MARCH UPDATE

Check out our summary of ECHO’s market consultation on cash transfer products. Are we heading towards the end of cash program contracting as we know it?

In other e-transfer news, it has been nearly two years since the ELAN launched the Data Starter Kit. Since then, debates on data and humanitarian action have slowly picked up steam. Stay up to date with our reading suggestions and interview with Digitally Responsible Aid - who think the time has come for collaboration.

(And, we’re making a really cool online course!)

**Does A + B = ECHO Cash Efficiency?**

As a loyal cashionista, you’ve probably heard about DG ECHO’s push to increase cost efficiency of cash programs by separating out cash delivery from other program activities. (If you’re late to the ABC party, check out ECHO’s guidance or trust us that this could mean a major makeover for cash programs).

On March 27th, DG ECHO hosted a market consultation session to explore how they might operationalize this new way of doing cash (recording). Confused? Check out this process flow map – which illustrates what this segregation of responsibilities might look like.

The Q&A session surfaced concerns including: how ECHO would address the lack of truly global payment providers (and challenges of sub-contracting), capacity building needs at all levels (including for ECHO, providers and end users), if both digital and physical cash
distribution is desired (it is), and the need to re-examine what is classified as a large program (and thus subject to this model).

The event kicked off an independent consultation that will analyze the cash transfer/payments market, and the feasibility of procuring such services through an international tender agreement. Matthew Keyes of DG ECHO emphasized that – for now – this is just an information gathering process: “We want to find out ... what is the possibility, the feasibility of procurement of services to deliver cash – whether we decide to do that, or not, is to be decided later.” The consultants will deliver a report to DG ECHO in May, which is meant to then be shared publicly.

**New This Month**

**Familiar Themes with New Urgency: Data Protection and Blockchain**

Chatham House’s migration expert reflects on risks vs. rewards of data in migration policy, and wonders why we have standards for shelter and sanitation, but not for data management.

Wired calls attention to the extreme stakes of biometrics and privacy for Rohingya fleeing violence in Myanmar and the range of approaches taken by humanitarian agencies.

**Pakistan’s Express Tribune** asks how blockchain may (or may not) revolutionize development.

And [two writers in Open Democracy](#) offer, "three bits of advice for blockchain advocates who think they understand aid." (Sneak peek: There’s a difference between doing the same things differently, and doing different things - period.)

**Do Digital Transfers Mean Education, Stability or Welfare? Or Perhaps All of the Above?**

The Guardian explores the political bargain of cash assistance for Syrian refugees in Turkey: how digital transfers can shape refugees' lives and educations and traces debates about the value of conditions on assistance.

**UK and GSMA Launch Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation Program**

The Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation (M4H) program is designed to, "accelerate the delivery and impact of digital financial assistance." Their launch - during the 2018 Mobile World Congress in Barcelona - includes a snazzy little video tying together humanitarian need and mobile connectivity. But you already knew when it can (sometimes) work, right?
Ask the Experts: Digitally Responsible Aid

Digitally Responsible Aid (DRA) runs the "Do No Digital Harm" initiative. The ELAN sat down with them to learn the risks digitized humanitarian aid creates, how to mitigate them, and what the heck "doxxing" is.

Digitally Responsible Aid (from left) Seamus Brugh, Director of Operations, Joseph Guay, Director of Research, Willow Brugh, Director of Community Engagement

Why now? What’s happened that brought data protection to the forefront for you?

Willow: I spent a fair amount of time in InfoSec circles, hacker camps, and also humanitarian and disaster response. It has been mind-blowing to me that there seems to be a sense that nothing bad will happen or that it can’t get any worse than it already is […] But we are now starting to see those risks come to light.

Joseph: The humanitarian sector is trying to grapple with the unintended consequences of data experimentation and the application of emerging technologies in fragile contexts and operational environments. But before we tackle things like AI, machine learning, and blockchain, we have to get the basics right.

I recently worked with an NGO in East Africa that was trying to scale up a digital data management system using mobile survey tools and networks of local informants. Upon closer inspection, it was clear that there were some very serious issues around the ethical and safe use of beneficiary data during the pilot phase of the project, which could have led to situations of re-identification and targeting of migrant families in transit countries. How can we even think about dealing with emergent challenges around big data when we still can’t seem to get surveys right?

Seamus: Now is the time for DRA - not because problems are novel, but because they are entering the public’s sphere. News stories like Facebook and Cambridge Analytica illustrate the challenges of Informed Consent and some of the undetected - though far-reaching - ramifications of digital externalities.

When this happens in the developed world, we can protect ourselves personally, prosecution or politicians swing into action, and Facebook’s stock drops. When misuse or predation happens in
the developing world, there are no customer support lines to call for help, there is no New York Times article, and those who create the vulnerability are not held accountable.

If you could get humanitarian organizations to do one thing differently, what would it be?
W: I know what my answer would be – it would be to follow what we already know about information security! Yes, there will be things that are unique to humanitarian responses and disaster response. But until we knock out all the low-hanging fruit that the security sector has known for decades, we’re not going to accomplish anything else.

Even something like two factor authentication – just do that, just start with that.

J: I second Willow’s assertion. There’s also a growing body of knowledge and expertise on digital security and data protection that hasn’t been socialized yet in humanitarian response. One of the things we’re trying to do to make this happen is to provide a platform and a process for the translation of this knowledge from one domain to another.

Why do you think it’s so difficult to get people fired up about issues of data protection and privacy?
W: It’s difficult to admit our faults and failure in this field. Security is all about what happens when things fail. You have to plan for failure, you have to have resources available, it’s owning up to our faults....This is something we’re comfortable doing individually, but not as organizations. It is very much like disaster response and humanitarian response – people called to do this work often empathize with the people affected by disaster. But until someone has had their hard drive erased or been doxxed [Ed., when information about you as an individual is published online against your will], it’s hard to prioritize.

J: Another factor is that matters of digital security, risk mitigation, and data protection tend to go against the grain, so to speak, when it comes to the Innovation Agenda that’s been adopted by the humanitarian sector. The explosion of innovation labs, funds, hackathons, makeathons, accelerators, hubs, incubators, etc, hasn’t coincided with considerations around human subjects research, network security, data responsibility, and risk management. What does it mean to "fail fast" when lives are at stake? What does iteration look like in highly insecure environments? Unfortunately, these questions have gone unanswered for too long.

What’s your vision for the next 12-18 months?
J: We want to be able to support any organization – from a large UN agency to a small, community-based organization in rural Myanmar – with the expertise and financial resources to benefit from digital data systems without the negative externalities. The first step is to help fill gaps and develop effective and secure systems, programs, tools, and strategies.

W: We also want to work with groups to build up a longer-term capacity-building initiative.
S: Our overall plans are large, but we’re doing more quick engagements now. We’ll present a webinar with NetHope in the next few months that will take people through the basics of threat modeling in the context of cash-based transfers. For the longer term, we’re already lining up projects in places like Iraq, Myanmar, and East Africa and excited about our initial direction.

Get Involved!

Together, we built a lot of great resources, folks, and there’s no reason they need to end with the ELAN (which *is* ending this year.) So in partnership with Ignacio Mas and the Digital Frontiers Institute, we are launching a [new online course](#) on digital humanitarian cash on April 30th.

Registration is open now - please let us know if you have questions and keep an eye out for more information!