**Problem Statement**

How can we tackle barriers that exist to access services related to safety and protection for the most vulnerable people in need of these services?

**Current Challenge**

Children and Youth together represent more than 50% of the people impacted by humanitarian crises and conflict and they are disproportionately subject to acute protection risks. Humanitarian crises, in particular conflict situations, are associated with high rates of school drop out as well as high unemployment and poverty rates. As a result, youth are susceptible to a range of negative coping mechanisms, including worst forms of child labour.

While in humanitarian responses there is considerable attention to children (such as mother & child care, Child Friendly Spaces, etc.), humanitarian response has failed to adequately target youth, especially teenagers, and address their (protection) needs. NGO activities are generally limited to targeting youth with mainstreaming activities.

The gap is due both to the specific risks facing youth which require tailored responses, and to challenges associated with developing programming for a group with diverse and rapidly fluctuating needs. Especially technology and social media platforms are hardly incorporated into youth programming. Similarly, youth entrepreneurship receives limited attention.

At the same time, youth in conflict represent an exceptional opportunity. They are uniquely positioned to contribute to stabilisation and rehabilitation of their communities due to a variety of factors, including a drive toward entrepreneurship, a capacity to use technology and networks to mobilise.

In response to the indicated gap, TdH has positive experiences targeting youth thru FabLabs in relatively stable humanitarian settings (Greece refugee crises and Ukraine). The challenge TdH is proposing is to translate the FabLab concept to unstable humanitarian contexts, such as the Borno province, scene of the Boko Haram insurgency, in northern Nigeria.

The situation in Borno province is symptomatic of the gap. A disproportionate ratio of the 1.9 million displaced people are youth, many of them living in IDP camps. Displacement has interrupted their education and they have little to no income generation opportunities. Meanwhile NGOs struggle to address their needs.
Impact Goal

Piloting a FabLab approach in unstable humanitarian contexts will help to develop an effective humanitarian response to target youth, also in unstable contexts. In the case of Borno province, a FabLab project will help displaced youth to mitigate the effects of protection risks, disruption to education and low income. Youth will be attracted to the space because of digital fabrication equipment; in the spaces, they will access information, psychosocial support and other services in a safe environment.

The FabLab network is a digital global movement of over 1600 FabLabs; the labs share resources and collaborate on various projects thru a global network. Fablabs also offer peer to peer cooperation, learning and bottom up education. This approach is effective both in attracting youth and in supporting learning among people with diverse skills.

Using Fab labs, youth will:

- continue disrupted education through informal means, with potential to develop alternative livelihoods;
- have access to fablabs, offering not only digital access and tools, but also access to protection information and services; vulnerable youth will be identified for supplementary support, including MHPSS;
- improve their digital skills using a collaborative approach, suited to a group with diverse needs. Youth learn how to interact with digital machines, as well as social skills. The informal learning environment mitigates risks associated with drop out and will create a bridge into protective environments for youth engaged in child labour;
- have increased access, thru this learning and training, to employment and entrepreneurship. FabLabs provide a space for youth to develop ideas, discuss market availability and interact with other entrepreneurs;

The proposed idea is critical for DRA since it:

1. targets a group whom the humanitarian community has difficulty reaching;
2. functions as a vector for protection activities, targeting youth and families;
3. develops linkages between communities in conflict and others;
4. supports informal education, markets and entrepreneurship;

Assumptions Made

The project makes the following assumptions:

- Digital tools and technology will attract youth. TdH has piloted FabLabs in stable humanitarian settings; the Tdh fablab in Greece, targeting Syrian refugees showed, clear impact, with an average of 27 visits per day of which 60% by youth, and > 50% by girls/women. Participants have improved skills and have received employment. TdH assumes that these results will translate to more challenging humanitarian contexts as well.
TdH assumes that it is possible to find adequately secure locations to implement such safe spaces and digital tools in challenging humanitarian contexts;

TdH assumes we can find the right partners to work with in challenging contexts, such as universities and government protection departments; we are currently in touch with the Maiduguri University;

The project assumes that the networking opportunities of such safe spaces offering access to digital tools and technology can be leveraged in a humanitarian context;

**Risks in Pursuing this Challenge**

Risks in pursuing this challenge, and mitigation measures, include:

- **Security risks.** Locating the space and tools in insecure environments leads to risk of theft or destruction of equipment. TdH mitigates against these risks by working with partners such as universities, technical schools and local authorities, by designing context specific set ups and by exploring options for smaller, mobile solutions.
- **Political risk.** There is a risk that equipment will be appropriated by local authorities. TdH mitigates against this risk by careful negotiation with local authorities and appropriate inclusion, if relevant, in project activities;
- **Quality risk.** There is a risk that the quality of the program may not be as high in acute humanitarian contexts, compared to non-humanitarian settings. TdH mitigates against this risk by an iterative and interactive learning process involving all spaces already created and partnerships with organizations working with similar contexts;
- **Measurement risk.** There is a risk that it will be challenging to measure the impact of the deployed digital tools and spaces. TdH mitigates against this risk by a conscious and continuous impact measurement strategy involving ODI and the University of Geneva;

**Next Steps**

- Identify appropriate locations and contexts besides Borno province, as well as appropriate partners for these locations. TdH would like to pilot spaces in at least 3 humanitarian contexts, together with interested partners. By implementing in more than one location, it will be possible to compare and identify best practices; One of the issues to be addressed in the selection is to identify appropriate contexts that permit risk mitigation;
- Deepen existing partnerships and identify new relevant partners, also per location (in case of more than one project location). We look for the right local and international partners interested in developing and piloting FabLabs in unstable humanitarian settings as part of Protection interventions; This includes academic and corporate partnerships to address challenges like accessibility, affordability, marketability, develop digital content or training tools and impact measurement; At the moment, TdH has partnerships with the FabFoundation, IOM, ODI, the University of Geneva and others.
- Install the FabLabs and create their network. Partners will conduct context analysis to understand how the appropriate tools and space can leverage existing community
economies and systems; they will then identify appropriate partners which could include existing users of digitally controlled tools, machines and similar technology, universities, government departments and the private sector. The spaces will be operated initially by a trained expert using these technologies, who will train new locally identified people in order to increase reach, coverage and continuity / sustainability;

- Develop appropriate Monitoring & Evaluation, share lessons learned and best practices. For the set up, TdH and partners will draw on existing best practices and lessons learned the mentioned pilot projects in stable humanitarian settings.