Global Covid-19 Humanitarian Support Package

Learning from H2H Network-supported projects
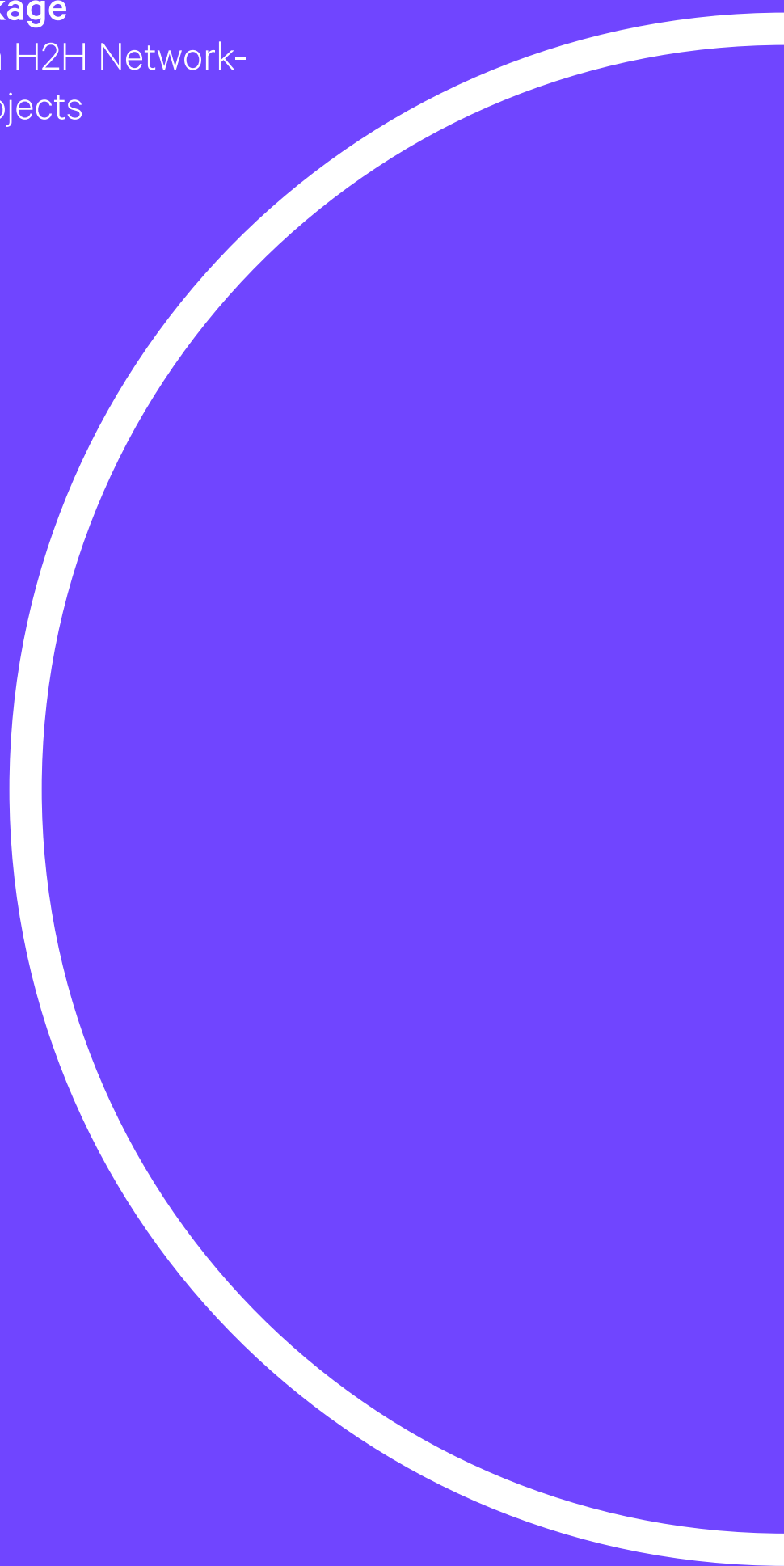
By March 2020, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the humanitarian sector was growing in every corner of the world. The technical skills and services of members in the H2H Network were needed – and in many cases, they could be delivered remotely. The H2H Network Global Covid-19 Humanitarian Support Package was put together to support "global yet local" efforts to fight the pandemic. The package aimed to fill a critical gap in the response to the pandemic, making 14 cutting-edge technical services available to international and local responders.

Overall, this 7th H2H Network Fund activation can be considered a success. It enabled network members to promptly provide their specialist services, and all 14 funded member agencies met or exceeded their objectives. This was the second H2H Network Fund activation to address the Covid-19 pandemic and the most comprehensive service package to date. It therefore represents an important learning opportunity for the network.

This report documents and reflects on promising practices and lessons learned from the programming that the H2H Network supported in the context of the Global Covid-19 Humanitarian Support package. Drawing on examples and experiences from H2H Network-funded Covid-19 projects, it aims to generate learning that can inform future pandemic and crisis responses, as well as deepen understanding of the specific role of humanitarian-to-humanitarian support within the wider humanitarian system. It accompanies an ongoing effort to document lessons learned and recommendations from the first 2 years of the H2H Network and H2H Fund, focusing on the fund mechanism, platform-level support for members and learning.

Background

The H2H Network Global Covid-19 Humanitarian Support Package is a scale-up of the **Covid-19 H2H Network response to the info-demic**[1]. By March 2020, it was clear that the network's cross-cutting and expert services could fill a niche within the overall global and local response to Covid-19. The core team proposed a second – much larger -- activation of the H2H Network Fund to the UK DFID Covid-19 Task Force. In the second week of April, DFID allocated 2 million GBP to the network to support the new activation.

[1] Responding to the Covid-19 Infodemic: Lessons from quick, collective and localized action

At-a-glance

The call for proposals and granting process followed established H2H Network procedure, with a 3-member independent grant panel reviewing and scoring proposals. 20 proposals from members were received (total request: £5,835,842). 14 grants were awarded with a total value of £1,75M GBP.

Thematic Scope

The scope of the activation was developed based on feedback and consultations with IFRC, WHO, UNICEF, DFID, and many network members who had already initiated Covid-19 response activities.
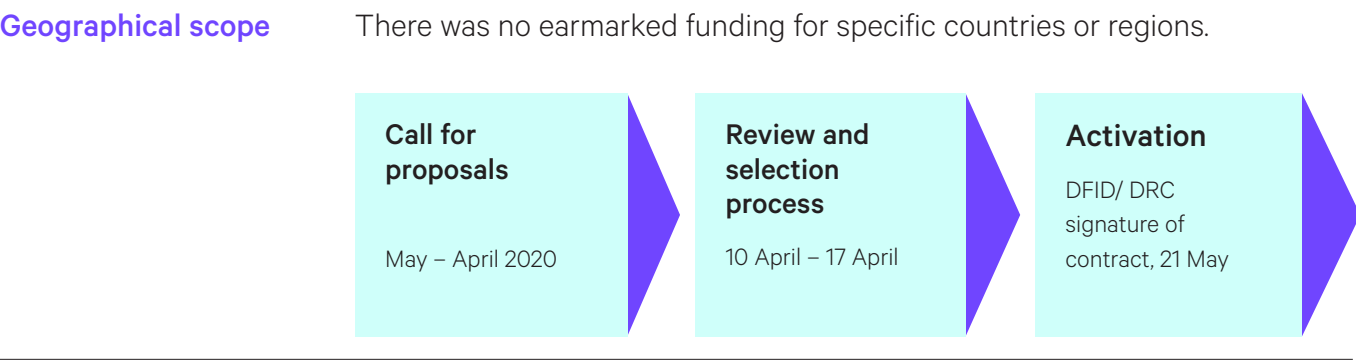
Scoring and package design gave particular emphasis to projects that met the following criteria:

Speed and timeliness
Projects that were able to begin as soon as possible, where demonstrated need was immediate.

Coordination and collaboration
Projects that were designed with coordination and collaboration in mind, both with other local and global humanitarian response agencies, and other H2H Network members. Docking and integration within existing humanitarian response structures developed by WHO, IFRC and other major agencies was highly valued.

Global yet local
Working closely with local and national partners; taking practice and/or lessons learned from country or regional responses to a global level, or to another region or country.

Ability to adapt and innovate
Projects with built-in processes to learn and adapt on an iterative basis.

Geographical scope   There was no earmarked funding for specific countries or regions.

Call for proposals	Review and selection process	Activation
May – April 2020	10 April – 17 April	DFID/ DRC signature of contract, 21 May

14
projects across four categories, including global, regional and national activities

1,756,000 GBP
total budget

June 2020 – January 2021
time frame for implementation

2,363
global or multilateral actors supported

5,878
local or country level actors supported

679
information and data products made openly available

288
capacity building activities delivered

Projects supported by the H2H Network Covid-19 II activation

Providers	Category of Need	Details of Service
ACAPS	Data and Information Management	Data analysis of how Covid-19 is reshaping humanitarian outcomes
Atlas Logistique	Security, Logistics and Programme Support	Optimizing the efficiency of the humanitarian supply chain in Kinshasa and North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo by analysing logistics and vulnerabilities
CartONG	Data and Information Management	Adapting data collection and M&E activities to social distancing and movement limitations and production of a variety of resources on findings
CDAC Network	Community Engagement and Accountability	Production of health messages grounded on a strong evidence base, coordination and dissemination
Evidence Aid	Community Engagement and Accountability	Robust research, freely available in one place, summarized especially for decision makers at all levels
Fondation Hirondelle	Community Engagement and Accountability	Production of radio and online content and capacity strengthening with media in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Uganda
Ground Truth Solutions (GTS)	Community Engagement and Accountability	Perspectives from the ground; periodic snapshots of areas impacted by the pandemic in Bangladesh, Iraq, Somalia, Syria and Uganda
Humanitarian Academy for Development (HAD)	Quality and Professionalization of the Sector	Training with local NGOs in Iraq, Syria and Yemen on business sustainability during crises
Humanitarian OpenStreetMap (HOT)	Data and Information Management	Collation through local network of providers: analysis and integration of open data (specifically geospatial) in Covid-19 response
Insecurity Insight	Security Logistics and Programme Support	Monitoring aid related security events to help aid agencies adjust their security risk strategies by following local changing trends
MapAction	Data and Information Management	Support with visualizing and collecting data-mapping including dashboards and spatial analysis in emergencies
RedR UK	Quality and Professionalization of the Sector	Training in culturally appropriate hygiene promotion and community engagement with affected populations
Sphere	Quality and Professionalization of the Sector	Guidance on Sphere and other humanitarian standards and their application
The New Humanitarian (TNH)	Community Engagement and Accountability	Newsletters, articles and updates through a network of international and local journalists and editors

Learning from H2H Network Covid 19 II projects

"Why are organizations so reluctant to share their biases? What can be done about it? The encouragement of admitting that no project is ever perfect and less paranoia about where the next funding will come from would also help. Having an explicit bias is a sign of having done a better analysis and so shouldn't be considered a weakness or vulnerability. There is possibly a role of the H2H Network in promoting this culture and a lot can be learned from other sectors e.g. research where these principles are long held and commonplace."

Panel discussion with audience, GeONG conference, CartONG, October 2020

The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted aid efforts across the globe, presenting humanitarian actors with uncertainty and new challenges at every turn. This section of the report will explore cross-cutting trends across the H2H Network Covid 19 II portfolio, focusing in particular on:

a. **speed and timeliness:** how fast funding and early action enabled members to get to work quickly;
b. **how projects delivered global yet local services:** supporting marginalized communities with highly localized activities, while maintaining a global perspective and view to scale;
c. **how members collaborated and coordinated:** filling gaps and providing essential technical support in service of the wider humanitarian response;
d. **how members innovated and adapted ways of working, with a particular focus on remote training and data collection.**

1. Speed and timeliness

"H2H's rapid response to the Covid-19 outbreak was in marked contrast to many other emergency donors. H2H funding continues to fulfil an important role in supporting smaller, innovative actors in the humanitarian field."

Evidence Aid

"The H2H rapid response was the key enabling tool that helped us to adapt and get the project off the ground when it was needed and there were no other resources available (...) this seed fund was for really vital work that due to various partnerships in project countries will keep morphing into important and more ongoing work."

Insecurity Insight

"Only this type of donor allows [for] support with this flexibility, and rapidity. The reactivity shown by the H2H Network and the connection with other members of the network are essential assets for an emergency deployment (...) H2H members we were present at the outset to accompany and support the organizations that arrived afterwards (...) The H2H network gave us the opportunity to test and set up a pilot that turned out to be positive...to find a funding opportunity to develop a brand new approach."

Atlas Logistique

Conditions of access to the Pinga health zone. Mpeti-Pinga axis (Masisi, North Kivu / Walikalé, DRC)

Photo: Atlas Logistique

The Global Covid-19 Humanitarian Support Package represents the largest portfolio, largest total programme budget, largest sub-grant size and duration, and largest overall service package handled by the H2H Network to date. It therefore presents an important learning opportunity for the H2H Fund, as a core service to members. The report will highlight several key lessons learned regarding the fund mechanism and administration, as they pertain directly to project implementation.

The H2H Network Global Covid-19 Humanitarian Support Package drove consolidation and improvement of the fund's grant making processes. Important numbers:

Largest programme budget to date

£1.7m

programme (average across previous activations: £260k)

Largest portfolio

14

sub-grants (average across previous activations: 3 sub-grants)

Largest sub-grant size

£260k

Average Covid-19 II grants/ past-activations average: £125k

Longest sub-grant duration

6

months on average/ average across past activations: 3 months

1.

Speed and timeliness

The H2H Network's Fund was established in 2018 as a new way of financing activities, aiming to disburse funds quickly and kick-start recovery.

The fund was designed as an alternative to more traditional funding mechanisms which members, donors and the wider humanitarian community saw as typically slow, reactive and centralized. As highlighted by members quoted above, the H2H Network Fund's ability to activate quickly is a major asset to members and to the humanitarian sector as a whole.

In the **Global Covid-19 Humanitarian Support Package grant period, the H2H Network Fund confirmed its ability to activate in a fast and timely manner, enabling members to promptly provide their specialist services.** Important numbers:

Total days for members to apply to the call for proposals:

7

Total days for funding decision:

5

Total days for DFID/ DRC approval process:

30

What did we learn?

At the H2H Fund level, the core team required reinforcement in order to handle the new workload.
Significant increase in size and budget required a rapid revision of the team's set-up. Two new positions were created: a dedicated coordinator for the grant portfolio, as well as a risk and compliance officer. The fund will build on this in the design phase of future activations.

"Fast and timely" fund activations still present challenges in practice.
The challenge was met, although it could have been faster. One of the biggest challenges arose around the lengthy DFID/DRC approval process, significantly delaying the start of projects. DFID and DRC signatures came in mid-May while the activation was triggered mid-April: 14 projects were lined up by 1 May. Nearly half were short in duration (3-4 months), with staff deploying to various affected areas of the world. Moving forward, the fund will keep working to improve procedures and guarantee the speed and timeliness of its activations.

"Now that everyone is working remotely, so much more time and effort is required."
CDAC Network

At project level, members identified Covid-19 restrictions as delaying implementation in many ways, requiring flexibility, altered timelines and no cost extensions to grants. The **Humanitarian Academy for Development (HAD)**, for example, saw their project delayed by a month when they relied on host organization Islamic Relief and relevant clusters in-country (Yemen, Syria and Iraq) to circulate their needs assessment to local NGOs and invite them to participate in HAD's capacity building activities.

Participating local NGOs, in turn, "[were obliged to] to manage other priorities in Covid situation" (HAD). **Atlas Logistique'**s project in North Kivu, DRC, also reported delays and barriers related to the pandemic: first, the project manager was only able to enter DRC after a month's delay (waiting for the first flight from Europe to Goma), and was then required to quarantine for 14 days on arrival. Secondary data collection activities were also delayed by reduced working hours and partial lockdown.

2.

Global yet local

"Initially donors asked about trying interactive voice response and social media scanning in order to gather data and share information from a distance. However, Ground Truth Solutions have found that traditional relationships continued to work very well and were able to use their network of community leaders in Uganda in order to perform Key Informant interviews. The Key Informants were able to put them in touch with other people and it was possible to discuss the data with Key Informant, post analysis, in order to check if they considered the data to be representative and useful."

Ground Truth Solutions

"An opportunity coming out of this situation has been the chance to work remotely which in some contexts can be a good thing and there are many areas where humanitarians can do more work remotely. Firstly, it forces us to rely on local persons and systems. It also saves a lot of time and money which would be better spent on things other than flights and hotels. It also reduces carbon emissions and sets a better example with regards to climate change."

Insecurity Insight

Many responders and commentators have asked what events in 2020 mean for the localization agenda. Have the operational challenges brought about by Covid-19 driven more accountable and equitable partnerships between international responders, local actors and host governments, to better serve people affected by crises? Or are we merely witnessing a temporary shift -- alternative transactional relationships that fail to genuinely challenge underlying power dynamics?

H2H Network members implementing Covid-19 projects repeatedly emphasized that close collaboration with local partners was more important than ever. Pandemic-related lockdowns and travel restrictions meant that pre-existing contacts and presence within communities was essential.

As providers of cross-cutting, technical support services for wider responses, H2H organizations are necessarily embedded within both local and global humanitarian response systems. At a time of unprecedented disruption, members and service users consistently reported advantages to the H2H way of working: as typically small, innovative organizations with relatively light organizational footprints, able to adapt quickly.

Working in close collaboration with local partners

Examples:

Atlas Logistique worked through 9 local NGOs in North Kivu Democratic Republic of Congo to collate data and map vulnerabilities.

CartONG established 10 shared services through staff and their network of volunteers. This included "tech watch", help desk and experience sharing webinars.

CDAC Network worked through the national Communications, Community Engagement and Accountability Multi-Stakeholder Platforms to improve coordination capacity across the humanitarian response, responding to local needs and narratives.

Ground Truth Solutions partnered with a variety of organizations in Bangladesh, Iraq, Syria, Somalia and Uganda to conduct one of their largest scale perception surveys to date. In Syria alone, more than 7,700 community focal points answered questions on how the pandemic was impacting their lives. In Uganda GTS conducted interviews in refugee settlements across 10 regions including a staff survey to hear from those working for International and National NGOs and the Ugandan Government and the Ugandan Red Cross.

Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team received local mapping from 5,000 'mappers' many from vulnerable areas.

The New Humanitarian worked with local and international freelance correspondents, allowing a direct window onto what was happening on the ground.

Shared services established by CartONG through their staff and network of volunteers.

Photo: CartONG

What did we learn?

Work with local correspondents and media organizations

Fondation Hirondelle highlighted the importance of collaborating with local media who are trusted by communities to engage audiences and share verified information with people in their own languages: "Local media organizations are among those suffering from the economic consequences of the pandemic. The funding from H2H not only enabled us to ensure that populations were receiving potentially life-saving information about the virus but helped ensure the survival – and sometimes growth – of local media, who are a lifeline to local communities."

Present solutions as well as problems

Coverage can be used not only as a tool to highlight problems but also to identify solutions. **The New Humanitarian** noted that they took the opportunity to emphasize neglected issues to help find ways to address long-standing problems, such as reducing gang violence and improving social services as part of the Covid-19 response in South Africa, immigration reform in Brazil and opportunities with Kenya's informal economy for a path to recovery.

"Our coverage frequently highlighted local solutions and involvement in the response, for example in Brazil, where community organizations, local officials, and private donors have taken the lead in the response".

Likewise, the programmes supported by **Fondation Hirondelle** aimed to help audiences find coping mechanisms to deal with a wide range of challenges, from mental health issues to financial difficulties.

Reach the most vulnerable and marginalized

Fondation Hirondelle observed that much conventional media coverage of Covid-19 fails to adequately reach those who may be disproportionately affected, such as people with disabilities, women, displaced people, and those in poor, remote areas. Their H2H Network-funded project incorporated an age, gender and diversity lens, by developing special content on topics such as Covid-19 and disabilities; by broadcasting content in languages of at-risk groups, such as refugees; and ensuring coverage of remote areas, for example by providing antennae to help rural audiences access radio content.

Use illustrations

Throughout **ACAPS** Covid-19 response, extra effort was made to improve the accessibility of the analysis through including illustrations and visuals.

"These visuals both garnered attention, thus ensuring a wider audience, as well as helping explain complex analytical concepts, thus ensuring a better absorption of information".
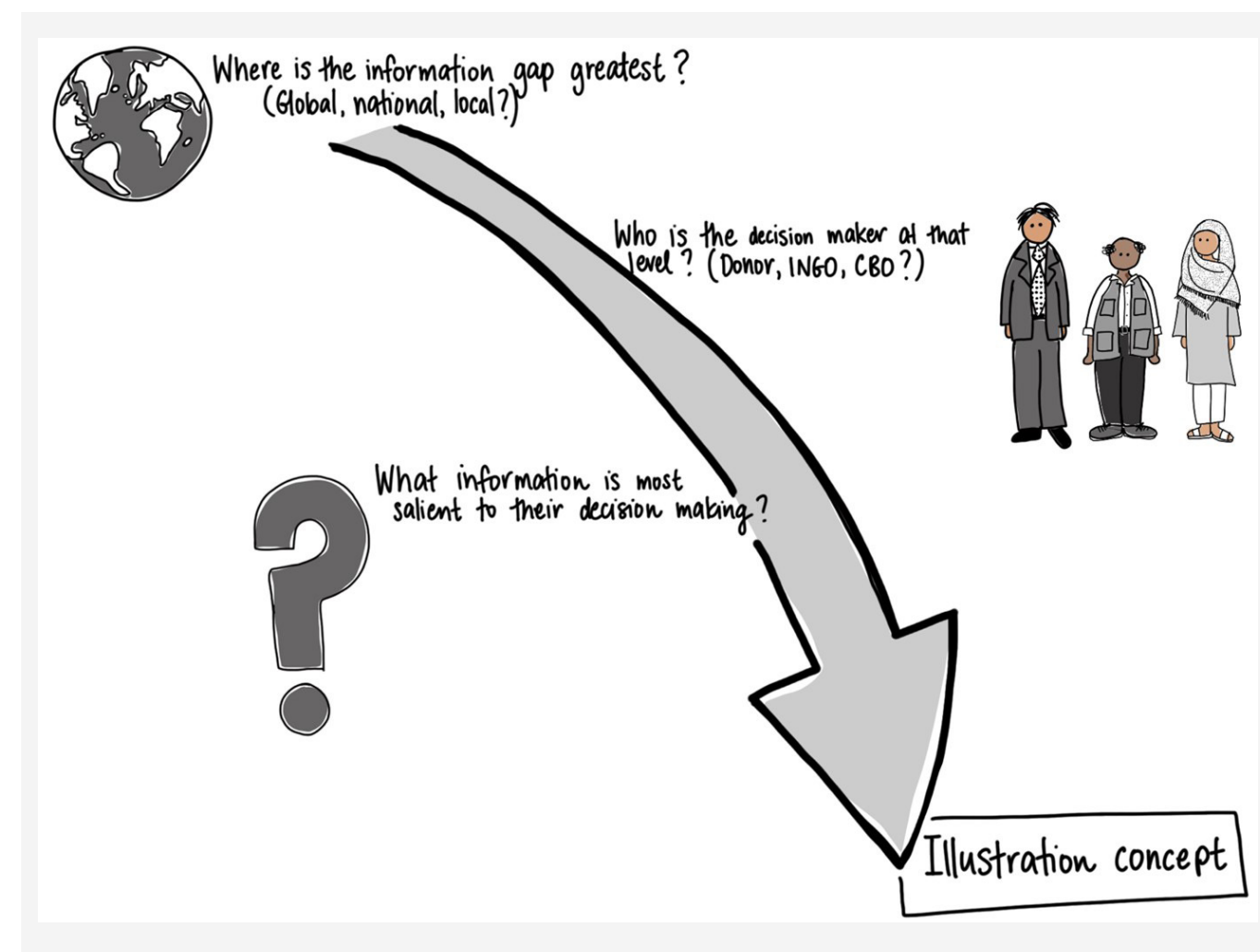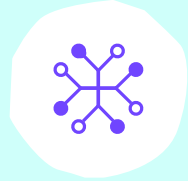
See **ACAPS' case study** for further discussion.

Illustration by:
Sandie Walton-Ellery

3. Coordinate and collaborate

> **"It's great to be part of such a global network and platform, always advocating for coordinating and complementing each other's efforts in order to reach those we serve in the best possible way."**
>
> Humanitarian Academy for Development

> **"Working with the H2H Network through the H2H Fund had many advantages, first is being part of a network of actors with different ways of working but with a common goal: humanitarian response. This potentially allows actors to build bridges and new collaborations in the future. The learning sessions were a helpful way to get to know other agencies better."**
>
> Fondation Hirondelle

> **"Although H2H funds enabled HOT [Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team] to exponentially scale up the reach of its Covid-19 response, from eight countries and a global response planned initially, to 28 countries. Perhaps the most unexpected additional benefit was the networking provided by H2H. It allowed HOT to have better insight into the activities happening in other aspects of the Covid-19 response, and allowed us to identify and build relationships with valuable operational partners (…) We would encourage H2H to double down on these activities, which adds value far and way above just the funding."**
>
> Humanitarian Open Street Map Team

From the outset, coordination and collaboration were top priorities for projects funded under the Global Covid-19 Humanitarian Support Package. Humanitarian-to-humanitarian technical services must – by definition – be used to inform and strengthen wider responses in order to improve quality and impact, so coordination with existing structures and agencies is indispensable.

Collaboration between members within packages is also highly valued and historically central to the H2H approach. It is seen as an important way to reduce duplication and maximize efficiency, with projects within a package "greater than the sum of their parts". Both "docking" and "collaboration between members" are scored highly by the grant panel when allocating H2H Network funds.

H2H Network member collaboration in action
Example from data management and geospatial mapping

CartONG, Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team and MapAction developed a joint project under the Covid 19 II activation. The collaboration was outlined at the proposal stage, but H2H Network funding and support facilitated the process.

"More people want more answers, more impact with less money. It's a necessity to collaborate, to stretch our resources and to expand the expertise and the breadth of our combined efforts."

MapAction

Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team focused on primary data collection. With international travel prohibited, they managed to gather content by working through their global network of over 20,000 volunteers from over 50 countries. Local volunteers uploaded data to OpenStreetMap, then shared back with the CartONG and MapAction teams to create print and digital map products. MapAction provided emergency mapping, information management systems and training for humanitarian field actors (often drawing on HOT data). They established an online Help Desk with a Covid-19 Hub, to meet and prioritize requests from organizations and authorities at global, regional, national and local levels providing analysis, geospatial and data products. CartONG supported humanitarian agencies to adapt their Information Management and monitoring and evaluation systems through training and form design, as well as analytical products such as dashboards and web maps for partners including Médecins sans Frontières and UNHCR.

Key outputs
– **CartONG** published 14 resources, of which 8 were translated into French, aiming to support NGOs to adapt data practices to Covid-10 physical distancing constraints. CartONG also published a joint resource with MapAction: Tips on how to use maps to enhance data during the pandemic[1].
– **MapAction**'s Help Desk delivered a total of 25 remote emergency responses across 6 regions. MapAction works with 75 Geographic Information System and Information Management experts. In their day jobs, these volunteers are geospatial specialists working in a range of fields from Antarctic surveying to zoological research.
– For the **Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team**, Covid-19 is the largest disaster response to date. 20,000+ global volunteers contributed over 4.4 million map features, almost 4 million buildings and over 96,000 kilometres of road.

[1] blog.cartong.org/2020/09/28/simple-informative-visually-coherent-maps-strong-allies-in-pandemic-10-tips-to-deliver/

3. Coordinate and collaborate

Examples:

ACAPS developed data sharing agreements with **Ground Truth Solutions, CartONG, Evidence Aid, Humanitarian Advisory Group,** and the **Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team.** A 'Thematic Series' was produce on Gender, Education and Migration, each including global, regional and crisis-level analysis.

Atlas Logistique collaborated with **CartONG** for guidance in data collection, analysis and representation in the North Kivu region of the Democratic Republic of Congo. CartONG mapped logistics vulnerabilities identified by Atlas Logistique.

CartONG collaborated with H2H members **Translators without Borders** on "Tips on Language for Efficient Data Collection"[1] and also with **Groupe URD** to develop accountability feedback and complaint mechanisms

ACAPS set up the **Humanitarian Experts Network (HEN)** to improve and increase collaboration, particularly with other expert organizations, and humanitarian actors on the ground.

Humanitarian Academy for Development (HAD) added **RedR UK** online courses to their existing resource documents shared with local NGOs. **HAD** also exchanged projects and discussed potential ideas for further collaboration with Insecurity Insight and **CartONG.**

Humanitarian OpenStreetMap (HOT), MapAction and **CartONG** coordinated requests for data collection and analysis from country level responders.

Insecurity Insight worked with **MapAction** to develop a global interactive map platform on attacks on healthcare to support the awareness around the difficult working conditions for health care providers around the globe. The collaboration developed new methods for how to display incidents on a map.

In Zimbabwe and Sudan, the **CDAC Network** was hosted by OCHA while running their H2H Network-funded Covid-19 project. **CDAC Network** routinely work with existing coordination mechanisms in at country level, as well as national governments, supporting access and efficiency. They work closely with 7 UN agencies who are also CDAC members.

Ground Truth Solutions partnered with and secured the services of different agencies in different places. Firstly, in Iraq with support of OCHA and the UNOPS call centre, Uganda through low-cost key informant consultations with networks of community leaders and in Syria where they tested their survey tool with key informants in partnership with IOM. In Somalia they designed their survey in consultation with MESH and REACH to ensure that work complemented ongoing data collection efforts.

[1] blog.cartong.org/2020/09/25/20-language-tips-for-effective-humanitarian-data-collection/

What did we learn?
Collaboration

At the design stage of the Global Covid-19 Humanitarian Support Package, there were high hopes for extensive collaboration between funded members. The call for proposals generated significant interest from across the H2H Network membership, and 14 projects were quickly funded in the network's largest and most diverse portfolio to date.

However, in practice, the diversity, size and speed of the activation all complicated collaboration. Limitations on international travel and successive lockdowns also limited the core team's ability to connect members and facilitate collaboration through face-to-face gatherings and workshops.

The following online activities were put in place by the core team:

- **Kick-off meeting** bringing together the 14 project managers. Introductions were made and formalities explained (Due Diligence Assessments, Sub-grant Agreements, External communications).
- **Online speed dating sessions**, in the form of 15 networking sessions between members funded as part of the package.
- **Group discussions,** framed around cross-cutting themes: Improving information accessibility, Operating from remote, Collaborating for impact in the time of Covid.
- **Covid-19 Skype group channel** to encourage and see regular posting from members sharing their questions, products, events and resources.

"The consistent efforts by H2H, both on the regular calls and through innovative initiatives such as the speed-dating meetings, have been instrumental in giving H2H members a better sense of the activities, opportunities, and challenges amongst different actors within the network. We would encourage H2H to double down on these activities, which adds value far and way above just the funding."

Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team

There were good indications of collaboration between funded members leading to reduced duplication and added value. However, and unsurprisingly, the impact of collaboration is difficult to measure. Initiating new and effective collaboration typically takes time, and on many occasions the H2H Network played the role of incubator or catalyst for collaborations that were already in place or would have taken place anyway.

Coordinate and collaborate

Meaningful and effective collaboration rarely happens overnight, but rather by agencies gradually getting to know each other – becoming familiar with each other and each other's specific skillset.

"The intention to collaborate within the H2H Network created an atmosphere of openness among several member agencies, resulting in more informal interactions and discussions related to common interests and themes (…) it has helped to build relationships within the membership for future collaboration."

ACAPS

Collaboration is a tool, not an end goal – the H2H Network should focus on the quality of collaboration rather than the quantity.

"[…] many H2H agencies fill particular niches and partnerships should be chosen for quality rather than quantity […] even more collaborative efforts could be in place, using the H2H Network platform but also driven by the members. This could be reflected in the clear incentives for consortia applying for activations."

Ground Truth Solutions

H2H Network members differ by sector, service, expertise, intervention modalities, intended users and expected impact. We learned that there is no need to force collaboration between members where there is no clear added value, and that collaboration in and of itself is not a goal. However, when collaboration results in increased efficiency, impact and/or accountability, then it remains a useful and promising way of working for H2H actors.
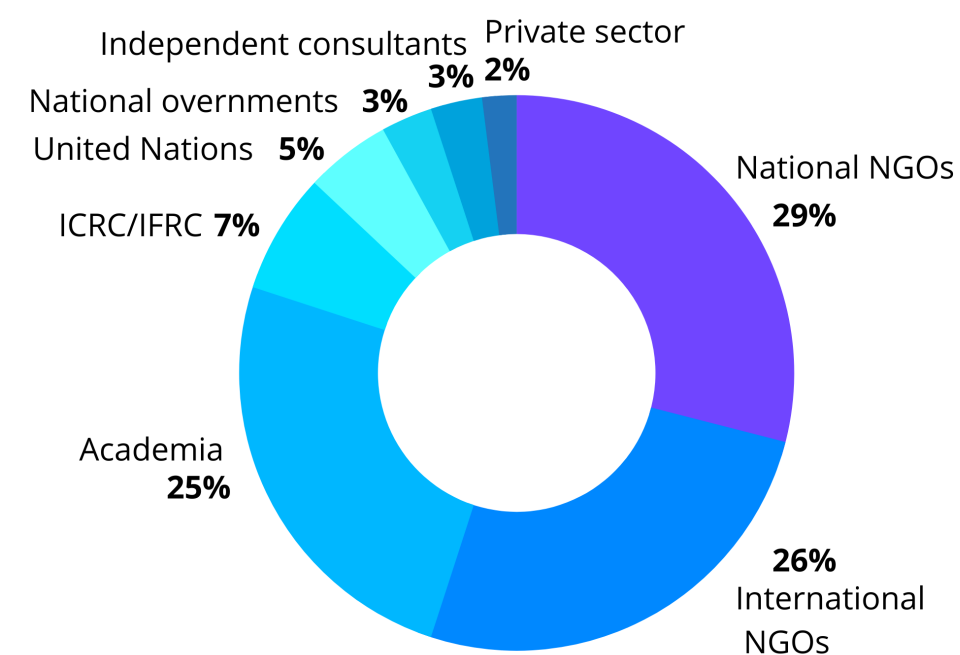
Coordination

Many H2H Network members reported coordination with UN agencies, local, national and international NGOs, and national governments. Members also reported coordinating activities through the cluster system, as an important way of reducing duplication and building awareness of H2H services on offer.

Members funded under the H2H Network Global Covid-19 Humanitarian Support Package reported some challenges around coordination: around the ongoing need to build awareness of and market for H2H services, and also specific challenges arising from Covid-19 restrictions.

Uptake and awareness[1]

Users of the H2H services came from across the humanitarian system:

Independent consultants
Private sector **2%**
National overnments **3%** **3%**
United Nations **5%**
ICRC/IFRC **7%**
National NGOs **29%**
Academia **25%**
26% International NGOs

Users primarily heard about the H2H service through member agencies' direct communications.
- **31%** were informed through their professional network (cluster coordination meetings, previous contacts)
- **27%** of respondents were informed through members' communications (email, newsletter, social media.)
- **18%** followed a recommendation (HQ, partner, colleague, friend)
- **8%** found the service with an internet search
- **7%** did not provide a response/or a valid response

About half of respondents were already familiar with the service they were using:
- **52%** of respondents were using the H2H service for the first time
- **48%** were already familiar with the service

H2H Network members spoke of using existing networks, platforms and contacts to disseminate tools, products and services, reaching larger numbers of humanitarian decision-makers and responders.

[1] H2H Network Global Covid-19 Humanitarian Support Package, After Action Review, April 2021.

3.

Coordinate and collaborate

Examples:

Insecurity Insight participated in a webinar with the International Federation of Medical Students Associations (IFMSA) on the violence against health care providers in the context of Covid-19. The webinar was attended by over 200 medical students from 53 countries.

Evidence Aid was publicly acknowledged as a source of evidence by WHO Information and Libraries service; they have an MoU in place with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and an acknowledgement that their library is used to inform their Covid-19 guidance. The Evidence Aid Library is also being used to inform global public health advice given out across the IFRC. At the national level, Evidence Aid resources were used by the governments of Ethiopia and Mozambique (via Irish Aid).

Across Africa, **Ground Truth Solutions** are partnering with the IFRC to track community volunteers perceptions on the pandemic. Applying lessons learned during this project, GTS have tailored their approach to unearth the most actionable findings for the Red Cross and Red Crescent. Into 2021 most of their survey work will shift from the more health-centric focus to themes related to economic impact and effectiveness, reflecting communities' top priorities.

The New Humanitarian made a conscious effort to actively engage with audiences that were already accessing their work as well as influencers, organizations and other stakeholders. For example, they reached out to key humanitarians, journalists and analysts in Yemen to share their award-winning Yemeni doctor's diary [1].

Members observed that Covid-19 travel restrictions made awareness raising and dissemination of services, tools and products especially difficult.

Previous H2H Network service packages have been designed around needs in a defined crisis zone, and a member of the core team has deployed to promote awareness and uptake of services. By contrast, the Global Covid-19 Humanitarian Support Package had no specific geographical scope, since the pandemic was affecting every country simultaneously, and no one could have deployed in any case due to travel restrictions. This meant that services had to be disseminated virtually, typically requiring more time and effort.

Members also noted challenges around "persuading established humanitarian actors to 'try something new'", amidst the operational challenges and pandemic-related restrictions.

The H2H approach – independent humanitarian agencies providing cross-cutting, open source technical services to support and strengthen responses – is still a relatively new way of working, and a category innovation for the humanitarian system. **There is an ongoing need to understand H2H service users and build the market: who users are, what they need and how they access services.**

[1] How coronavirus hit Aden: A Yemeni doctor's diary: thenewhumanitarian.org/special-report/2020/07/07/coronavirus-aden-yemen-doctor-diary

4. Adapting and innovating

Events in 2020 forced the entire humanitarian sector to rethink, rework and adapt tried-and-tested ways of working. Covid-19 has led to a wide range of measures affecting project implementation in many countries, including lockdowns, curfews, and significant restrictions to movement and gatherings. This has been accompanied by high levels of uncertainty and constant change, making planning and response even more challenging. As a result, H2H Network members had to adapt ways of working in various ways and above all have had to be more flexible.

In focus: Remote training

Quality and sector professionalization -- including organizational development, capacity building and training, policy and standard setting -- is a major H2H category. These areas of work are good examples of the kind of cross-cutting, sector-wide activities that are typically entrusted to the small, independent and specialized organizations that make up the H2H Network.

In many contexts, H2H Network members switched to remote training techniques, or to a combination of face-to-face and remote approaches, by necessity. Members often had pre-existing experience with online platforms and training techniques; nonetheless, adapting materials, schedules and approaches in a short timeframe was a steep learning curve.

Remote training examples:

CartONG coached and trained 190 international and national staff through remote webinars for staff responsible for Monitoring and Evaluation and Information Management.

CDAC Network provided communication, community engagement and accountability technical support to existing National Platforms and mobilized 25 coordinators to strengthen capacity using adapted CDAC training materials.

Fondation Hirondelle and partners trained dozens of journalists on fact-checking, communication around Covid-19 and mobile journalism. They also provided ongoing mentoring and editorial advisory support.

Humanitarian Academy for Development (HAD) carried out 117 training courses: 335 staff member completed mentoring / training courses (27 NGOs, 17 mentors, in 3 countries – Iraq, Syria and Yemen).

RedR UK ran 143 courses for 3000 people from 91 countries using 11 short online modules for Covid-19 designed and delivered in English and Arabic. They trained a total of 2,344 people from over 800 organizations via online interactive modules.

RedR UK also carried out four blended two-day training courses designed and delivered to 93 medical staff directly responding to Covid-19 in North-West Syria. 272 non-medical staff, also in North-West Syria, received training on psychological first aid and Covid-19 prevention.

Sphere facilitated 7 multi-language webinars on humanitarian standards and their application to the Covid-19 response with 1,500 humanitarian participants.

Adapting and innovating

What did we learn?

'Learning by doing' is essential, and remote training should not be passive

Humanitarian Academy for Development (HAD) have been providing training courses on business continuity for humanitarian professionals in Syria, Iraq and Yemen to support local NGOs. Rather than traditional classroom-style training they used a 'learning by doing' approach with mentors who worked very closely with the local NGOs to develop tailored processes, plans and policies within their organizations, such as financial or HR planning, fundraising strategy or safeguarding policies.
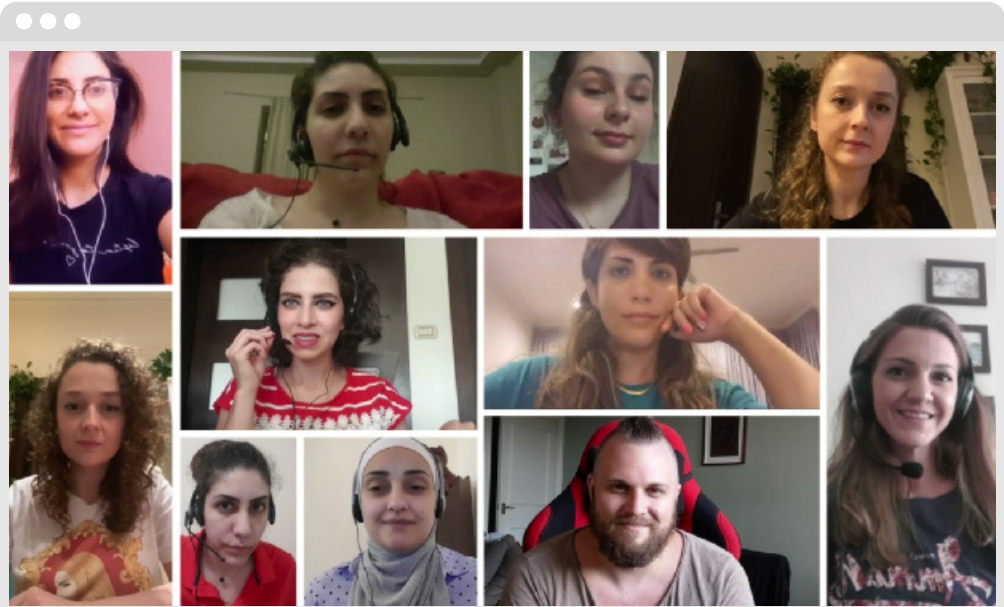
In the Covid-19 response for MENA, RedR UK designed 11 online training courses to address these specific challenges.

Photo: RedR UK

Speakers and trainers should be diverse, and experienced

Sphere webinars included contributions from community members, local aid workers and other first responders working at local level. "Listening directly to local voices (local humanitarian actors in Spheres training sessions) was considered as a major benefit as their experiences were perceived as authentic, describing local realities and providing perspectives that often are not included in learning events of this kind." **(Sphere)**

IT management and use of technology

Importance of careful IT setup was emphasized by several members, including participant registration, screening requirements and in-session interaction control for 'Zoom calls with multiple people'. **Sphere** noted that careful management meant that there were no 'hacking' episodes throughout their webinar series

Use relevant materials and use of case studies

RedR UK noted that their material development process included an 'inclusion audit' to make sure that case studies, photographs, and role plays were representative of a wide range of perspectives. Accessible fonts, colours, and text placements were used in key messages and PowerPoint slides so that learning materials were fully accessible to people with learning difficulties. Sphere used case studies from the particular region/ country in question.

Adapt monitoring and evaluation activities

RedR UK noted that their ongoing monitoring and evaluation was conducted through surveys and feedback forms. This data was used to inform additional modules and updates to existing modules in line with evolving guidance and in response to changes in context. All RedR UK participants were offered an HPass Badge at the end of the course, a digital indicator of achievement, and a way for participants to demonstrate their skills and experience.

4. Adapting and innovating

In focus: Remote data collection

"A 'silver lining' we've noted from the pandemic is the way in which various agencies have banded together to try to share lessons learned and streamline data collection processes. An inability to travel to data collection sites made verification more difficult. More attention had to be paid to data quality checks, which were made possible by online data processing formats, but were time consuming. We focused heavily on health, but soon learned that people's major concerns were economic, or related to the ongoing sustainability of the response. This project and its wealth of lessons have encouraged us to shake up our methods overall, focusing more on contextualized, creative approaches and planning for a future in which travel is no longer the norm."

Ground Truth Solutions

Data to plan a humanitarian response to Covid-19 was required from some of the most 'hard to reach' communities. An estimated 1 billion people live in places that are partially or completely unmapped, hindering the ability of local and national governments to anticipate and respond to needs, including testing, treatment, and contact tracing.

Escalating travel restrictions complicated data collection and international operators were forced to rely even more heavily on local networks and local responders. Despite frustrations associated with operating from remote (endless zoom calls, internet outage and time consuming conversations) H2H Network members described opportunities and innovations, such as greater local capacity development, a focus on sustainability for local providers, a more equal South/ North information input together with reduced travel costs and environmental footprint.

Remote data collection examples:

Ground Truth Solutions (GTS) partnered with a variety of organizations in Bangladesh, Iraq, Syria, Somalia and Uganda to conduct one of their largest scale perception surveys to date. In Syria alone, more than 7,700 community focal points answered questions on how the pandemic was impacting their lives. In Uganda GTS conducted interviews in refugee settlements across 10 regions including a staff survey to hear from those working for International and National NGOs and the Ugandan Government and the Ugandan Red Cross.

As part of their H2H Network-funded Covid-19 project, **Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team** received local mapping from 5,000 'mappers' many from vulnerable areas, citizens of the countries working at the very local level.

Insecurity Insight received data management support from three US universities: Berkeley, Drexel University and John Hopkins University to ensure fast processing and data and expand outreach.

4. Adapting and innovating

What did we learn?

Respecting standard protection procedures around informed consent and confidentiality

Ground Truth Solutions (GTS) notes that although they did not engage in person with any affected individuals they "facilitated thousands of conversations with them and although this was done remotely they made sure that they respected standard protection procedures including informed consent and confidentiality". The enumerators working with GTS were trained in protection procedures: in the introduction to calls, the enumerator told the participant that the purpose of the survey was an independent response performance monitoring/research, and that participation was voluntary and not linked to targeting criteria or an individual's ongoing aid provision. Participants were informed that they could stop the interview at any time. They were also advised that they could ask for the data collected to be deleted at any point (and were given simple instructions as to how to request this). In each context, referral pathways were set up to ensure that protection concerns or emergency situations raised during calls were adequately handled.

Adapt timescale and pace

Working remotely takes a lot of time. **CDAC Network** feedback suggests that a lot of communication work is informal. "Deploying soft skills, it's the lubricant that makes everything run (smoothly) – and now that everyone is working remotely so much more effort is required (...) Plan ahead, be concise and clear with required local staff and volunteers and with 'information gatherers' on the ground." **Ground Truth Solutions** notes that one of the biggest lessons they learned during the Covid projects was "how much effort and investment it can take when working largely remotely... relating to everything from trustworthy sampling strategies to finding the right partners, to countering and understanding biases, to analysis".

Grow and maintain a network of volunteers

MapAction has 75 Geographic Information System (GIS) and Information Management (IM) experts. In their day jobs, these volunteers are geospatial specialists working in a range of fields from Antarctic surveying to zoological research. Volunteers join MapAction as part of a team ready to be deployed at very short notice anywhere in the world, or to provide more longer term GIS/ IM support and expertise on ongoing projects. Over 20,000 volunteers from HOT participated in the Covid-19 response.

Be ready to adapt data collection methodology, and to learn from past pandemics

Ground Truth Solutions (GTS) had to adapt their methodology to fit the Covid-19 context. Their large perceptions-tracking project covering Bangladesh Iraq, Somalia, Syria and Uganda, feeds country-level findings into global analysis. GTS used their experience and knowledge from the Ebola crisis to link evolving perceptions to response decisions. Using a combination of phone outreach, online surveys and key informant interviews (KIIs) they worked remotely with local coordinators and agencies to

a. track the views of citizens and frontline workers at regular intervals on issues related to information provision;
b. trust (in responders and response effectiveness);
c. behaviours (inhibiting and motivating factors);
d. economic impact (ability to meet basic needs).

Regular dialogue with responders on the findings together with content from their tracking allowed them to produce periodic perceptions snapshots in areas impacted by the pandemic. These perceptions were then used in targeted communication and advocacy products.

Share learning and good practice continuously activities

CartONG specializes in Information Management. They act as a multidisciplinary resource and expertise center producing documentation, building capacities and raising awareness on the technical, strategic and ethical challenges of digital technologies. In this project they developed a variety of briefing documents on how to adapt data collection activities to the Covid-19 context. They also put services and training in place for local staff and volunteers.

Photo: CartONG

Conclusion

This report has documented and discussed promising practices and lessons earned from the programming that the H2H Network supported in the context of the Global Covid-19 Humanitarian Support package. It aims to generate learning that can inform future pandemic and crisis responses, and deepen understanding of the specific role of humanitarian-to-humanitarian support within the wider humanitarian system.

The following summarizes lessons learned from the 14 H2H Network projects funded as part of this package:

As typically small and innovative humanitarian organizations without large reserves, members valued H2H Network's rapid response to the Covid-19 pandemic, together with the speed and timeliness of the fund. Both were identified as important enabling tools supporting members to mobilize quickly.

The Global Covid-19 Humanitarian Support Package drove consolidation and improvement of the fund's grant making and administrative processes, and the capacity of the core team. There is still room for improvement.

At the project level, Covid-19 restrictions delayed implementation in many ways, requiring flexibility, altered timelines and no cost extensions to grants. Both funded members and H2H as a donor had to adapt plans on multiple occasions.

During the pandemic, close relationships with local partners, pre-existing contacts and presence within communities were more important than ever. Members and service users reported advantages to the H2H way of working as supporting flexibility and adaptation at a time of unprecedented disruption.

Important and promising examples of collaboration between H2H Network members emerged as with the Covid-19 Humanitarian Support Package, effectively reducing duplication and maximizing efficiency. However, the diversity of the grant portfolio, the size and speed of the activation all complicated collaboration. Limitations on travel and successive lockdowns also presented challenges, making it more difficult for the core team to facilitate collaboration through face-to-face gatherings and workshops.

The H2H Network's experience with this package of services highlighted the need for members to become familiar with each other and each other's specific skillset ahead of an activation. This insight will inform the network development strategy.

H2H Network members reported coordination with UN agencies, local, national and international NGOs, and national governments. Members also reported coordinating activities through the cluster system, as an important way of reducing duplication and building awareness of H2H services on offer.

Members highlighted challenges around coordination. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, services often had to be disseminated virtually, typically requiring more time and effort. Members also noted challenges around "persuading established humanitarian actors to 'try something new'", amidst the operational challenges and pandemic-related restrictions.

Project implementation was adapted in various ways. The switch to remote programming modalities has presented new challenges and opportunities, and H2H members quickly built and shared new practices around remote training and remote data collection.

Finally, learning from the H2H Network Global Covid-19 Humanitarian Support Package shows that the H2H approach – independent humanitarian agencies providing cross-cutting, open-source technical services to support and strengthen responses – is still a relatively new way of working, and a category innovation for the humanitarian system. There is an ongoing need to understand H2H service users and build the market: who users are, what they need and how they access services.

The H2H Network remains dedicated to strengthening and supporting members with ongoing advocacy, funding, opportunities for collaboration and learning.

We are catalysts for change.

We provide an effective and efficient humanitarian response to better serve people affected by crisis.

What we do

At H2H Network, we assess humanitarian crises to define the type of response needed. We then co-ordinate specific Network members to quickly provide relevant services to the humanitarian crisis.

All services to are available to all Network members. During an activation, these services are available at no cost.

The Network

Our Network consists of independent, high-quality organisations or service providers that collectively support humanitarian response in the following categories:

– Community engagement and accountability
– Data and information
– Quality and sector professionalisation
– Security, logistics and programme support.

Speak with us!

Reach out to H2H Network for direct contacts and to request other services from H2H Network members at h2hnetwork.org or email info@h2hnetwork.org.