



Artificial intelligence for humanitarian action

Side event on the margins of the annual session of the Executive Board

Wednesday, 26 June 2024, 13:30–14:30

Auditorium, WFP headquarters

Introduction

During the 2024 first regular session of the Executive Board, Executive Director Cindy McCain emphasized "WFP will pioneer the utilization of science, technology and innovation to profoundly impact the lives of the most vulnerable communities". This vision and commitment resonate with the Secretary-General's United Nations 2.0 initiative, which seeks to explore artificial intelligence (AI) and other frontier technologies in fostering inclusivity, reducing inequalities, advancing the Sustainable Development Goals, and bolstering United Nations operations.

Advancements in artificial intelligence and machine learning (AI/ML) promise to transform how WFP and other organizations anticipate and respond to humanitarian crises, effectively catering to the needs of the most vulnerable populations. Historically, the integration of digital technologies and data has amplified the efficacy of WFP's operations, as outlined in the 2022 strategic evaluation on WFP's utilization of technology in challenging environments. While mindful of potential risks, harnessing AI/ML capabilities will further augment WFP's capacity to fulfil its mission.

Objectives

This side event aims at:

- **Highlighting current AI investments relevant to humanitarian action.** The speakers will present examples of ongoing AI investments, including by and in partnership with WFP. They will share lessons learned and anticipated future benefits for humanitarian operations, including proactive response, timely decision-making, increased productivity and reduced costs. Additionally, the discussion will cover developments in governance and regulatory frameworks affecting AI deployment by WFP.
- **Gaining insights from AI thought leaders and practitioners in the government and technology industry.** Considering WFP's mandate and the nature of its operations, experts will delve into the imperatives for strategically and sustainably adopting AI by global organizations like WFP. Key considerations include governance and regulatory requirements, capability requirements, data management, privacy and ethics, risk management, and fostering behavioural change across the organization.
- **Exploring partnership models for AI deployment.** The event will also emphasize the pivotal role of partnerships in technology adoption, showcasing examples of ongoing collaborations. It will also explore ways to enhance cooperation between WFP, governments and the private sector to keep pace with technological advancements and effectively manage the vast amount of data that organizations handle.

Agenda

1. Opening remarks

- Ms. Cindy McCain, Executive Director, WFP

2. Panel discussion

Moderator:

- Ms. Meghan Latcovich, Chief of Staff, WFP and Chair of the WFP Digital Business Technology Committee

Speakers:

- Mr. Jean-Martin Bauer, Country Director, Haiti, WFP
- Mr. Jason Hickey, Head of Research in Ghana, Google Inc.
- Ms. Lauren Landis, Country Director, Kenya, WFP
- Dr Mark Latonero, Head of International Engagement, U.S. Artificial Intelligence Safety Institute
- Mr. Guy Shalev, Lead AI Researcher, Google Inc.

Discussion points:

- What are some of the current trends or developments in AI R&D and applications for the humanitarian sector, and what are the gains thus far in addressing humanitarian and development challenges?
- To scale, sustain and evolve AI applications for humanitarian action, what are the foundational requirements and considerations (e.g. governance, data management, privacy and ethics, safety and tooling, literacy, change management and organizational culture), that humanitarian organizations, like WFP, need to invest in?
- In what ways can partnership models effectively foster synergies between WFP and governments, the private sector, academia, and NGOs to provide the necessary capacities to advance and sustain AI-driven solutions for the wider humanitarian sector and expand the public good?

3. Open discussion (Q&A)

4. Closing remarks

About the moderator and speakers



Ms. Meghan Latcovich
Chief of Staff, WFP

Ms. Meghan Latcovich was previously Chief of Staff at the US Mission to the United Nations Food Agencies, and at the McCain Institute for ten years serving concurrently as strategic advisor and director of the Sedona Forum at the McCain Institute for International Leadership at Arizona State University. Before joining the McCain Institute team, she served as Chief of Staff for and advisor to Ms. Cindy McCain. Ms. Latcovich was a Naval Helicopter Pilot, worked in the Navy's Office of Legislative Affairs in the United States Senate, and flew combat missions. She is a graduate of the United States Naval Academy.



Dr Mark Latonero
Head of International Engagement, U.S. Artificial Intelligence Safety Institute
National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)

Dr Latonero works on the social and policy implications of emerging technology and examines the benefits, risks and harms of digital technologies. Dr Latonero was previously Deputy Director of the National Artificial Intelligence Initiative Office at the White House, providing leadership in the development and use of trustworthy AI systems in the public and private sectors, AI research and development, and coordination of United States federal AI activities. He was the United States representative to the OECD Working Party on AI Governance and Network of Experts, and worked at the United Nations Executive Office of the Secretary-General where he developed policy guidance for human rights due diligence for digital technology use across the United Nations system. He has published several reports on the impact of data-centric and automated technologies in human trafficking, exploitation and forced migration.



Ms. Lauren Landis
Country Director, Kenya, WFP

Ms. Lauren Landis joined WFP in 2009 as Chief of Staff, later becoming Director of the WFP Geneva Office. From 2013 to 2016, she served as the Country Director in Chad before returning to Rome as Director of the Nutrition Division. Ms. Landis began her career in relief and development with OCHA and worked as a Disaster Operations Specialist and Emergency Operations Coordinator for USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance. In 1993, she transitioned to the NGO sector, serving as Director of Humanitarian Response and Director of the Food Security Unit at Save the Children.



Mr. Jean-Martin Bauer
Country Director, Haiti, WFP

Mr. Jean-Martin Bauer has served with WFP in the Sahel and Central Africa and has responded to food emergencies in Afghanistan and the Syrian Arab Republic. He has led country offices in the Republic of the Congo and in Haiti. His work has also focused on leveraging digital technology and analytics to fight hunger. A Washington, DC, native, Mr. Bauer holds degrees from the London School of Economics and the Harvard Kennedy School.



Mr. Jason Hickey
Head of Research in Ghana, Google Inc.

Mr. Jason Hickey heads Google Research in Accra, Ghana. His work focuses on identifying and implementing ways Google can use advanced machine learning methods to improve welfare in Africa, particularly around food security, weather and climate forecasting, pest and crop disease prevention, crisis response, languages, and more. He has a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from the California Institute of Technology, a master's degree in electrical engineering from Cornell University, and Master of Science and Doctor of Philosophy in Computer Science from Cornell University.



Mr. Guy Shalev
Lead AI Researcher, Google Inc.

Mr. Guy Shalev is a researcher at Google Research, specializing in flood forecasting. His work integrates hydrology, machine learning, and early warning systems. He initiated and has led the hydrology team at Google since 2018, focusing on developing models and user-facing systems that provide reliable 7-day flood forecasts on a global scale. Mr. Shalev holds bachelor's and master's degrees in Computer Science from Tel Aviv University.