

**The GSMA Humanitarian
Partnership Framework:**
A Framework for Catalysing
Cross-Sectoral Partnerships
in Support of Humanitarian
Assistance



The GSMA is a global organisation unifying the mobile ecosystem to discover, develop and deliver innovation foundational to positive business environments and societal change. Our vision is to unlock the full power of connectivity so that people, industry, and society thrive. Representing mobile operators and organisations across the mobile ecosystem and adjacent industries, the GSMA delivers for its members across three broad pillars: Connectivity for Good, Industry Services and Solutions, and Outreach. This activity includes advancing policy, tackling today's biggest societal challenges, underpinning the technology and interoperability that make mobile work, and providing the world's largest platform to convene the mobile ecosystem at the MWC and M360 series of events.

We invite you to find out more at www.gsma.com
Follow the GSMA on Twitter: [@GSMA](https://twitter.com/GSMA)



IOD PARC is an independent consultancy company. We support organisations around the world to strengthen their results and increase their impact - so they can ultimately improve people's lives. We blend the rigour and analytical skills of monitoring, evaluation, and learning with a process-based approach to organisation development and change. We work on both the strategic and operational aspects of organisations and of programming, across the humanitarian, development and broader social change sectors. Built on over 25 years of experience, we bring a strong understanding of our partners and clients, the context they work in and the dynamics of the internal changes, challenges, and improvements which they navigate.

Find out more at: www.iodparc.com or connect on: uk.linkedin.com/company/iod-parc

Recommended citation: Matthews, H. (2023) The GSMA Humanitarian Partnership Framework. GSMA.

GSMA Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation

The GSMA Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation programme works to accelerate the delivery and impact of digital humanitarian assistance. This is achieved by building a learning and research agenda to inform the future of digital humanitarian response, catalysing partnerships and innovation for new digital humanitarian services, advocating for enabling policy environments, monitoring and evaluating performance, disseminating insights and profiling achievements. The programme is funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, and is supported by the GSMA and its members.

Learn more at www.gsma.com/m4h or contact us at m4h@gsma.com

Follow GSMA Mobile for Development on Twitter: [@GSMAm4d](https://twitter.com/GSMAm4d)



This initiative has been funded by UK Aid from the UK Government and is supported by the GSMA and its members.

The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK Government's official policies.

Author:

Hector Matthews, MEL Manager, GSMA Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation

GSMA Contributors:

Matthew Downer, Senior Insights Manager, Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation

Isaac Kwamy, Director: Strategic Partnerships, Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation

IOD Parc Contributors:

Hannah Beardon, Independent Consultant and Team Leader for Outcomes Assessment of GSMA M4H Strategic Partnership

Erica Packington, Director, Principal Consultant and Partnership Specialist

Acknowledgements: The GSMA would like to thank partners for sharing lessons from their engagements. The author would also like to thank the team at IOD PARC for conducting the Outcomes Assessment of GSMA M4H Strategic Partnership work, which identified many key findings in this report, as well as developing the initial partnership framework.

Contents

01	Introduction	2
02	The GSMA Humanitarian Partnership Framework	4
03	Factors for success: What makes a good partnership catalyst?	11
04	Impact of a partnership catalyst	14
05	Conclusion	16

01

Introduction



Increasingly, humanitarian response includes broad and diverse partnerships working together to deliver impact. These partnerships include organisations and individuals from different sectors, backgrounds and experience. As humanitarian need escalates and resources fail to keep up, the role of the private sector and other non-traditional actors will become increasingly important.¹ It will be essential to find effective ways for these organisations to partner with traditional humanitarian players, supporting their mandate to serve those affected by crisis.

The GSMA has supported the development of strategic partnerships between the mobile and humanitarian sectors before, during, and after emergencies for several years. Beyond leveraging existing mobile networks for humanitarian needs, humanitarian organisations and mobile network operators (MNOs) can partner to identify innovative new solutions and increase the impact of their work. The unique core competencies and expertise of MNOs and humanitarian organisations in combination can improve the coordination, effectiveness and outcomes of joint response and recovery efforts, and result in more impactful programming for people affected by crisis.² The same is true for other cross-sectoral partnerships between humanitarians and non-traditional actors.

Insights from the GSMA's partnership portfolio have consistently highlighted the role of a partnership broker to facilitate viable partnerships, coordinate actors and manage expectations. A successful partnership facilitation model can create sustainable, demand-led engagements where each stakeholder clearly understands the value of the partnership, which builds from the bottom up and is tailored to their individual needs.³ The work of such brokers is often catalytic, in that it creates changes which may be felt subtly and is perhaps not always recognisable by partners. In this way, this paper will refer to 'partnership catalysts' as actors whose mission is to forge effective partnerships without having another agenda.

Historically, the GSMA's Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation programme has taken two approaches to facilitating partnerships for humanitarian response:

- **Strategic Partnerships:** Catalysing partnerships between humanitarian organisations and MNOs and broader digital service providers through technical advisory support, acting as an intermediary between partners to identify and deliver impactful digital humanitarian assistance.
- **The Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation Fund:** Providing catalytic financial and technical support for mobile-enabled humanitarian innovations delivered through meaningful partnerships.

As the work of the GSMA Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation Strategic Partnerships team has developed organically since it was created in 2018, the GSMA commissioned independent research to articulate the current process and outcomes of the team's work catalysing partnerships for humanitarian response. Importantly, the research looked to understand what elements were most valued by partners. This was an important analysis for the team, as they look to build on and consolidate these partnerships. The analysis focused on 13 partnership initiatives across six countries. The consultants, IOD Parc, reviewed more than 100 pieces of evidence, conducted 27 in-depth interviews with GSMA staff, consultants and partners, and facilitated numerous co-creation and validation workshops with the team.

While the primary audience for this research was internal, there are insights and implications which can be of value others attempting to catalyse partnerships with non-traditional actors in the humanitarian space. Primarily, through articulating the team's processes, a practical framework for partnership support was developed, which highlights the approach the GSMA takes, developed organically over several years based on trial and error.

This report lays out the key insights from this internal work, overlaid and interpreted based on other analysis and evidence available to the GSMA team. It is hoped that this will support other organisations playing a catalytic role in humanitarian partnerships and encourage more to take up this mantle.

¹ Connor, G. and Mylly, T. (2002) *Seizing the Peace Dividend: Private Sector Contributions to Forging Resilient Societies*. UNDP

² Baah, B. and Downer, M. (2020) *Partnering During Crisis: The Shared Value of Partnerships between Mobile Network Operators and Humanitarian Organisations*. GSMA

³ Baah, B. and Hamilton, Z. (2021) *Building and strengthening digital ecosystems in humanitarian contexts*. GSMA

02

The GSMA Humanitarian Partnership Framework



Forging cross-sectoral partnerships can be challenging. Organisations often have unaligned objectives, ways of working and language, making it difficult to find common ground. Previous GSMA research has found that partnerships between mobile network operators (MNOs) and humanitarian organisations need to identify shared value, align their expectations, use a shared language, and ensure they allow sufficient time, among other factors, to be successful.⁴

The GSMA has spent several years catalysing cross-sectoral partnerships in support of humanitarian action, influencing stakeholders' readiness to form partnerships and to implement innovative new solutions together. In assessing the outcomes of this work, an articulation of how the GSMA has been successful identified a range of relevant activities and contributions. Many are well-known to partners while others are more subtle, but nevertheless important.

This articulation is presented in **The GSMA Humanitarian Partnership Framework** (Figure 1), highlighting entry and touchpoints for partnership facilitation and support. The framework is not specific to digital humanitarian assistance, meaning partnership catalysts focusing on other sectors can use it to help make informed choices and to focus activities to maximise results. The framework is structured under four themes, though activity is likely to fall within more than one, especially where support is longer lasting.

- 1. Engage:** *Understanding the ecosystem and convening for purpose*
Background research and context assessment aimed at identifying key challenges, common interests, and potential opportunities.
- 2. Align:** *Selecting, brokering and aligning partnerships*
Identifying partners, aligning expectations, and embedding process and support to maximise ongoing communication and collaboration.
- 3. Support:** *Supporting project implementation and longer-term viability*
Providing support and technical assistance to keep projects on track and to develop strategies for longer-term viability.
- 4. Amplify:** *Collecting and disseminating evidence and learning*
Strengthening partner monitoring, evaluation and learning capacity, ensuring key lessons are available, and supporting with amplification of results with stakeholders.

At the centre of the framework are core factors which enable partnership catalysts to effectively develop and support cross-sectoral partnerships. They are not always tangible or quantifiable, and often embedded in the positioning of the organisation, the way they work and the choices they make. These include reputation and positioning, partner selection, partnerships management, relevant expertise, and learning culture, and are explored further in the next chapter.

Non-linear 'cycle' of support

The framework presents a non-linear cycle of support for partnerships. Entry points differ based on the partnership, project and context. Although the various aspects are interconnected, where support is initiated and how it manifests is determined by the specific opportunity, partner needs, maturity of the existing relationships, and the humanitarian context. Where partnerships are more advanced, there may already be existing capacity to work with each other directly, meaning partner catalysts can focus more on support project design. In other instances, more support may be needed in bringing actors together to start exploring the opportunities of cross-sector work.

Importantly, a successful approach to facilitating one partnership may not necessarily be the same for another, especially when day-to-day operating processes are strained during crisis response situations.

⁴ Baah, B. and Downer, M. (2020) [Partnering During Crisis: The Shared Value of Partnerships between Mobile Network Operators and Humanitarian Organisations](#). GSMA

Figure 1
The GSMA Humanitarian Partnership Framework

-  **Engage**
-  **Align**
-  **Support**
-  **Amplify**





Engage: Understanding the ecosystem and convening for purpose

Successful humanitarian partnerships are based on a deep understanding of the context. This includes the nature of a crisis, the needs and preferences of affected people and an awareness of the existing response (among others). With this information, diverse stakeholders can be convened to identify potential areas for joint impact.

Understanding the ecosystem

Research and assessments help develop shared understandings of the potential impact to be derived from joint work. Partnership catalysts can support this by conducting, commissioning or facilitating the production of evidence, bridging knowledge gaps between their sectors. This should include identifying sector-specific strategies and barriers faced by local humanitarian partners.

For the GSMA, this often includes information on the preferences of crisis affected people in the use of mobile and digital technologies⁵ as well as an

understanding of local mobile operator capacity, something that has been highly valued by partners. By encouraging partners to pool their knowledge and conduct collaborative research, partnership catalysts help ensure interventions are appropriate to people's needs and the local context.

This step is often iterative, taking place during partnership initiatives and including a diverse range of perspectives. It is vital that affected communities are consulted on solutions, including potentially marginalised voices.⁶

GSMA support to the Ethiopia Collaborative Cash Delivery (CCD) Consortium

The GSMA supported CCD members as they reflected on the potential of mobile money for cash assistance by commissioning a gap analysis of local mobile money services. Building on this, the team helped the CCD to develop tailored regional research to inform pilots. This work enabled the consortium to look at the existing policy environment and infrastructure available, preparing them to—where appropriate for the people they serve—partner with local mobile money providers. The research was the first of its kind in Ethiopia and filled an essential gap to help humanitarians understand more broadly how to consider in what way they might work with the local private sector.

Convening for purpose

Bringing together stakeholders from different sectors, who may not have partnered in the past, creates opportunities to coalesce around challenges, learn from each other's experience, identify common needs, and develop potential solutions and approaches that leverage their respective strengths. Partnership catalysts can encourage this by proactively and strategically creating opportunities for convening. Convenings might take the form of research launch events or co-creation workshops addressing a humanitarian challenge, but most importantly, they need to create space for stakeholders to identify the value of a cross-sectoral partnership.

The GSMA often brings together MNOs, humanitarian organisations, government officials and others to discuss the potential of mobile technology in humanitarian response. In this space, MNOs and humanitarian organisations have unique and complementary capacity and knowledge, and partners from both sectors often value the opportunity to learn from respective digital and humanitarian ecosystem insights. GSMA partners have found value in these convenings as a means of facilitating introductions and fostering cross-sector connections.

GSMA convening in Burundi

The use of mobile technology for humanitarian assistance is still relatively nascent in Burundi, and partnerships between the two sectors are not common. The GSMA convened a workshop with a local MNO, along with UN agencies, NGOs and the government to conduct a collaborative context mapping and discussion of priority areas for development and co-creation. This engagement, and the collective thinking that followed, supported the development of new ideas, solutions and pilots, many of which the team continues to support.



⁵ GSMA (2023) [Humanitarian Connectivity, Needs and Usage Assessment](#).

⁶ Hamilton, Z., Casswell, J., & Alonso, A. (2020) [Human-centred design in humanitarian settings: Methodologies for inclusivity](#). GSMA



Align: Selecting, brokering and aligning partnerships

A successful partnership catalyst plays a key, and often unseen, role in identifying and selecting the most suitable and enthusiastic partners in the ecosystem. This also involves ensuring effective foundations and expectations are built into new and emerging relationships between non-traditional partners.

Partnership brokering

Partnership catalysts need to identify partners who are eager to move past discussion and use their organisation's skills and resources in meaningful cross-sectoral idea development, aligning expectations ahead of any attempt to formalise arrangements. This involves identifying and documenting key areas of value for each partner, as well as their motivation and capacity. This work should also include an awareness of respective costs and financing requirements.

The catalyst should also suggest how partnerships may be best structured. These could be bilateral

(between two cross-sectoral organisations), consortia (several organisations from two or more sectors) or triangular (a bilateral partnership with the inclusion of a third organisation to provide specific technical or support services) models. Often times in the early stages of a partnership, the catalyst should stay involved to act as 'the glue' holding stakeholders together and supporting implementation.

For the GSMA, this has often involved identifying willing and able MNOs that can eagerly and collaboratively support humanitarian partners to meet specific challenges.

GSMA brokering in Somalia

Telesom, a leading MNO in Somaliland, became aware of issues facing humanitarians related to the verification of cash recipients and knew they had the capacity to help find a solution. The GSMA brokered a partnership with CARE International, through which a solution could be designed, developed and piloted. The work, guided by a strong sense of collaboration and mutual understanding, developed Voice-ID, which uses voice biometrics and IVR to verify recipients remotely.⁷ As CARE looked to expand the technology into different regions of Somalia, the GSMA played a key brokering role in supporting CARE to reach agreements with two new MNO partners and take the solution to scale.

⁷ GSMA (2021) *Verifying recipients of cash assistance through Voice ID: Pilot project lessons and outcomes*

Project development

Joint initiatives often involve lots of iteration, with project details and the input needed from partners shifting. Misunderstandings and misaligned expectations can lead to partnerships breaking down, where successful partnerships collaboratively keep ideas moving forward together.

While project ownership must sit with the partners themselves, after linkages have been made, a partnership catalyst can play a key role in materialising activities by supporting initial project development. They should ensure the process fosters mutual understanding about the design, direction,

approach and goals of projects. This may manifest as facilitating and organising development discussions or clarifying the focus and objectives of different actors and creating actionable and realistic proposals and workplans.

The GSMA use systematic but flexible approaches to help develop and drive partnerships through their early planning and design phase. In some instances, even when a relationship between partners already exists, the facilitation of more productive conversations has been credited with helping to progress and deliver initial partnership activities.

Development of a digital refugee livelihoods initiative

A humanitarian partner requested GSMA support in bringing an MNO onboard to develop and refine a new livelihoods project for refugees and host communities. Despite having an existing supplier-relationship with the MNO, GSMA support was needed to help shift this into a project partner relationship, with the MNO offering substantial alterations to their normal ways of working for the project to succeed. The development required considerable back and forth, with ongoing discussions on the detail of the project and the support needed from each side. The GSMA team were credited with re-establishing and revitalising the relationship, helping to mediate and overcome challenges, and creating the time and space for constructive discussions.





Support: Supporting project implementation and longer-term viability

Once a partnership and respective projects have been initiated, ongoing support is often needed to ensure communication, collaboration and delivery stay on track. This is especially true for cross-sectoral partnerships where organisations can be structured very differently, with separate ways of working.

Day-to-day support

After partnerships and initiatives have been established, there is often an important supportive and facilitative role for partnership catalysts to maintain, ensuring collaboration and activities remain on track. It can take time for humanitarian and private sector partners, such as MNOs, to adjust to working together. In the interim, the project catalyst can play a supporting role in establishing collaborative structures, protocols, and overall project management approaches.

This may take place through arranging and documenting regular project meetings or by providing project management and delivery support,

ensuring all partners meet their obligations and acting as a go-between when necessary. In this role, the catalyst acts as an enabler and unifier.

For the GSMA, this has included providing dedicated project management and support consultants, based in the project location, that can act as a readily available coordinator across the partnership. The GSMA has also commissioned consultant subject matter experts to provide more technical support as needed. Partners especially appreciate this when they do not have in-house capacity or require guidance through more complex elements of delivery.

Technical assistance

When catalysing partnerships, a key aim for the GSMA is to help partners build their capacity to integrate digital solutions in humanitarian programming successfully. Partner capacity and readiness is often driven by increased knowledge and awareness of mobile-enabled solutions, and how best to work with technology partners. To achieve this,

the GSMA provide partners with technical advisory support and help build their capacity for using innovative technology in ongoing projects, as well as support in developing organisational strategies and approaches for continued cross-sector engagement and collaboration.

MNO humanitarian positioning strategies

The GSMA has supported MNOs in Burundi, Kenya and Somalia to develop organisational strategies to create and expand partnerships with humanitarian agencies in their countries. These strategies document their willingness to provide services tailored towards the needs of humanitarian partners and the people they serve. They also provide the mechanisms and structure to build collaboration and co-creation with humanitarian partners into their working practices. This has helped the MNOs to clearly prioritise areas of engagement with the humanitarian sector, where they did not have this before. This was done through consultation across the MNOs and potential partners, with the involvement of dedicated consultant support.

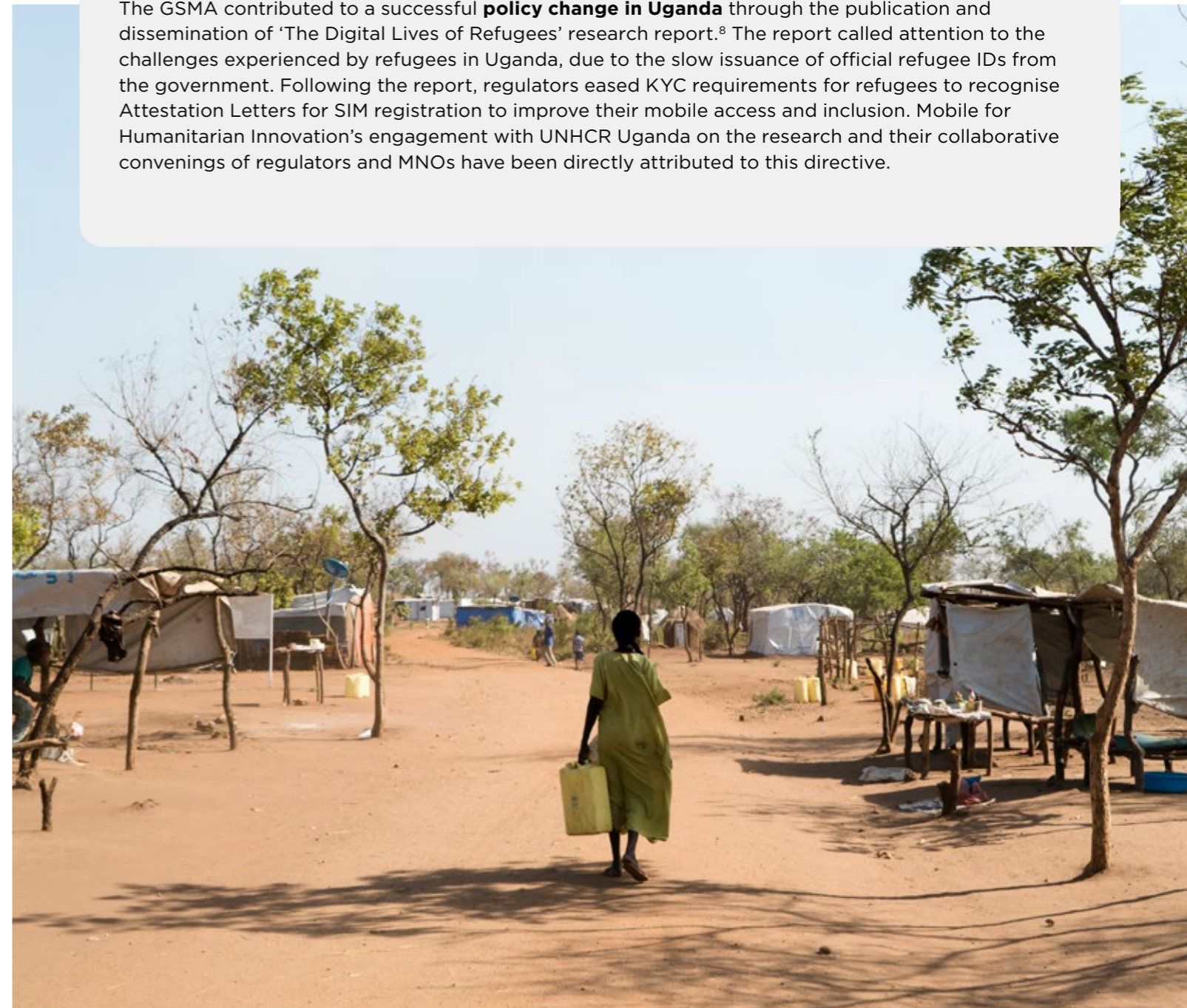
Project viability

Having a good understanding of the local regulatory context before a project starts can have a major impact on project implementation. While an enabling environment and a supportive regulation can facilitate digital humanitarian programming, more restrictive policies can make it a challenge. It can be useful for partners to connect with relevant stakeholders in government, technology and humanitarian sectors to understand the current policy and regulatory context and how, if at all, it is likely to develop. Partners may also be able to support each other to conduct joint advocacy activities when developing collaborative activities and interventions.

While advocacy might not be a core role of partnership facilitators, helping partners to identify and address specific policy and regulatory barriers or opportunities can be beneficial. On some occasions, the GSMA has been able to help partners engage with governments and regulators to improve the relevant policy and regulatory environments. Although usually a longer-term solution, this type of support can help unlock access to new mobile-enabled services and solutions on a large scale, and ultimately facilitate the transformation of the local digital ecosystem.

Advocating for policy change in Uganda

The GSMA contributed to a successful **policy change in Uganda** through the publication and dissemination of 'The Digital Lives of Refugees' research report.⁸ The report called attention to the challenges experienced by refugees in Uganda, due to the slow issuance of official refugee IDs from the government. Following the report, regulators eased KYC requirements for refugees to recognise Attestation Letters for SIM registration to improve their mobile access and inclusion. Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation's engagement with UNHCR Uganda on the research and their collaborative convenings of regulators and MNOs have been directly attributed to this directive.





Amplify: Collecting and disseminating evidence and learning

This area of partnership facilitation is focused on strengthening partner monitoring, evaluation and learning, as well as amplifying and promoting key outcomes, messages and lessons. This can increase the likelihood of successful partnership projects iterating, scaling-up and being adopted by others.

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning

Strong MEL data allows partners to see what is working, what is not, and adjust their project accordingly. Encouraging and supporting partners to build a robust evidence base can also help future fundraising, establish partners as thought leaders, or influence relevant policy decisions. The findings from research and evaluation can also act as important milestones for convening project partners and sharing open self-reflection, which is vital in longer-term engagements.

For the GSMA, the aim of MEL support is to ensure partners reflect on the types of evidence they need

to answer questions related to project impact, the ways in which new technology is being used, and importantly, the value of cross-sectoral partnerships. This has involved providing support to humanitarian partners to develop and strengthen their project monitoring frameworks, as well as helping to deliver specific research and evaluation projects. For projects that contribute to specific learning objectives, the GSMA has commissioned third-party research and evaluation support. This ensures both quality output as well as taking some of the burden from partners.



Promotion and dissemination

Partnership catalysts can also add value by creating opportunities and platforms for partners to showcase their projects, publicise their results and share their lessons with broad audiences. Exposure at national, regional and international levels can help projects be discovered, profiled, funded, and replicated in new locations. To this end, catalysts can identify or create opportunities for partners to share their work. This could be through supporting the development of published outputs or highlighting and providing access to relevant platforms and events.

The GSMA has convened internal workshops, external webinars, and wider multi-sector and government fora to promote partner projects. Partners are also given visible promotion in published outputs and at global events, such as GSMA Thrive Africa. Partners may also be able to leverage their own positions, networks and platforms by allowing their collaborators to showcase additional projects and impact.

This work also has value for partnership catalysts themselves. Sharing evidence of success can highlight a need for continual partnership facilitation. For the GSMA, a portfolio of successful cross-sectoral partnerships demonstrates the impact that the mobile industry can have in support of humanitarian action and is likely to encourage others to engage with GSMA humanitarian partnership support, or to forge similar partnerships without the need for GSMA facilitation.

03

Factors for success: What makes a good partnership catalyst?



We will now look at the factors that have enabled the effectiveness of the GSMA's approaches to partnership facilitation in more detail. While not always tangible or quantifiable, they are embedded in the positioning of the team, the way they work and the choices they make. It is important for partnership catalysts to assess the various factors that may affect their ability to develop and support partnerships. The activities and practices of the GSMA team have developed organically to meet the needs of particular contexts and time, and are a result of the specific skills, insights and connections brought by the individual team members. To make most use of the framework going forward, it will also be important for them to regularly review changes to the external context and internal team capacity to assess which practices will continue to be the most effective.



Reputational capital and positioning

The GSMA Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation team is uniquely positioned at the intersection of the mobile and humanitarian sectors. Importantly, it is not seen as a competitor for either industry but known as a neutral party with an aim to see partners succeed. This means that they can bring different organisations and sectors together and facilitate the sharing of their insights in a non-competitive space. As a result, partners noted that both MNOs and humanitarians have been more amenable to engaging when the GSMA are involved. The team are broadly able to

identify suitable partners from a motivated and engaged network, which allows them to successfully engage the right partners on the right projects in the right contexts.

Additionally, this reputation and position is helpful on issues related to policy and regulation. Partners value the expertise and connections to identify and facilitate discussions with policy makers and influencers where appropriate.



Effective partner selection

The GSMA are well-connected across the humanitarian, mobile and wider technology sectors. The team can either leverage these connections or use institutional links to pursue new opportunities as necessary to develop and drive forward partnerships. The research found that team members demonstrate deep contextual knowledge, clear market insight, and an ability to bridge and align different needs.

The team's approach to project and partner selection was also found to be an important element for success. Initial analysis and stakeholder mapping identifies needs and entry points, before providing focused and tailored support to the ideas and stakeholders with the highest potential. This relies on the softer skills of spotting the most motivated and capable partners, identifying opportunities, and matching up needs with solutions.



Strong partnership management

The GSMA team was felt to have an aptitude for connecting and helping partners overcome challenges, supporting partners with the capacity to think differently, and capitalising on opportunities. The team are recognised for creating active and collaborative spaces for partnerships to take place and enabling innovations to develop and scale up.

The team has developed clear objectives to guide their approach to managing partnerships, but recognises the value of flexibility to adapt, respond and support as needed. The team's practices are rooted in contextual knowledge but their soft skills and ability to find solutions to problems are also highly valued by their partners.



Recognised thought leaders

The GSMA is recognised as an expert in the area of digital humanitarian assistance, with a substantial in-house knowledge base and access to an extensive wider network for additional expertise as needed. The practical toolkits and training that the GSMA's Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation team has developed provide operational guidance and accessible instruments to potential partners.⁹ Thanks to their strong national networks of technical consultants, the Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation team are also able to provide access to a unique mix of highly specialised technological, humanitarian and mobile expertise via their established network

of third-party partners and consultants. The Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation team can leverage their wider connections to help partners to inform their engagement with industry and government stakeholders. This includes drawing on the GSMA's wider wealth of policy expertise to help partners understand new and complex crisis contexts.

This presents the GSMA not only as a capable partnership catalyst, but also as a beneficial thought partner and adviser on the specific topics and challenges to be addressed.



Embedded culture of reflection and learning

Robust research and monitoring, evaluation and learning is a GSMA-wide approach that underpins the team's partnership facilitation work. Collecting lessons from across the portfolio and identifying and responding to evidence gaps in mobile-enabled innovation is a wider focus of the Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation programme. Through its dedicated MEL activities, research and insights capacity, and stakeholder engagement activities, the programme works to help strengthen the evidence

base and tools needed to support organisations to deliver high-impact digital humanitarian assistance. The Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation team also use their unique positioning and broad networks to ensure that the evidence collected is not only robust but that it is also disseminated and gets noticed. Their unique reach and thought leadership positioning is beneficial for amplifying learning and getting more stakeholders interested in what their partners are achieving.

Factors for success

For any partnership catalyst to make use of the GSMA Humanitarian Partnership Framework, it is important for them to consider these enabling factors when assessing their ability to develop and support cross-sectoral partnerships in the particular contexts they are active. As some of these factors are linked to the GSMA's unique position and function, it may not always be possible for an organisation to directly replicate all areas within the framework when playing a similar role across other sectors.

⁹ GSMA(2021), [Developing guidelines for cash transfers in Somalia](#); GSMA (2022), [Mobile internet skills training toolkit](#)

04

Impact of a partnership catalyst



The purpose of cross-sectoral partnerships between humanitarians and non-traditional actors is to drive positive outcomes for people in need of humanitarian assistance. As such, a key aim of the independent research into the GSMA's partnership catalysing work was to identify, articulate and evidence the results and outcomes of supported projects. It also sought to assess the approaches and areas of work that have been most successful.

→ Project level outcomes

A key and important outcome of supporting cross-sectoral partnerships is measured in the development, piloting and scaling of new and enhanced approaches to address humanitarian challenges. In this way, partnership catalysts can be considered successful when partners deploy solutions which directly meet the needs of crisis-affected people.

The GSMA has a well-documented portfolio of supporting partners developing new mobile-enabled solutions from scratch, enabling the adaptation of existing services in partnership with MNOs or other digital service providers. Ultimately, these projects have been found to meet existing needs within crisis-

→ Partner level outcomes

In addition to driving outcomes at a project level, partnership catalysts can consider the impact of their work in the development of capacity, culture and awareness of supported partner organisations. This can be across a range of topics, notably where the catalyst has expertise to share. For the GSMA, this has been demonstrated through increased capacity to effectively deploy digital solutions and forge cross-sectoral partnerships, as well as strengthening their MEL capabilities.

The GSMA works with MNOs to guide them to become more effective partners to humanitarian

→ Ecosystem level changes

Partnership catalysts can also have more nuanced, system level changes within the ecosystems or locations in which they work. These changes tend to be slower and represent broader shifts within systems and frameworks to increasingly facilitate the type of work being pursued. For the GSMA, for example, this

The findings identified three levels of results where partnership catalysts (including the GSMA) might have influence:

1. The project or initiative (project level);
2. The partner or consortium (partner level); and
3. The country or ecosystem (ecosystem level).

The GSMA can most clearly articulate contribution at project and partner level, but this is harder for more catalytic support at the ecosystem level. Future assessments will approach this through analysis with a lens of systems change.

affected communities while also often improving the overall efficiency and effectiveness of interventions.

For example, the GSMA's work on Voice-ID in Somaliland involved working with partners to develop a new technology to validate recipients of cash assistance. While this was a challenge primarily faced by humanitarian organisations, it was also essential that any new solution was well-received by the people ultimately using it. An evaluation of the initial pilot found that the solution both reduced verification costs by around half and that 99 per cent of aid-users having to use it easily received their assistance and 91 per cent recommended using it for future programmes.

organisations, especially when the GSMA is no longer involved. One operator in Somalia reported that since working with the GSMA, they have now committed to best practice for operational processes and established a dedicated unit of staff trained in humanitarian cash transfer operations. Additionally, several humanitarian partners supported by the GSMA's Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation team also reported an increased interest and readiness to implement mobile-enabled humanitarian assistance, including being able to reflect on where it will add value for aid-users.

may look like a shift in policy in a particular country to allow refugees to access SIM cards with their readily available refugee ID documentation. Additionally, it can represent influence on stakeholders who are one-step removed from the work of the catalyst, and are inspired to pursue it themselves.

05

Conclusion



As humanitarian actors utilise new technologies for more effective humanitarian action, the sector is increasingly looking to engage with non-traditional partners to understand the opportunities and risks of innovative approaches to meet the needs of crisis-affected communities. Response and recovery efforts now regularly include different actors working together to jointly deliver interventions which rely on partnerships spanning different sectors, backgrounds and experience.

This report has shown that although it can be challenging, catalysing cross-sectoral partnerships with non-traditional actors can improve the accuracy, effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian interventions. Private sector involvement in humanitarian action can be beneficial for all those involved and strategic partnerships can successfully enable results, changes and outcomes at project, partner and ecosystem levels.

The GSMA Humanitarian Partnership Framework presents the key entry points for catalysing partnerships, as well as when and how they can be best be facilitated and supported moving forwards. The accompanying use cases also provide evidence of the value, effectiveness and outcomes of these partnerships at different levels, as well the valuable role partnership catalysts play to engage, align, support and amplify partnerships between humanitarians and private sectors partners. Although drawn from the GSMA's partnership portfolio, it is not specific to mobile-enabled assistance and can

be used by organisations of all sizes and sectors to navigate and support the increasing opportunities for cross-sectoral partnerships in support of humanitarian assistance.

The Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation team will continue to catalyse cross-sectoral partnerships with non-traditional actors to deliver digital humanitarian programmes and facilitate the development of fully functioning digital ecosystems. Identifying the approaches and interventions that have had the greatest impact, as well as the approaches that partners have valued most, enables the team to focus its efforts moving forward. The lessons and evidence presented in this report will help strengthen the GSMA's partnership portfolio as it continues to deliver a replicable model for developing and supporting strategic partnerships for innovative mobile-enabled humanitarian solutions. The team will also continue to generate evidence to guide future programming and share lessons to inform the future of digital humanitarian action.

The overall strategy and approach of the GSMA Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation Strategic Partnerships team is clearly working, successfully generating results, and is highly valued by partners.

GSMA Head Office

1 Angel Lane
London, U.K.
EC4R 3AB
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0)20 7356 0600

