WFP EVALUATION

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

Centralized Evaluation Report – Volume I

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WFP
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Acknowledgements

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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?	*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.*
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?	*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.*
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?	*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.*
PARTNERSHIPS	4	How well does WFP manage its **partnerships** in relation to the provision and use of digital technologies in constrained environments?	*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.*

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.

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[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
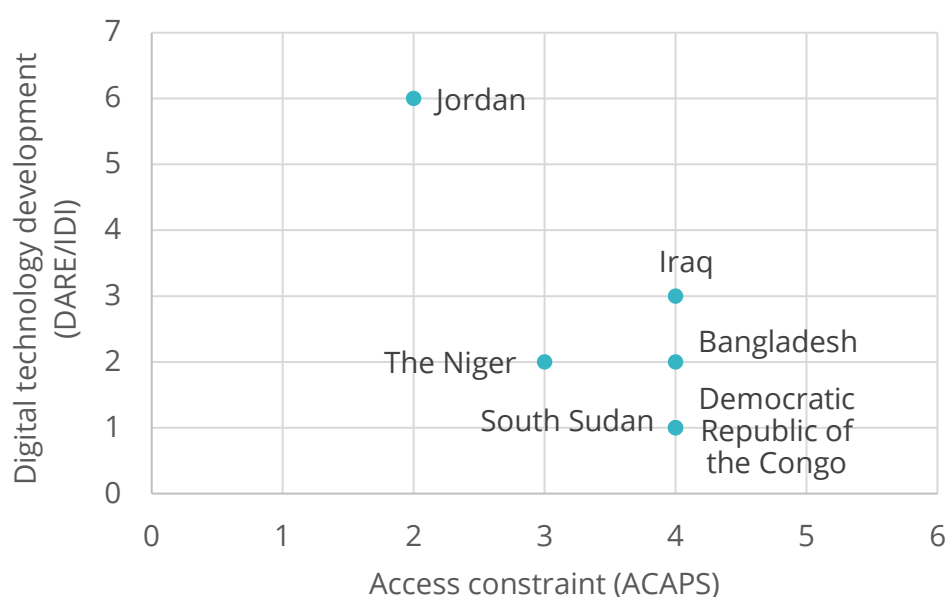
Sources: *Aide à la Décision Économique.* 2021; ACAPS. 2020. *Humanitarian Access Overview*.
Abbreviations: DARE = Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs Digital Accessibility Rights Evaluation
Index; IDI = International Telecommunication Union ICT Development Index

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
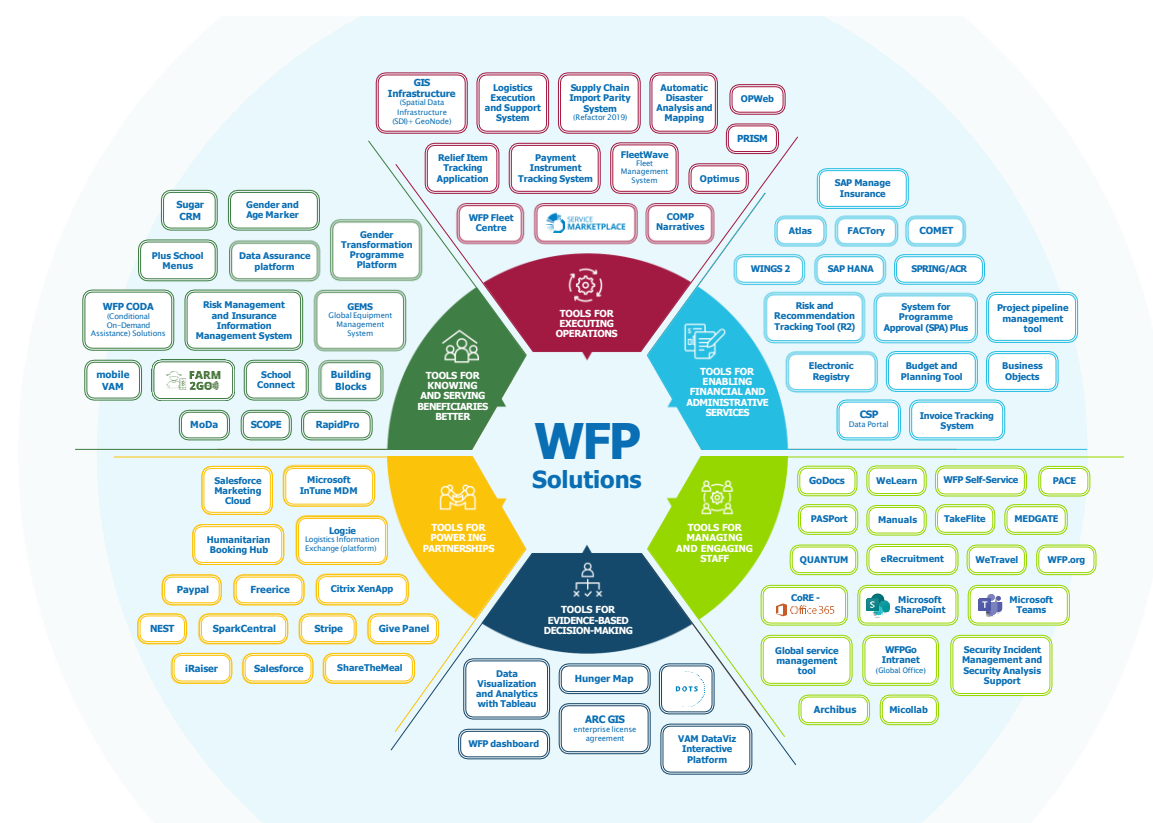
Source: WFP, 2021

EVALUATION FINDINGS