cumulative effects of these errors would probably make it difficult to adjust or change GAHI for the better.

✓ Despite GAHI's failure, the need for a mechanism to collaborate, learn and share lessons on innovations prevails.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The key lessons learned is that GAHI close down is <u>not due to its irrelevance</u> in the humanitarian ecosystem, but mainly due to the designing, structuring and management of the Alliance. The underlying challenges in the humanitarian innovation ecosystem are still present and the ecosystem is still in need of a collaborative platform for enhancing the impact of humanitarian innovation.

Although GAHI has been closed down, innovators are still aiming at transforming the humanitarian system. There are currently more than 800 initiatives related to humanitarian innovation[3] and the ecosystem has come further in their efforts of building innovative solutions that are both sustainable and scalable. UNHCR innovation services are for example increasing its efforts by establishing their own innovation fund together with other initiatives such as the Humanitarian Education Accelerator (a DFID-funded partnership) and a Community Connectivity Fund. Public funding schemes for innovation in the humanitarian sector are still comprehensive. Denmark decided for example in 2018 that their strategic CSO partners could spent up to 10 percent of MFA funding to innovation. In Norway, the newly launched Humanitarian Innovation Program Norway has – after the first pilot year only – decided to increase the funding with 8,2 mill NOK, thus with a total of 38,2 mill NOK for innovating and scaling solutions to the humanitarian sector for this year.

A global alliance for collaboration on humanitarian innovation is thus still a need, and a relevant idea. In particular since there are few initiatives aiming at building bridges and partnerships across donors' and organisations' existing efforts within the field humanitarian innovation. The questions that need to be asked are then; how can it be designed and operationalised? In this regard it is needed to look closer at *what are the most important needs* for collaboration, and *how can a collaboration be structured* to meet the needs, address them, and ensuring that the innovation ecosystem becomes more robust in overcoming them? Should an alliance also include program elements, where partnership activities includes funding?

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[3]file:///G:/Advisory/04.%20Kunder/GAHI/Background%20documents/The%20New%20Humanitarian%20_%20Humanitarian%20innovation%20f.pdf

Literature

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Annex 1: Interview List

Name	Institution
Aiden Goldsmith	Australian DFAT
Andreas Schuetz	OCHA
Andrew Billo	GAHI
Andy Andrea	Alliance4Impact
Ben Kumph	UNDP/Dfid
Chris Cushing	GAHI
Dan McClure	GAHI
Graham Lang	UNICEF
Grant Gordon	IRC
Giulio Coppi	Fordham University/NRC
Harriet Milsted	GAHI
Howard Rush	University of Brighton
Ingvild Strand Von Krogh	Innovation Norway/UNICEF
Jessica Camburn	Elrha
Kate O'Reilly	Elrha/GAHI
Kjersti Sommerseth	Norwegian MFA
Laura Sørenson Topp	Denmark MFA/Danida
Laura Walker McDonald	GAHI
Lesley Bourns	GAHI
Maxime Vielle	Response Innovation lab
Rahul Chandran	GAHI
Tarah Friend	Dfid
Wendy Fenton	ODI

Annex 2: GAHI members

Access2Innovation
ADRRN
Airbnb
Atma Connect
Australian Aid
Blue Rose Compass
Box.org
DCHI
Centre for Humdata
Centre for Innovation, Leiden University
Cisco
Development United
Development Watch
Elrha
Field Ready
Frog
Grand Challenges Canada
Human Surge
Humanitarian Design Bureau
Humanitarian Leadership Academy
Humanitary Road
IIHA
Mercy Corps
Microsoft
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands
Net Hope
OCHA
Philips Foundation
Response Innovation Lab
Spring Impact
Start Network
The Government of the Grand Duché of Luxembourg
UK Aid
UNDP
UNICEF
University of Virginia
World Food Programme
World Humanitarian Summit
World Vision

KPMG

Kontakt oss
Name
Partner: Oddbjørn Vegsund
T   +47 4063 9919
E   oddbjorn.vegsund@kpmg.no

kpmg.no