

From multi-actor partnerships to innovation platforms: the case of Alianza Shire and Lab Shire

Javier Mazorra Aguiar, Research Fellow, Technical University of Madrid (corresponding author)

javier.mazorra@upm.es
(0034) 910 671 397
Innovation and Technology for Development Centre (itdUPM)
Av. Complutense s/n. Ciudad Universitaria. Madrid, Spain (28040)

Manuel Pastor Gutiérrez, Research Fellow, Technical University of Madrid

m.pastor@upm.es
(0034) 91 452 49 00 - 1661
Innovation and Technology for Development Centre Director (itdUPM)
Av. Complutense s/n. Ciudad Universitaria. Madrid, Spain (28040)

Ander Arzamendi Argaya, Research Fellow, Technical University of Madrid

ander.arzamendi@upm.es
(0034) 91 452 49 00 - 1661
Innovation and Technology for Development Centre Director (itdUPM)
Av. Complutense s/n. Ciudad Universitaria. Madrid, Spain (28040)

Jaime Moreno, Research Fellow, Technical University of Madrid (UPM)

jaime.moreno@upm.es
(0034) 91 452 49 00 - 1661
Innovation and Technology for Development Centre (itdUPM)
Av. Complutense s/n. Ciudad Universitaria. Madrid, Spain (28040)

Carlos Mataix, Associate Professor, Technical University of Madrid (UPM)

carlos.mataix@upm.es
(0034) 91 452 49 00 - 1661
Innovation and Technology for Development Centre Director (itdUPM)
Av. Complutense s/n. Ciudad Universitaria. Madrid, Spain (28040)

Xosé Ramil, Research Fellow, Technical University of Madrid (UPM)

xose.ramil@upm.es
(0034) 91 452 49 00 - 1661
Innovation and Technology for Development Centre Director (itdUPM)
Av. Complutense s/n. Ciudad Universitaria. Madrid, Spain (28040)

Dalia Mendoza Figueroa, Research Intern, Technical University of Madrid

dalia.mendoza.figueroa@upm.es
(0034) 91 452 49 00 - 1661
Innovation and Technology for Development Centre Director (itdUPM)
Av. Complutense s/n. Ciudad Universitaria. Madrid, Spain (28040)

1. Introduction

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) represent an ambitious and universal commitment whose implementation emphasizes the need to activate multi-actor strategic partnerships that foster a collaborative action of all kind of actors through multi-stakeholder partnerships. Currently, these structures are intended not only to find their way through the accomplishment of SDGs, but also to create hubs that enable the sharing and exchanging of information, acknowledgements, accomplishments and failures with the international community, in order to foster replicability and scalability in the work in partnerships.

Framed within SDG 7 – Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all – and SDG 17 – Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development-, “Alianza Shire. Energy Access to Refugees and Host Communities” was created in 2014 as a partnership with the aim of developing innovative solutions for improving energy supply services and quality of life in refugee camps.

Alianza Shire is the first multi-stakeholder partnership for humanitarian action in Spain, with the objective of developing innovative solutions for improving refugees and displaced populations’ access to energy. It counts with the participation of the private sector – through three of the leading companies in energy sector in Spain, which are Acciona.org Foundation, Iberdrola and Signify -, the public sector – through the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation and Development – and the academic sector – through the Innovation and Technology for Development Centre at the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (itdUPM).

The partnership’s first experience took place at Adi-Harush refugee camp in Shire, in the north of Ethiopia, where more than 8,000 Eritrean refugees live, many of whom are unaccompanied minors. Energy access-related problems at Adi-Harush were numerous. From 2018, thanks to the positive results of the previous intervention, the project is being extended to four refugee camps and their respective host communities, by enhancing local capacity and improving access to basic services¹.

During the first phase, a need to create an innovation space within the partnership was identified. Rojo et al (2017), in a previous paper regarding knowledge transfer derived from partnerships, highlighted the need to create a testbed of innovations that can be exported to other areas². Thus, Alianza Shire has created the Lab Shire, designed as an innovation platform, centered on SDG 7 and on SDG 17. Its main functions should be to assure that innovation is fostered during the project implementation, as well as a correct dissemination of knowledge, promoting continuous learning inside partnerships, and to encourage connections within organizations, researchers, higher education institutions and the international community working on the SDG 7 and SDG 17.

This paper aims to illustrate how the experience and lessons learnt from a partnership can be translated into an innovation platform for knowledge exchange. In this sense, it introduces Lab Shire as an innovation lab created to accelerate the transformations promoted by Alianza Shire, and as a hub in which actors from different sectors can share their knowledge

¹ Technical Team, itdUPM. 2017. "Estudio De Caso: Alianza Shire.". Madrid.

² Rojo, Alejandra. 2017. "Transfer Of Knowledge In Refugee Camps". Madrid.

and experience in order to articulate action plans that seek for scalable and replicable solution strategies for complex problems in humanitarian contexts.

2. Partnerships and innovation in Humanitarian Action

The humanitarian system faces grave challenges as natural disasters and escalating conflicts have increasing repercussions. In these contexts, universal access to basic services such as health, water, sanitation, energy or waste management remains a challenge for groups suffering structural inequalities. Addressing it requires paying special attention to technology, service provision models, and the creation of public policies. This comprehensive approach needs complementary capabilities that rarely reside in a single organization. In this sense, multi-stakeholder partnerships can be a suitable instrument for developing ambitious programs of a certain scale.

The need for fostering a collaborative action of all kind of actors –public, private and social–through multi-stakeholder partnerships has been stressed insistently in all declarations, reports, and recommendations that have paved the way to the 2030 Agenda. In fact, Goal 17 calls for revitalizing global partnerships for sustainable development.

Towards the seek for achievement of the SDGs, humanitarian agencies have held high hopes for contributions from the private sector, traditionally seen simply as an alternative source of funding³. Lately the private sector has been playing other roles, most notably in product and process innovation. It has also been increasingly recognized as operating at various scales, from multi-national corporations to national companies to small businesses created by refugees and internally displaced people⁴. While many humanitarian actors are drawn to the funding and know-how that the private sector offers, some remain hesitant about whether a profit motive compromises the ability to uphold humanitarian principles and to operate in the most resource-scarce conditions. Furthermore, across the humanitarian system, more systematic research on the role of the business sector is needed.

As noted in the 2013 report of the UN Secretary General to ECOSOC, “There is a need to build a more inclusive global humanitarian system, with stronger relationships at the global, regional and national levels”⁵. There seems to be a perception of dissatisfaction towards the result of traditional humanitarian actors in establishing partnerships that leverage the assets that each different stakeholder has to offer. The need for innovation in humanitarian action has grown and become more complex. Hence, organizations and involved actors have identified an inadequate approach to innovation in this domain, in which resources for research and development are lacking, innovative solutions are developed in isolation, and demonstrations of success are not being shared. As a central component of innovation, partnerships are important to draw in ideas, good practices, and resources from private technology developers, universities and affected people themselves⁶.

³ Van Landeghem, Lindsay. 2016. *Private-Sector Engagement The Key To Efficient, Effective Energy Access For Refugees*. Ebook. London. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2016-05-19-mei-private-sector-engagement-landeghem.pdf>.

⁴ International Finance Corporation. World Bank Group. 2019. "Private Sector and Refugees. Pathways to Scale.". New York: The Bridgespan Group. <https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/04c889b0-1047-4c2c-a080-e14afb9a4bf2/201905-Private-Sector-and-Refugees-Summary.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=mGiP6tr>.

⁵ itdUPM, Public-Private Partnerships for Humanitarian Action, 2013.

http://www.itd.upm.es/download/appah/Executive%20Summary_ECOSOC_final.pdf

⁶ Betts, Alexander and Bloom, Louise. 2014. *Humanitarian Innovation: The State of the Art*. OCHA Policy and Studies Series, 009. November 2014.

New technologies, partners, and concepts allow humanitarian actors to understand and address problems quickly and effectively. To contend with these growing, and changing demands, organizations are increasingly exploring the idea of “humanitarian innovation,” which draws upon concepts from the private sector to adapt and improve the humanitarian system.

As the SDGs have a focus on transformation, it must be considered that partnerships ought to contribute to systemic change. In this sense, Leda Stott, a partnership expert for the European Social Fund, remarks that a switch from a transactional orientation to a transformational change resulting from collaboration may include the development and endorsement of positive rules and norms at the policy level, shifts in individual and organizational behaviors, and the empowerment of vulnerable and marginalized populations⁷.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships should be the new institutional infrastructures that we need for tackling complex problems that, nowadays, have not yet had a technical solution through conventional projects. We all talk about partnerships; however, moving from rhetoric to its practical deployment, and generalizing its expansion, requires a boost from people and organizations who are highly committed to this approach.

The following part of this paper presents Alianza Shire as an example of an innovative multi-stakeholder partnership in the context of humanitarian action with a transformation approach, as well as some of its main success and improvement areas towards the aim of scaling from a project into a platform structure.

3. Alianza Shire

According to data provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), by the end of 2015, there were more than 55 million displaced people around the world. Around 14 million of them were refugees who were forced to flee due to persecution, conflict, repression and natural disasters. This number has increased up to the end of 2018, to almost 70.8 million individuals forcibly displaced worldwide, from which around 26 million are refugees⁸. The priority of the humanitarian community is to provide these people with basic services such as shelter, food, water and protection. Although, access to energy has been historically disregarded among refugees’ needs, despite its relevance and cross cutting impacts, during last years it has gained attention and several international initiatives to address this problem have been set up like the Moving Energy Initiative (MEI), Safe Access to Fuel and Energy (SAFE) or the Global Plan of Action (GPA) for Sustainable Energy Solutions in Situations of Displacement.

In this context and bearing in mind the potential of several Spanish energy companies, the Office for Humanitarian Action from the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) and the Innovation and Technology for Development Centre at Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (itDUPM) fostered the creation of Alianza Shire in 2014.

⁷ Stott, Leda. 2019. "Partnerships for Sustainable Development: The Monitoring and Evaluation Challenge - ECDPM". *ECDPM*. <https://ecdpm.org/great-insights/civil-society-business-same-direction/partnerships-sustainable-development-monitoring-evaluation-challenge/>.

⁸ "UNHCR Statistics. The World in Numbers." UNHCR Population Statistics - Data - Overview. 2019. Accessed July 19, 2019. <http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/overview>.

In this section, the Pilot Project, as well as the partnership's phase II are detailed. Moreover, a series of learnt lessons are exposed, setting Alianza Shire as a demonstrative experience of achievements and failures resulting from the work in partnerships, and how this can evolve into a platform for innovation and knowledge sharing.

3.1. Pilot Project: Adi-Harush

Between 2014 and 2017, Alianza Shire developed a pilot project in the refugee camp of Adi-Harush (Shire, Northern Ethiopia), where approximately 8.000 people lived. Thus, a comprehensive improvement was made to the electric grid to which the community services of the field were connected, and public lighting was installed over more than 4 km. In addition, refugees were trained and, with the support of the partners of the Alliance, implemented all the improvements to keep them working properly up to today.

Regarding viability, strategical actions began to be implemented, such as carrying out an audit of the electric grid of the refugee camps and the preparation of a guide for the management and optimization of them. In addition, to the development of a training toolkit for the maintenance and repair of the electric grid, and a report on logistics and operations in the field. For this matter, a proper previous diagnose and context identification was required for acknowledging the technical conditions to be faced.

Refugees' participation was crucial in this project's implementation. It was mainly possible because of the provision of theoretical and practical training focused on the results of the needs assessment. People from the host community also joined the training. This resulted essential to transcend from the design of simply technical solutions, towards transcendental management solutions based on a transformation approach.

3.2. Phase II: Energy Access to host communities and refugees

After evaluating the results of the pilot project, the members of Alianza Shire decided to scale it up. From 2018 until 2021, the Alliance develops the second phase of the project; "Alianza Shire: Energy Access to host communities and refugees", funded by the European Union Trust Fund for the Horn of Africa.

In this second phase, work is being done in four refugee camps and their respective host communities, reaching more than 40,000 people. The extension of the network and connection of community services and businesses will be carried out, along with the installation of more than 20 km of street lighting. Businesses will also be created for the distribution of 1,700 Solar Home Systems (SFD). Finally, refugees and local communities will receive training on installation and maintenance of the network, and on entrepreneurship subjects for the development of six businesses based on the distribution and maintenance of the SFD.

The overall objective of the Project is to improve the living conditions in refugee camps and their host communities, strengthening local capacities, creating income generation opportunities and improving access to basic services through the cross-cutting impacts of energy.

The Alliance collaborates with the Ethiopian National Ethiopian Electrical Utility (EEU) as one of the implementing partners, to improve the supply of electricity in the fields and in the host communities, the correction of anomalies, the extension of the electrical network and

the installation of public lighting. In addition, it will provide training for capacity development among the refugee population and host communities for the maintenance of the facilities. It considers a “trainer of trainers” model, seeking to extend the project’s impact, and guarantee its sustainability towards the future.

On the other hand, it promotes the creation of micro-businesses by the refugee population and host communities, based on the supply of electricity through Solar Home Systems. The objective is to create opportunities for income generation and livelihoods to improve the quality of life. This market-based approach aims at the long-term sustainability of electrical supply at household level enabling the maintenance and the supply of spare parts.

Alianza Shire also includes a work line to systematize and disseminate the main experiences and learnings acquired during the project, to make them available for the international humanitarian community.

3.3. Lessons learnt

From the experience of the pilot project, and after identifying the need for systematizing the lessons learnt for a correct deployment of the project’s phase II, efforts have been made towards the identification of possible improves, both at a project and at a partnership level. This identification process is considered of high relevance for the upcoming knowledge systematization and transfer schemes, framed within the scaling up of the partnership into an innovation platform.

Taking place within a humanitarian context, a partnership requires different approaches and a complete shared understating from all its members. Among the aspects that differentiate this type of initiatives from traditional partnerships, it is worth mentioning the need for quick responses and immediate decision making, strict alignment to protocols due to political and security issues, the application and respect for the principles of humanitarian action, special attention to the promotion of local empowerment, careful management of relations between partnership members and implementing partners, and an extensive institutional support from a facilitating institution⁹.

This complex context and its framework determine the partnership’s functioning, as well as the implementation of its projects. In this sense, there are some reflections that can be used to improve the service and management model of future interventions carried out by the partnership, and that can be of use for other experiences involved in similar contexts. In the case of Alianza Shire, evaluations and reports have been made, focusing in the partnership’s management, the participation of the members, and the project implementation in the camps. Evaluating these three areas derives in a series of lessons learnt, detailed in this section.

a. Partnership’s management

In terms of coordination and an appropriate responsibilities distribution, a “brokering entity” is essential for the Partnership’s consolidation and sustainability. In the frame of Alianza Shire, the management capacity of itdUPM as the facilitating entity has been crucial. The

⁹ Stott, Leda, and Maria Prandi. 2015. "Informe Sobre Lecciones Aprendidas". Apoyo Al Desarrollo De La Alianza Pública Privada Para La Acción Humanitaria (APPAH) Para El Acceso A Energía En Campos De Refugiados. Madrid.

University enjoys a unique position and space to play the role of facilitator or broker. However, the complexity of an initiative with the characteristics of Alianza Shire makes it face numerous challenges: a complex operational deployment, non-traditional approaches in the humanitarian response (joint work with host communities and refugee camps, service distribution models basic inspired by the creation of micro businesses, etc.) and close coordination between diverse organizations with cultures and rhythms that are not always coincident.

In addition, Stott et al (2015), in previous partnership management evaluations remarked that the required time for creating and implementing Alianza Shire should not be underestimated¹⁰. Now, five years after its creation, the partnership has the adequate knowledge and services to offer to the humanitarian community, thanks to the acquired knowledge from experience. To guarantee the success of this project, its future sustainability and the potential of a platform of this type, a complement is needed to share this acquired knowledge, and to ensure that innovation and learning processes are not overshadowed by the needs of the operation.

On the other hand, and in order to guarantee transparency and mutual accountability, a fluent internal and external communication should be ensured. In this sense, communication regarding the operation has been clear and consistent, though the need for a platform that concentrates previous experiences, technologies, initiatives, actors and information about the operating contexts has been identified since the implementation of the pilot project, and carried out by the partnership's members and the brokering entity throughout the evolution of the partnership.

b. Participation of the members

In order to carry out the work in partnership, all members mobilized not only material, financial and cost-price material resources, but also technical knowledge, skills, human resources, capacities, and contacts. Hence, one important lesson learnt related to resources is to go beyond the approach merely focused on obtaining economic revenues. All with the aim of defining the partnership as an opportunity for innovation within the transformation approach.

Furthermore, all members must be well informed and updated on the context where the project and partnership are working. A right connection with established protocols and joint decision-making processes together with the refugee population and host communities is required to enable and ensure the project's long-term success and sustainability.

Having a deep understanding of the context, and exploring their complementary capabilities, partnership members ought to go beyond the design of technological solutions, and instead, aim for transcendental management solutions through knowledge transfer based on a transformation approach.

c. Project implementation in the camps

In order to achieve project results, it is crucial to involve all local partners from the identification phase as well as to coordinate all stakeholders in the energy sector.

¹⁰ Stott, Leda, and Maria Prandi. 2015. "Informe Sobre Lecciones Aprendidas". Apoyo Al Desarrollo De La Alianza Público Privada Para La Acción Humanitaria (APPAH) Para El Acceso A Energía En Campos De Refugiados. Madrid.

Participation of all stakeholders is the only way to ensure, on one hand, identification of context-adapted solutions, and on the other hand, the intervention's sustainability.

A thorough and detailed identification is crucial in order to gain deep and up-to-date knowledge of the context by all partnership members. Although in the pilot project, a characterization report of the refugee camps in the area was carried out, partnership members claim not having absorbed enough knowledge on the context and environment of implementation. On the other hand, refugee population and host communities might also require a deeper knowledge on Alianza Shire's work on the field. Thus, communication materials and the sharing of baseline information must be a must for the brokering entity and partnership members.

To this extent, characterization reports, case studies, baseline quantitative and qualitative data, information gathering methodologies, etc. codesigned among partnership members, humanitarian innovation actors, and diverse groups from university, public or private sector working around this subject would ideally be shared among the partnership, implementing partners and refugee population. This could be a powerful tool to increase the comprehension of the context, and foster innovation towards the creation of new solution strategies.

Towards the seek for sustainability, it was identified of high relevance to create a training program with a ToT approach (Trainer of Trainers), and to form a group of technicians who can repair the technological equipment and do maintenance work. Training and creation of the group highlighted the added value of this Partnership according to the main humanitarian actors working on the field. As an ultimate step, the systematization of these training programs will enable their evaluation, impact estimation, replicability and scalability in similar contexts for humanitarian interventions.

4. Fostering Innovation: Lab Shire

The work that Alianza Shire has been carrying out since 2014, as well as the numerous previous experiences of its members in access to basic services, demonstrates that new relationship schemes and collaboration structures based on multi-stakeholder partnerships are needed. However, there is an identified lack of tools designed from practice, which makes it essential to generate independent spaces in which learning is systematized and innovation happens in different levels -technological, provision models, public policies, international frameworks, etc. Based on this identification, and the gathering of lessons learnt after the implementation of the pilot project and the current deployment of Phase II, came the need for scaling the work in partnership from Alianza Shire, into a platform scheme designed to foster innovation and knowledge transfer.

An Innovation Lab seeks to be a space in which different sectors can articulate actions to participate in the resolution of problems. As a platform, innovation labs summon dynamic and multidisciplinary partners and collaborators to work around specific problems and create scalable and replicable solutions or strategies¹¹.

The multisectoral collaboration that characterizes an innovation lab, usually gathers in its work plans participants from the academic sector, the private sector, government, NGOs

¹¹ UNICEF Innovación. 2012. "Laboratorios De Innovación: Una Guía Práctica". New York. <https://www.unicef.org/videoaudio/PDFs/laboratorios-de-innovacion3b3n-una-guia-practica1.pdf>.

and civil society. Hence the creation of a successful lab may not be a simple task. Under a platform or interface model, this space should promote the alignment and integration between actors, dynamics and diverse interests.

When studying what has been made in this area through the elaboration of a benchmarking and an identification of good practices and characteristics under which an innovation platform should be created, it was identified that an innovation lab is preferably immersed in an environment and culture of innovation. This encourages openness to change and adaptability in conflict resolution processes. Inside an effective lab of this type, one of the main activities should be the evaluation of failures and mistakes, for recognizing them as areas of opportunity for improvement¹².

Within the framework of Alianza Shire, the LABSHIRE was born as a space that complements the projects themselves and focuses mainly on knowledge management and innovation. Although LABSHIRE is framed within two specific Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): the 7th "Affordable and non-polluting energy", as a transversal and fundamental element of human development, and the 17th "Partnerships to achieve the objectives" as a result of basing its creation on Alianza Shire, it could be an opening up towards other SDGs, as an opportunity for innovation with a wider range of subjects.

LABSHIRE is an innovation lab created to accelerate the transformations promoted by Alianza Shire. It will have physical headquarters in Madrid, and it is planned to have them also in Shire in Refugee Camps, and will be coordinated and hosted by itdUPM, in collaboration with the rest of the partners, pursuing the following objectives:

- Take advantage of the project's second phase 2018-2021, to develop transdisciplinary processes in Shire camps, which will lead to new solutions and knowledge derived from co-creation between refugee communities, local communities, researchers from various disciplines and experts from the private and humanitarian sectors.
- Systematize the experiences and generate new narratives, both from the project and from LABSHIRE itself, to share them with the international community, so that the transdisciplinary work approach can be applied to other experiences in which joint efforts could be promoted.
- Generate evidence and take advantage of the capacities of all the organizations connected to LABSHIRE, in order to influence decision-making processes and public policies creation on the management of refugee crises and on the need for boosting partnership work.

4.1. LABSHIRE scope areas

LABSHIRE works on three complementary scope areas: Research and Innovation; Training; and Knowledge Transfer and New Narratives, each detailed in this section.

a. Research and Innovation

¹² Technical Team, itdUPM. 2019. "LAB SHIRE BENCHMARKING. Alianzas Y Laboratorios Sociales Y De Innovación: Mejores Prácticas, Metodologías y Funcionamiento.". Madrid.

In order to obtain access to basic services in complex contexts, new relationship schemes and collaborative structures based on multi-stakeholder partnerships are needed. Thus, within the framework of LABSHIRE, applied research and innovation in transversal areas are promoted, paying special attention to the systematization of the experiences developed by Alianza Shire in its projects, as well as in the LAB itself, through the deepening of research on specific aspects, the development of case studies, or the application of innovative evaluation methodologies both in the field of alliances and in the field of basic services.

b. Training

LABSHIRE aims to develop training materials for actors and organizations from different areas - public, private, civil society, etc. – who are working in partnerships. These materials aim to focus especially on the competencies for working in partnership and the required capacities to be able to work in the provision of basic services in complex contexts.

This area is oriented in two main directions. In the first place, towards the members of Alianza Shire with the aim of facilitating the alignment of visions among organizations, and a greater knowledge of the principles that govern work in multi-stakeholder alliances, promoting a common language and shared working strategies. Second, towards other organizations and actors who are interested in the subject.

c. Knowledge Transfer and New Narratives

LABSHIRE promotes the creation of spaces for connection and conversation, in which the rigorous debate about the main challenges of partnership are encouraged, seeking for the universalization of energy access and other basic services. LABSHIRE connects the projects derived from Alianza Shire with other relevant projects, organizations and alliances, facilitating the exchange of experiences and the discussion about methodologies, approaches and learning. Special attention is given to the generation of new narratives that re-frame refugee crises and contribute to influencing more ambitious public policies for their proper management.

LABSHIRE also pretends to systematize the learning derived from these discussions and incorporate them into Alianza Shire's own project and to the LABSHIRE training plan, in order to turn them into knowledge products that can be disseminated in the international community. Furthermore, this allows the LABSHIRE ecosystem to expand, connecting it with other relevant initiatives and positioning the "Shire" brand in the international community, as a key reference for universal access to energy in humanitarian contexts.

4.2. Stages and Evolution of LABSHIRE

Today, LABSHIRE's priority is to innovate in the means for exploiting the complementary capabilities of the partners. Hence, it already promotes learning processes to institutionalize the knowledge generated and the lessons learnt from Alianza Shire, and to share them with the humanitarian community and the Spanish and international private sector. Thanks to the complementary capacities of the partners, knowledge products and knowledge transfer interventions are being generated based on the projects that have been carried out. Although there are some tangible products already, some systematization, decision and transmission protocols and procedures are on the path for strengthening and improvement.

As stated before, the second phase of Alianza Shire faces numerous challenges derived from the proper complexity of working in humanitarian contexts. These challenges demand a wide and strong room for innovation towards sustainable and replicable solution strategies.

For this reason, from the various work units of Alianza Shire, complementary actions have been identified that will be developed by LABSHIRE, which will strengthen the work in partnership and will help other multi-stakeholder initiatives to take advantage of what they have learned from this experience.

In the midterm, LABSHIRE aims to become a demonstrative experience of Spanish cooperation, where public and private organizations interact, experiment, and generate knowledge regarding access to basic services. This initiative could be replicated in other sectors to create a lab network on multi-stakeholder alliances and critical areas for the achievement of SDGs.

5. Conclusions

The growing and changing demands for innovation in humanitarian contexts could be the needed trigger to consider partnerships as the main contributor to systemic change. A switch from a transactional orientation to a transformational change in the form of multi-stakeholder partnerships should be the new institutional infrastructure for tackling complex problems that, nowadays, have not yet had a technical solution through conventional projects.

Created in 2014, Alianza Shire is now an example of an innovative multi-stakeholder partnership in the context of humanitarian action with a transformation approach. The work that has carried out since its creation, as well as the numerous previous experiences of its members in access to basic services, demonstrates that new relationship schemes and collaboration structures based on multi-stakeholder partnerships are needed.

From identifying the potential for knowledge sharing and transformational capabilities of the partnership, after the gathering of lessons learnt from the implementation of Alianza Shire's pilot project and Phase II, came the need for scaling from work in partnership, into a platform scheme designed to foster innovation and knowledge transfer. Leda Stott remarks that "internalisation of learning from partnering encourages improvements in organisational mandates and processes and assists deeper shared understanding of the value and importance of other sectors and their roles in society"¹³.

Thus, within the framework of Alianza Shire, LABSHIRE was born as a space that complements the projects themselves and focuses mainly on knowledge management and innovation. Although framed within SDGs 7th and 17th, LABSHIRE as an innovation lab created to accelerate the transformations promoted by Alianza Shire could be an opening up towards other SDGs, as an opportunity for innovation within a wider range of subjects.

Through its complementary areas (research and Innovation; Training; and Knowledge Transfer and New Narratives), LABSHIRE's priority is to innovate in the means for exploiting the complementary capabilities of Alianza Shire's partners. Hence, it already promotes

¹³ Stott, Leda. 2019. "Partnerships for Sustainable Development: The Monitoring and Evaluation Challenge - ECDPM". *ECDPM*. <https://ecdpm.org/great-insights/civil-society-business-same-direction/partnerships-sustainable-development-monitoring-evaluation-challenge/>.

learning processes to institutionalize the knowledge generated and the lessons learnt from the work in partnership, and to share them with the humanitarian community and the Spanish and international private sector.

As an innovation lab comes from an environment and culture of innovation, LABSHIRE is an example of how the lessons learnt from practice can encourage openness to change and adaptability in conflict resolution processes, while contributing to a successful switch from a transactional to a transformational approach through the creation of innovation platforms for the creation of solution strategies in humanitarian contexts.