Money gives women and men greater freedom, choice, a sense of control over their lives and dignity. Both humanitarian cash transfers provided directly by WFP as well as Government-to-Person (G2P) payment schemes increasingly supported by WFP, can provide first-time access to—and usage of formal financial services to unbanked and underserved populations and their businesses. When deliberately designed to do so, cash transfers can thereby contribute to longer-term objectives such as Digital Financial Inclusion (DFI) and Women’s Economic Empowerment (WEE). Access to financial services such as payments, savings, credit and insurance—together with financial education and consumer protection—help women and men better cope with shocks, including shocks related to climate change, build their financial resilience and invest in their futures and aspirations.

Since 2020, WFP has been working to accompany women on their journey toward greater digital financial inclusion and economic empowerment.

“With the business, I was able to buy 5 cows and 2 goats. I opened two more branches of mobile money.”

Chantal
In Nakivale, Uganda

“Money gives women and men greater freedom, choice, a sense of control over their lives and dignity. Both humanitarian cash transfers provided directly by WFP as well as Government-to-Person (G2P) payment schemes increasingly supported by WFP, can provide first-time access to—and usage of formal financial services to unbanked and underserved populations and their businesses. When deliberately designed to do so, cash transfers can thereby contribute to longer-term objectives such as Digital Financial Inclusion (DFI) and Women’s Economic Empowerment (WEE). Access to financial services such as payments, savings, credit and insurance—together with financial education and consumer protection—help women and men better cope with shocks, including shocks related to climate change, build their financial resilience and invest in their futures and aspirations.

Since 2020, WFP has been working to accompany women on their journey toward greater digital financial inclusion and economic empowerment.

“We know that half of the cash that we provide goes to women, which is already a really good thing. But rarely does it go into an account in their name. If eradicating hunger and extreme poverty is at the core of WFP’s business, then digital payments are too. We have the responsibility to provide that first-time access to a bank, or to mobile money account, while also helping governments to do the same in their Government-to-Person payments systems, which we’re increasingly supporting.”

Valerie Guarnieri
Deputy Executive Director, WFP

This has become a corporate priority reflected in our normative framework: WFP now envisions to support 10 million women through their own financial accounts.

On these accounts women will be able to receive money from WFP, other humanitarian partner organisations, or governments supported by WFP, as well as money from their families and of course their income.

1 Definition of account ownership (the Global Findex Report 2021): having an account (by themselves or together with someone else) at a bank, another type of financial institution (credit union, microfinance institution, post office), or a mobile money provider. WFP envisions to transfer money through accounts to 10 million women, and these accounts would be either opened by WFP or accounts women already have and choose to receive money on.
I have an accepted form of ID that enabled me to open an account.

I have a digital account in my name and have control over the money that I receive.

I know how to use the money on my phone for spending and saving; I enrolled in a course on how to best manage the money that I receive.

Banks and mobile money operators offer products and services that are relevant to me.

I know my rights and entitlements as a recipient of transfers and know how to voice my grievances.

I can use my account to receive my social assistance payments from the government.

I get paid into my account by clients buying groceries in my shop.

I can receive remittances from my brother abroad on the same account.

I can save some of my money on a savings account.

I can pay school fees and electricity bills with my phone.

I can pay with my phone in local shops.

I use my account to pay my monthly health insurance.

I can make payments to my community savings group.

**OUR VISION?**

**ENABLING WOMEN’S DIGITAL FINANCIAL INCLUSION THROUGH CASH TRANSFERS**

WFP believes in an inclusive financial ecosystem that extends the reach of affordable digital financial products and services to all. Women and men should have the required financial and digital capabilities to make informed financial decisions, and the private sector should have the right market incentives to expand the reach of its networks and provide innovative solutions whilst upholding customer rights and protection standards.
Similarly, national regulatory environments and financial inclusion policies and strategies should be inclusive, fostering and not limiting digital financial inclusion for all. Given the gender gap in financial access, WFP focuses on identifying and overcoming access and usage barriers of digital financial products and services for marginalised women particularly in the most difficult contexts.

**WHEN WE DELIVER**

We focus on choice, dignity, empowerment, and accountability. We identify and reach people who need help and know how to send them money so that they can buy what they need, even in the hardest to reach areas, even for the most marginalised. Most of these people are women. Most of them are mothers or grandmothers. We help them to get IDs to open their own formal accounts.

When we stop giving them money, people still have an affordable and secure means to receive and send, save and spend their own money, or even get access to credit to make their projects come true or insure their livelihoods. Playing our part in a broader ecosystem of players we aim for women and men to have recognised IDs so they can do things like vote and access government services, and participate fully in society. Women and men can call us for information or when there is a problem. We give them the confidence to uphold their rights and suggest improvements. We can show donors exactly who received their money.

**WHEN WE ENABLE INCLUSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION PAYMENTS**

WFP also help governments to transfer money directly to people. Together with our partners we can deliver payments to hard-to-reach populations in unstable and fragile environments, and we can deliver them fast, and provide end-to-end assurance that the right entitlements went to the right people. We can do it for governments, but the aim is to help them set up their own payments system. Whether the payment is a safety net, subsidy, unemployment insurance, crop insurance, pension, salary or refund, the government can use the same payment platform, and people can choose how they want to receive their money. When they spend their money, it goes back into the local economy and multiplies, including by creating jobs.

We advocate with Ministries of Finance and Central Banks to develop inclusive regulation and protect consumers. We engage with banks, telecoms companies and money transfer operators to develop products adapted to the people we are serving, increase transparency and reduce the fees that they charge people for sending money home to their loved ones.

---

**Digital financial inclusion describes the access to—and use of formal affordable digital financial products and services (e.g. payments, savings, loans, insurance) suited to people's various needs. Women and men should feel comfortable using these products and trust their capabilities to manage their own finances. Ultimately digital financial inclusion should increase people's financial health and resilience.**
EXAMPLES

ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED BY WFP COUNTRY OFFICES TO ENHANCE WOMEN’S DIGITAL FINANCIAL INCLUSION AND THEIR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT:

DEMAND SIDE:

• WFP Jordan has been transitioning the disbursement of cash transfers to Syrian refugees from e-cards to mobile money wallets. Women and men now have a mobile money account in their own names enabling them to build a transaction history, and they can even choose with which mobile money provider they prefer to open their mobile wallets!

• The engagement of men and boys is critical in addressing social norms preventing women from accessing and using digital financial services. WFP Uganda created a network of male digital champions in Nakivale settlement, which led to changes in the way women are viewed by their partners and included in financial decision making.

• The national safety net that WFP supports in Somalia prioritizes women in rural areas, opening mobile wallets for 200,000 women, even in male headed households. WFP and GSMA - the worldwide association of mobile network operators - are now rolling out a training to build women’s confidence and skills as they engage with mobile money.

SUPPLY SIDE:

• The Somalia CO is organizing an exchange visit so that the government and mobile money operators in Somaliland learn from the success of their counterparts in Kenya, where an enabling regulatory environment has spurred the development of financial products and services such as savings products and loan schemes used by women receiving social cash transfers.

• In Haiti, WFP created a women’s digital financial inclusion community, together with the Haitian Alliance for Financial Inclusion. The community of practice is building the business case for serving women and serves as a platform where financial service providers share knowledge around user-centered product design.

• In the Caribbean, governments are exploring digital payments for their social assistance programmes with WFP’s support. WFP promotes user centered approaches to better understand what people want and what the private sector can offer to match these needs.

REGULATORY SIDE:

• Sustained advocacy of the Uganda CO and the cash working group with the Central Bank of Uganda led to blanket recognition of refugee attestation letters alone to open mobile money accounts. The Central Bank is also simplifying the administrative requirements to become a financial agent, which will facilitate refugees, and women refugees to consider this as a livelihood opportunity. This followed an advocacy mission organized by the Uganda CO and partners with the Central Bank to the Nakivale refugee settlement.

• In Ghana, WFP has helped the government to collect sex-disaggregated data particularly on mobile phone ownership and the use of digital financial services through the development of data collection tools and supplementary training to the government’s M&E department. This will inform changes to the current implementation of the government’s social cash transfers, ensuring increased inclusion of women.

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE, REACH OUT AND WE CAN PUT YOU IN TOUCH WITH THE RIGHT PERSON IN THESE COUNTRIES!
WHY WFP?

**A FIRST BRIDGE:** WFP cash-based programmes can be a starting point for financial inclusion, by providing access to—and usage of accounts and financial services to unbanked and underserved populations, often for the first time.

**AN INDIRECT ENABLER:** In addition to its direct operational footprint, WFP supports national social protection systems and inclusive G2P payments extending its indirect reach to millions of people.

**A MARKET INCENTIVIZER:** When WFP brings resources to a market segment that has been overlooked by the private sector, it can lower the barriers to entry and acquire new customers. We can build the business case so that private sector sees the benefits of developing products specifically tailored to women's needs, looking at their different life stages.

**A KNOWLEDGE-BROKER:** We have experience sending money to hard-to-reach communities with the help of our local partners; we engage with women and men to better understand their needs, capabilities and preferences.

**AN ADVOCATE:** Several of the barriers to financial inclusion require global, regional and country-level advocacy efforts that WFP can lead, catalyse or join with other partners—working with national regulators, financial service providers, government counterparts and civil society actors.
OUR PRINCIPLES

1. DIRECT MONEY INTO WOMEN’S DIGITAL ACCOUNTS

In 2021, out of 1.3 billion USD unrestricted cash², WFP transferred around 116 million USD into accounts held by around 1 million women through our direct operations. This is our baseline and shows the opportunity we have moving forward. Beyond our direct operations, we advocate with international financial institutions to ensure the national governments they support also prioritize women as recipients of their social protection payments. WFP will enable women to use existing accounts of their preference, or open new accounts to receive money from a variety of income sources: government social assistance, remittances, WFP, other humanitarian agencies and their own livelihoods. Yet, increasing women’s account ownership is not enough if women simply cash-out their assistance. Good formal financial services should support building women’s financial well-being.

2. PROVIDE CHOICE FOR WOMEN

When women can choose where, when and how to receive their money - from WFP, from the government, or from their family members living elsewhere - their gains are amplified. We want to provide women with choice over the payment modality and service provider they want to receive their money from. This will allow them to seek the best combination of privacy, friendly service, cost and convenient user interfaces, all elements contributing to their increased use of these digital financial services to serve their aspirations. We also want them to be able to easily switch if they find something that works better for them.

“We think about economic empowerment in terms of three priorities: cash, care, and data. (...) Cash means making sure that recovery, stimulus, and social protection money gets directly into women’s hands. (...) Implementing cash transfer programs could lift 100 million women out of poverty.”

Melinda French Gates

SOURCE:
Generation Equality Forum: Now is the time for gender equality - Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

3. BASE DECISIONS ON EVIDENCE AND DATA FROM THE FIELD

We process large amounts of payment data, and more importantly we engage with people and communities in hard-to-reach areas through our field presence. We base our directions and decisions on what women and men tell us they need.

---

² Unrestricted cash transfers allow people to spend the money they receive however they like in order to meet their food and other essential needs. Cash transfers are restricted if people’s choice regarding the use of the money is limited (e.g. value vouchers restricted to food purchases only redeemable at specified shops).
**WHY WOMEN?**

WFP is serious about prioritizing women because it's the right thing to do and the smart thing to do. We know that when women are economically empowered, everyone benefits, not just because economies grow, but also because women tend to invest their earnings in their families and local communities. Moreover, greater inclusion of women in the labour market keeps girls in school, delays girls’ sexual debut, reduces child marriage, improves girls’ nutritional status, and enhances economic resilience of the household. For years, WFP has prioritised women as recipients of in-kind food assistance in line with its policy to promote gender equality. Continuing to prioritize women, now as recipients of money transfers, is a game-changer.

According to the most recently released Findex data, **742 million women still remain excluded from formal financial systems**—if that were a country, it would be the **third largest** in the world. These excluded women tend to be the poorest, the most difficult to reach—living in rural areas, the least educated, the least likely to have connectivity, and with limited to no access to a mobile phone. Each of these factors add an extra layer of complexity—making these women less likely to be reached through traditional financial sector actors, without a deliberate push to reach them. And these hard-to-reach women are the segments that WFP and the social protection programmes we support focus on.

---

**FACTS**

- **Receiving payments into an account is a catalyst for using other financial services to save, borrow, and store money or get insurance:** 865 million adults in developing economies opened their first account to receive money from the government, including 423 million women. 83% of adults in developing economies who received a digital payment also made a digital payment, up from 66% in 2014 and 70% in 2017.

- **Mobile money has become an important enabler of financial inclusion in Sub-Saharan Africa - especially for women** - as a driver of account ownership and of account usage through mobile payments, saving, and borrowing: In Sub-Saharan Africa in 2021, **55% of adults had an account**, including 33% who had a mobile money account—the largest share of any region in the world.

- **Lack of money, distance to the nearest financial institution, and insufficient documentation** were consistently cited by the 1.4 billion unbanked adults as some of the primary reasons they did not have an account. **Half of women** in low-income countries do not have an ID (compared to 28% of men).

---

**FACTS**

- Global GDP would **increase by 26%** if women participate in the market economy to an identical extent as men.

- In 2022, at the current rates of progress, it will take **151 years** to close the Economic Participation and Opportunity gender gap.

- Women make up **80% of people forcibly displaced** by climate-related disasters in developing countries, and they are more likely to die as a result of natural disasters like droughts, floods, and storms. While the poorest and women suffer disproportionately from climate shocks, they have the smallest margins and least access to resilience strategies that can help them avoid, absorb, and adapt to shocks.
We want to direct money digitally into women’s accounts and design money transfers in a way that increase their ease of access and use of digital financial services. It doesn’t mean that men’s access will decrease, to the contrary! WFP’s vision for digital financial inclusion is for both women and men. For instance, women might explain distance to agent is a main barrier for them, because they don’t have the money or the permission to travel due to social norms. In that case, making the business case with private sector providers to bring agents closer improves access for women, but for men too. Should opening hours be extended to accommodate women’s household commitments, even men would benefit of this additional flexibility. Several men in the communities we are working with are convinced that prioritizing women will help their households and the whole community; and we work with them as community champions to support women’s digital financial journeys.

PRIORITIZING WOMEN DOESN’T MEAN EXCLUDING MEN!

SHE HAD TO HELP SUPPORT HER MOTHER WHEN HER DAD DIED. SHE STARTED WORKING ON ONE OF THE WFP RESILIENCE PROGRAMMES AND RECEIVES HER SALARY THROUGH A MOBILE ACCOUNT.

REHAM AND HER MOTHER IN JORDAN

“With an e-wallet you can easily cash out your money, save money, transfer to anyone without paying fees and pay my bills and university fees while sitting at home.”

WHAT CAN WFP COUNTRY OFFICES AND GOVERNMENTS DO IN PRACTICE?

• PRIORITISE WOMEN AS PRIMARY RECIPIENTS OF MONEY TRANSFERS that benefit the household and establish money transfer systems that reflect women’s needs, preferences, and experiences. While specific design for women is needed to ensure women’s access to services, WFP will ensure that vulnerable men and their households are not excluded if the household does not receive a transfer through a woman.
- **CONNECT WOMEN WITH GOOD FORMAL FINANCIAL SERVICES AND PRODUCTS** - Women need an account in their name to receive money from a variety of sources in addition to WFP, such as government social assistance and remittances, to deposit and save their own earnings, and to build a credit history so that they can qualify for loans and insurance.

- **PROMOTE THE ACCESS OF GOVERNMENT ID TO WOMEN** - Connecting women to formal financial services also includes ensuring they have a government-issued ID. With an ID women can open bank accounts, access other public services, such as health care and schools for their children, vote or get a SIM card.

- **PROVIDE WOMEN WITH THE KNOWLEDGE, TRUST AND SKILLS** to take full advantage of economic opportunities and instruments at their disposal. Women need to enhance their financial management skills to use financial products to their benefit. And they need to know how to use digital tools if they opt for digital financial products.

- **INFORM WOMEN OF THEIR RIGHTS AND ENTITLEMENTS** and set up **COMMUNITY FEEDBACK MECHANISMS** where they can safely and easily get help or complain when things go wrong.

- Map women needs, preferences and experiences through **USER JOURNEYS** to understand barriers that impede the uptake of digital products and services on the demand side.

- Carry out supply and national regulatory environment analyses to **UNDERSTAND THE REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT FRAMEWORKS** and the products and services available on the market, and **ADVOCATE** for an inclusive national regulatory environment (e.g. flexible Know-Your-Customers requirements) and national financial inclusion strategies.

Please contact us should you want to learn from country offices which have already put one or several of the above areas of work into practice. We have collected lessons, recommendations and tools that can be useful to you and your teams.

**WHO IS INVOLVED?**

This area of work is led by WFP’s Cash-Based Transfers Division (CBT) and involves colleagues in Programme, Social Protection, Gender, TEC, Finance and Supply Chain, and Partnerships (with the private sector and international financial institutions) at global, regional and country level.

Any questions or generally interested in the topic and how it might apply to your context? Reach out to astrid.devalon@wfp.org; and suzanne.vanballekom@wfp.org.