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WFP EVALUATION

Strategic Evaluation of WFP's Use of Technology in Constrained Environments

Centralized Evaluation Report – Volume I

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Contents

Executive Summary.....	i
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Evaluation features	1
1.2 Context	3
1.3 Subject being evaluated	7
1.4 Evaluation Methodology, limitations and ethical considerations	13
2. Evaluation findings.....	20
2.1 Technologies How does the use of technologies help WFP increase the effectiveness and efficiency of its operations in constrained environments?	20
2.2 People How does the use of technologies in constrained environments affect the people served by WFP, and how do people affect this use?.....	29
2.3 Policies and processes How appropriate are WFP policies and processes in place to enable strategic use, promote innovation and manage risks in relation to the use of technologies in constrained environments?	52
2.4 Partnerships How well does WFP manage its partnerships in relation to the provision and use of technologies in constrained environments?	67
3. Conclusions and recommendations	78
3.1 Conclusions.....	78
3.2 Recommendations.....	83
Acronyms.....	93

List of Annexes (in Volume II)

Annex I	Summary Terms of Reference
Annex II	Evaluation Timeline
Annex III	Conceptual Framework
Annex IV	Methodology
Annex V	Evaluation Matrix
Annex VI	Data Collection Tools
Annex VII	Fieldwork Agenda
Annex VIII	Comparative Learning Exercise
Annex IX	Mapping of Findings – Conclusions – Recommendations
Annex X	List of People Interviewed
Annex XI	Bibliography
Annex XII	Acronyms

List of figures

Figure 1: WFP emergency responses (2011-2021).....	8
Figure 2: Portfolio of WFP digital technology and data solutions	11
Figure 3: Conceptual framework and evaluation questions.....	14
Figure 4: Evaluation data sources	15
Figure 5: Case studies map	16
Figure 6: Extent to which the use of technologies by WFP has improved interaction between beneficiaries and WFP	21
Figure 7: Extent to which the use of technology by WFP has improved the ability of WFP to serve its beneficiaries	21
Figure 8: Extent to which the digital technology or data was appropriate in the specific context.....	24
Figure 9: Extent to which the use of technology by WFP has contributed to beneficiaries' ability to continue to receive assistance during the pandemic?.....	28
Figure 10: Extent to which the use of technology by WFP has enhanced efficiency and effectiveness gains for people served.....	30
Figure 11: Most common technology-related challenges for beneficiaries.....	32
Figure 12: Extent to which technologies are perceived as reaching those most in need and improving the meeting of needs.....	32
Figure 13: Extent to which technology is perceived as contributing to fair and equal results for women and men.	35
Figure 14: Groups perceived as marginalized by the use of technologies by WFP across case studies.....	36
Figure 15: Extent to which beneficiaries know what to do or whom to contact to give feedback, complaints, suggestions or requests regarding WFP assistance.	40
Figure 16: Beneficiary perception on the degree to which the WFP digital community feedback mechanisms improve accountability to affected populations	42
Figure 17: Risk for the targeted population by using digital technology.....	45
Figure 18: Degree to which beneficiaries are informed about the type and amount of personal information that WFP holds on them	46
Figure 19: Degree to which beneficiaries express understanding of data protection, privacy and security.....	47
Figure 20: Beneficiaries' level of comfort in sharing their personal data (including biometric data) with WFP	48
Figure 21: Triad pattern "main challenges in the use of digital technology".....	49
Figure 22: Top five areas of technology use with positive impact	52
Figure 23: Perceived extent to which clear policies and processes were sufficiently present for the use of digital technologies in global survey respondent stories.....	52
Figure 24: Extent to which beneficiaries understood concepts such as informed consent, data protection, data privacy and data breaches	56
Figure 25: Inter-Agency Standing Committee principles for data responsibility in humanitarian action.....	61
Figure 26: Triad – who benefits most from the use of digital technology or data in global survey narratives?	71
Figure 27: Link between findings and conclusions.....	78

List of tables

Table 1: Information technology spending and budget over time (in USD millions).....	13
Table 2: Digital technology-related budgets identified in key documents.....	13

List of boxes

Box 1: Inclusion and protection approaches from the comparative learning exercise.....	37
Box 2: Accountability to affected populations and technology: Best practices and patterns from the comparative learning exercise	43
Box 3: Capacity building challenges across the comparative learning exercise.....	50
Box 4: Comparator organizations private sector partnerships.....	69
Box 5: Differing approaches across the comparative learning exercise	71

Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

EVALUATION FEATURES

1. This strategic evaluation covers WFP's use of digital technologies and data in constrained environments from 2014 to 2021. The purpose of the evaluation is to assess whether WFP uses, and is equipped to use, the most appropriate digital technologies to achieve its objectives under constrained conditions and whether it has put in place appropriate measures to mitigate and manage risks to populations and operations resulting from the use of digital technologies and data in constrained environments. The evaluation considers an environment to be constrained when WFP operations face important access constraints (e.g. due to insecurity or physical obstacles) or where there are considerable barriers to the use of digital technologies (e.g. due to poor mobile network coverage or political restrictions). The conceptual framework for this evaluation considers four pillars: digital technologies, people, policies and processes and partnerships. The core evaluation questions have been formulated in the context of these four pillars (figure 1).

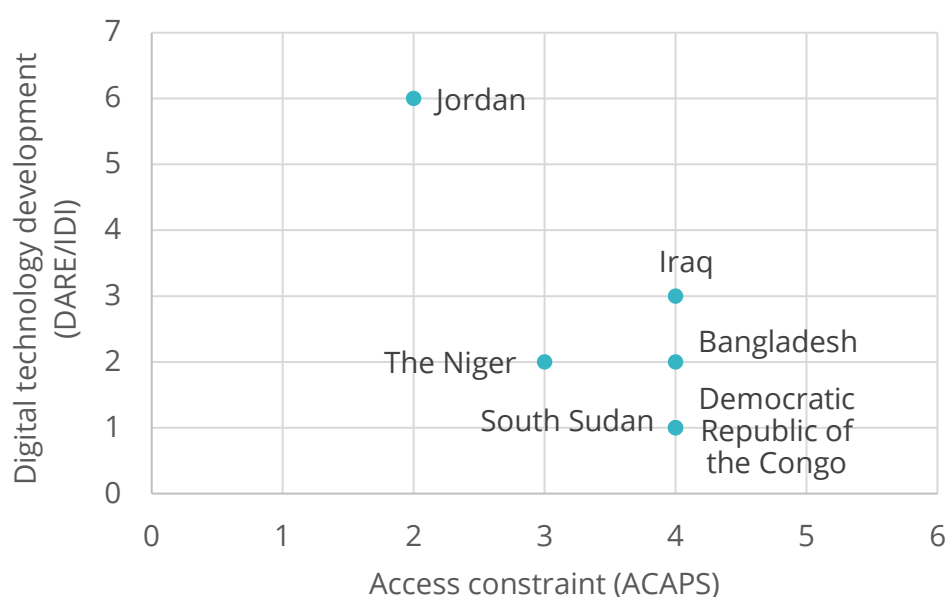
Figure 1: Evaluation questions and conceptual framework

	EVALUATION QUESTIONS		TECHNOLOGY USE SYSTEM
DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES	1	How does the use of digital technologies help WFP increase the effectiveness and efficiency of its operations in constrained environments?	<i>Includes the characteristics, applications and status (stage in the innovation process) of the digital technologies used or promoted by WFP. This also encompasses the infrastructures and resources (funding) underlying these technologies.</i>
PEOPLE	2	How does the use of digital technologies in constrained environments affect the people served by WFP, and how do people affect this use?	<i>Refers to technology users, technology decision makers, technology developers and managers and affected populations. It encompasses individuals affected by digital technologies or that affect the use of digital technologies.</i>
POLICIES AND PROCESSES	3	How appropriate are WFP policies and processes in place to enable strategic use, promote innovation and manage risks in the use of digital technologies in constrained environments?	<i>Includes the normative environment underlying the development, adoption and use of technologies and digital data. It also includes matters of digital data generation, management, use and governance.</i>
PARTNERSHIPS	4	How well does WFP manage its partnerships in relation to the provision and use of digital technologies in constrained environments?	<i>Focuses on partners that WFP engages with in their operations which enable or affect their use of technologies. It also encompasses the services and transfers of information and communications technologies and digital data that WFP provides to these partners.</i>

2. The evaluation used a mixed-methods non-experimental design leveraging conventional and participatory quantitative and qualitative methods. At the global level, the evaluation featured an extensive desk review, an online WFP staff survey with 874 respondents, 96 key informant interviews and a comparative learning exercise involving four other humanitarian organizations.¹ At the local level, the evaluation featured six in-depth case studies of countries selected on the basis of their regional representation and constraints in terms of humanitarian access and digital development (figure 2). The case studies involved desk reviews, 182 key informant interviews, beneficiary surveys with 1,260 beneficiaries and 137 focus group discussions, including with women, the elderly, adolescents and people with disabilities.

¹ The United Nations Children's Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mercy Corps and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Figure 2: Case study countries and ACAPS/IDI scope



Sources: *Aide à la Décision Économique*. 2021; ACAPS. 2020. *Humanitarian Access Overview*.

Abbreviations: DARE = Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs Digital Accessibility Rights Evaluation Index; IDI = International Telecommunication Union ICT Development Index

CONTEXT

3. Over the past decade, the humanitarian context has seen an increase in the number, scale, complexity and duration of humanitarian crises due to violent conflict, climate change, epidemics and other human-caused and natural disasters of growing proportions. With no indication of these trends changing in the near future, it is expected that humanitarian needs will continue to rise. At the same time, the humanitarian funding gap is growing, as are expectations by donors and politicians regarding transparency, accountability and value for money with regard to humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian organizations are therefore faced with rising needs across the globe as well as increasing expectations regarding cost-efficiency and the protection of the people they serve.

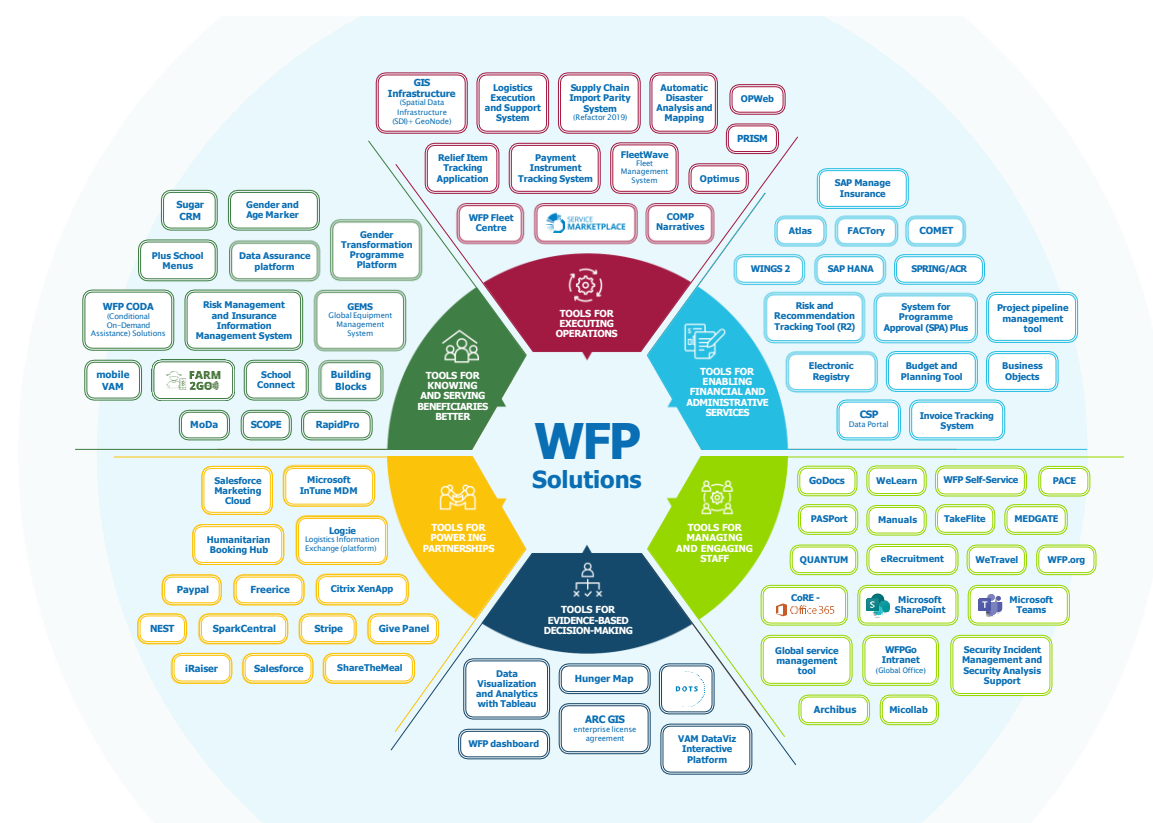
4. Simultaneously, the protracted nature of many contemporary crises entails that most environments in which WFP operates are constrained in one way or another as a result of fragility and extreme poverty, often linked to and compounded by conflict or other human-caused and natural disasters. In parallel and in response to these trends, WFP has made a significant shift in its approach from food aid to food assistance accompanied by a rapid increase in the scale of cash-based transfers (CBTs), which is expected to provide more people and the right people with the right assistance at the right time, while also ensuring that operations are cost-efficient.

5. In parallel, across the humanitarian sector digital technologies and data have been regarded as transformational factors to be used in the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals. Digital innovations have been deployed over the past decade to ensure internet access and connectivity to populations on the move, to enable the use of mobile money payment applications for cash-based transfers and for identity registration and verification, among other things. While technological innovation in the humanitarian sector has the potential to improve the quality and continuity of assistance and yield effectiveness and efficiency gains, it can also present major risks and uncertainties, including potential repercussions for affected populations. Digital technologies, for example, can lead to the creation of more inequality and violence, including threats to privacy as a core human right, the risk of growing disparities and imbalances through elite capture of data, the threat of identity theft and fraud and the environmental impact of technological infrastructure.

SUBJECT

6. Over the evaluation period, WFP has invested considerably in digital technologies to support the planning, design, targeting, implementation, monitoring, management and security of its operations. WFP uses and manages digital technologies throughout all focus areas and activities and across all of the environments where it works. Figure 3 shows corporate solutions and systems that are used across organizational levels and units and programme-specific solutions developed at the programme level. There are also numerous local solutions, developed at the country office level. Along with the development of key digital technologies and the increased use of digital data for programmatic decisions, WFP has developed a broad portfolio of policies and processes to guide its use and development of digital technologies. Partnerships with other actors in the humanitarian technology space have also increased during this time, including with private sector actors and governments.

Figure 3: Portfolio of WFP digital technology and data solutions



Source: WFP, 2021

EVALUATION FINDINGS

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