



EVALUATION OF INNOVATION AT THE ICRC 2018-2023

FULL EVALUATION REPORT

December 2023

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AI	Artificial Intelligence	IFT	Innovation Facilitation Team
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action	IHL	International Humanitarian Law
CHF	Swiss Franc	IMaP	ICRC Management Program
CONICET	National Scientific and Technical Research Council - Argentina	INSA	Institut National des sciences appliquees
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease	IT	Information Technology
Comms	Communications	KPI	Key Performance Indicators
DAC	Development Assistance Committee	L&D	Learning and Development
DG	Director General	NAME	North Africa and Middle East
DTD	Digital Transformation and Data department	OECD	The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
EcoSec	Economic Security	PfR	Planning for Results
EODG	Executive Office of the Director General	PMO	Project Management Office
EPFL	Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne	RFL	Restoring Family Links
EQ	Evaluation question	RFP	Request for Proposals
ERCM	Electronic Red Cross Message	RPA	Robotic Process Automation
ETHZ	Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich	SDT	Support and Digital Transformation Division
FAQ	Frequently asked question	SF	Strategic Foresight
FTE	Full time equivalent	SFI	Strategic Foresight Initiative
HQ	Headquarters	TRAK	Trends, Reputation, Analysis and Knowledge team
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross	UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
		VR	Virtual Reality
		VRU	Virtual Reality unit
		WatHab	Water and Habitat

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1. INTRODUCTION

1. Innovation offers a break from the status quo; a rationale to allocate space, time, and resources to new ways of thinking and working. At the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), a dedicated innovation effort was launched in 2014 and then formalized through a Directorate Resolution in 2017. Several principles were defined, including that it should focus on accelerating the ICRC's adaptation to the needs of people affected by conflict and that it should be a distributed and shared responsibility¹. An Innovation Facilitation Team (IFT) was established with a Board, staff, and budget.
2. The ICRC commissioned an evaluation of the IFT and its overall approach in July 2023. Situated within the broader humanitarian innovation environment, the ICRC Strategy 2019-2024², and the current organizational context, the evaluation takes stock of the IFT's journey so far. It focuses on the period from January 2018 to June 2023 and considers the key areas of relevance, effectiveness, impact, and lessons learned. It outlines how the ICRC's future innovation work should respond to the organization's needs, bearing in mind the positioning and value proposition of innovation within the Executive Office of the Director General (EODG).
3. The primary audiences for this evaluation are the IFT, the Inno Board, and the ICRC's many innovators. The report was intended to inform their work and the direction of the next iteration of innovation at the ICRC. The Board and IFT defined the purpose and objectives of the evaluation and commented on the preliminary findings and recommendation areas. The evaluation findings were also presented to a wider group of ICRC stakeholders during evaluation week in December 2023.

1.1 INNOVATION AT THE ICRC

4. The IFT is a team of 4.5 FTE (full-time equivalent) staff (plus 1-3 consultants at different times) with an annual budget of 3 million CHF per year. It sits within the ICRC's Institutional Strategy and Organizational Development³ pillar within the EODG. It is governed by the Innovation Board, which is chaired by the Director General and includes five other high-level strategic staff members. The "Inno Board" meets quarterly for updates and sign-off on key funding decisions.
5. The 2017 Directorate Resolution defined three overarching aims for innovation: to promote a culture of innovation, to support "bottom-up" initiatives, and to drive "top-down" innovation targeted at strategic challenges. The evaluation scope extends across these activities:

Building a culture of innovation

6. Under this pillar, the team delivered global events called InspiRED Days, a dedicated session on innovation as part of the ICRC Management Program (IMaP), external innovation courses for managers, and brown-bag lunches on relevant multidisciplinary topics.
7. The IFT also launched a Strategic Foresight Initiative (SFI) as a key focus and methodology in August 2021. Staff could engage with the SFI through online training, 'futures analysis' workshops tailored to distinct themes and teams, or the flagship Strategic Foresight (SF) Forum, a week-long training and foresight exercise.

Bottom-up initiatives

8. Since 2018, the IFT has provided seed funding and technical support to teams wanting to develop a proof of concept for a new idea or an improvement on existing work. This pillar involved funding for innovation initiatives in both the field and Headquarters.
9. From 2020, an annual call for ideas sourced projects from across the organization aligned with three thematic areas:

- environment and conflict,
 - modern and future warfare,
 - urban pressures and protracted needs,
 - plus an 'x-file' for initiatives that fell outside these thematic areas.
10. In 2021, a series of regional Climate and Conflict Challenges was launched to support climate adaptation of conflict-affected communities region by region. The challenges aimed to bring innovation deeper into departments and closer to field operations.
 11. The IFT also invested in bottom-up initiatives outside of Challenges. The team provided funding (on average 65,000 CHF per initiative) as well as bespoke support that included brainstorming, championing, and making introductions and linkages. An IFT staff member positioned 50% in the IFT and 50% in the Support and Digital Transformation (SDT) Directorate helped facilitate the incorporation of digital initiatives.

Top-down challenges

12. The IFT also supported initiatives that were 'building blocks' for larger transformations in Energy, Virtual Reality, Digital Health, and most recently Generative AI. These were all domains that were owned by multiple parts of the organization, where the IFT provided tailored support designed to advance innovation. The support included:
 - Funding key staff members
 - Funding specific initiatives within these domains
 - Convening staff around key issues such as Intellectual Property issues
 - Producing written outputs related to top-down challenges, notably the Tech Horizon Scan for the SDT Directorate

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 OBJECTIVES

13. This evaluation was commissioned with two objectives:
 - **Assess internal organizational change as a result of the IFT's approach.** The evaluation team identified the barriers and enablers to innovation adoption and implementation, such as organizational culture, resources, leadership, and external factors. The evaluation team sought to gather perspectives from different levels including senior leadership, HQ, and field staff.
 - **Identify the opportunities and needs within the ICRC that can guide the drafting of strategic orientations for the next innovation approach.** The evaluation provided a comprehensive understanding of the current innovative landscape achieved so far within the ICRC. The evaluation team conducted analysis to gain insights into how to optimize the ICRC's current innovation approach. The evaluation drew on the findings to issue a set of actionable recommendations that will support the design of the next iteration of innovation at the ICRC.
14. The emphasis was on both learning and strategic positioning. The Request for Proposals (RFP) (see Annex 1) highlighted that an element of accountability was included to document the ICRC's investments, but accountability did not form the primary purpose of the evaluation. It aimed to learn from past experience as well as to directly inform future plans.
15. An evaluation framework was developed during the inception phase, including four evaluation questions, with sub-questions and sources of evidence that were consulted for each (see Annex 7). The overarching questions were:
 - How **relevant** was the innovation approach for the ICRC? Is it still relevant?
 - How **effective** has the innovation approach been in achieving its objectives?
 - What **preliminary impact** can be observed within the ICRC as a result of the innovation approach since its implementation?
 - What **lessons have been learned** from the successes, challenges, and opportunities experienced by the Innovation Facilitation Team?
16. The evaluation sub-questions were both summative (based on experiences, achievements, and lessons learned) and formative (to draw out a set of actionable recommendations). Minor amendments and clarifications to sub-questions were made during the inception phase.
17. The first three evaluation questions were based on the OECD DAC and ALNAP evaluation criteria of Relevance, Effectiveness, and Impact⁴. The definitions (provided in the RFP and outlined in Annex 7) were adapted from the original criteria to encompass the processes, relationships, and capabilities needed for innovation. The fourth question drew out lessons learned and best practices that fed into actionable recommendations.
18. We saw through the evaluation that innovation means many different things to different people. We used the 2017 Directorate Resolution as our basis for exploring the strategic approach and priorities of the IFT. We also held a series of discussions with the IFT to draw out the objectives of the team. The aim was not to provide a formal theory of change for the IFT but rather to document a set of ambitions that have guided the team's work and the rationale behind them.

2.2 METHODOLOGY

19. The evaluation followed a mixed-methods approach to explore the IFT's relevance, effectiveness, impact, and learning. The evaluation was non-experimental, based on mixed analytical methods including case studies, thematic analysis of the interview data, and outcome reviews. Data was collected through multiple methods. The evaluation design was similar to other evaluations of humanitarian innovation and was selected because it was flexible, relatively rapid, able to answer different types of evaluation questions, and did not require significant baseline data.
20. The evaluation consisted of an inception phase, data collection, analysis, and writing and feedback. These are described in Annex 8 with key elements of the data collection and analysis summarized here:
 - **Documents:** The desk research included 51 documents on the Innovation board, strategy, approach, and team activities as well as 106 project submission forms as outlined in Annex 9. The review was used to substantiate and validate findings against existing records and to triangulate data from other sources.
 - **Interviews:** We purposively sampled 61 interviewees including the Board, team, innovators, senior leaders, and external actors, providing a wide range of perspectives on the evaluation questions. An informed consent process was implemented.
 - **Surveys:** 23 initiative leads responded to a brief survey, reporting on 31 different initiatives. The survey questions explored innovators' understanding of the objectives, the support received from IFT, their achievements, experiences, and future plans.
 - **Team discussions:** A series of four in-person team discussions were held with the IFT, focused on critical turning points in the IFT's history, the objectives for innovation, barriers to innovation within the ICRC, and alternative models for structuring innovation.
 - **Meta-analysis:** Available data on the 128 funded initiatives was compiled into a table including information on the project, dates, funding, locations, and outcomes.
 - **Capturing change:** A process for capturing impact (or "changes") was adapted from an outcome-harvesting methodology. Changes were identified through the desk review and through capturing change questions in interviews. The task was to explore the changes that had occurred at different levels and how the IFT contributed to those changes.
 - **Deep dives:** Nine initiatives were selected for analysis of their achievements, barriers, and impact. The deep dives were: Strategic foresight initiatives, Virtual reality, Energy challenge, Digital Cyber Emblem, North Africa and Middle East (NAME) Climate and conflict challenge, Electronic Red Cross Message (ERCM), Complex Networks to Identify Missing Persons, Autonomous RFL Services in Deportation, and Conflict and Climate Resilience in Niger. Summary reports were developed to answer each of the evaluation questions.
 - **Analysis and reporting:** Interviews were transcribed and all data was coded against the evaluation sub-questions. Detailed tables of the team's goals, barriers to innovation, and alternative models for innovation were produced. The evaluation team used rubrics to provide a clear link between the findings and the evaluation conclusions. Emerging findings were presented to the IFT and Inno Board, to elicit feedback and support for recommendations. The findings were presented in a draft report and the IFT and Evaluation Office provided two rounds of comments and suggested amendments. This document is a final version based on their feedback.

2.3 ETHICS

21. During the study's inception, we developed a detailed risk assessment that outlined methodological risks such as bias, ethical considerations such as confidentiality and safeguarding, and contextual risks such as evaluation use. We developed mitigating strategies to foster a more robust and trustworthy process.

2.4 LIMITATIONS

22. Innovation involves complex processes where change happens in fits and starts and where there may be very little visible impact for long periods. These things make evaluating innovation difficult. We worked closely with the IFT through the evaluation to understand their underlying questions and their definitions of success. We triangulated findings based on multiple data sources. We drew on the IFT's documents, but where data on performance was limited we augmented it with survey responses, interview data, and our own analysis of the position of the IFT. Limitations of the methodology are outlined in Annex 8, including the absence of a theory of change, possible interview selection biases, and the short amount of time that has passed since some initiatives were implemented.

2.5 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

23. The evaluation report is organized around the four evaluation questions. Chapter 3 explores how relevant the innovation approach was to the ICRC and the adjustments that should be made for future relevance. In Chapter 4, we consider the extent to which the IFT met its objectives, the barriers to effective innovation, and how they have been addressed. Chapter 5 turns to the question of impact, and outlines the IFT's contributions to new thinking, tools, and approaches. Finally, Chapter 6 provides conclusions and recommendations for the future.
24. Eleven annexes are provided, which include:
 - ANNEX 1: TERMS OF REFERENCE
 - ANNEX 2: AREAS FOR INNOVATION
 - ANNEX 3: INVESTMENT CRITERIA
 - ANNEX 4: SUMMARY OF BARRIERS AND STRATEGIES
 - ANNEX 5: DEEP DIVES
 - ANNEX 6: MODELS OF INNOVATION IN THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR
 - ANNEX 7: EVALUATION FRAMEWORK
 - ANNEX 8: FULL METHODOLOGY
 - ANNEX 9: LIST OF DOCUMENTS
 - ANNEX 10: LIST OF INTERVIEWS
 - ANNEX 11. LIST OF INITIATIVES
25. The report has been structured to meet the requirements of the ICRC Evaluation Report Quality Checklist.

3. RELEVANCE

This section addresses the relevance of the IFT, exploring the purpose of innovation, how the approach has developed over the past five years, and the extent to which the direction was adapted to changing contextual factors.

To what extent has the organization experienced innovation in the past 5 years?

26. The ICRC has a long history of innovating in response to challenges and constraints. A rich array of innovations has been implemented across the organization. While it was far beyond the scope of this evaluation to enumerate all the innovative projects within the ICRC, the interviews unearthed examples from robotic process automation (RPA) for expense processing, to platforms for south-south knowledge exchange on de-mining, to makeshift approaches to building bricks or harvesting rainwater in very remote settings.
27. Innovation happened across multiple directorates, metiers, and delegations. However, these were largely ‘isolated islands of innovation’ with few structures to link, organize, and upscale the solutions. Because of this, it depended on where participants sat within the organization as to whether they felt the ICRC had a culture of innovation or not. Innovation breeds innovation, and innovators can affect the working culture around them. However, interviews illustrated that an innovative team alone wasn’t sufficient to enable new ideas to influence the wider organization. For example, the RPA currently used for expense processing has potential applications all across the institution but isn’t known. Financial and organizational constraints made it difficult to share work outside of silos.
28. Within this context, the IFT was set up as a result of a donor’s interest in supporting innovation-led and managed from the ICRC Headquarters. This led to multi-year funding for a team located within the Executive Office of the Director General (EODG). The IFT received funding from a single donor allowing it to provide flexible support for innovation outside of the ICRC’s annual Planning for Results (PfR) cycle. The flexibility of funding was a notable strength of the IFT and sets it apart from many other humanitarian innovation initiatives.
29. Almost unanimously, evaluation participants described innovation as an important capability for the ICRC. The IFT boasted a strong internal reputation and fostered a wide network of relationships throughout the organization. Their approach was to be led by the priorities and interests of innovators, looking for opportunities to add value. This included convening people across the ICRC around relevant topics of interest, such as Intellectual Property and Generative AI.
30. The initial 2017 Strategic Resolution came from the Director General and described an ambition to foster a culture of innovation and to support bottom-up and top-down initiatives. The IFT maintained this tripartite focus throughout. Figure 1 illustrates its spending on initiatives over the evaluation period, which included:
 - The **Strategic Foresight (SF) Initiative**, aimed to build foresight capabilities and foster future thinking. A growing body of literature demonstrates that SF can contribute to organizational flexibility and learning in the face of uncertainty⁵. Evaluation participants emphasized that SF could help address the need for better mid-term planning, improved decision-making, and strategic thinking within the organization. The Strategic Foresight Forum has trained participants from across the Directorates and from 76 different locations. Participants from delegations in particular emphasized the training as a unique learning opportunity. However, they also expressed frustration that there was no clear pathway linking the outcomes of foresight exercises to formal strategy development processes, something the IFT did not see as part of their original intent.
 - Supporting **incremental innovations**, from a diverse array of teams across the organization. These included both technical innovations such as AI-enabled approaches to identifying minefields and non-technical innovations such as building community resilience to conflict and climate change in Niger. The recent Regional Climate and Conflict Challenges encouraged transversal approaches that brought together people from delegations and metiers.

- Investing in **'building blocks' for larger transformations** including in Energy, Digital Health, Virtual Reality, and Generative AI. These were sometimes very territorial spaces and the team emphasized an intention to provide staff time and support, fund proofs of concept, and champion progress but not to "own" areas of work. These initiatives were all grounded in research to establish an understanding of the potential solutions and how they would be relevant to the ICRC. Respondents described how the IFT encouraged partnerships with the academic world.
- The IFT had an open call for ideas each year but largely sourced its initiatives more informally, identifying potential for innovation across the organization, making decisions on the appropriate balance of investments, and judgments about how to balance different types of opportunity and risk. The current Head of Innovation played a particularly important role in this, identifying potential initiatives across the organization often through personal connections and informal discussions over weeks or months. This role was important given the limited number of projects identified through the annual call for ideas.
 - The priority was developing a proof of concept for innovation initiatives. The innovation teams described how they were coached in developing a 'hypothesis' and a thorough plan for testing. There were examples of the hypotheses being proved (for example, the development of a digital emblem) and disproved (for example, in the design of better body bags), which illustrates a level of risk-taking in the choice of initiatives. Many of the innovators described the IFT's contribution to developing a proof of concept for their ideas as critical, and this is explored more under Objectives (Section 4.1).
 - Innovation is rooted in new ideas, and this introduces an inherent acceptance of failure and a risk of unintended consequences. There were instances where the team took considered risks, with several projects debunking their initial hypotheses. This didn't necessarily mean the failure of the entire idea. Where the core objective was problem-solving, failures sometimes served as sources of learning. The experience of the Better Body Bag initiative exemplified this, illustrating how learning from setbacks could inform and enhance future iterations of the team's work. However, several evaluation participants spoke of a prevailing hesitancy, driven by an organizational culture that does not embrace failure and by personal concerns about how initiative failures might impact their careers. Establishing a culture of innovation required the IFT to collectively shift toward embracing the reality that not every endeavor would succeed.

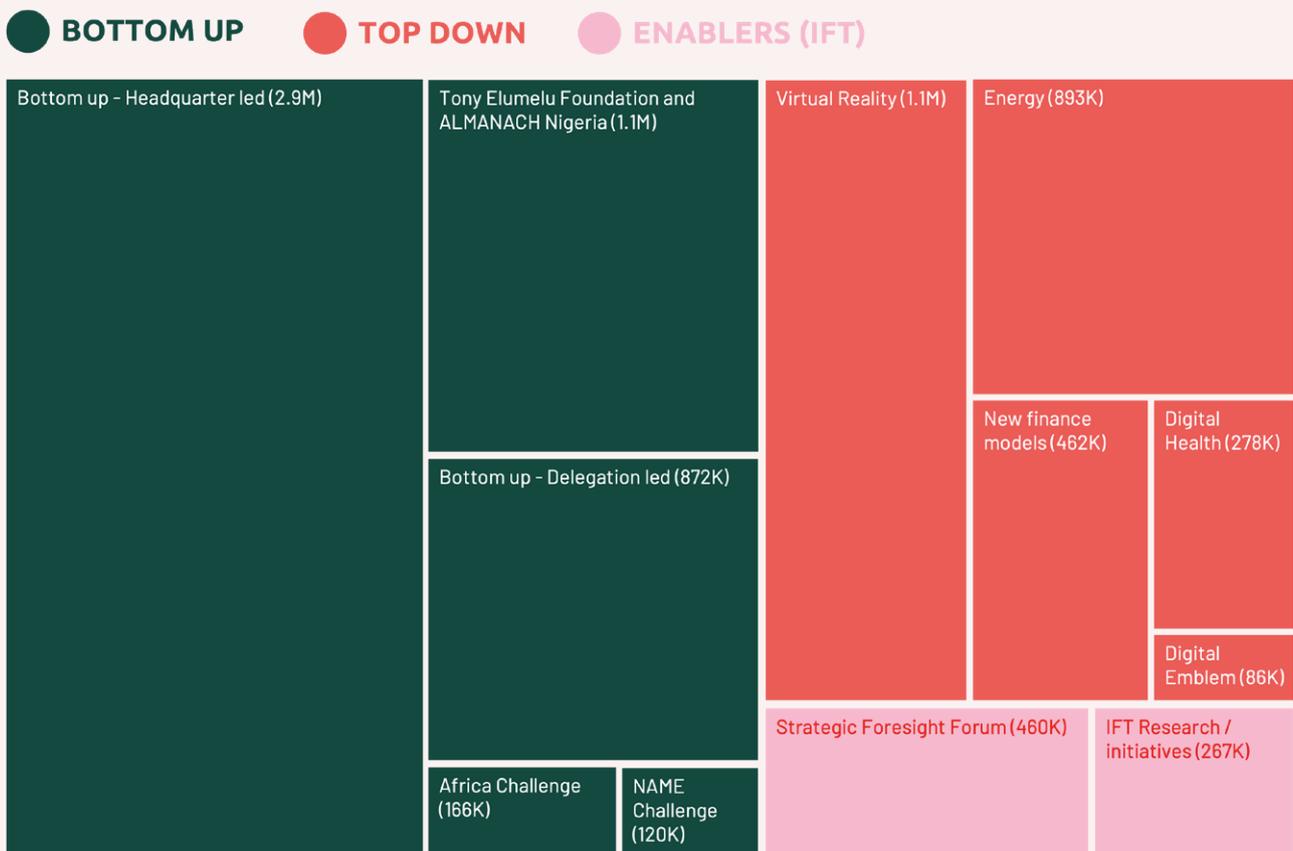


Figure 1. Total IFT investments (8.7M CHF), 2018 to June 2023, including 86 closed and 7 ongoing initiatives with available data. Excludes other IFT activities such as communications, InspiRED days, and other training and facilitation.

3.1 AN INNOVATION JOURNEY

How did the innovation approach change and how relevant were the changes given ICRC’s internal context? What influenced the approach to innovation and how was it affected by external factors?

- 34. Over the evaluation period, the IFT trialed, adapted, and clarified its approach to supporting innovation and garnered greater support within the institution. The IFT was established in 2017 (see Figure 2). At the time, innovation was organized around a community of practice, with ICRC staff being supported to implement a collection of unconnected projects. The original approach was reportedly described by the former Head as “a thousand flowers blooming, a thousand flowers dying.” A new Head began in 2018 and progressively recruited a team, built capital within the organization, established a strong network of relationships, and tested and refined a range of different operating models. From 2018 to 2023, the IFT trialed and adapted its approach. Their support became increasingly organized (while remaining bespoke), through the development of structures (Innovation 2.0), the addition of a portfolio approach (Innovation 3.0), and the further addition of regional Climate and Conflict challenges (from 2020). These proved useful structures that enabled the team to support a more diverse range of innovations from a wider range of delegations and metiers.
- 35. Portfolios were developed in 2018 based on topics of interest that were also relevant to the ICRC’s wide-reaching 2019-2024 institutional strategy. The portfolios were fairly broad categories and included an X-file for anything not falling within the portfolio focus. This gave the team flexibility, meaning that anything could be funded. However, participants did not feel that the portfolio categories were narrow enough to drive innovation in specific areas, nor to reflect a systematic analysis of future priorities for the ICRC.
- 36. The Board figure-headed innovation and provided some senior support to the team. However, their input was largely limited to a quarterly Board meeting for discussing and approving key decisions and budgets. This gave the IFT autonomy and flexibility, however, there was a lack of strategic direction from senior Board members that would have increased its authority.

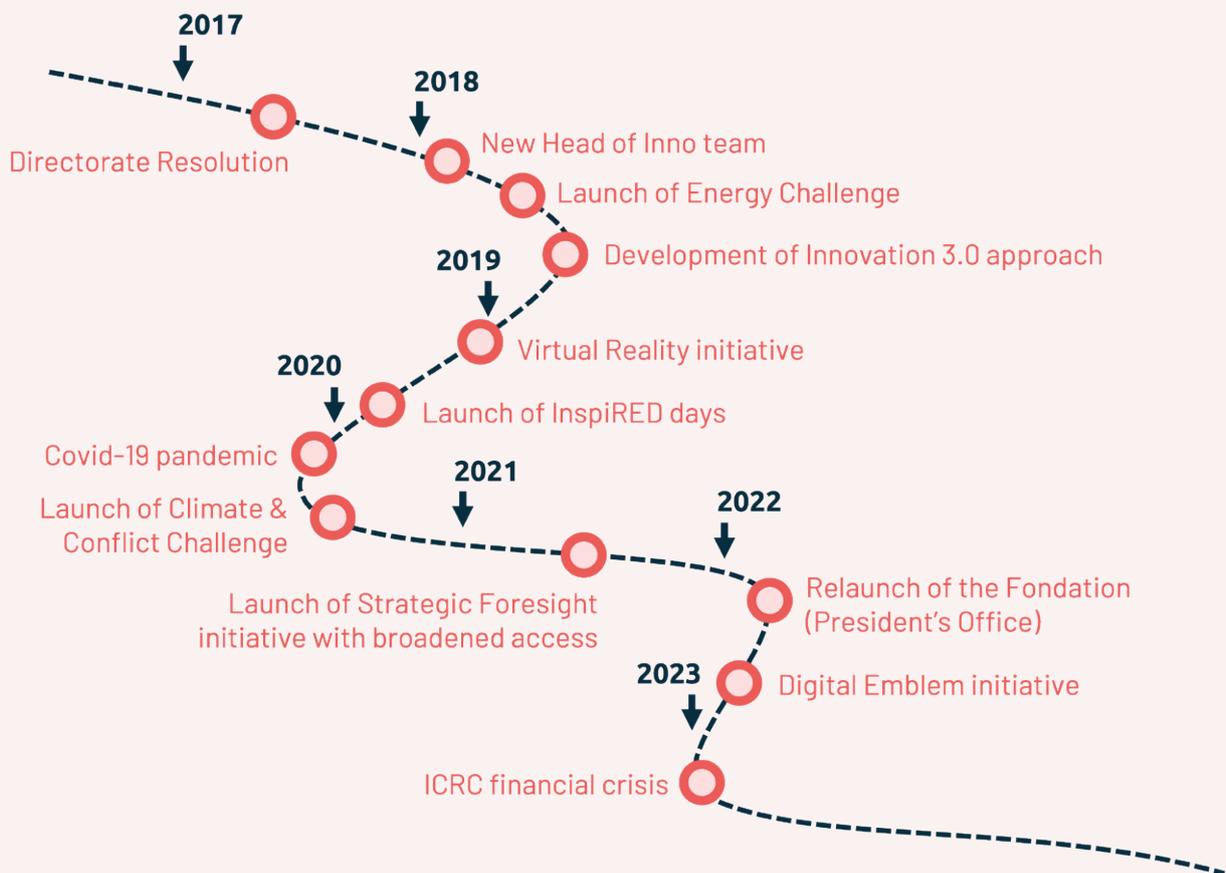


Figure 2. Timeline of significant events for the IFT.

37. The autonomy of the innovation team allowed it to develop an approach that was remarkably organic in comparison to other humanitarian innovation initiatives. While most other initiatives have a formal call for proposals, with detailed proposals, external reviewers, and funding panels, the IFT instead held discussions on priorities with potential partners and then collaboratively developed a proposal. This had the advantages that the team was remarkably responsive and that little time was wasted in developing proposals for initiatives that would never receive funding. However, it also came with a risk: it was not systematized and was vulnerable to staff turnover and loss of institutional knowledge and strategy (see Annex 6 on Models of Innovation). The recent regional challenges have moved towards a more traditional approach, with funding boards and (more) formal decision-making structures.
38. Although the open call for ideas accepted innovations from across the organization's metiers and delegations, many participants perceived innovation to be Headquarters-focused (see next subsection). In 2020, the team tried to increase engagement with field teams through regional challenges, resulting in 23 new initiatives in Africa (2021), Asia (2022), and NAME (2022).
39. Collaboration was part of the team's DNA. In 2019, they delivered training and scoping exercises with the Partnership Brokers Association and The Partnering Initiative respectively designed to support better partnering. As the IFT grew, its approach was to be led by the priorities and interests of partners, looking for opportunities to add value (see Effectiveness). Participants described how this approach was used across the SFI, bottom-up, and top-down initiatives.
40. From 2020 to 2021 the IFT began to consider opportunities that would complement other elements of the ICRC. This led to the identification of SF as a new priority area that could help the ICRC become more sustainable or 'future-fit'. Team members conducted a desk review of relevant studies on the future (the period 2040-2060) to identify relevant themes within climate change, technology, AI, and pandemics. A discussion with the Board helped narrow ten potential topics down to five. Over 2021 and 2022 the team experimented with different approaches to pedagogy and approach. Participants reported that the appetite for SF increased, especially during COVID-19. However, they received mixed signals about the value of Foresight from leadership, which originally had significant support, and later had significant pushback. A series of SFI initiatives focussed on specific teams and themes were launched and provided bespoke learning and skills-building. Participants valued SF but were frustrated that their outputs were not integrated into organizational strategy processes.
41. The IFT did not see replication and scaling as their responsibility. The IFT funded some outstanding initiatives that held great potential, but for many the challenge was what to do once the IFT funding is finished. Many were absorbed into the ICRC's annual PFR process (see Section 5.2 on Impact), but few were significantly replicated during the evaluation period. Two exceptions to this were the ALMANACH project in Nigeria, a digital health tool that received >1M CHF and was replicated through the Nigerian healthcare system, and the Virtual Reality Unit (VRU) which the team supported to replicate through introductions, championing, and funding. However, overall, this was an area where there was a vacuum of responsibility - neither the IFT, the innovators, nor the metiers saw it as their role. Interviewees referred to the lack of 'readiness of the institution' to take on new initiatives and to the initiatives being seen as 'a priority among many priorities'. This is discussed further in the Conclusions.
42. This was a period of significant challenge in the ICRC, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the ICRC's financial crisis. Overall, participants described how these factors reduced funding "to maneuver, to do, to try and test new things." Some innovators described how COVID-19 had increased their need for funding and also driven demand for technical solutions such as VR training and a chatbot for automated FAQ responses from the Africa Forensics Regional Team. It also led to a desire for more meetings and connections through the SF Forum and webinars. However, many more participants spoke of how financial constraints had made it difficult to explore pathways for adoption. It may be the case that scarcity feeds the demand for innovation. However, it is also one of the factors that make sustainability and replication difficult, making it harder for departments to absorb successful pilots into the PFR process.
43. Through this period innovation benefited from a stable team with little staff turnover. This provided continuity, the development of strong institutional knowledge, and a deep network of relationships. It also helped to mitigate the significant changes in leadership in the EODG, which otherwise contributed to a lack of strategic direction. The line management of the Head of the IFT changed five times in five years, in addition to the position of the IFT within the EODG being restructured. This created a sense of shifting priorities and uncertainty about priorities, the future of the team, and the staff's roles.

How was the intent of the IFT understood by innovators and others?

44. The 2017 Directorate Resolution⁶ for the IFT documented a broad set of activities that were not clarified through specific objectives from the Board or senior management. This left the team somewhat vulnerable to misunderstanding, conflicting agendas, and expectations. We had relatively few engagements with staff that had not engaged with innovation but suspected that unclear or unspecified objectives may have also inhibited engagement with the IFT, as innovators would not necessarily have known whether their work fit within the objectives of the team or not.
45. Among the evaluation participants, there were different views on what innovation should be for and how it should be organized. Different people saw different limitations of the current model, and there was no consensus on any of these issues. Annex 6 outlines some models used by other humanitarian organizations in addressing these challenges and possible ways forward are considered in the conclusions. The limitations raised by participants were:
 - **Limited connections with the field offices**, with participants suggesting a role for regional innovation support. This approach has been taken by several other innovation units such as UNHCR. Annex 6 outlines implications for cost and the co-location of the team.
 - **Difficulty of scaling innovations**, with participants noting challenges in obtaining manager buy-in, getting approvals for digital innovations, and replicating between delegations.
 - **Insufficient focus on “breakthrough” innovations**, although few participants could give a clear answer on what might constitute a breakthrough innovation for the ICRC.
46. Innovators who received funding from the IFT had a good understanding of the intention of the IFT. They emphasized support, tech support, improving efficiencies, testing new ideas, and networking, which reflected the stated objectives of the team (see Section 2.1). Nevertheless, some innovator participants said they struggled to see how smaller activities were part of the bigger picture.
47. While the IFT had achieved impacts (see Section 5) they struggled to communicate their impacts effectively and to achieve good coverage. Two particular challenges were the competition for communication attention across the ICRC coupled with inefficient communication platform structures. The Inno Board discouraged the IFT from creating its own website because of the investment, ongoing content creation needs, and concerns about viewership. Instead, the team relied primarily on interpersonal communication to build relationships as well as organizing events such as brown bag lunches, Innovation and wine tasting and InspiRED days. In addition to these, the IFT communicated via RedPulse (Intranet), emails, and Innovation blog posts. However, many participants noted that they didn't know enough about what the IFT did and the impact of its work. This is a particular problem during the financial crisis, which is causing leaders to think about what is most 'essential'.
48. There were several misconceptions about the IFT that could also be addressed through clearer communication. These included an expectation that the IFT would support initiatives to scale (which is not currently reflected in its objectives) and perceptions that the IFT was looking for 'flashy' solutions.

Conclusion: How relevant was the innovation approach for the ICRC? Is it still relevant?

49. Innovation was seen as an important capability for the ICRC. The IFT had a strong reputation and was well positioned for success, through its position in the EODG and by the relationships it had fostered across the institution. As shown in Section 3.1, it funded a broad spectrum of activities across various sectors, metiers and delegations. Innovations ranged from technical solutions like digital chatbots to non-technical strategies for community resilience. Section 3.2 outlined how the approach changed over time, becoming more structured as the team learned more about how to facilitate innovation at the ICRC. A range of factors including Covid-19, the financial crisis, new digital technologies and the Ukraine crisis increased demand for innovation. However, the same factors often made it harder to integrate and replicate new initiatives within the organization. Section 3.3 showed that although the IFT had a strong focus on collaboration and partnerships, there were often misunderstandings about its role and the ambitions of innovation at the ICRC. The Conclusions in Section 6 address the implications of this, providing recommendations on objective setting, clarifying areas of innovation, and strategic communications.

4. EFFECTIVENESS

This section addresses the effectiveness of the IFT, exploring how effective it has been in achieving its objectives, how it has worked with other functions and metiers, the role of research in innovation, and the barriers to effective innovation.

4.1 OBJECTIVES

To what extent did the IFT achieve its objectives?

46. Beyond the PfR, the IFT did not have a formal set of objectives against which they measured progress. Instead, their work was guided by a set of common goals, developed and refined across the team and informed by the 2017 Directorate Resolution⁷ and the Summary Note 'Towards Innovation 3.0 in the ICRC'. The below goals largely reflect the KPIs for the PfR process and were articulated by the team during a focus group discussion as part of this evaluation:
- Promote a culture of collective innovation⁸
 - Build connections between innovators
 - Support innovation efforts
 - Provide a 'safe space' for testing
 - Invest intentionally
 - Support the ICRC to be prepared for the future
47. This section examines these six goals by considering both the approach of the IFT to achieving them and the activities they undertook. The section draws on evidence from the meta-analysis, survey, KIs and document review. Each goal is assigned a RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rating based on the IFT's current progress towards achievement of the goal. A red rating indicates that no progress has been made toward the goal, an amber rating indicates that some progress has been made but it is limited, and a green rating indicates that progress is on track toward achieving the goal. This approach takes into account the time frame of the evaluation and the nature of some of the goals which are based on a longer-term approach and would therefore take longer to be achieved.
48. Overall Section 4.1 finds that the IFT made some progress toward achieving three of its goals and was on track to achieve the other three. This demonstrates high levels of effectiveness in achieving their goals to: support innovation, provide a safe space, and build connections, and some effectiveness in achieving their goals to promote a culture of collective innovation, invest intentionally and support the ICRC to prepare for the future. The IFT has invested a significant amount of time and intentionality in its approach. Defining and documenting more specific objectives that align with the new institutional strategy and are measurable and achievable would be an appropriate next step in the development of innovation at the ICRC.

How effective have they been in achieving each goal?

Promote a culture of collective innovation

49. The IFT adopted a dual approach to promoting a culture of collective innovation based on their understanding of the innovation landscape at the ICRC. Recognizing that innovation was already taking place across the ICRC, they sought to build meaningful connections with existing innovators and those who were 'innovation-prone' within the organization and develop a community of innovators who were invested in the work of the IFT. Simultaneously and in response to a lack of awareness of innovation and innovation skills across many parts of the ICRC, they also focussed on people who had limited innovation knowledge by seeking to raise awareness of innovation across the ICRC and build skills.

Table 1. Goals, approach, and contributions. The rating is based on the IFT’s current progress towards the goal.

Goal	IFT approach	IFT activities that have contributed toward the goal
<p>Promote a culture of collective innovation</p> <p>Some progress</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with innovators across the ICRC • Develop a community of innovators who are invested in the work of the IFT • Raise awareness of innovation across the ICRC • Skills building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated 4 InspiRED days (2019 onwards) for ICRC staff, informal events at HQ, 1 regional InspiRED day (2022, Pakistan) and Brown Bag lunches • Launched the annual Call For Ideas with 72 innovative ideas submitted since 2021. At least 32 led to a discussion of the next steps with the IFT. • Launched a Strategic Foresight Initiative and trained 968 staff members in total • Published 65 Inspired blog posts featuring funded initiatives and events • Built relationships with 128 innovation teams • Made agreements with 2 different departments for a member of the IFT to work from their office weekly
<p>Build connections between innovators</p> <p>On track</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create links and connect innovators with other innovators or experts (internal and external) • Avoid duplication of efforts within the ICRC • Support transversal and multi-disciplinary efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified systemic challenges within the organization, and brought colleagues together to form 4 top-down Challenge Teams to develop and implement solutions • Developed multi-disciplinary review committees for the Climate and Conflict Challenge in four regions (including Ops-Cos and heads of sectors), that contributed to proposal development • Connected people from different parts of the organization who are working on similar things or could complement efforts • Connected people with external networks including academic institutions
<p>Support innovation</p> <p>On track</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support innovative ideas with funding, technical support where needed, and moral/ political support and networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported 128 initiatives (including those that applied through funding calls and those identified opportunistically) and 4 top-down Challenge Teams. • Funding was external to the PfR and enabled innovators to explore new areas. • Provided other forms of support, including brainstorming (45%), moral (39%), technical (29%), connections with stakeholders (26%), communications (13%), training in innovation methodology (3%), and monitoring (3%).
<p>Provide a ‘safe space’ for testing</p> <p>On track</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide space to brainstorm, design and test new, creative ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaged relationally with innovators allowing them to freely express ideas without fear of criticism • Provided flexible funding outside the PfR, with less pressure on time frame and results
<p>Invest intentionally</p> <p>Some progress</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify areas/ trends to capitalize on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed an organic approach to identifying innovation and approaching innovators across the organization • Adopted a strategic portfolio management approach that prioritized innovations by type and theme.
<p>Support the ICRC to prepare for the future</p> <p>Some progress</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop foresight capabilities across the organization • Embed foresight within organizational practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launched a Strategic Foresight Initiative including 90-minute videos, a series of ‘futures analysis’ workshops tailored to eight distinct teams or themes, and an annual, week-long, training and foresight exercise. • More than 1700 ICRC staff participated in foresight workshops. Trained a total of 280 staff in foresight between 2022 and 2023.

50. The IFT was effective at connecting with people across the ICRC and this resulted in a relatively small but cross-organizational community of people committed to innovation at the ICRC. The IFT built relationships with 128 innovation teams. Interview and survey data indicated that innovators were extremely satisfied with their interactions with the IFT and relationships were maintained beyond the end of the funding period. Many innovators we spoke to had received funding for more than one initiative, illustrating the effectiveness of the IFT in developing long-term connections with innovators, rather than only supporting one-off initiatives. Innovators were introduced to the bigger picture of innovation at the ICRC through global events showcasing innovations, including InspiRED days, brown bag lunches, and SFI workshops. Interviews highlighted that these events were effective in helping some attendees to feel part of something bigger within the ICRC, beyond their metier or delegation.
51. The IFT adopted a relational and opportunistic approach to connecting with innovators that was less effective outside of Headquarters. The IFT had an open-door policy and met regularly, in person with Headquarters-based innovators. They sometimes approached individuals at Headquarters who had innovative ideas that they wanted to consider supporting. The team was based solely in Geneva for the majority of the evaluation period and so this relational approach disadvantaged innovators outside of Headquarters. While the IFT did build strong relationships with some field-based innovators, for example through bottom-up initiatives, identifying innovation potential opportunistically was less common because there were fewer connection points. This contributed to the unequal distribution of funding between Headquarters and delegations (see Section 4.2). It also meant that innovation initiatives within delegations were more likely to be funded through a regional challenge⁹.
52. The Strategic Foresight Initiative played a key role in the skills-building efforts of the IFT. In 2020 they launched a Strategic Foresight Initiative and to date have welcomed around 1,700 ICRC staff members to participate in foresight workshops and trained a total of 280 staff in foresight through the Forum. Interviews with participants highlighted that those who had attended 'teams and themes' and Forum trainings felt connected to the wider innovation efforts of the ICRC and the work of the IFT.
53. Raising awareness of innovation was limited by communication channels and the capacity of the team. The IFT's aim to raise awareness of innovation across the organization was impeded by limited opportunities for broadcasting through official ICRC channels and a lack of support from the communications team for any additional communications efforts. As highlighted in Section 4.3 this evaluation identifies limited communications avenues as an organizational barrier within the ICRC. The IFT did outsource a monthly blog to an external blog writer and published a total of 65 blog posts on the Inspired blog but access data indicates that engagement (both number of subscribers, and number of readers) has been limited. Due to their small size, the IFT had limited capacity and chose not to engage in any further additional communications efforts which has limited their promotion of a culture of collective innovation.
54. Overall the IFT made some progress towards promoting a culture of collective innovation in the ICRC. Efforts to connect with innovators across the ICRC, develop a community of innovators invested in the work of the IFT, and build skills were all effective in contributing towards the goal. However raising awareness of innovation across the ICRC limited the IFT's promotion of a collective culture of innovation.

Build connections

55. The IFT also employed a relational approach to build connections between innovators. They sought to do this by creating links and connecting innovators with other innovators or experts (internal and external), avoiding duplication of efforts within the ICRC, and supporting transversal and multi-disciplinary efforts.
56. The IFT was committed to supporting the organization to work more transversally and used innovation as a connecting force. The ICRC had a rigid institutional structure that limited transversality. Interviews highlighted that departments tended to work in silos which led to duplication of efforts and territorialism (and this was identified as an organizational barrier, see section 4.3). According to interviewees, there were few other forums within the organization that connected people across different metiers, delegations, and levels of seniority. Interviewees highlighted this as a unique attribute of the IFT. The IFT's positioning within the EODG placed them outside any specific metier or department but provided validation to their work due to the connection to more senior ranks of the organization. This positioning and inherent validation helped them to connect different actors and support them to innovate together.
57. The IFT was proactive and intentional in identifying and creating links across the organization. The creation of top-down Challenge Teams, the development of the regional Climate and Conflict Challenge, connecting individual innovators, facilitating the SFI, and hosting innovation events were all examples of areas where

the IFT identified links and connected individuals. 26% of innovators surveyed were connected with relevant stakeholders by the IFT. The IFT saw their role as connecting relevant actors and then allowing relationships to form organically. Opening up channels of communication between different individuals working on similar projects, they also reduced duplication (Eg, in the Energy challenge). The IFT was also effective at connecting innovators with their own external networks, including with academic institutions. Overall evidence indicates that the IFT was on track towards achieving this goal.

Support innovation

58. The IFT sought to provide in-house support for innovative ideas across the ICRC. Their bespoke support packages included: funding, technical support where needed, moral/ political support and networks.
59. The innovators we spoke to emphasized the quality of bespoke support, which included the provision of unearmarked funding, moral support, political support, introduction to the IFT's networks, and increased visibility. The range of support received also varied depending on the needs of innovators, for example, the survey highlighted that after funding, the most common types of support received by innovators were brainstorming support (45%), moral support (39%) and technical support (29%). Interviews highlighted that these different types of support were highly appreciated by innovators, particularly moral support, and made significant contributions to initiatives across the organization. Multiple sources described the IFT's relational approach to providing support: working alongside innovators, taking time to listen and understand their needs, helping them to think through challenges, and practically pushing innovations forward.
60. The provision of political support, communications, and HR support incentivized engagement with the IFT. The IFT's positioning in HQ provided delegation-based initiatives with validation and exposure at HQ, in some cases this contributed to securing support for initiatives across the organization (for example, Conflict and Climate Resilience in Niger¹⁰). Communications support, including events and blogs, raised the profile of some initiatives, both internally and externally. While this type of support was valued, how the IFT chose who to feature and promote was unclear. The experience of those innovators that received HR support (by funding positions) was also positive and the IFT should also consider funding more positions where possible within available budgets, to alleviate the pressure on existing staff members.
61. The limited support for identifying next-step pathways inhibited the uptake of innovations after funding ended. This is further discussed in Section 5.2. Overall evidence indicates that the team supported innovation and it is therefore ranked as on track to achieving this goal.

Provide a 'safe space' for testing

62. The IFT identified the need for - and provided a safe space to - help innovators experiment and think through new ideas at the ICRC. Psychological safety is the top factor needed for effective teams¹¹. They understood the importance of a space to learn and test outside of the PfR, without fear of criticism or the obligation to show instant results.
63. The unearmarked nature of the funding was a standout benefit but affected reporting and uptake pathways. Innovators highlighted that earmarked funding gave them the flexibility to work in new or different ways with reduced bureaucracy. In some cases, interviewees highlighted that the financial support provided was minimal in comparison to operational budgets, but resulted in significant and impressive initiatives. However, being outside the PfR meant that reporting and monitoring were different too. The IFT aimed for light-touch reporting but this sometimes resulted in innovators finding it difficult to articulate the impact of initiatives and demonstrate their value-add for the institution beyond the original location. Funding outside of the PfR also added to the challenges for uptake after IFT support ended. However, overall evidence indicates that the IFT was on track to achieving this goal.

Invest intentionally

64. The IFT sought to invest intentionally by identifying areas or trends to capitalize on. However, the innovation thematics and types supported a broad approach. Both the thematics (modern and future warfare, environment and conflict, urban pressures and protracted needs) and types (disruptive, transformational, routine, novel) held value but the team did not have quotas or a clear structure for how the types and thematics should be used. As a result, they had limited impact on funding decisions of the team or the board.
65. The IFT's investment areas were shaped by the varied interests and skill sets of different members of the team. The IFT provided a complementary range of support to innovators that was built around their own diverse skills. Interviews with the IFT highlighted that some areas were not pursued because there was a lack of interest within the team, for example, specific support to backbone departments despite a strong

expression of interest for innovation from within these departments. Conversely, in 2021 the IFT conducted detailed scoping research, developed a new area of focus and launched the Strategic Foresight Initiative. This reflected a desire to develop a stronger focus on supporting the ICRC to anticipate and prepare for the future and fill gaps that weren't being met within other parts of the institution. These were based on both findings from the scoping study and resulting motivation within the team.

66. The IFT recognized the importance of considering what an innovation replaced or how it complemented existing programs but was yet to systematize an approach to this challenge. Instead of adding to the number of programs being implemented by the ICRC, the team highlighted that they wanted to support ideas that would improve existing programs in a more systematic way, but had not yet identified a way to do this.
67. The majority of funding decisions were made solely by the IFT, but some were informed by external perspectives. For example, for proposals over 100,000 CHF Board members were consulted and asked to approve. For Climate and Conflict Challenges, a multi-disciplinary committee was consulted and involved in the decision-making process. Some funding decisions were also based on research, for example, a member of the IFT conducted and documented a thorough review of the evidence around virtual reality (VR), and this gave the team the confidence and motivation to invest heavily in VR. Overall the IFT would have benefited from narrower investment criteria and quotas to enable intentional investment. During the period of this evaluation, their efforts in this area demonstrated some progress.

Support the ICRC to prepare for the future

68. In order to support the ICRC to prepare for the future, the IFT sought to develop and embed foresight capabilities across the organization. The decision to use foresight was based on an understanding of the need for more intentional tools for planning across the organization. But as a new approach for the IFT and the ICRC, it was an ambitious aim to both develop foresight capabilities across the organization and embed it within the first three years of operation.
69. The introduction of the SFI was effective at developing foresight capabilities across the organization. Over 1700 ICRC staff members participated in foresight workshops and trained a total of 280 staff in foresight between 2022 and 2023. As highlighted in Section 5.1 | all 50 of the first cohort of SF forum participants successfully completed it, and 85% found the tools to be 'highly effective'¹².
70. Embedding foresight within organizational practices was more challenging. While some teams embraced the foresight methodology, many participants attended training as individuals which has limited the institutional impact so far. There was also limited evidence of foresight being used by the senior leadership of the organization. SF required senior management buy-in to be fully effective in supporting the ICRC to prepare for the future Overall, evidence demonstrates some progress against this goal.

4.2 AREAS OF FOCUS

Where has the IFT focussed its efforts so far and what areas of the ICRC could benefit the most from innovation?

71. As outlined in Section 1.1 the IFT focussed its efforts on three key areas: bottom-up initiatives, top-down Challenge Teams, and promoting a culture of innovation.
72. IFT funding was biased towards initiatives at Headquarters and digital technology initiatives. According to the meta-analysis of funded initiatives conducted as part of this evaluation, 45% of funded initiatives were based at Headquarters, 50% in delegations and missions, and 5% at both Headquarters and in a delegation or mission. This almost 50-50 split between initiatives funded at Headquarters and delegations/ missions is far from a reflection of the distribution of staff across the organization, where HQ-based staff make up around 6%¹³ of ICRC staff members. The meta-analysis also indicated that 54% of IFT spend went to digital innovations (54 initiatives). This rose to 57% when including initiatives that incorporated both research and digital technology (62 initiatives). These distinctions reflect two significant biases of the IFT, towards funding initiatives based at Headquarters, and funding technological initiatives.
73. IFT funding also reflected a gender disparity. As identified through the meta-analysis, 70% of IFT-funded initiatives were led by men and 30% by women, although average budgets were slightly higher for women (80k vs 67k for men).

74. Innovation breeds innovation. The meta-analysis indicates that the team supported over 35 different delegations or metiers, however, there was a concentration of initiatives in WatHab (24%), EcoSec (20%), Health (6%), and DTD (6%). KIs with the team revealed that this was intentional and the team had chosen to focus on metiers that were more open to innovation and reduced engagement with departments where they encountered what they perceived as intractable political or institutional blockers. IFT team members also spent time working in the two metiers most supportive of innovation (WatHab and EcoSec) and attended their team meetings to enhance connections and support.
75. Additionally, a significant number of submissions to the Call for Ideas were from operational departments (including Finance and HR), while the IFT held follow-up discussions with many of the applicants, the majority of ideas were not pursued. While multiple reasons were given for this, there is clearly an interest in innovation from operational departments.
76. The IFT's biases towards funding initiatives at Headquarters, technological initiatives, male innovators and innovation within certain metiers, are critical distinctions that will be important for the IFT and Board to consider when shaping future strategy for innovation at the ICRC. Without agreed objectives, targets or quotas it is unclear if some of these were intended funding splits, or whether they occurred unintentionally. However, they clearly highlight tendencies in the team's approach which have implications for the rest of the organization and the way innovation is perceived. The IFT and Board should consider how to achieve a reasonable balance of funding across the organization and different types of innovation, in order to ensure that innovation does not become its own silo, known to only serve certain locations, departments, or types of innovation.
77. Despite the diversity of staff represented across the ICRC, the IFT suffered from a lack of diversity. For example, it had limited representation from the Global South and other diversity markers, for example disability. Research shows that a lack of diversity leads to decision-making bias¹⁴. As the areas of focus to date reflected areas of interest of the team this had a significant impact on what they funded. There is a strong potential for increased diversity through new hires to ensure the team itself enables and does not stifle innovation.

4.3 BARRIERS

What are the barriers to innovation in the ICRC and how have they been addressed by the IFT?

78. There are many barriers to innovation across the ICRC. The organization is global and complex with over 21,000 employees¹⁵ and a long history. Inevitably, it is beset with entrenched challenges that pose barriers to effectiveness. KIs and survey responses identified 12 common barriers (see Figure 3), a significantly higher number than barriers to other innovation initiatives within humanitarian organizations.
 - **Organizational barriers** emanating from the ICRC's culture, policies and processes, strategy, finance and communications that create common challenges across the organization.
 - **Innovation-specific barriers** related to human resources, funding amounts, information management, structure for adoption, lack of buy-in and lack of understanding.
79. Most of the organizational barriers were beyond the scope of the IFT to address, however they made clear efforts to try to navigate or counteract the impact of almost all of these barriers on their work. For example, in opposition to the risk-averse culture in the ICRC the IFT was explicit in its communication to innovators on the ability to test and fail safely. They provided tailored support to innovators to navigate bureaucratic processes, hired an external blog-writer, and published monthly blogs as a way to enhance their communications efforts without over-stretching the teams' capacity. As highlighted in Table 1, navigating siloed working was one of their main objectives, and in response to the lack of a clear top-down direction or framework for innovation within the organization, they worked according to their own goals which they sought to align with the institutional strategy.
80. The IFT was creative in addressing human resource and information management barriers to innovation. KIs with innovators and the IFT provided examples of how the IFT focussed on working hand-in-hand with innovators and supported practically when innovators did not have the capacity to perform certain tasks themselves, for example drafting documents. They put human resources behind initiatives by funding positions, for example for Digital Health and the Digital Emblem, and provided in-kind support to VRU and other digital initiatives. They also sought to overcome information management challenges, for example by focussing on networking and conducting a tech scan document to map different technologies and who was working on them within the ICRC.



Figure 3. Common barriers to innovation in the ICRC, identified in interview and survey responses.

81. Additional effort to develop more coherent structures for integration and scale-up of both technological and non-technological innovations is essential to ensure initiatives are able to continue once IFT funding ends. Technological innovations face an additional barrier in this area as there is a gap between technological innovations and ICT frameworks and practices. The IFT recognised that the structure for scale-up will need to look different for technological and non-technological innovations. At the time of the evaluation, only larger projects received funding from the Tech and Data Board, which made it particularly difficult to integrate smaller digital projects that had received initial funding from the IFT, leaving them without a clear path ahead at the ICRC. The IFT engaged with the PMO on this issue and made some progress with the architecture board to officially recognize some tools. They identified IT project managers as key people to have on board, and learned that having the metier validating the request was more effective, but it still posed a significant barrier to digital innovations. Governance (particularly the involvement of the Inno board and the shared position between Innovation and IT) and adapting their approach to support initiatives based on learning about the gap and how to deal with it were strategies used by the IFT to navigate this barrier but efforts were ongoing. This barrier is significant to the IFT at this time as it is currently impacting their ability to demonstrate value-add for the organization beyond testing early-stage innovations.
82. Addressing the barrier of lack of understanding of innovation at the ICRC, may lead to improved buy-in from relevant teams and departments. These two innovation-specific barriers are interrelated. Interviews demonstrated that there is a significant lack of understanding across the organization about innovation, and particularly innovation at the ICRC. Further work to increase understanding of innovation across the ICRC through skills building and showcasing initiatives, would serve a dual purpose of also generating improved buy-in as ICRC staff develop a clearer picture of who the IFT are and the potential of innovation within the ICRC.

4.4 COORDINATION

How did the IFT coordinate with other ICRC functions and metiers focused on adapting and improving operational and management processes?

This section examines the IFT's coordination with five ICRC functions/ metiers identified through interviews with key stakeholders as focussed on adapting and improving operational and management processes. The five functions/metiers considered are: Finance, Comms, IT, Data Protection, and Learning and Development.

83. The IFT coordinated to varying degrees with each of these functions and metiers. For example, interviews highlighted that the IFT had high levels of coordination with Finance which led to the creation of a new financial system to manage initiatives. They sought to coordinate with IT to facilitate the deployment, implementation, and testing of digital initiatives, and with Data Protection to navigate existing policies and gain approval for cloud-based solutions. Coordination with Learning and Development (L&D) was achieved by the Head of the IFT sitting on the L&D governance board, but coordination with Communications was minimal.
84. In many cases, levels and ease of coordination depended on the types of challenges to be addressed which in turn affected the willingness of these functions and metiers to engage with the IFT. Finance engaged freely with the IFT, partly due to the IFT's single donor and flexible funding requirements, but also due to an obligation to facilitate financing models. However coordination with IT and Data Protection was fraught with more intractable challenges. For example, efforts to coordinate with IT were needed to facilitate the deployment, implementation, and testing of digital initiatives. The team encountered challenges in formalizing the alignment between IT and innovation, including: competing priorities, resource allocation, lengthy approval processes, and lack of a clear decision-making approach regarding adoption. Data protection policies also made it difficult to pursue certain technology solutions. In several cases innovation teams already used "shadow" IT and there were few routes to formalize use of these technologies. The limited communication avenues across the institution further entrenched coordination challenges.
85. Efforts of the IFT to coordinate were impeded by other organizational and innovation-specific barriers, including silos and territorialism, a risk-averse culture, and resource constraints, which also played a role in reinforcing the reluctance of functions and metiers to engage with the IFT.
86. Coordination improved the IFT's effectiveness. For example, the new financial system to manage initiatives improved the IFT's efficiency. By contrast, a lack of coordination with Comms reduced the IFT's Communications efforts and impeded their ability to raise awareness of innovation across the ICRC, which in turn reduced their effectiveness in promoting a culture of collective innovation across the ICRC. Efforts to coordinate with Data Protection led to some examples of improved effectiveness. In one example, the IFT undertook a careful process of risk mitigation and of communicating the value of a new cloud-based platform which led to its approval.
87. Despite the challenges, the IFT demonstrated strong motivation to improve their effectiveness through coordination, particularly in the areas of IT and Data Protection, and were resilient in their efforts to do so. But coordination to improve effectiveness was a slow and time-consuming process and will continue to require significant effort and determination from the team.

How can the relationship between research and innovation be leveraged effectively to generate innovative solutions? What is the best way to cooperate for the most effective results?

88. The IFT had a strong focus on research, but this was largely independent from other research efforts taking place across the organization. The IFT's focus on the research included:
 - Funding research initiatives of the 128 initiatives analyzed, approximately 15% solely focussed on research and a further 8% included a research component.
 - Publishing or sharing learning or evidence - of 31 initiatives surveyed, 32% indicated that they had published reports and 10% had published peer-reviewed papers.
 - Relying on research to inform their own decision-making and decision-making by other departments - For example, the IFT conducted their own research which informed the development of VR, and conducted research on behalf of SDT which informed the development of the new digital strategy.

89. As a starting point, the IFT could build stronger connections with other research efforts internal to the ICRC, including the CORE (Centre for Operational Research and Experience). Efforts to strengthen this connection should include encouraging innovators to seek approval from the Ethics Review Board. It could also draw on the CORE's expertise in methodologies, knowledge of research risk mitigation and capacity to support research initiatives.
90. To ensure more diverse and representative inputs, the IFT could invest in developing relationships with academic institutions in other countries. Interviews highlighted that the IFT and innovators outsourced research support. The IFT developed strong relationships with Swiss technological institutions including the Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL) and Zurich (ETHZ), but the evaluation did not find evidence of equally strong relationships with research institutes or universities in other countries. Several participants also noted an overreliance on paid consultants that limited connections with the wider institutions.

Conclusion: How effective has the innovation approach been in achieving its objectives?

91. The IFT operated within a constrained working environment and faced multiple barriers related to both the organization as a whole and innovation specifically. Nevertheless as shown in Section 4.3 their work provides multiple examples of how they navigated these barriers, honed a thoughtful and strategic approach, and worked effectively towards achieving their goals. As highlighted in section 4.1 the innovation approach was partly effective in achieving its goals, demonstrating that it is on track in the areas of supporting innovation, providing a safe space, and building connections, and demonstrating some effectiveness in promoting a culture of collective innovation, investing intentionally and supporting the ICRC to prepare for the future. As Section 4.2 shows, the IFT's work also reflected some significant biases, for example towards funding technological innovations and those based at Headquarters, which will need to be considered by the team and Board when new objectives and investment criteria are agreed, in order to ensure that innovation within the ICRC follows an intentional and strategic direction and does not become its own silo.



5. IMPACT

This section addresses the impact of the IFT, exploring how its work has contributed to new thinking and practice, to new tools and solutions, and to catalytic effects.

5.1 THINKING AND PRACTICE

How did the innovation facilitation team bring new thinking and practice into the ICRC?

92. Between 2020 and 2023, the IFT championed SF within the ICRC. While several teams had previously used foresight methods, the way they used them varied. The IFT introduced a structured and systematic framework for SF, and trained 1,700 people including through the Forum (295 participants). These efforts led to a surge of interest in SF, evidenced by high numbers of applicants and participants as well as “more and more requests” for forward-looking analysis to the TRAK team. Over 1,100 applicants applied for the SF Forum’s two cohorts (2022 and 2023). Impressively, all 50 of the first cohort of SF forum participants successfully completed it, and 85% found the tools to be ‘highly effective’¹⁶.
93. The SF Forum saw diversity as a prerequisite for success¹⁷. Participants were selected based on geographic location, professional background, areas of specialization, departmental affiliation, and level of seniority. It included participants from across the Directorates and from 76 different locations. Participants noted the quality and depth of discussion and the equitable balancing of headquarters and field voices. Participants from delegations in particular emphasized the training as a unique learning opportunity. They saw the forum as a novel opportunity, particularly for residential staff within delegations with little exposure to such initiatives.
94. In several metiers and units, SF led to more participatory approaches to analysis and planning. Several delegations used SF to develop their understanding of problems or as a planning tool. Interviewees discussed using trends analysis, horizon scanning, and scenario planning to develop a new perspective on future scenarios. They felt the tools helped them to develop “medium-term” and “anticipatory” plans that they fed into the planning efforts in their departments and metiers. That was particularly noted by teams in EcoSec and WatHab.
95. New thinking and practice were also introduced through the challenge-based approach to Energy (2018) and Climate and Conflict (2022-23). Most interviewees who had participated in Challenges said they provided a ‘fresh perspective’ for tackling complex issues ‘transversally’ and encouraged inter-metier/department and inter-delegation exchanges. Some senior managers felt that the competitive spirit introduced through the challenge approach had spurred their team members to engage more proactively with their metiers and the IFT to refine their initiatives.

5.2 TOOLS AND SOLUTIONS

What are the most impactful innovation tools, applications and solutions that were supported by the IFT within the evaluated timeframe?

96. In total, the IFT invested 8.2 million CHF on 128 innovation initiatives (see Figure 4). This represented between 15-26 initiatives each year with an average budget of 65,000 CHF, varying from 6,000 CHF to 540,000 CHF.
97. Between 2018 and June 2023, the IFT invested 8.2M CHF into 128 top-down and bottom-up initiatives and 0.5M into Strategic Foresight (see Figure 1). The evaluation examined these investments against three outcome areas that are used for evaluating humanitarian innovation¹⁸. We analysed these outcomes for each of the deep dives (see Annex 5) and for the initiatives identified by participants as impactful (see Table 2).

128
INITIATIVES

£8.2+
MILLION
INVESTED

64
DEVELOPED
AT HQ

68
TESTED IN
COUNTRY

31	WATER + HABITAT
26	ECONOMIC SECURITY
8	HEALTH
8	DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION + DATA

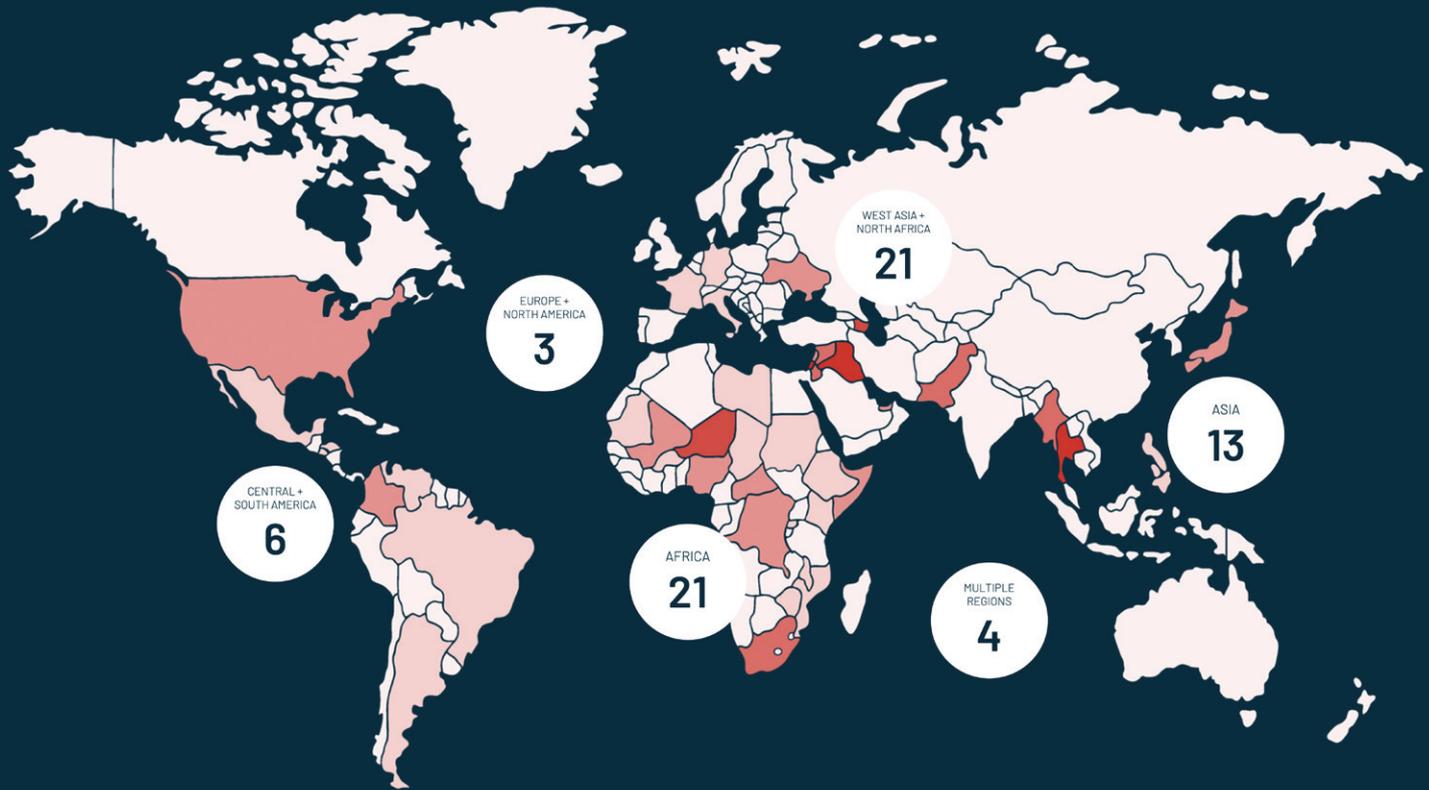


Figure 4. 2018-23 IFT supported initiatives.

- **Consolidated learning:** There was evidence of learning outcomes across the portfolio. Interviews with initiative leads indicate that the majority of learning was used by the innovation teams to develop the solution and/or to inform other work. For example, although the Better Body Bags initiative concluded that the new solution was not an improvement on current practice, it generated academic evidence that will inform future work on body bags. Five of the nine case study initiatives had published research or for wider use and all had shared learning via blogs. There was no documentation of how learning had been used by the ICRC more broadly (a normal challenge for research and learning initiatives) although several respondents noted awareness of research from other innovators.
- **Improved solutions:** Participants described how the IFT helped innovators articulate a hypothesis that they could test through innovation funding. All seven of the deep dives into innovation initiatives led to new solutions that provided efficiencies (e.g. the Autonomous Restoring Family Links (RFL) service and the Electronic Red Cross Messaging service), new technical solutions (e.g. the Digital emblem), or novel approaches (e.g. to community-based climate resilience in Niger). Of 99 closed initiatives, 42% were integrated into the PfR and 10% received alternative funding (see Figure 5), indicating buy-in for the solution.
- **Wide adoption of new solutions:** It can take years to decades for innovations to be developed, tested, and adopted at scale. Many of the solutions that were funded by the IFT are still at a fairly early stage and will need more funding, time, and support to reach their potential. Two of the projects that achieved the greatest uptake were recipients of significant funding: the ALMANACH (short for the Algorithm for the Management of Childhood Illness) digital health tool in Nigeria and the Virtual Reality Unit, which now has at least 20 different training scenarios for staff from different metiers. The IFT helped teams think about 'next step pathways' after testing, but this was not a primary objective.

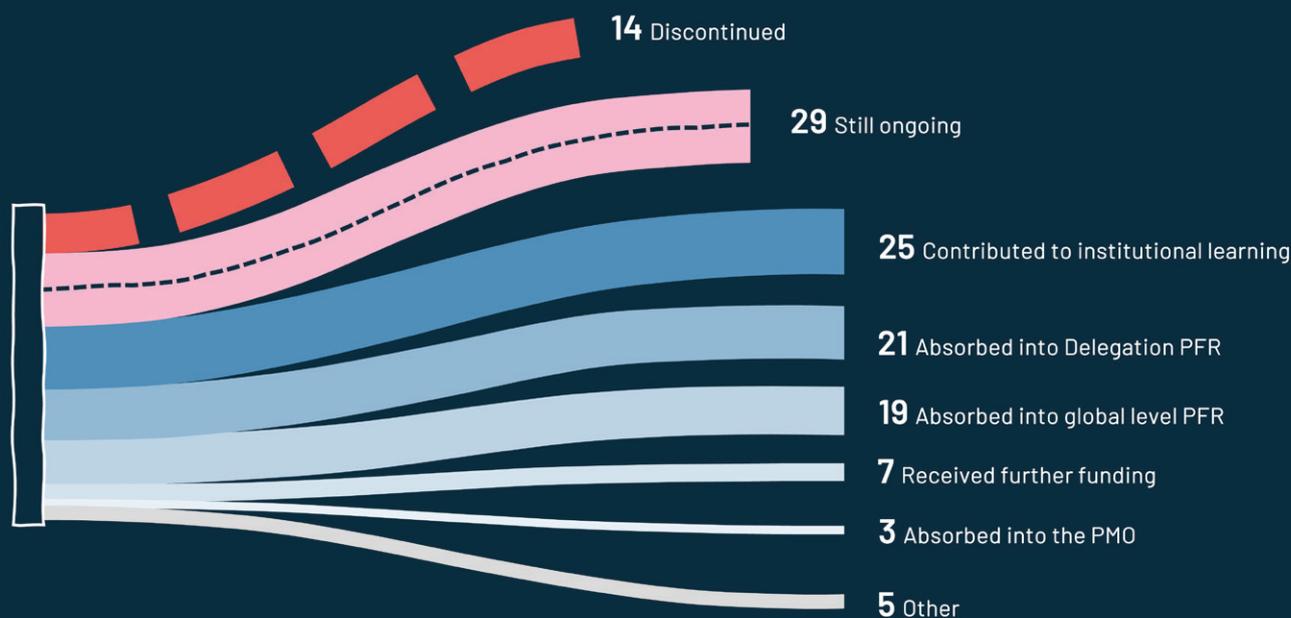


Figure 5. Documented pathway at close of initiative, with one primary pathway per initiative. Number represents number of initiatives in each pathway - 128 initiatives in total (pathway data was unavailable for 5 initiatives).

98. The failure rate was relatively low compared to other humanitarian innovation initiatives and very low in comparison to innovations in other sectors¹⁹. 14% of the innovations had been discontinued (see Figure 5) due to staff turnover, changing operational context (including the financial crisis), or because they failed to garner management buy-in. Participants linked the success rate both to thoughtful investments but also to ICRC staff caution in proposing solutions with a low likelihood of success, particularly for reasons linked to organizational culture.
99. A constellation of factors proved important in those innovations that were adopted into metiers or delegations (see Figure 6). A proof of concept was important, but so was buy-in from senior people and relationships across relevant divisions and metiers. Innovators needed to systematize the engagement of people in delegations from the outset. Multiple participants explained how the IFT contributed to addressing these factors (and therefore to adoption), by supporting structured learning processes, partnerships, or through championing. The VRU, for example, was supported to form new linkages with units interested in virtual reality tools as well as to build relationships with the SDT Directorate, to which it will relocate in 2024. Similarly, the IFT supported the handover and local adoption of ALMANACH – a mobile application that supports healthcare workers in diagnosing childhood illnesses. In 2023, IFT funds enabled handover to the Ministry of Health in Nigeria by migrating the solution to an open-source platform (the IFT’s largest single investment in the evaluation period).
100. The portfolio showcased some impressive achievements and outcomes. Table 2 illustrates the solutions that participants viewed as most impactful in the ICRC. They are ranked according to their impacts on consolidated learning, on the development of new solutions, and on widespread adoption of those new solutions²⁰. Among these, the IFT’s forays into virtual reality (VR)²¹ and the Energy Challenge stood out. Their impact is marked by their cross-departmental reach, permeating various metiers and delegations. The visible support from senior leadership has significantly enhanced their success. The VR projects, for example, have led to the development of tools and scenarios for Fundraising, Forensics, and Learning & Development.
101. It can take years to decades for innovations to be developed, tested and adopted at scale²². Many of the solutions that were funded by the IFT are still at a fairly early stage and will need more funding, time, and support to reach their potential. Nevertheless, there are promising initiatives among recent grantees. In the Improved Resilience of Honey Beekeepers initiative (2023), for example, 50 honey producers were equipped

with 150 climate-resilient beehives as part of the climate and conflict challenge²³. Preliminary observations indicate heightened bee activity and increased production in these beehives, with hopes that the solution will be adopted by EcoSec.

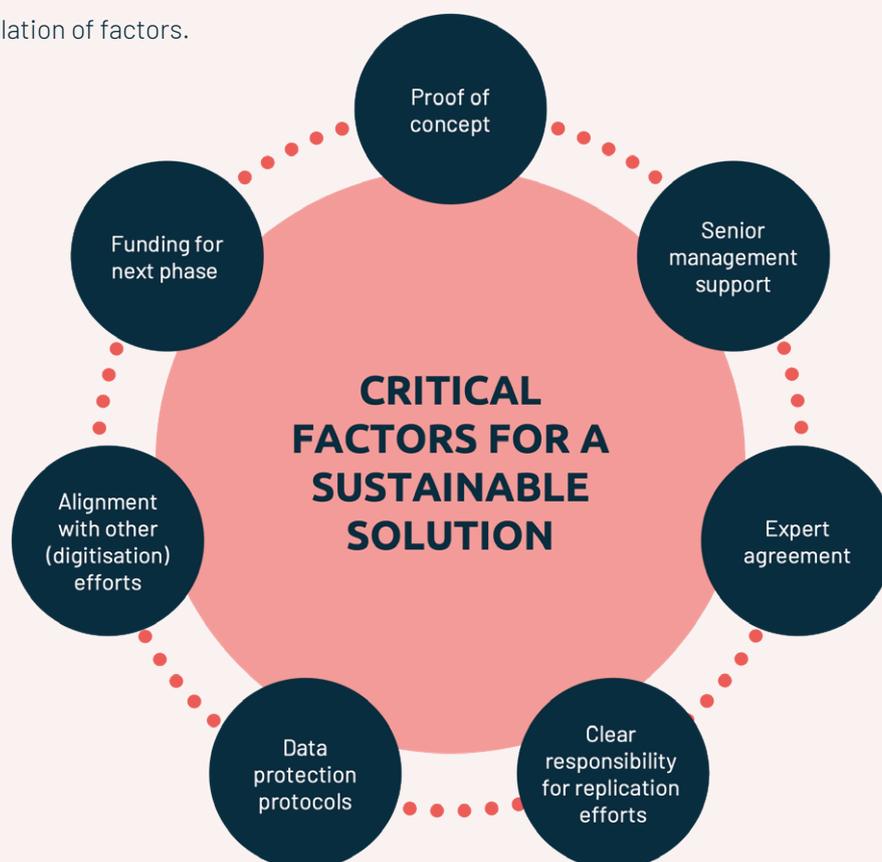
102. Although the IFT helped teams develop ‘next step pathways’ after the testing phase, replication of innovations was not a primary objective of the IFT (see Section 3.4).

Table 2. Initiatives identified by participants as high impact. A rating was assigned based on the type of impact (Annex Table 8) to indicate the level of impact in each area: **High (H)** / **Moderate (M)** / **Potential (P)** / **Low (L)**.

Initiative	Type of impact	Description of impact
Agilis (2018)	(H) Learning (H) Improved solution (R) Replication	The innovation developed and tested a low-cost, high performing prosthetic foot with new composite materials and design features with amputees with high mobility needs. This innovation positively enhanced amputees’ ability to perform their daily activities with a notable increase in both walking distance (+70%) and duration (+90%) when using the new prosthetic foot compared to the previously used prosthetics ²⁴ .
ALMANACH (2018-2023)	(H) Learning (H) Improved solution (P) Replication	ALMANACH, a mobile app designed in collaboration with the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute, aids healthcare workers in improved diagnosis of childhood illnesses through a context-specific algorithm. With IFT funding it expanded its reach from 272 to 403 health facilities in Adamawa State, Nigeria. Between January and October 2021, over 64,000 children under the age of five years were diagnosed and treated using the ALMANACH ²⁵ . In 2023, the IFT supported handover to the Ministry of Health in Nigeria.
Blended finance model (2017)	(H) Learning (M) Improved solution (M) Replication	The Goma West Resilient Water Supply initiative introduced a new financing mechanism that blended humanitarian funding with complementary parallel investments by development and private actors such as the World Bank ²⁶ . The project has been expanded and is being tested in Mozambique.
Complex Network Analysis (2018)	(H) Learning (H) Improved solution (M) Replication	The initiative used Complex Network Analysis methods to search and trace missing migrants by examining the relationships and networks between them. The initiative was used to calculate the number of missing migrants in the Catania Shipwreck. It identified individuals for whom tracing requests were not initiated, and for whom no identity documents were discovered in the shipwreck. It has already been replicated by the Spanish Red Cross and by the Delegation in Mexico to enhance the accuracy, timeliness and efficiency of tracing missing migrants.
Digital dilemmas (2023)	(M) Learning (H) Improved solution (M) Replication	The Digital Dilemmas immersive experience initiative aimed to sensitize participants to the complexities of digital risks in humanitarian contexts, including surveillance, cyberthreats and disinformation. Over 100,000 people have engaged in the experience and there are plans to host it in a series of high-profile locations.
Digital Emblem project (2020)	(H) Learning (M) Improved solution (L) Replication	The digital emblem is a cyber marker for protected entities, replicating the longstanding tradition of employing distinct emblems for safeguarding during armed conflicts. An approach to creating a digital emblem has been developed and a high-profile research study has been published. Approaches for how to integrate the digital emblem into international humanitarian law are now being considered ²⁷ .

Initiative	Type of impact	Description of impact
Energy Challenge (2018)	(H) Learning (M) Improved solution (M) Replication	The IFT made a series of investments in the Energy space, building internal and external relationships and exploring new financing models to assess and increase the use of renewable energies; and building staff capacity through a dedicated training center. One investment established the ICRC Energy Training Center in Nairobi, Kenya, a center for training staff to navigate growing energy needs. The challenge activities resulted in better energy management and efficient consumption in key fuel-consuming sites through energy sensors and an Internet of Things (IoT) monitoring platform. The partnership with UNITAR and Energypedia fostered a broader discourse on energy for humanitarianism ²⁸ .
RedSafe app (2017 and 2021-2022)	(H) Learning (H) Improved solution (H) Replication	RedSafe is a novel digital humanitarian platform that allows the affected communities to safely store their documents in a digital repository. This represents a new service in an area core to the ICRC's mandate. Using RedSafe transforms the way people store data and access information in a manner that protects their privacy and confidentiality ²⁹ . RedSafe represents an innovation with a clear pathway for absorption and adoption within the ICRC.
Virtual reality (2018-2023)	(H) Learning (H) Improved solution (H) Replication	The creation of a virtual environment in an urban conflict setting has facilitated impactful training for military commanders and soldiers in International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in Ukraine. This Virtual Reality (VR) tool enables realistic and interactive role-playing, complementing traditional classroom training methods. Moving forward, the VR unit plans to create Mirror World—a virtual representation of the environments and landscapes where the ICRC operates. This initiative aims to enhance advocacy efforts and training impact through an immersive and dynamic virtual experience.

Figure 6. Constellation of factors.



5.3 CATALYTIC IMPACTS

To what extent have the innovation initiatives generated catalytic effects that will yield results across the organization?

103. The most significant catalytic impact was the IFT's role as a connector. Another significant impact of the IFT's work was its role as a connector. The team cultivated productive relationships and facilitated cross-departmental collaborations. This led to the exchange of information and experiences, with participants noting the scarcity of such spaces within the ICRC. The InspiRED days and the SF Forum, in particular, were described by participants as unique in forming linkages across diverse organizational levels and units. The headquarters and regional InspiRED events proved effective in showcasing innovation at the ICRC, connecting staff, and strengthening relations with key donors and funders. It also contributed to positioning the ICRC as an innovative entity.
104. For innovators, access to innovation support catalyzed new ideas. For example, through the IFT's collaboration with the EcoSec team, the IFT worked closely with new innovators to develop innovative ideas, articulate a hypothesis for testing, and support the team's design and implementation. The provision of flexible funding and the ability to implement activities outside the PfR process without managerial approval processes instilled a sense of autonomy and safety to test and fail. The approach has allowed many staff to explore, test, and even fail, fostering a sense of experimentation within parts of the organization.
105. New research partnerships were also catalyzed with entities outside of the ICRC. Collaborations with prestigious research entities, included the University of Geneva, École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH Zurich), Swiss Tropical Public Health Institute and Institute of Calculus at Universidad de Buenos Aires (CONICET). Moreover, some of the research initiatives themselves (e.g. research on data privacy and on the digital emblem) have the potential to influence entities beyond the ICRC, although there is not currently a way of tracking research impact. Several initiatives, such as the Digital Dilemmas immersive experience, showcased potential influences beyond the ICRC.

5.4 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

To what extent do the current KPIs reflect the value-add of innovation across the ICRC? What other indicators or measurements could be used?

106. The IFT based its Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) on activities being delivered under support, influence & culture, and integration & sense-making. It also tracked the percentage of initiatives adopted into the PfR with an ambition of two thirds achieving uptake.
107. The indicators provided a starting point for monitoring activities that were aligned with the objectives that were described through the evaluation process. But alone they are insufficient for assessing the IFT's value-add for four reasons:
 - The IFT did not have a set of written objectives with which to align. Without considering the strategic context, it's not possible to develop KPIs that align to the team's mission and long-term success.
 - Monitoring activities and outputs provides information on what is being done, but it does not necessarily measure the outcomes or impact of those activities. Outcome measurement is essential for understanding the real value or effectiveness of the efforts. Without assessing the real-world results and benefits brought about by the funded projects, it becomes challenging to gauge the value-add of the innovation
 - Emphasizing activities and outputs alone can incentivize a focus on quantity rather than quality. For instance, if KPIs solely measure the number of initiatives funded, there's a risk of funding a larger quantity of initiatives without ensuring that they are strategically aligned, well-executed, or delivering substantial value. This approach could lead to a dispersion of funds across a multitude of initiatives without a clear understanding of their effectiveness.
 - Innovation inherently involves experimentation and learning from both successes and failures. If KPIs only track activities and outputs, they might not provide sufficient insights into the adaptability of the fund and the lessons learned from various initiatives. To truly understand the value-add of an innovation fund, it's important to measure the fund's ability to foster a culture of learning, iterate on ideas, and pivot when necessary.

108. The next chapter provides recommendations for strengthening the IFT's objectives and data. It proposes an approach based on: alignment with objectives; consolidated learning; improved solutions and adoption of solutions.
109. In addition, best practices from other innovation initiatives include:
- Track key investment metrics including demographics of leads
 - Reserve capacity to maintain contact with former initiatives and track replication two, five and ten years post-funding.
 - Encourage more confidence around failure, aim to share stories of projects that generated learning but were not adopted

Conclusion: What preliminary impact can be observed within the ICRC as a result of the innovation approach since its implementation?

110. Between 2018 and June 2023, the IFT allocated 8.2M CHF across 128 initiatives, introduced the Strategic Foresight Initiative (SFI), and organized a range of meetings, events, and collaborations. Section 4.1 examined the SF Forum's influence on enhancing planning and idea generation among participants. Section 4.2 detailed the impacts of the funded initiatives, highlighting projects like the Better Body Bags initiative, the Digital Emblem, and the Energy Challenge, which contributed to team and organizational research and learning. It explored evidence of improved solutions noting that 42% of the initiatives were integrated into the ICRC's PfR. The IFT was instrumental in the broader adoption of several innovations, particularly the ALMANACH digital health tool and the Virtual Reality Unit. Section 5.3 delved into the IFT's role as a catalyst, fostering cross-departmental collaborations and forming partnerships with renowned academic institutions. Lastly, Section 5.4 critiqued the IFT's current approach to measuring impact, a discussion further explored in the following conclusions section.



6. CONCLUSIONS, FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- C1. The evaluation set out to assess internal organizational change as a result of the IFT's approach and to identify the opportunities and needs within the ICRC that can guide the next innovation approach. It used interviews, a survey, focus group discussions, and 'deep dive' case studies to gather perspectives from more than 160 documents and 85 people across the ICRC.
- C2. Overall, it found that innovation was recognized by participants as an important capability for the ICRC. The IFT boasted a strong internal reputation and fostered robust relationships throughout the organization. The team effectively utilized its position within the EODG to establish valuable relationships across siloed segments of the organization.
- C3. Challenging organizational factors, such as territorialism, a lack of understanding of innovation, and a tendency towards short-term planning had created significant barriers. Nevertheless, the IFT was on track in delivering some objectives and had made progress towards others. Over five years, it had moved towards a more structured approach. Despite a modest budget, it had invested thoughtfully in an impressive selection of initiatives and was perceived to have delivered consistently high-quality support.

Strategic objectives

- C4. The IFT lacked strategic objectives against which it could assess success. Strategic direction was set in 2017 through a Resolution that defined a broad remit for innovation but did little to define its scope or provide metrics for success. The Board did not assume responsibility for setting strategic direction, which would have provided guidance, leverage, and accountability. In some ways, the team benefited from a lack of predefined objectives, which allowed them a great deal of flexibility to identify new opportunities. However, now that the IFT is established, its sustained success requires more than unbridled flexibility.
- C5. The lack of objectives has resulted in a broad set of intentions and initiatives. The team set out their intent in their annual report to the funder, and retrofitted their objectives for this evaluation. The objectives they articulated were ambitious and wide-reaching from creating a culture of innovation to supporting innovators. Evaluation participants similarly described different purposes of innovation funding and support including to modernize the ICRC, identify new solutions that would reduce costs, improve the quality of core services (to be 'faster, stronger, better'), address the implications of current technologies with regard to IHL, and facilitate digitalization.
- C6. Greater clarity is now required. A Board-led strategy process should build on the IFT's own work on strategic foresight and set out what the IFT is trying to achieve, covering the following questions:
 - What are the objectives of innovation?
 - What areas of innovation should be prioritized?
 - What is the IFT's role in facilitating scaling?

Areas of innovation

- C7. The IFT connected with, funded, and supported more than one hundred innovation teams across the ICRC as well as delivering training to more than 1700 people. To guide investment choices, the IFT developed portfolios in 2018 based on topics of interest among their stakeholders that were also relevant to the ICRC's

wide-reaching 2019-2024 institutional strategy. The portfolios were fairly broad categories and the team included an X-file for anything not falling within the portfolio focus meaning that almost anything could be funded. The evaluation participants did not feel that the portfolio categories were narrow enough to drive innovation in specific areas, nor to reflect a systematic analysis of future priorities for the ICRC.

- C8. Given the limited resources and the breadth of the organization, the investments were inevitably biased. Activities were disproportionately implemented in HQ, in programmatic teams, and in a small number of metiers. Investments in a mixed portfolio were made but lacked a clear rationale for why they were selected over alternative strategies. Although the open call for ideas accepted innovations from across the organization's metiers and delegations, the majority of participants perceived innovation to be Headquarter-focused. It is important to ensure that innovation does not become its own silo, known to favour certain demographics, locations, departments, or types of innovation.
- C9. The evaluation articulates three alternative routes forward and we recommend that the Board decides on one of these options in Q1 2024. This would help guide investment decisions, and provide staff with a rationale for what gets supported and for the overall portfolio. Trade-offs between each option are outlined in Annex 2.
- **Option 1:** Programmatic Innovations - Articulate a narrower scope for the IFT based on innovations within clearly defined portfolios that focus only on operational/programmatic areas
 - **Option 2:** Diversified Innovations - Rebalance innovation for the whole organization, with a focus on solutions for both programmes and institutional processes related to procurement, administration, finance etc.
 - **Option 3:** Digital and top-down Innovations - Have a more exclusive focus on innovations in new technologies. This tighter focus appealed to a minority of stakeholders but risks less connection with the delegations.
- C10. Once this has been decided, the team should begin to monitor whether its resource distribution serves the diversity of its intended users. This is not to say that the team can facilitate innovation in every unit and delegation, but that its innovation initiatives should include examples that are relevant to and can inspire all of its potential innovators.

Capacities and tools

- C11. In its early days, the IFT experimented with a range of different training methodologies including for partnership brokering and in the innovation pipeline. Since then, it has primarily focused on supporting innovation teams in hypothesis testing through funding and in launching a significant strategic foresight initiative. IFT figures indicate that approximately 8% of the organization engaged in strategic foresight activities. These activities established frameworks for envisioning future needs and planning innovations.
- C12. The team should continue to consolidate its training efforts in these areas. Participants' desires to see foresight used at an institutional level are logical and positive but there are significant hurdles to integrating new organizational processes in the ICRC. In the immediate term, investing in the growing cohort of foresight participants represents a positive start for the initiative.

Impact and data

- C13. The IFT kept records on the investments made, how funding was used, and what happened to investments at the end of funding. However, without investment criteria, they haven't had a way to assess this data against their original intentions. The evaluation documented impacts across the portfolio, including different types of learning and improved solutions. However, the IFT found it was challenging to measure the impact of an innovation portfolio that incorporated a wide array of initiatives operating in different sectors, at different scales, and with different types of social or institutional outcomes. Different team members, Board members, and observers viewed different types of impact more or less favorably. Without criteria to assess the quality of the initiatives, decision-making depended on personal experience, and the relative value of some investments was hotly contested.
- C14. The next step is to develop a more rigorous approach to data. Research on evaluating innovation highlights three types of impact that were used to assess impact in this evaluation (see Section 5)³⁰. These provide a good starting point to help guide investment decisions and analysis. The Board should build on these priorities to establish investment criteria for the IFT to ensure that the investments align with the team's goals and have a positive impact in the intended areas. Once decided, these investment criteria should be made available to all potential innovators and shared in the annual call for proposals. They could include:

- Consolidated learning in relation to particular problems, in relation to particular types of solutions (e.g. those using Generative AI or those implemented in low connectivity environments), or in relation to pathways to adoption
- An improved solution in terms of cost reduction or measurably improved services
- Widespread adoption of an improved solution

Scaling

- C15. The experience from other humanitarian initiatives underscores the persistent challenge of scaling innovation, and the necessity of explicitly prioritizing and resourcing scaling efforts. The annual report to the donor articulated an intent to explore scaling but in interviews the IFT did not see scaling as an explicit or implicit goal.
- C16. The IFT had a clear emphasis on innovations for the ICRC and this was reflected in most discussions with interviewees. One or two investments were made in innovations that scaled outside of the ICRC (most notable the ALMANACH project, an investment of over >1M that scaled a digital health tool within the Nigerian Government). However, most participants spoke of replication across different metiers and delegations as the primary scaling pathway. Although the IFT supported teams in thinking through their post-funding plans, neither innovation teams, nor the IFT, nor the metiers and delegations that the innovations were situated within thought replication was their responsibility.
- C17. The IFT should both consider the potential for scale in its investment decisions and should clarify its position in supporting scale, allocating human resources to support teams to replicate and consolidating learning across various initiatives. The structure for replication will look different for technological innovations, where the team must navigate the gap between technological innovations and ICT frameworks and practices (including that at the time of the evaluation, only larger projects receive funding from the Tech and Data Board).
- C18. At the same time, the relaunch of the ICRC Foundation provided a second source of funding for innovation. In its first financial year, the Foundation will provide follow-on funding for eight of the IFT's most promising initiatives. While the additional funding for innovation was welcome there was clearly some confusion about the roles of the two entities. The role of the Foundation is beyond the scope of the evaluation. However, successful scaling for innovations requires teams to be thinking about scaling from the first prototypes. It is not possible or desirable for the IFT to completely hand over responsibility for scaling. Clearly distinct roles for the IFT and the Foundation are needed to avoid confusion and duplication and are still being defined.

Connections and communication

- C19. There is huge potential for engaging across the ICRC, the movement, and the innovation sector more widely. However, the results so far illustrate the value of incrementally building on the team's work, focussing on transversal relationships, stronger systems, and bespoke support. This should continue in the next iteration, especially given the anticipated staff turnover. The focus should include developing narrower investment criteria, clarifying and investing in pathways for innovation adoption, and strengthening communications with the delegations.

Table 3. Recommendations to the Board, IFT and to the IFT/Innovation Initiative leads together. The objectives are ordered by priority within each grouping.

LEVEL	RECOMMENDATION
Inno Board	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Given the constraints of their roles, the Board should hold a yearly half-day workshop to set strategic direction for the IFT including defining a set of objectives and investment criteria. The first should take place as soon as possible, ideally early in 2024. The Board should draw upon the IFT’s own Strategic Foresight thinking to inform priorities. Clarify and resource a role within the IFT for supporting the uptake of innovations within (and possibly beyond) the ICRC. This may be divided between multiple team members and could build on the effective role provided to the Virtual Reality Unit. It should include working with innovators, the Foundation, the PMO, and the Board to plan for the transition from innovation funding to institutional handover from the outset. As part of this, the Board should clarify distinct roles for the IFT and the Foundation to reduce duplication and address confusion among innovators.
IFT	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to invest in the strategic foresight initiative, focussing on skills-building for staff across the ICRC. In the immediate term, focus on individual learning outcomes. In the medium term, continue to look for ways to integrate foresight into organizational processes. Develop a systematic mechanism for approving which projects receive funding based on planned learning, scaling, and impacts. Introduce more structured and standardized reporting requirements that capture outcomes against the planned objectives, and that plan for the innovation’s next steps. Continue to explore structured approaches to engaging systematically with regions and delegations, for example, the regional challenges. Strengthen internal communications, including a stronger emphasis on the IFT’s impact in communications, including through a rebrand of the Inspired blog to modernize and hosting more events that showcase innovations and bring innovators together. Continue to use IFT funds to alleviate the pressure on people who are innovating on top of their regular roles. Consider how to provide this type of support outside of the top-down challenges and extend it as far as possible within the available budget.
IFT and Innovation initiatives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in processes to consolidate learning across the portfolio, including peer-to-peer exchange. Work with innovation teams to share research plans with the Research Ethics Board for advice, and methodological feedback and to mitigate ethical risks.

ENDNOTES

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2. ICRC, ICRC Strategy 2019-2024. ICRC Website, released June 2020.
3. This was changed from the Foresight and Techplomacy pillar during the evaluation period.
4. ALNAP, Summary Brief: Review of the OECD DAC criteria for evaluating humanitarian action. ALNAP/ODI. 2023
5. Haarhaus & Liening, Building dynamic capabilities to cope with environmental uncertainty: The role of strategic foresight. 2019
6. DIR 2417 rev, Annex 1
7. DIR 2417 rev, Annex 1
8. This is a phrase coined by IFT members. For the purpose of the evaluation, it was defined as an organisational culture that supports and values innovation and collaboration around innovation.
9. Data from the meta-analysis showed that 55% of innovations within delegations were funded through a regional challenge.
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