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

2014-2021

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Round Table

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SAVING
LIVES
CHANGING
LIVES

Evaluation context and scope

- Increase in the number, scale, complexity and duration of humanitarian crises

- Increased expectations in terms of efficiency, protection and accountability

- Humanitarian crises often occur in environments with siginificant access constraints

- Digital technologies and data increasingly deployed to support operations

- Constraints and risks related to use of ICTs

Conceptual framework and evaluation questions

How does the use of technologies help WFP increase the effectiveness and efficiency of its operations in constrained environments?

How does the use of technologies in constrained environments affect the people served by WFP, and how do people affect this use?

TECHNOLOGIES

PEOPLE

WFP OBJECTIVES

POLICIES AND PROCESSES

PARTNERSHIPS

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?

How well does WFP manage its partnerships in relation to the provision and use of technologies in constrained environments?

3

Evaluation approach and methodology

ICT Development vs **Access Constraints**

- Jordan
- Iraq
- Niger
- Banglade...
- South Sudan
- D.R. Congo

INCEPTION

Key Informant Interviews (56)

Document review (100+)

Country Case Studies (6)

Key informant interviews
WFP (105)
External (77)

Document review (615+)

Surveys
People served (1260)
Field teams (123)
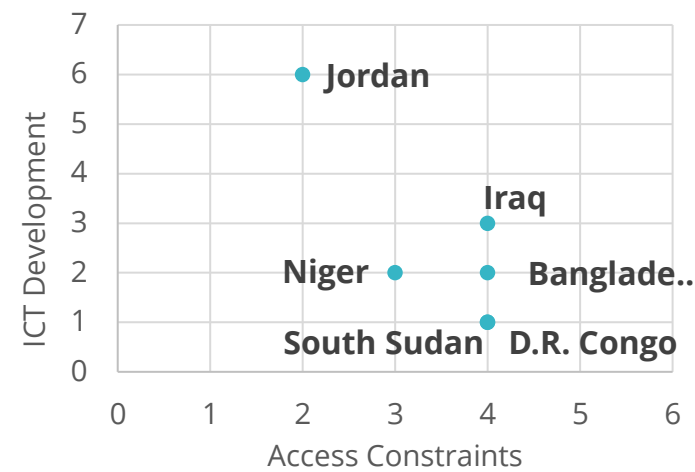Focus Groups (137)

Global survey (874)

Document review (150+)

Comparative learning exercise (UNICEF, UNHCR, ICRC, Mercy Corps)

Key informant interviews (15)

Document review (70+)
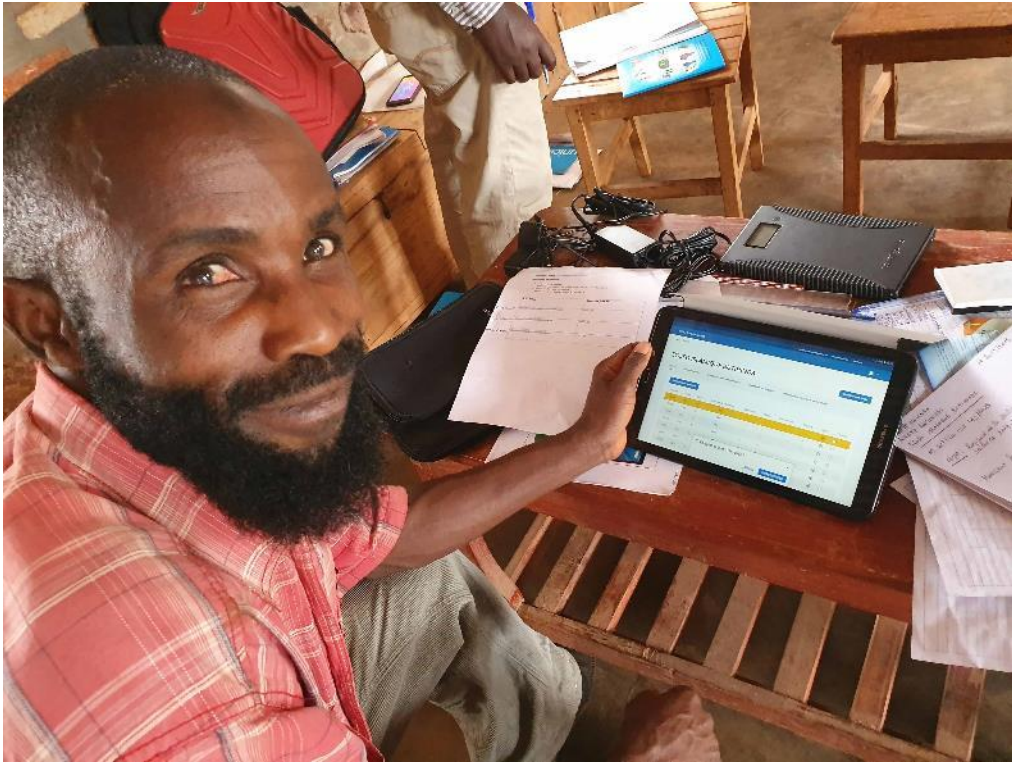
Key informant interviews (96)

ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

Triangulation, analysis and synthesis

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4

How does the use of **technologies** help WFP increase the effectiveness and efficiency of its operations in constrained environments?

- Increased effectiveness across multiple dimensions: targeting, delivery, gathering of information, coordination of logistics, M&E

- Improved efficiency and adaptability of operations through automation, simplification, error reduction, enhanced management. Also illustrated in COVID-19 adaptation

- Appropriateness and relevance of technologies decrease with higher levels of constraints in the environment

How does the use of technologies in constrained environments affect the **people** served by WFP, and how do people affect this use? (1/2)

- General positive effect on the lives of people served by WFP, including increased access, flexibility and dignity

- Technology benefits are dampened by known barriers, new risks and increased burden (shift) carried by the people served by WFP

- Digital technologies are often mistakenly seen as inclusive or neutral with limited consideration for gender, marginalized groups

How does the use of technologies in constrained environments affect the **people** served by WFP, and how do people affect this use? (2/2)

- Major progress on data protection and cyber-security falls short of a more central and general concern for the protection and security of populations and staff.

- Investment in the digital literacy and IT capacity of staff and cooperating partners is insufficient, lacking a broader "change management" approach.

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? (1/2)

- Rapid and necessary expansion of policies and processes, and efforts to clarify and improve decentralized governance and processes for digital innovation

- Technology development process remains slow, costly, and cumbersome, contributing to tensions between rapid innovation needs and risk management

- Central guidance is limited and fragmented, and the relevant guidelines are little known or considered optional

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? (2/2)

- Risks to operations are well considered but clarity on roles and responsibilities is lacking.

- Monitoring, evaluation and knowledge management on the use and performance of ICTs are very limited.

- Limited resources to support and oversee deployment of digital technology in constrained environments.

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

- WFP is leading the provision of technology services across the humanitarian sector

- Information sharing is increasingly critical and frequent but hindered by technical mechanisms, protocols, interoperability

- WFP provides necessary technologies and related skills to its partners but limited support on broader digital skills

- WFP is a pioneer in working with the private sector and in assistance to governments, but room to improve transparency and consultation on strategy and during due diligence processes

- Compliance with policies and processes is lacking in relation to partners, and there is a lack of resources to effectively formulate agreements in light of national laws

Conclusions (1/3)

STRATEGY

- WFP leadership in the use of digital technologies in response to humanitarian crises with important performance and flexibility gains
- Strategic role of technology not clearly articulated. Lack of clear and coherent vision, positioning and strategic direction on humanitarian debates
- Insufficient prioritization of protection, localization and participation

GOVERNANCE

- Formalization of roles and regulations regarding development and use of digital technology at various organizational levels is very recent → awareness and compliance are still limited
- Struggle to find right balance between country specific solutions, and corporate solutions and processes needed for internal coherence and security

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Conclusions (2/3)

RISKS AND PROTECTION

- Concerted efforts to manage cyber-security and data protection risks
- Implementation of policies and guidelines related to data protection is lagging → significant vulnerabilities and risks for WFP and affected populations

INCLUSION, ENGAGEMENT AND APPROPRIATENESS

- Appropriateness of people-facing technologies undermined by lack of meaningful engagement with people served
- Lack of monitoring of differential impacts and exclusion dynamics

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Conclusions (3/3)

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

- Unique level of experience on digital technology use in constrained environments
- Lack of systematic process to monitor and share experiences on the development, testing, deployment and continued use of technologies

DIGITAL SKILLS AND PARTNERSHIPS

- Insufficient investment in diverse digital skills of staff and partners
- Opportunity to engage more with partners on critical debates around humanitarian technologies

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Recommendations (1/2)

1. Formulate an overall strategic vision for the use of digital technology and data in which people and protection are central concerns. Translate this vision into clear standards, directives and guidance, and disseminate them internally and to partners.

2. Clarify and strengthen governance arrangements, division of roles and responsibilities, and allocation of resources driving WFP's digital transformation across all levels of the organization, enhancing the balance between product-driven efforts and business needs.

3. Develop strategies and mechanisms for ensuring effective protection of affected populations and personnel and the management of risks associated with the use of technologies, considering constrained environments in particular.

Recommendations (2/2)

4. Integrate inclusion, gender equality and women's empowerment in technology development and use, and meaningfully engage with diverse community members.

5. Develop a knowledge management approach appropriate for constrained environments to capture, store and disseminate relevant information on WFP's use of technology.

6. Invest in developing and implementing a coherent capacity development and change management strategy with regard to basic digital skills and data literacy for all WFP staff.

7. Invest in developing and supporting successful technological partnerships for operations in constrained environments, including efforts to improve access to the Internet.