

TACKLING THE NEW FRONTIERS OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION

The Foundation for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) wants to accelerate humanitarian innovation to deliver the most relevant, effective and sustainable impact for populations affected by conflicts and violence. We have identified six focus areas in which we want to act as an investor and a laboratory for the ICRC, so that it can keep delivering its lifesaving mission in complete independence.

JOIN US IN REIMAGINING THE FUTURE OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION.



STRENGTHENING THE LAWS OF WAR



“Ultimately, most of us can agree that an algorithm – a machine process – should not determine who lives or dies, that human life must not be reduced to sensor data and machine calculations.”

Peter Maurer, President of the ICRC

In the course of its 160-year history, the ICRC has played a central role in developing international humanitarian law (IHL) and drawing the attention of States to the protection needs of war victims and the unacceptable effects of specific weapons. The ICRC has notably helped develop rules that ban chemical and biological weapons, anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions, and limit the use of other means and methods of war.

Technological developments have given rise to new threats such as cyber warfare, autonomous weapon systems powered by artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning. Urban warfare can also have dramatic humanitarian consequences and create major humanitarian, legal and ethical dilemmas. The Foundation supports work evaluating such dilemmas and developing rules and practices to protect civilians, vital infrastructure and the environment.

- How should IHL tackle the development of autonomous weapons, when life-and-death decisions are made by sensors and algorithms?
- How should the risks of weaponizing and militarizing cyberspace and outer space be mitigated for civilians?
- What are the challenges posed by cyber warfare to ensuring that IHL keeps protecting conflict-affected people?

LEVERAGING NEW TECHNOLOGIES

New technologies such as virtual reality, AI and satellite imagery have a vast and largely untapped potential for humanitarian action. The Foundation wants to help leverage the potential of these fast-evolving technologies to better empower, assist and protect war-affected populations.

- Advances in AI can increase the chances of finding missing persons and reuniting families. For example, facial recognition software can accelerate the matching of pictures, provided by relatives, with missing persons.
- The use of drones that incorporate miniature thermal-imaging cameras can help locate unexploded ordnance, by detecting different heat signatures and using AI technologies to identify the types of mine or munition.
- Virtual reality can enhance the effectiveness of IHL training programs for military commanders and combatants. It can also improve the process of recovery and socio-economic reintegration for people disabled during war.



The Foundation also supports the increased use of digitalization and big data in humanitarian response. This involves combining physical proximity and ‘digital proximity’, with the

ultimate aim of interacting more closely with affected populations who are increasingly online, while handling and protecting personal data responsibly.

DEVELOPING NEW FINANCIAL MODELS

As traditional funding systems are under strain, new financial models involving multi-sectoral cooperation offer a vastly untapped potential.

The Foundation supports the development of innovative financial mechanisms for people affected by conflicts and violence. We want to build on the successful launch of the first-ever Humanitarian Impact Bond by the ICRC in 2017, by bringing new models to scale for greater humanitarian impact.



“As the COVID-19 pandemic has put a strain on public finance, we want to develop a portfolio of new financial instruments that leverages the skills and resources of private and development actors. Through innovative multi-stakeholder models, we can achieve what no one can do on their own.”

Gilles Carbonnier, ICRC Vice-President and President of the Foundation for the ICRC

BUILDING RESILIENCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY



“We need to join forces across the humanitarian sector and beyond to mitigate climate change and ensure that people are adequately supported as they adapt to the climate crisis now and into the future. Inaction is not an option.”

Robert Mardini, Director-General of the ICRC

Climate change and environmental degradation affect every aspect of our lives but those hit the hardest are marginalized communities in fragile contexts.

At the Foundation, we believe it is critical to help strengthen people's resilience and invest in environmental sustainability. We support the ICRC and the wider aid sector in cutting down their environmental footprint while

better assisting the communities most affected by climate risks.

We help provide vulnerable people with greener alternatives for obtaining water for drinking, farming and herding.

- Communities in Papua New Guinea, Somalia and Sudan benefit from repaired or installed rainwater catchment or harvesting systems that minimize or eliminate the need to use underground water.

We want to promote more energy-efficient options for communities' daily activities and for the functioning of health facilities and places of detention.

- Vulnerable households and displaced communities in Cameroon, Libya and Myanmar receive solar lamps for use at night, which enhances their security and allows children to study.

ENGAGING THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR GLOBALLY

The widening gaps between humanitarian needs and response cannot be addressed by any single organization.

As the founder of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement – the largest humanitarian network in the world – the ICRC is strongly connected with the broader aid ecosystem. Building upon this worldwide recognition, the Foundation facilitates the establishment of strategic, sector-wide partnerships to achieve positive change for people affected by conflicts and violence.

We also support the development of cooperative strategies with international and local aid organizations, businesses, research institutions, development actors and financial institutions to help the ICRC seize new opportunities to fulfill its mission.



“We’re experiencing an evolution in humanitarian needs, people in many countries face the compounded effect of multiple crises taking place at the same time. The capacity of traditional humanitarian actors to respond is being put to the test. This is why it is crucial to adapt the way the ICRC works with others.”

Katrin Wiegmann, Deputy Director-General of the ICRC

INNOVATING WITH, AND FOR THE PEOPLE



To effectively assist and protect people affected by armed conflicts and violence, the ICRC needs to innovate continuously. This is essential for meeting growing humanitarian needs and delivering greater impact.

The Foundation supports initiatives that put populations affected by violence at the center of developing solutions. This approach opens up a space for people to articulate their needs and have their perspectives and knowledge incorporated

in the design and implementation of humanitarian responses, for affected communities are experts on their own situation.

In Mexico and Central America, for instance, insights from migrants and aid organizations working along migration routes enabled the ICRC to adapt its advice on safety and health matters, which it then shared widely through a mobile-messaging application.

EXAMPLES OF PROJECTS SUPPORTED BY THE FOUNDATION FOR THE ICRC

Innovating with and for the people

We helped assess the feasibility of collecting voluntary DNA samples from migrants to assist States in ascertaining missing migrants’ identities.

Leveraging new technologies / Strengthening the laws of war

We explored factors that increase people’s vulnerability to IHL violations when information is weaponized.

Building resilience and environmental sustainability

We contributed to the reinsertion of people affected by armed conflicts in economic markets.

Engaging the humanitarian sector globally

We supported the launch of a multi-stakeholder partnership focused on demonstrating – through data and research – current and potential gaps in the humanitarian system.

New financial models (NFM)

We helped improve the ICRC’s organizational readiness to explore NFMs and generate a strategic pipeline of projects for the organization.