

CREATING
HOPE
IN CONFLICT:

A HUMANITARIAN
GRAND CHALLENGE



**ANNUAL
REPORT
2024**

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Creating Hope in Conflict: A Humanitarian Grand Challenge (CHIC) is a partnership of the U.S. Agency for International Development, the U.K. Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, and Global Affairs Canada, and is implemented by Grand Challenges Canada. CHIC identifies and accelerates innovations that save and improve the lives of those living in humanitarian crises caused by conflict.

Visit www.humanitariangrandchallenge.org

Cover photo: Hand in Hand for Aid and Development





Photo source: Convexity Humanitarian Aid Transfer Solution (CHATS) uses a web and Android-based app and blockchain tokens to distribute cash voucher assistance through blockchain tokens.

“ Creating Hope in Conflict not only provided funding but went a step further ... by organizing and facilitating capacity-building sessions. This has been a great experience that gave our team an opportunity to learn and to share information with other innovators and most importantly with other potential funding partners.”



LETTER FROM DR. FAWAD AKBARI DIRECTOR OF HUMANITARIAN INNOVATION AND PROGRAM OPTIMIZATION

In mid-2023, I had the privilege of visiting one of our innovation partners, Sehat Kahani, in Pakistan. This visit was personal to me, as I share cultural ties with the Afghan refugees and host communities that the project serves. My visit, highlighted in this report, reinforced a core truth: in conflict-affected areas, local communities are best equipped to address their people's needs.

As global humanitarian catastrophes continue to emerge and intensify, the resources required to meet the needs of affected communities are falling behind. Local innovators can meet those needs: they are creative, flexible, and adaptable to ever-shifting crises. In 2023 and 2024, CHIC made strides in prioritizing localization, derisking transformative solutions through early investments, and promoting innovation adoption across the humanitarian sector.

Our impact has been substantial. To date, we have funded 91 innovations, nearly half of which are locally-led and almost one-third led by women. Innovators funded by CHIC have leveraged more than \$110 million CAD from other partners, investors, and donors. Collectively, they have reached more than 3.6 million people across 27 conflict-affected countries.

I am excited to share that, from over 600 applications, we have selected projects for our fourth seed innovation cohort. Over two-thirds are locally owned or led, a nearly 45% increase from where we started in 2018. Each will receive \$250,000 to test novel ideas in some of the world's most challenging environments, aiming to reshape humanitarian aid delivery. We've also awarded three new transition-to-scale grants to innovators preparing to scale their proven solutions.

This year, we begin a new partnership with Gray Dot Catalyst to provide more tailored regional support for innovators. We have also laid the groundwork for initiatives that can unlock opportunities for scale and adoption. In the spring, we launched our first ecosystem catalyst grant, informed by a discussion we hosted at the Grand Challenges Annual Meeting in Dakar last October. This mechanism aims to unlock the systemic impact of innovations by funding humanitarian agencies to develop partnerships with and adopt promising solutions.

In 2023 and 2024, we continued advancing learning initiatives to inform innovation support and adoption. We made progress on our Innovation Adoption Strategy, launched in late 2023, strengthening collaborations with humanitarian actors to adopt and scale innovations. We collaborated with The Research People to produce a paper on lessons learned from CHIC's support to local innovation, offering recommendations to enhance community-led solutions. At Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week 2024, we sponsored a cohort of innovators to share insights on fostering innovation, especially as conflicts worsen and AI becomes a vital tool in service delivery.

The progress we've made would not have been possible without the support of our partners: the U.S. Agency for International Development, the U.K. Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, and Global Affairs Canada. Together, we are advancing bold, community-driven solutions and redefining the future of humanitarian support. With our collective commitment, we are poised to continue driving meaningful change where it is needed most.

Dr. Fawad Akbari

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fawad Akbari', written over a horizontal line.

OUR IMPACT

91

INNOVATIONS FUNDED

\$110M

ADDITIONAL FUNDS LEVERAGED BY INNOVATORS*

\$3.23

IN NEW INVESTMENTS FOR EVERY \$1 OF CHIC FUNDING

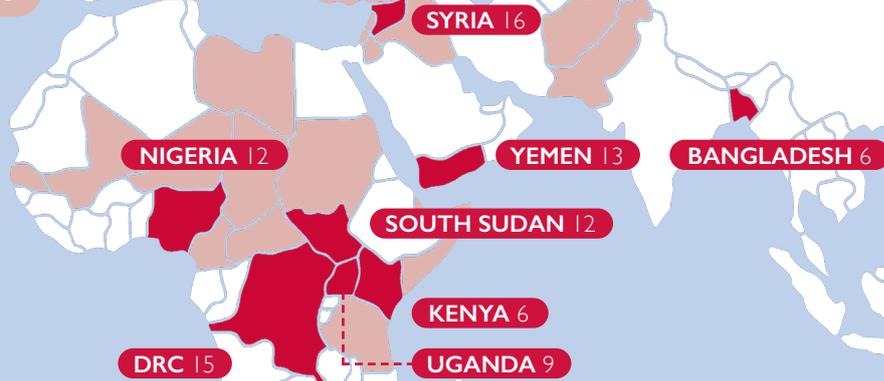
3.59M

PEOPLE WITH ACCESS TO NEW INNOVATIONS

TOP IMPLEMENTATION COUNTRIES

NUMBER OF INNOVATIONS

OTHER COUNTRIES



386,034

LIVES IMPROVED

(197K women, 189K men, 188 other identities)

*All funding reported is in Canadian Dollars (CAD)

MEET THE NEW INNOVATORS

This year, following a competitive selection process with over 600 applications, CHIC awarded 11 new and promising seed innovation grants of \$250,000 CAD each. These innovations address the needs of conflict-affected communities and will test new ideas related to energy, health, and life-saving information to improve how humanitarian assistance is delivered.

ENERGY

Africa GreenTec Electrification Rurale Sarl

In order to address the shortage of accessible, reliable energy sources across conflict-affected communities in Mali, Africa GreenTec will deploy Solartainer, a clean, affordable and self-sufficient energy generator designed to improve access to essential energy services.

MALI

ITDC

In response to severely debilitated transportation infrastructure, the International Training and Development Center (ITDC) has developed a 96 hour manufacturing process that converts existing vehicles into electric ones that run on solar energy, enabling remote, conflict-affected communities to better access critical services.

YEMEN

African 1000 Days Action (ADA)

A shortage of clean energy, sanitation, and safe cooking methods presents a significant challenge for internally displaced persons in South Sudan. ADA's Eco-friendly Biogas and Briquettes Use Promotion Project will train technicians to convert stool waste into biogas and charcoal briquettes as an alternative energy source for cooking while improving community sanitation.

SOUTH SUDAN

HEALTH

The Alliance for International Medical Action

In remote communities affected by limited access to medical care, the Alliance for International Medical Action connects patients with healthcare professionals online through a solar-powered telemedicine platform, allowing real-time tracking of crucial health indicators like heart rate, oxygen levels, and blood pressure.

CENTRAL AFRICAN
REPUBLIC

Thrive Gulu

The increasing mental health challenges faced by South Sudanese refugees have prompted Thrive Gulu to develop a novel Dance + Therapy approach. Led by displaced communities, the program combines counselling with dance movement to heal trauma and promote group solidarity.

UGANDA

University of Juba

The University of Juba will implement two solutions to reduce high infant mortality rates and limited specialist care in conflict-affected communities. AIR will enhance resuscitation devices with real-time feedback, improving ventilation quality and fostering continuous clinician training. PRISMS will offer digital guidance for newborn assessment, ensuring quality in the absence of pediatricians.

SOUTH SUDAN

Spark Charity for Innovation and Creativity

Conflict and an under resourced health sector have hindered timely and accurate breast cancer diagnoses in Gaza. Spark has developed Gaza HopeWave, a cutting-edge, AI-powered system that provides a non-invasive alternative to biopsies, facilitating early detection and classification.

GAZA

Convexity Technologies Ltd.

Limited access to essential care in IDP camps results in an increased incidence of malaria in children. Convexity has developed 'CHATS', a platform that leverages geo-fencing, blockchain and machine learning to improve the delivery and distribution of tests and antimalarial medication across IDP camps, aiming to reduce infant and child mortality.

NIGERIA

Berine and Bokwe Foundation

Maternal Health Mobile Hub is a mobile clinic offering affordable misoprostol for postpartum hemorrhage, birthing kits, antenatal care, and training for birth attendants. By integrating technology, community engagement, and modern and traditional health systems, they provide high-quality maternal healthcare to communities with elevated maternal mortality rates.

CAMEROON

“ Our initiative received exceptional support from CHIC, with timely access to the right resources and responsive staff who provided valuable advice and guidance through regular communication and participation in their accelerator program, positively impacting our work.”

LIFESAVING INFORMATION



Dalhousie University

Across IDP camps, many people face mental health challenges, including PTSD, depression, and anxiety. Dalhousie University will implement 'RESETTLE-IDPs' a novel, locally facilitated, and tailored life-skills training program. The program aims to provide crucial support to help internally displaced persons improve their mental health, rebuild their lives, and thrive in their new surroundings, enhancing their psychosocial well-being and integration skills.

NIGERIA

STAND-UP

In communities where conflict has limited and delayed disease tracking, Solutions Techniques Adaptées et Novatrices pour le Développement Universel des Populations (STAND-UP) is developing an electronic, event-based surveillance system to track and monitor diseases in real time, enabling rapid disease response even without internet access.

D.R. CONGO

2023-2024 TRANSITION TO SCALE INNOVATORS

CHIC's Transition-to-Scale (TTS) funding supports innovators who have demonstrated that their solutions are effective and feasible, have the potential to positively impact the lives of people affected by conflict, and are ready to transition toward scale and sustain their solutions. TTS funding addresses a critical and common gap in investments between early-stage and scaling innovations.

This year, CHIC awarded three new transition-to-scale grants aimed at improving access to energy, health supplies and services, life-saving information, and safe water and sanitation.

BALCONY LABS INC.

\$ 809,000 CAD

📍 BANGLADESH | UKRAINE | YEMEN



THE CHALLENGE

In conflict-affected crises, existing communication tools between aid workers can be fragmented and slow, leading to delays, inefficiencies, and missed life-saving opportunities due to a lack of efficient, real-time management and communication solutions.

THE SOLUTION

Balcony is an intuitive, privacy-focused humanitarian management and messaging platform that optimizes real-time, location-specific information exchange. The solution leverages Geographic Information Systems, Artificial Intelligence, and Augmented Reality to enhance communication, coordination, and decision-making for humanitarian organizations in crisis settings.

THE AMBITION

With TTS funding, the team will further develop their technology and design a toolkit to accelerate onboarding and sales. They will deploy their platform with NGO partners working in conflict zones, addressing duty of care and emergency response management scenarios, and creating opportunities for NGOs to become direct subscribers of the service. They will also refine their monitoring and evaluation model in collaboration with Queen's University.



Photo source: Surgibox Inc.

SURGIBOX INC.

\$ 750,000 CAD

📍 PALESTINE | SYRIA | UKRAINE | YEMEN

? **THE CHALLENGE**
In conflict-affected contexts, there is insufficient access to safe surgical care due to the unavailability of sterile facilities, damaged infrastructure, and insecure travel conditions.

THE SOLUTION
SurgiField is an ultra-portable sterile operating room that fits into a backpack, enabling safe surgeries closer to the point of injury. Its SurgiBubble and battery-powered Smart Control Module ensure a sterile field for patients and providers.

THE AMBITION
With TTS funding from CHIC, Surgibox seeks to reduce unit costs by establishing a more cost-effective manufacturing line for SurgiBubble, the disposable component of the product. Surgibox will also provide 200 conflict-affected individuals with life-saving surgeries in partnership with MedGlobal and Médecins Sans Frontières. They will validate the product's market fit, demonstrate its benefits to partners and hospitals, and build a pipeline of early adopters, including integration into MSF's procurement system.



Photo source: The Mentor Initiative

THE MENTOR INITIATIVE

\$ 950,000 CAD

📍 PALESTINE | SYRIA



THE CHALLENGE

Between 2011 and 2021, cases of cutaneous leishmaniasis in Northern Syria quadrupled. Cutaneous leishmaniasis is a parasitic disease spread by sandflies that can leave life-long scars and cause severe disabilities. Despite efforts in 2022 to control it, recent natural disasters and urban destruction have increased conditions conducive to its spread. Similarly, in the Gaza Strip, overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions have heightened the risk.

THE SOLUTION

As specialists in vector control, The MENTOR Initiative has developed two versions of spatial repellents—thin sheets of paper coated in transfluthrin, a commonly used insecticide—that are hung in homes and displacement shelters to deter mosquitos, sandflies, and other insects, providing protection for up to one year.

THE AMBITION

As specialists in vector control, The MENTOR Initiative have deployed two versions of innovative Spatial repellants, developed by SC Johnson. These products are thin plastic sheets coated with transfluthrin, a commonly used insecticide, that are hung in homes and displacement shelters to deter mosquitos, sandflies, and other insects, providing protection for up to one year.

ADVANCING KNOWLEDGE FOR ACTION: SUPPORTING LOCALIZATION IN HUMANITARIAN INNOVATION

Our 2023 evaluation underscored the importance of generating more robust evidence to highlight the benefits of local humanitarian innovation. In response, we commissioned The Research People to review CHIC's portfolio of locally-led and owned innovations to generate lessons highlight best practices and offer sector-wide recommendations to advance localization efforts. Read the full report [here](#).

Below are some of the key recommendations which we hope to assess and act on during our next strategic period.

Continue seeking and supporting innovations led by women, gender-diverse leaders, and marginalized groups.

While comprising only 24% of our entire portfolio in Round 1, locally led innovations now represent 46% of the CHIC portfolio as of Round 4. However, only 29% of these projects were women-led, and innovators from outside urban centres and other marginalized groups report additional barriers to accessing capital and support.

Recommendations:

- Build on efforts to localize innovation by broadening our scope to engage traditionally under-represented groups, including women, gender-diverse individuals, people with disabilities, and other marginalized groups, and integrate this into our portfolio-level data tracking.
- Tailor support and refine resources to scale diverse local innovators, including investing in local language translations and facilitating networking opportunities.



Simplify funding processes, make funding more flexible and predictable, and increase available overheads.

Rapidly changing conflict contexts, logistical and security challenges, and bureaucracy are significant hurdles for innovators. Local innovators often leverage their community connections, shared culture, and local understanding to navigate these challenges. While CHIC supports flexibility through no-cost extensions, budget supplements and adjustments, and iterative project design, compliance requirements and funding parameters remain persistent challenges that constrain effective humanitarian programming.

Recommendations:

- Advocate for larger overhead allowances to help local innovators build organizational resilience.
- Simplify due diligence and reporting processes and templates, creating more support for innovators to meet compliance requirements.
- Develop bridge funding mechanisms to reduce project disruptions.

Collate data on innovators' priorities for support.

Local innovators are best served when technical support and mentorship are tailored to their specific needs and delivered by those with regional expertise. Recently, CHIC held a focus group with current innovators to gather feedback for selecting a new support platform provider. Needs assessments will inform support offerings across topics such as business development, fundraising, gender equity, and monitoring and evaluation.

Recommendations:

- Collect quantitative data on types of support requested by innovators to identify and address patterns and gaps.
- Establish formal feedback loops and document how feedback is used to optimize support.

Invest in relationships to find collective solutions to funding barriers.

While CHIC funding addresses a critical gap in transitioning promising projects to scale, many high-impact innovators need help to secure partnerships for scale and adoption. Policy change is required to target the procurement, process, and political barriers to adoption. In response, CHIC is piloting an Ecosystem Catalyst Grant mechanism to match promising CHIC innovations with humanitarian scaling partners to accelerate adoption and scale.

Recommendations:

- To expand upon their work with the Ecosystem Catalyst Grants, CHIC should explore setting up a formalized working group with other humanitarian organizations to find and implement collective solutions and policy changes that could improve innovation adoption and address current challenges in scaling innovation.
- Share best practices and successful case studies to promote learning with humanitarian actors.



Photo source: Sun Buckets

ADVANCING INNOVATION ADOPTION: PAVING THE WAY FOR SYSTEM-LEVEL CHANGE

Our 2023 Humanitarian Innovation Adoption Strategy outlines recommendations for CHIC to accelerate demand-driven innovation and channels for uptake within large humanitarian agencies, with the long-term goal of enabling more efficient humanitarian responses. Over the past year, we have made strides in our approach, centring our work around our five key actions: collaboration, matchmaking, coordination, knowledge sharing and catalytic funding. Here is a snapshot of our progress this year.

COLLABORATION | MATCHMAKING | COORDINATION KNOWLEDGE SHARING | CATALYTIC FUNDING

We have strengthened our collaboration with **UNICEF's Office of Innovation**. We will work together to discover bold ideas to address humanitarian problems, drive impact through collaboration and improve lives by strengthening local capacities for innovation adoption and scale.

COLLABORATION | MATCHMAKING

We have deepened our formal partnership with **Plan International Canada** to match them with promising CHIC innovations for adoption into their humanitarian operations. Together, we will generate knowledge products and host innovation showcases and networking sessions.

COLLABORATION | MATCHMAKING KNOWLEDGE SHARING





Dr. Iffat Zafar (Sehat Kahani),
Dr. Hussam Alkhowail (Hand in
Hand for Aid and Development),
Dr. Hisham Alshaer (Pragmatic
Innovation) and CHIC's
Zainah Alsamman

With input from innovators, we have selected Gray Dot Catalyst as our new **Innovator Support Platform partner**, who will help innovators advance their scaling goals. Gray Dot Catalyst will provide tailored capacity building and networking support. They will collaborate with regional experts in the Middle East and Africa to offer mentorship in business development, financial sustainability, and market linkages.

COLLABORATION | MATCHMAKING | KNOWLEDGE SHARING

At the **Grand Challenges Annual Meeting** in Dakar, Senegal, CHIC hosted a roundtable with humanitarian agencies, funders, and innovators to design our first ecosystem catalyst grant call, which was launched in June 2024, and the final selection is underway. These grants will pair promising CHIC-funded innovations with scaling partners and support early adoption, for example through adapting humanitarian agency-level processes or convening stakeholders for effective innovation integration.

COLLABORATION | KNOWLEDGE SHARING | CATALYTIC FUNDING

CHIC participated in the **2024 Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week** in Geneva, collaborating with Response Innovation Lab (RIL), Innovation Norway, UNICEF, UK Humanitarian Innovation Hub, and Elrha to co-lead three sessions sharing learnings about AI in the humanitarian sector and strategies to accelerate innovation adoption. We also collaborated with Elrha, RIL and Innovation Norway on a networking event, where we brought together over 100 innovators, humanitarian actors, and supporters, to mobilize collaborations.

COLLABORATION | MATCHMAKING | KNOWLEDGE SHARING

ON-SITE LESSONS AND KEY DISCOVERIES

Site visits are crucial to the success of our support model; they are essential for building trust, encouraging humility, and learning, and deepening our service to the innovators we engage with. During visits, we gain perspective on project progress, explore potential scaling opportunities, and witness the positive impact of innovations first hand. Visits were made to innovators in three countries: the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Nigeria, and Pakistan. Here, we share insights from community members, including staff, subscribers, and end-users of the various innovations.

INNOVATIONS VISITED

Prado Power

Prado Power focuses on improving energy access and agricultural productivity. They provide solar mini-grids and productive-use equipment (PUE) such as grinding machines, cold storage, and solar water pumps, to communities. The company emphasizes improving women's socio-economic status through access to PUE which adds value to agricultural products and increases their market value.

NIGERIA

Altech

ALTECH, a for-profit solar energy distribution company operating across DRC, offers solar lanterns, lighting solutions, solar home systems, and cookstoves, with flexible pay-as-you-go payment plans. Altech received a blend of grant and debt financing from CHIC over 18 months to transition to scale.

D.R. CONGO

The Sentinel Project

The Sentinel Project is dedicated to preventing mass atrocities and protecting communities through establishing safe zones and prevention measures for civilian populations. Sentinel launched the Kijiji Cha Amani project in the Democratic Republic of Congo to tackle misinformation and disinformation. The project uses open source 'Wiki Rumours' software to moderate misinformation.

D.R. CONGO

Nuru

Nuru constructs and operates solar-hybrid mini-grids with smart meters and mobile money payment solutions in DRC. In 2020, they secured \$1M CAD from CHIC to build a 3.7 MW hybrid solar mini grid in low-income neighborhoods of Goma, successfully de-risking this project and crowding in additional investors.

D.R. CONGO

Across the visits to Nigeria and DRC, several key trends and insights emerged:

Successful innovation design processes must include affected communities.

The innovations visited excelled in community engagement throughout their design process and prioritizing the inclusion of feedback from women and youth. Feedback from community members interviewed across the innovations highlighted how setting clear expectations at a project's inception is essential to achieving community acceptance.

CHIC funding enabled innovators to nimbly adapt to operate in fast-changing environments.

Innovators have faced humanitarian crisis-induced challenges including product stock-outs, violence, accessibility issues, and bureaucratic delays. Site visits validated innovators' adaptability and commitment to function despite constraints.

Introducing innovation takes time and is new to many stakeholders involved.

Innovators experienced significant delays, in part because of challenges in mobilizing the right stakeholders to strengthen their projects. Piloting innovations requires trust-building with communities while negotiating how stakeholders should work together.

Site visits underscored the differences between private and not-for-profit innovation.

For businesses, there is a tension between the practical imperative of profit-making and the prioritization of humanitarian principles, particularly ensuring inclusive and equitable access for the most vulnerable. Site visits illustrated that for some innovations, sustainable price-points can be out of reach for the most vulnerable, and flexible funding and adoption support from organizations like CHIC can ensure the sustainability of life-saving products.

Photo source: Altech



Sehat Kahani

Sehat Kahani is a female-led telemedicine solution in Pakistan that includes a mobile application, a 24/7 helpline, and nurse-led e-clinics. With the support of CHIC funding, the organization refined its mobile application and established 25 e-clinics to serve refugee communities.

PAKISTAN



Key insights that emerged from this visit included:

Taking an innovative approach to digital health

Sehat Kahani's community-based model includes three main services: corporate services, a mobile app for on-demand healthcare, and refugee community healthcare funded by CHIC. In refugee communities, community nurses run low-cost clinics from their homes. Sehat Kahani equips them with technology, including computers, solar power, and internet, enabling telehealth services that connect patients with female doctors from the community, who otherwise face barriers to employment in the health sector.

Empowering community health workers towards self-sustainability

Community health workers keep their autonomous clinics while benefiting from Sehat Kahani's support. CHIC-funded equipment upgrades make these clinics more efficient, with a portion of profits used for maintenance and subsidizing Sehat Kahani's training. Community health nurses involve their families in clinic operations, boosting revenue and fostering ownership and sustainability. Sehat Kahani aims for nurse-owned clinics to become self-sustaining within 1-2 years. This low-cost, low-risk model could offer valuable insights for healthcare in underserved areas.

Ensuring equitable access

One to one conversations with clients confirmed Sehat Kahani has an effective fee waiver policy, which ensures that those who can't afford the fee can be treated. In the refugee-hosting communities CHIC funding supports, a significant portion of users benefit from 100% fee waivers offered by Sehat Kahani.

Overcoming challenges and positioning towards scale

Community-level challenges include poverty, insecurity, ongoing violence and insurgency, along with the uncertain legal status of Afghan refugees. Policy constraints impact Sehat Kahani's stability and expansion, particularly in remote areas. While their program is secure in major cities, scaling up in high-need regions requires government and international support, and CHIC is committed to supporting Sehat Kahani to garner such support.

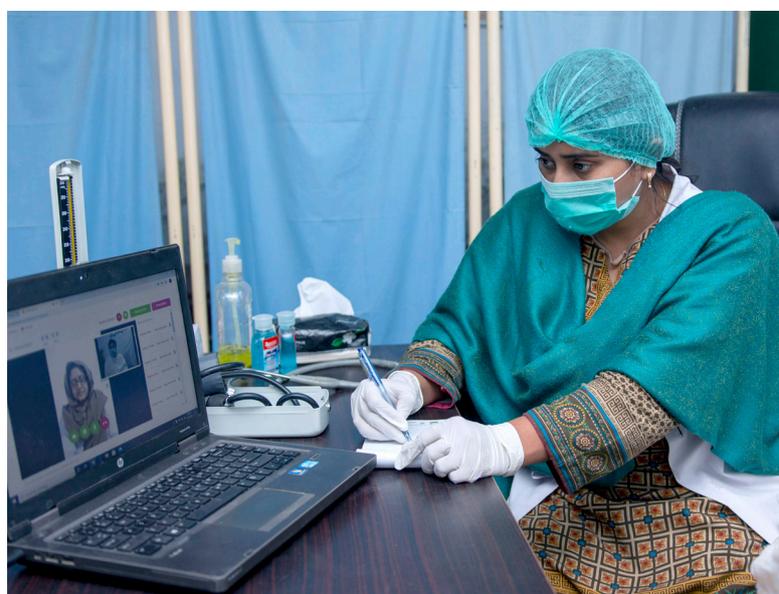


Photo source: Sehat Kahani

CHARTING A PATH FORWARD

This has been a year of learning, iterating, and evolving to enhance our support to innovators working in some of the most complex settings. We will continue to ensure that the innovators we support are well equipped to make the biggest impact possible. To do so, we have been designing a program strategy to guide us over the next five years, which we plan to launch later this year. Key themes that will feature in our forthcoming strategy include:

Advancing our localization agenda to ensure resources are accessible to those closest to the problems.

Optimizing support to enable innovators to maximize their scale and impact potential.

Accelerating scale and adoption by working more collaboratively with humanitarian scaling partners.

Testing new models to expedite funding decisions during acute crises.

Advancing our thought leadership to share lessons and position CHIC as a thought leader.



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