**Disability Data:
An evidence-informed
approach to the use of
data for disaggregation
in WFP programming**

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# Contents

# Executive Summary

**Purpose:** This document presents 5 evidence-based criteria that can support decision making as to whether to disaggregate data by disability, using the Washington Group Short Set of Questions (WGQ-SS).

**Intended Audience:** Regional and CO level RAM, Program, and Protection staff in decision making or influencing roles regarding data, particularly during Country Strategic Plan processes.

**Rationale:** Disaggregated data are a powerful resource to better facilitate, monitor, advocate for, and assess the inclusion of food insecure persons with disabilities in WFP programming. In certain data collection activities, such as a census, the rationale for disaggregation is clear and should be adequately resourced. However, during the data collection activities that WFP more frequently engages in, often characterized by small samples, remote modalities, limited timeframes, or other constraints, confusion exists as to whether disaggregation is necessary or sufficient to ensure persons with disabilities are included in WFP's life-saving and changing activities. This paper aims to provide WFP with a pragmatic and empirically developed approach to guide decisions regarding disaggregation of data by disability.

**Structure:** This document has four main sections.

**1.** Five criteria that can be used to guide WFP staff to decide whether, when, and where to employ data for disaggregation.

**2.** Examples of decision making in action, using retrospective WFP case studies.

**3.** Alternative actions if the criteria suggest that disaggregation will not work in your scenario.

**4.** A brief overview of the rigorous research underpinning these findings, including the underlying theory of how appropriate data disaggregation can contribute to inclusive action and outcomes.

**Note:** This note does not provide technical advice on 'how' to disaggregate data by disability; it is assumed that as per best practice, the WGQ-SS will be used.[1] In line with WFP's commitment to leave no one behind, and corporate[2] and external[3] reporting commitments on disability inclusion (DI),[4] the use of these five criteria should not be interpreted as a justification for never disaggregating data. WFP's Protection and Accountability Policy notes "Data disaggregation is key to targeting and reaching people in the most vulnerable situations" and WFP's Technical Note on the Mainstreaming of Disability Disaggregation[5] advocates use of a phased approach. In all cases where disaggregation is not employed, WFP should pursue alternative ways of proactively gathering information about people in vulnerable situations.

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1    Disaggregation and SDGs. Washington Group, 2020 [Online]

2    https://executiveboard.wfp.org/es/document_download/WFP-0000133355

3    https://www.globaldisabilitysummit.org/commitments

4    As per the United Nation Disability Inclusion Strategy: The term "disability inclusion" refers to the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in all their diversity, the promotion and mainstreaming of their rights into the work of the Organization, the development of disability-specific programmes and the consideration of disability-related perspectives, in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This requires the development and implementation of a consistent and systematic approach to disability inclusion in all areas of operations and programming, internally and externally

5    WFP, 2021, Technical Note on the Mainstreaming of Disability Disaggregation: A Phased Approach

# Introduction

## BACKGROUND

As WFP progresses its efforts on disability inclusion (DI), disaggregating data across the programme cycle[6] is increasingly presented as a requirement to improve programming and measure outcomes for people with disabilities. As a result, the organizational conversation has focused on the question of 'how can WFP disaggregate its data by disability?'. A de facto push towards whole-of organization, mandatory disaggregation of data by disability is built on several key assumptions:

**1.** Disaggregation is feasible in the majority of WFP's operational settings and across activities,

**2.** Disaggregation is necessary to improve food security outcomes for people with disabilities,

**3.** The benefits of disaggregation outweigh the risks.

The research from the TCD-WFP partnership, presented here, aims to demonstrate the faults in these assumptions and prevent any expectation that disaggregation may be sufficient for inclusion. Before resources are invested in the disaggregation of data, it should first be ascertained that the data are necessary and can be used. Beyond reporting as an end in itself, good disability-related data should support the main objectives of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy and WFP's DI Road Map; addressing and mainstreaming the rights of persons with disabilities, including the right to food, and contributing to sustainable and transformative change.

To better support achieving inclusive outcomes, our findings propose a re-framing of WFP's guiding question away from 'how to achieve universal disaggregation?' to instead ask: "Under what conditions can disaggregated data support better food security outcomes for persons with disabilities?"

Below, we present five criteria that can be applied on a case-by-case basis to support a consistent decision-making process, while maintaining the flexibility required across the range of WFP operational contexts. These criteria are the result of 1.5 years of embedded research, which is detailed in a later section.

## THE WASHINGTON GROUP SHORT SET OF QUESTIONS (WGQ—SS) WHAT AND WHY?

In this document, wherever we refer to disaggregating data by disability we assume use of the **WGQ-SS, the gold standard tool for this purpose**. The Washington Group on Disability Statistics was formed in 2001 as a UN Statistical Commission City Group, including representatives from various UN agencies, bilateral aid agencies (inc. USAID, DFAT & FCDO), INGOs, OPDs and researchers. The WGQ-SS was developed with the major objective of providing basic, internationally comparable information on disability. The questions are primarily intended for population-based measurement e.g., census and household surveys.

It is well documented that ad-hoc adaptations to the WGQ-SS, such as changing or merging questions or answer categories, adding screening questions, or even replacing the WGQ-SS with binary yes/no questions, affect the reliability and validity of data collected, result in under-estimation, and impacting comparability. **Therefore, we do not endorse or recommend ad-hoc adaptations of the WGQ-SS**. Further detail on the WGQ-SS, cognitive testing, translations, and international application are available online.

**It is important to be aware that the WGQ-SS is a tool for disaggregating data and is not an identification tool**. If the main purpose of your data collection is something other than disaggregation and comparison between persons or households with and without disability, or if the primary purpose of data collection is identification of individuals or contextual barriers, Section 3 presents alternative data approaches, rather than adaptations to the WGQ-SS.

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6   Including needs assessment, registration, process and outcome monitoring, evaluation, complaints and feedback, etc.

# Section 1: Five criteria to support decision making

The wide variation in WFP's operational contexts means that any technical guidance must choose between a level of generalization that limits specific detail, or a level of specificity that challenges general application. In practice, this means that WFP staff must often make a judgement call in deciding how to proceed. To support staff who may have limited experience with data and/or inclusion, our findings avoid general advice about how to implement disaggregation, and instead present a framework to guide local decision making (Table 1). This provides the flexibility to make a context specific decision, using a rationale and approach that is corporately consistent.

A 'yes' response to each of the criteria suggests that data disaggregation is likely to 'work' in context, i.e., to be successfully and reliably implemented and analyzed, and to produce information that can support positive outcomes for food insecure persons with disabilities. Where the answer is no, Section 3 provides suggestions and resources for getting to yes, and advice regarding alternative approaches. A mixed set of yes and no responses is possible, and short case studies are included to help decision-makers learn from previous WFP experience.

**Table 1: Five criteria to support decision making regarding disaggregation of data.**

| | | WILL IT WORK? | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **CRITERIA** | **QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN CONSIDERING DATA FOR DISAGGREGATION** | | **EXAMPLE** |
| **Purpose** | Is there a clear and shared understanding of why these data should be collected, and how the resulting information can contribute to programmatic objectives? | [YES] | "Our context analysis suggests that families with disabled members are especially poor, and we want to quantify this relationship before developing our targeting criteria." |
| | | [NO] | "We should collect these data because disability inclusion is a hot topic!" |
| **Buy-In** | Are key staff involved in the collection, analysis, and use of data willing to implement the WGQ-SS? | [YES] | "Staff recently received a training in disability data collection and feel confident they can sensitively collect this data" |
| | | [NO] | "Key staff disagree about collecting disaggregated data, and the responsible staff is inexperienced with this type of analysis." |
| **Feasibility** | Is disaggregation feasible in the available timeline and implementation context, using the available resources and modality of data collection? | [YES] | "During household data collection we already ask demographic questions about each member of the household, so we can add the WGQ-SS." |
| | | [NO] | "During mobile data collection most callers stay on the line for less than 10 minutes, we're worried if we ask the WGQ-SS they'll hang up before we gather the information we need.There's no local translation of these questions available, and we have no time to create it." |
| **Quality** | Is your data collection process capable of implementing quality checks and adapting as required?[7] | [YES] | "We conduct this data collection exercise twice a year, so we can trial implementation and make any changes in 6 months." |
| | | [NO] | "Our data collection tool is already finalised and is shared with the government, so we can't make changes." |
| **Analysis & Action** | Is there a plan in place to analyze and use the data to contribute to inclusive programming? | [YES] | "The data are being collected during a needs assessment and RAM and Programme teams plan to use the data to inform their targeting approach." |
| | | [NO] | "We don't have any staff who know how to analyse these data, and it is not clear when and where it should be reported." |

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7   This criterion does not refer to adapting the questions themselves, which is discouraged. Two standard adaptations that can be implemented are the removal of reference to hearing aids and/or glasses, if rare in your context. Otherwise, adaptations tend to negate the comparability and reliability of the questions, frequently distort participants interpretation of the meaning of the questions, and/or make them harder to answer for persons with certain impairments.

A detailed explanation of each criterion plus illustrative data supporting its development are presented below, or you can scroll to Section 2 to see case study examples of the criteria in action.

# Criteria in Detail

In this section, a detailed explanation of each of the five criteria is presented, alongside illustrative quotes from theory led interviews with WFP staff that contributed to their development. While each criterion is distinct, they interact with one another to either disrupt or build momentum for effective disaggregation.

## 1. PURPOSE

**Is there a clear and shared understanding of why these data should be collected, and how the resulting information can contribute to programmatic objectives?**

Disability inclusion is a relatively new priority for WFP and its donors, and experience has shown that data work best where the programmatic purpose of those data is clear from the outset. When the purpose (and limitations) of data for disaggregation remains ambiguous, it is challenging to generate buy-in for implementation, or data may be collected but never analyzed or meaningfully actioned.

**HQ Protection Staff:** *"Think it [DI] had been raised a lot within the executive board, with the member states. I don't know exactly why, but for sure, there was, it had been raised by a few member."*

**RBB Country Office RAMAN Staff:** *"is it [disability data] [an] important thing that is going to change the way we're doing work? Maybe not, because maybe you're already picking them [persons with disabilities] up in your work and now you're doing the targeting, and then in some cases maybe no and maybe yes, so..."*

**RBB Country Office Protection Staff:** *"I think the big change I can observe here is on the conceptual clarity, is the increase in discourse or narratives or developing narratives around disability. So this is something new... something new we have observed in the [country] office.*

## 2. BUY-IN

**Are key staff involved in the collection, analysis, and use of data willing to implement the WGQ-SS?**

Organizationally, WFP is characterized by disseminated decision-making power. Ensuring shared understanding of the purpose and importance of data disaggregation is therefore key, yet buy-in is typically not an 'all-or-nothing' feature. Rather buy-in reflects the staffs' response in a particular activity, and context, and may change over time. The opposition of a single individual can prevent implementation, while the buy-in of even one key staff has resulted in large scale and national level collection of data for disaggregation.

**RBB Country Office Protection Staff:** *"there's also a lot of discretion in how the office will do data. And it's one of the protection risks that I've communicated to the country office, is the lack of systems makes it very difficult for us to establish minimum standards and have oversight. So, it's really, really, difficult."*

**Regional Bureau Staff:** *"What I think is actually the bigger potential challenge or barrier... which is much smaller but much more forceful, is substantive concern about the approach. What is this really going to show us? How is this fitting in with our mandate? A little bit of existential stuff as well about - is this WFP's role? Is this our responsibility?"*

**Regional Bureau RAMAN Staff:** *"It seems like there's a lot of weight to something...now I worry about gender, now I worry about disability. And then we're going to have to include race, ethnicity. And, you know, it scares people that they don't first of all, understand it."*

## 3. FEASIBILITY

**Is disaggregation feasible in the available timeline and implementation context, using the available resources and modality of data collection?**

It must be practically feasible to collect the data for the purpose identified, using the timeframe and financial and human resources available. Consider the need for staff training, survey design adaptations, and the analysis implications of your sample. Remember that adaptation of the WGQ-SS is not advised, as it negatively impacts comparability and validity of resulting data. Instead, see section 3 for alternative data approaches.

**Regional Bureau RAMAN Staff:** *"Data has to be statistically representative. So that's also an issue, because if you want to decide to give the information by type of disability or whatever, it's impossible, your sample size should be huge. So that is something that we need to take into consideration, right?"*

**RBB Field Office Staff:** *"But, we did not allow for sufficient training to guarantee the quality of the data. And we also did not translate the questionnaires. So, we have no control over how the questions were framed in local languages. And this is not because they were not advised to do so, it's because it was considered not a priority considering the time frame required for the data collection exercise."*

**RAMAN Senior Staff:** *"But the issue is, yes, we can collect everything we want. I mean, you will need resources and it's going to be tricky... Can we do it logistically? Can we really implement that? And are we willing to engage into that?"*

## 4. QUALITY

**Is your data collection process capable of implementing quality checks and adapting as required?**

This criterion does not refer to adapting the questions themselves but instead encourages a period of piloting, or post-process reflection, to ensure that implementation really does/did fulfil the purpose you initially identified and proved feasible in practice. Throughout our research, we repeatedly encountered incidences where WFP personnel were collecting data for disaggregation by disability that weren't working for them e.g., confusion regarding analysis, or lack of a clear plan of what to do with the resulting data. Processes may need to change with experience and although staff stated their intention to re-visit and trouble-shoot their process, the realities of short timeframes, competing priorities, and system design often prevented such iterative improvement. Rather than waiting to 'see how it goes', ensure that a quality check is built in to the process, and includes all relevant colleagues.

**Regional Bureau RAMAN Staff:** *"The intention was in any case to start gathering some data, make COs aware of the need to think about disabilities, and to gather lessons learnt and improve. So, it was a first step...We wanted to profit [from the opportunity] to include and to start, you know? And then after that, I did go back to the technical unit a couple of times to say, "Guys, I mean this is the information we have gotten – it's not very good. These are the lessons learned. So, it's time to revise these methodologies." ...they told me, "OK, wait a little bit. We'll call you back when we are able to touch on this topic."*

**RBB Field Office Staff:** *"But in actuality, an issue starts if I do not have the required sense of the importance of the thing [DI], then definitely I will not give proper time and resources to that thing. And sometimes, like if I do 100 assessments in a day instead of 30, how it is possible I will maintain quality?"*

**Gender Advisor:** *"if you're going to be introducing anything that's new, and this is going to be really out of the box for pretty much everybody, it cannot come without guidance methodology. How do we really collect this? What is the relevance of it? How do we analyze and interpret it and apply it?"*

ELIMINATA RIFAI TUTTE 8   While two standard adaptations that can be implemented are the removal of the question's reference to hearing aids and/or glasses, if such devices are rare in your context. Otherwise, adaptations tend to negate the comparability and reliability of the questions, and frequently distort the participants interpretation of the meaning of the questions, a problem further exacerbated by language translation.

# 5. ANALYSIS & ACTION

**Is there a plan in place to analyse and use the data to contribute to inclusive programming?**

To date, data disaggregated by disability have been successfully leveraged across WFP for beneficiary targeting, output monitoring, and donor advocacy (to our knowledge, programme design remains a gap). Where data are collected but not analyzed, it wastes time and financial resources, and contravenes the principle of data minimization. Where data are collected but are incorrectly analyzed, not used, or are perceived to be misused, doubts and resistance will arise. Over time, this can have a negative impact for inclusion efforts overall, as staff (and communities) perceive 'never-ending' data collection, leading to little concrete action. Ensure that relevant colleagues have the necessary skills and time to analyze and appropriately interpret the data, and that end users have an action plan for the resultant information (e.g., targeting, advocacy, reporting, etc.)

**Country Office Protection Staff:** *"We didn't at that stage understand why we were collecting the data. So, we collect data because we were required to collect the data. But the data wasn't being used to inform programming"*

**Regional Bureau RAMAN Staff:** *"I think there is still not a big push to use this data. So, there are a few country offices that are doing it [collecting disaggregated data]. And even those who are doing it, they tell you, look, I don't think that the management uses the information."*

**Country Office Programme Staff:** *"So when you're working with this disability and inclusion data it has the potential to go down the wrong way. And then, having directions from a manager saying you have to find all disabled people and get them on the list and give them food or cash, so they can have high numbers to report."*

**Country Office Protection Staff:** *"it's [WFP] a numbers agency. It's tonnage, it's disaggregation, it's quantifiable and it's something that's easily translated to downstream partners…"*

# Section 2: Decision making in action

The following case examples were developed by retrospectively identifying instances where WFP staff made a decision regarding disaggregation. As part of the research partnership, we are continuing to collect examples of the outcomes of deciding for or against disaggregation across a range of activities, e.g., CFM's, remote data collection etc.

### Case Study 1: Zimbabwe – Targeting in an Urban Environment

| | |
|---|---|
| **Scenario:** Decreasing funds amidst ongoing needs necessitated a data collection exercise to ensure WFP assistance continued to target those most in need. Context analysis suggested persons with disabilities were highly food insecure, but existing data collection identified few households with disabilities among existing WFP beneficiaries. | |
| Purpose | Yes. Re-targeting of assistance required more detailed understanding of who is food insecure, and both the local community and activity donor requesting DI data focus. |
| Buy-In | Yes. The activity and RAMAN teams agreed regarding the data approach. |
| Feasibility | Yes. The use of house to house, census style data collection made it possible to collect information about each household member and there was time for brief training to relevant staff. |
| Quality | Yes, the survey tool could be updated to align with data best practices (WGQ-SS).<br>An initial piloting phase was possible. |
| Analysis & Action | Yes. The resulting data would be used to directly inform the vulnerability matrix and re-targeting decisions. |
| **Outcome** | **Re-targeting data disaggregated by disability, using the WGQ-SS[9] for every adult household member. Disability was shown to be correlated with food insecurity and disability was integrated into (re)targeting criteria.** |

### Case Study 2: Central African Republic – National Household Survey (ENSA)

| | |
|---|---|
| **Scenario:** CO aware that persons with disabilities are likely highly vulnerable to food insecurity, but limited data were available. UN Country Team highlighted dire need for disability data in CAR, including to inform the Common Country Analysis (CCA). The annual ENSA survey provided a data collection opportunity. | |
| Purpose | Yes. Context analysis suggested persons with disabilities were highly marginalized, therefore need to better quantify local relationship between disability and food insecurity. |
| Buy-In | Yes, program, RAMAN and protection staff were collaboratively engaged with the process. |
| Feasibility | Yes. The CO benefitted from a reasonable timeframe, the availability of technical support for training and analysis, and a local implementing partner with protection expertise. |
| Quality | Mixed. The survey tool was updated, and over the longer term, the annual repetition of the same national survey would allow for iterative improvement. |
| Analysis & Action | Yes. The data were used for evidence-based advocacy around disability and food insecurity in CAR. |
| **Outcome** | **Survey data disaggregated using the WGQ-SS. Challenges with individual level data in household level tool were noted, and adaptation was planned for subsequent rounds of implementation. Resulting data were used for advocacy for an inclusive response at the UNCT, and WFP took a lead role in reporting inclusion in the CCA.** |

9   Washington Group Short Set of Questions for disaggregation of data sets by disability

## Case Study 3: Afghanistan – Emergency Scope Registration

| | |
|---|---|
| **Scenario:** As part of an emergency response and rapid scale up of SCOPE registration, Afghanistan CO needed to make and justify a decision as to whether to disaggregate SCOPE data by disability. | |
| Purpose | Mixed. Some staff felt the data could be important to support future decision making post blanket distributions, others felt disability was already covered in pre-registration targeting criteria, making the data less important. |
| Buy-In | Mixed. Staff were on board with WG-SS as a tool, but after careful deliberation it was decided the benefits of disaggregation for SCOPE were too minimal to outweigh the costs. |
| Feasibility | Mixed. Emergency scale-up resulted in fears that any additional data collection burden could delay life-saving assistance. |
| Quality | No. Emergency scale-up of registration, using a standardised process with no data piloting. |
| Analysis & Action | No. SCOPE registers only those beneficiaries already selected for assistance, and blanket assistance was in place, meaning that in the short-term, disaggregated data could not be used for targeting. |
| **Outcome** | **Afghanistan SCOPE registration data was not disaggregated by disability, and disability considerations were integrated elsewhere in the programme cycle.** |

# Section 3: What if you decide not to disaggregate?

In line with WFP's commitment to leave no one behind, and corporate[10] and external[11] reporting commitments on disability inclusion (DI)[12] the use of these five criteria should not be interpreted as a justification for never disaggregating data. WFP's Protection and Accountability Policy notes "Data disaggregation is key to targeting and reaching people in the most vulnerable situations" and WFP's Technical Note on the Mainstreaming of Disability Disaggregation[13] advocates use of a phased approach. Similarly, these findings assert that a 'no' to disaggregation, should be interpreted as a no in a certain place and time, due to specific, identified factors.

This decision can be periodically re-examined, with steps taken to address 'no's' where possible. Where disaggregation is not employed, WFP should pursue alternative means of proactively gathering information about people in vulnerable situations.

**What if the Answer is No?** If your use of the 5 criteria suggests that data disaggregation will not work for you, there are two options you can consider.

## 1. Getting to yes

There are actions you can take to turn a no into a yes, increasing the likelihood that data disaggregation will work. See below for suggestions of actions you can take to reach a 'yes'.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Purpose** | Before starting disaggregation, first identify a clear purpose for the proposed disaggregated data, review whether the data can realistically achieve this, and ensure the purpose is articulated to key team members. |
| **Buy-In** | If the purpose of the data is clear but staff remain reluctant, training or sensitization to address common misconceptions about the WGQ-SS and disability data may be useful. If staff concerns are related to the feasibility of data collection, the potential quality of data, or how the data will be used, see the next points. |
| **Feasibility** | Simply put, data that cannot be feasibly collected, analyzed, or used, should not be collected, analyzed or used!<br><br>Consider feasibility in advance and if challenges are identified, adjust the available timeline or material and technical resources to support success. |
| **Quality** | It is advisable to appoint one person with responsibility for the collection and analysis of these data, especially if it is new. This person should have experience with WGQ-SS, and/or technical support available to them (see regional or HQ DI, Protection, or RAM teams, and the CBM Global Helpdesk).<br><br>This person can then check for errors, such as faulty translation, lack of skip logic, incorrect question placement etc. that can negatively impact question quality.<br><br>Post implementation, review the data process to see if learning can be gathered for the future. |
| **Analysis & Action** | Before embarking on disaggregation, first identify who will carry out the analysis and what training or support they may require. Analysis advice, including syntax and training, are available online.<br><br>Similarly, the information arising from disaggregated data is most likely to be actionable if it can be used by the right person at the right time – identify key staff and the appropriate opportunity in the program cycle or CSP phase. |

If, following this review, disability disaggregation still seems unlikely to work or meet your needs, you can consider alternative approaches.

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10    https://executiveboard.wfp.org/es/document_download/WFP-0000133355

11    https://www.globaldisabilitysummit.org/commitments

12    As per the United Nation Disability Inclusion Strategy: The term "disability inclusion" refers to the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in all their diversity, the promotion and mainstreaming of their rights into the work of the Organization, the development of disability-specific programmes and the consideration of disability-related perspectives, in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This requires the development and implementation of a consistent and systematic approach to disability inclusion in all areas of operations and programming, internally and externally.

13    WFP, 2021. Technical Note on the Mainstreaming of Disability Disaggregation: A Phased Approach

# 2. Taking an alternative approach

Data disaggregation by disability is a powerful tool to support inclusion, but it is not the only tool available, and alone, it is unlikely to be sufficient. Secondary data or primary qualitative data can serve to complement and triangulate disaggregated data, or may provide an alternative approach if you have decided not to implement data disaggregation using the WGQ-SS.

## 2.1 Secondary data sources and how they can inform inclusive action

Data that have already been collected can provide useful information to support food security outcomes for persons with disabilities. When working with secondary data, it is important to ascertain the quality, recency, and coverage of the data available, and to critically assess how data were collected. If persons without disabilities, or only men with disabilities were surveyed, then there may be specific gaps in the information gathered. If quantitative data were disaggregated using a tool other than the WGQ-SS, expect potential underestimates of disability prevalence.

**Household surveys:** If disaggregated, secondary data from household income and expenditure surveys or similar may provide insight to the relationship between disability and economic deprivation or food insecurity, justifying the use of disability as a targeting consideration.

**Context Analysis or Qualitative Reports:** If local context analyses suggest an increased burden of physical impairments due to conflict or natural disaster, then having accessible distribution points in a very close radius to people's homes may be useful. Similarly, if the context is highly exclusionary or inaccessible for persons with disabilities (e.g., discriminatory legal framework, absence of social safety net) you may decide to overweight disability as a criterion or consideration in targeting or programme design.

**National census:** Nationally representative data can provide a baseline prevalence of disability against which WFP monitoring figures can be compared, to gauge whether persons with disabilities are proportionately included in activities.

**OPD Lists:** Organisations of Persons with Disabilities often have lists of individuals or households with disabilities in their communities. If you have decided that such households are of interest, these lists can be used to identify or triangulate identification for assessment, registration, or inclusion. This approach can also help to overcome the limitations of the WGQ-SS as a data disaggregation, rather than identification, tool (e.g. persons with psycho-social disabilities or albinism are often not captured using the WGQ-SS).

## 2.2 Qualitative data and how it can be used to inform inclusive action

Quantitative data can provide powerful information regarding scale and relationships between variables, e.g., disability and employment. However, it often lacks additional detail that can suggest what to do about your findings. Qualitative data can fill this gap and triangulate findings.

**Community Consultations**: WFP's targeting and prioritisation (T&P) operational guidance[14] advises that community engagement should be mainstreamed throughout the T&P process. Inclusion of persons with disabilities during consultations can help to identify needs, capacities, and access barriers for this population. Having one representative with a disability in a group consultation can recreate patterns of marginalisation and silencing, so consider having a dedicated consultation with varied men, women, girls and boys with disabilities.

**OPD Consultations:** Speaking directly with OPD's can identify important contextual risks and hidden exclusion, for example if certain impairments or conditions such as albinism are especially stigmatised, or if persons with disabilities are more vulnerable to being subjected to making informal 'payments' from their assistance. Similarly, OPD's will likely have good ideas about how assistance could be adapted to best meet their access needs.

**Community Feedback Mechanisms:** Helplines and other modalities can provide useful information to support effective inclusion to achieve zero hunger for all. Syria CFM is trialling a new data collection approach to gather information on who is unable to access existing CFM mechanisms, and how open data fields can be efficiently analysed to gather deeper insight from the affected population. As learning progresses, we will link it here.

## 2.3 Alternative quantitative approaches and how they can be used to inform inclusive action

The below methods are suggested as a response to real contextual constraints, rather than being suggested as a gold standard approach. When considering either of the below approaches it is strongly encouraged to do so i) with technical support (e.g., regional or HQ DI

teams, protection specialists or support from the CBM Global Helpdesk), ii) alongside another method that can triangulate your data, and iii) with an awareness that these methods can overlook the most marginalised, persons with disabilities. These approaches are best applied for programme adaptation (e.g. identifying households to receive deliveries of in-kind assistance) and are not well suited to aggregated reporting, meaning their use may require justification and discussion in the context of disability-focused donors.

**Plausible Proxy Indicators:** Disability as a demographic factor is of interest to WFP not because of a status based mandate to prioritise persons with disabilities, but because of the link between disability and food insecurity. Disability is linked to multi-dimensional poverty and food insecurity through numerous mechanisms, including increased costs (e.g. transportation, assistive devices, medications) and lower access to income generation (e.g. decreased educational attainment, employer stigma). Some (but not all) household members with a disability may be unable to contribute economically to the household, or other household members may be prevented from economic activity due to disability-related care taking responsibilities. Where WGQ-SS data are available in the dataset, due to its verifiability and significance, WFP often uses it as a proxy for vulnerability. If the WGQ-SS are not being used, age disaggregation, data on chronic conditions, and dependency ratio may be informative for targeting by functioning as proxy indicators for household potential economic capacity and costs. However, keep in mind that proxy indicators are often blunt tools and these approaches risk incorrectly labelling all persons with disabilities as vulnerable, and do not directly identify households with members with disabilities.

**Self-Identification:** Directly asking people 'Do you have a disability?' is discouraged for disaggregation purposes. Factors including stigma, distrust or differing cultural and individual conceptualisations of disability mean this approach generally only identifies the most severe cases, resulting in low reporting of disability. However, in practice, identifying only the most severe cases may be of interest, e.g. if trying to identify households for priority lines at distribution points. In such instances, and for the purposes of identification rather than disaggregation, binary self-reporting (i.e. 'Do you or a household member have a disability?' Yes/No) may be justified, but it must be employed with the understanding that it is a blunt tool which leaves many (and often the most stigmatised) disabilities unidentified.

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14    WFP Targeting and Prioritisation Operational Guidance Note, January 2021.

# 3. What if you decide to disaggregate data by disability and it doesn't work?

You may decide to implement disaggregation by disability, but over time learn that it is not meeting your needs. In the below example, Sri Lanka CO struggled to gather quality data from the WGQ-SS when implemented by teachers in schools enrolled in the School Meals Programme (SMP).

After reviewing their process, they decided to stop using the WGQ-SS in SMP, and to instead seek relevant secondary data. Through its partnership with the government, an alternative opportunity to support disaggregation of the national census by disability was identified and prioritised for support. Census disaggregation is expected to produce a powerful data set.

### Case Study 4: Sri Lanka – Secondary Data in School Feeding

| **Scenario:** Sri Lanka CO implements school meal programmes (SMP) in link with the Government. It introduced the WGQ-SS in its student data collection to better understand whether students with disabilities were being reached by SMP. | |
| --- | --- |
| Purpose | Yes. Local knowledge suggested that children with disabilities were less likely to be enrolled in school and availing of SMP. Disaggregated data would help Sri Lanka CO to understand whether this group were able to benefit from their programming. |
| Buy-In | Yes. WFP staff were willing and worked with the teachers who would administer the tool. |
| Feasibility | Mixed. Initially it was unknown how feasible data collection would be, as it was new to school feeding. Over time it proved unfeasible as teachers struggled to implement the questions. |
| Quality | Yes. Alongside high RAM capacity in-country, a field visit by TCD and the RBB DI advisor provided an opportunity to review the process and identify an alternative approach. |
| Analysis & Action | No. RAM team had no prior experience analyzing data collected by the WGQ-SS.<br><br>If children with disabilities were not enrolled in schools, WFP could engage in advocacy at governmental level, but ultimately SMP was not designed to target children outside of the school setting. |
| **Outcome** | **Over time and with increasing experience, the CO decided to transition from direct disaggregation to use of secondary data. With teachers struggling to implement the questions and RAM unsure of how to analyse the data, the CO decided to remove the WGQ-SS and to instead obtain secondary data from the schools. Knowing how many schools had special education units, and their enrollment figures could serve as a proxy measure for the number of children with disabilities who could benefit from SMP.** |

**Note:** *The WGQ-SS, meaning 'short set', is just one of multiple Washington Group Question modules. As of 2021, work is underway on a new module of the WGQ designed to be implemented by teachers.[15] In the future, this module may be especially relevant to WFP School Feeding programs, making it feasible to collect primary, disability disaggregated data for this activity.*

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15    Testing a Teacher's Version of the UNICEF/Washington Group

# Section 4: Research Methodology and Underlying Theory and Findings

These findings are derived from an embedded, multi-year research partnership using realist evaluation methodology and a mixed methods research design. Realist Evaluation (RE) is a scientific methodology concerned with answering the question "what works, for whom, in which contexts, and why?" and seeks to move beyond a description of programmatic outcomes to the production of explanatory theory that can inform programme planning and implementation. RE is underpinned by the philosophy of scientific realism. Distinct from the positivist belief in observable and infallible knowledge, RE claims knowledge to be partial and fallible, and argues against a linear, successionist understanding of causation. RE thus opposes the view that causality is always observable and measurable.

Realists argue against the over reliance on methodologies such as randomised control trials for evaluating the effects and effectiveness of interventions (Wong et al. 2017; Dalkin et al. 2015; Pawson 2006; Pawson and Tilley 1997; Pawson 1996). In 'real life' humans are embedded in multiple, complex, and intersecting strata and systems. Unlike in a lab setting, these variables cannot be controlled for across the extended causative chains present in social interactions (Pawson 2013). RE methodology explicitly acknowledges the confounding and enabling influences of open systems, making it a well-suited methodology for application in the fluid, complex settings in which WFP operates, and which the organisation itself constitutes.

For the realist evaluator, context is key, as it functions to enable or constrain mechanisms (Greenhalgh et al. 2017b) which generate observed outcomes. RE interrogates theoretical 'hunches' using qualitative and quantitative

data to build an explanatory theoretical framework that can unpack the black box of mechanisms, explaining how outcomes occur while acknowledging context as an explicit mediating factor (Salter and Kothari 2014). This fits naturally alongside the theory of change approach utilised across WFP policy and programmes. By identifying the pertinent characteristics of context and mechanisms, and articulating these patterns through context-mechanism-outcome configurations, known as CMOC's (Pawson and Tilley 1997), RE strengthens theory about how programmes work. The ultimate aim of RE is the production of portable, explanatory theory that can be utilised across contexts with similar, relevant features to support effective programmes (Wong et al. 2016).

## Realist interviews

The importance of qualitative data, particularly interviews, in realist methods stems from the potential to explore and expose the unobservable generative causation inherent to realist mechanisms. Qualitative interviewing is thus an important method to generate, validate, refute, and refine realist theory. While realist evaluation is less heterogenous than more linear evaluation approaches, such as randomised control trials or systematic reviews, it should be equally rigorous, with clear evidence at all stages of how evidence and decisions were sought, made, and synthesised. Explicit guidance to ensure rigour and robustness in RE findings exists and was drawn upon during this research (Wong et al. 2017), including guidance on realist interviewing.

Footnote references:

Dalkin, S.M. et al. (2015) 'What's in a mechanism? Development of a key concept in realist evaluation',

Greenhalgh, T. et al. (2017) What realists mean by context.

Manzano, A. (2016) 'The craft of interviewing in realist evaluation'

Mukumbang, F.C. et al. (2020) 'Using the realist interview approach to maintain theoretical awareness in realist studies'

Pawson, R. (1996) 'Theorizing the Interview'

Pawson, R. (2006) 'Digging for Nuggets: How "Bad" Research Can Yield "Good" Evidence'

Pawson, R. (2013) The Science of Evaluation: A Realist Manifesto.

Wong, G. et al. (2017) 'Quality and reporting standards, resources, training materials and information for realist evaluation: the RAMESES II project'

Unlike other qualitative interview approaches, realist interviewing techniques centralise the role of theory and invites the interviewee to engage in theorising, adding trustworthiness to the process and results (Mukumbang et al. 2020). Interviews can roughly be divided into the three progressive, though not strictly linear, phases of theory gleaning, theory refining, and theory consolidation (Manzano 2016). Theory gleaning allows the progressive knowledge and experience of the embedded researcher to inform theories than are then refined and consolidated in more advanced interviews. Rather than asking the interviewee to share their perspective, the subject matter of the realist interview is the researcher's own theory, which may be exposed in full or in part, with the interviewee invited to confirm, refute, or refine the theory. Interview participants are chosen according to their role and capacity to offer insight as to the causative elements (why did something work) of interventions, and their outcomes (for whom did it work, in what context)? A mix of interviewees drawn from the roles of policy or intervention architects, implementers, and subjects is most effective in uncovering explanatory theory accounting for both intended and unintended outcomes.

Irrespective of the role of the interviewee, realist interviewing techniques, such as the 'teacher-learner' cycle, enable the interviewer to share their line of thinking for critique and feedback. In contrast with the naïve researcher stance often employed in qualitative research, the realist interviewer thus makes the proposition to the interviewee 'I'll show you my theory if you show me yours" (Pawson and Tilley 1997: 169). Ultimately, this enables WFP staff to see their own, partial knowledge and concerns reflected and embedded in the research findings, thus ensuring that although the output is framed as theoretical proposition(s), it is always practically oriented.

# Data preparation

An outline of the first 35 interviews is included in the table below. To maintain confidentiality, the location of each role is not presented, however the tabulated interviews largely span the RBB, RBD, RBD bureaux and CO's, plus HQ. Senior level staff and global areas leads whose job titles would make them easily identifiable are not included in this table or are presented as 'senior management'.

The audio recording of each interview was imported into NVivo where automatic transcription was used. Transcripts where then manually checked, during a familiarisation process, and corrected as required. Secondary data was cleaned and organised into Excel spreadsheets to allow for analysis. Additional data includes 3 focus groups, 196 online survey respondents and two years of secondary, disaggregated data drawn from a disability related indicator (A9) in WFP's Corporate Results Framework.

| Interviewee Number | Role |
| --- | --- |
| 1 | Protection Officer |
| 2 | Programme Officer |
| 3 | Data Officer |
| 4 | Protection Officer |
| 5 | Gender Officer |
| 6 | Field Officer |
| 7 | Gender Advisor |
| 8 | Regional Data Advisor |
| 9 - 10 | Gender and Protection Officer |
| 11 - 14 | Data Officers |
| 15 - 18 | Programme Officers |
| 19 - 20 | Programme & Protection Officers |
| 21 | Regional Protection Advisor |
| 22 | Nutrition Officer |
| 23 | Regional Protection Advisor |
| 24 | Resilience Programme Officer |
| 25 | Programme Officer |
| 26 | Gender Advisor |
| 27 | Programme Officer |
| 28 | Monitoring & Evaluation Officer |
| 29 | Protection Advisor |
| 30 | Senior Management |

# Ethics

Ethical approval for this research was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Linguistic, Speech & Communication Sciences, Trinity College Dublin.

Separate ethical approval was secured for data collection from beneficiaries, or from WFP staff, partners, and secondary sources. This reflects the more complex ethical considerations and the increased power imbalance present with beneficiaries and food insecure research subjects.
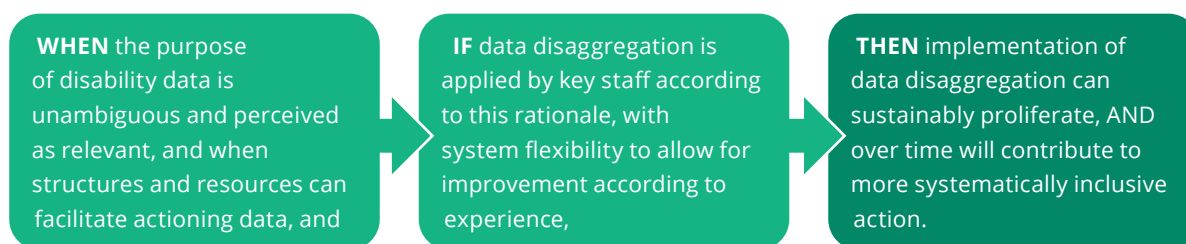
# Analysis

To facilitate the process of iterative theory refinement, context-mechanism-outcome configurations (CMOC) were used as the key analytical unit. CMOC's are configurations of context and mechanisms which together produce observable outcomes. Constellations of related CMOC's can be compiled to build robust, evidence informed theory about why programmes are having effects for particular persons, in particular contexts.
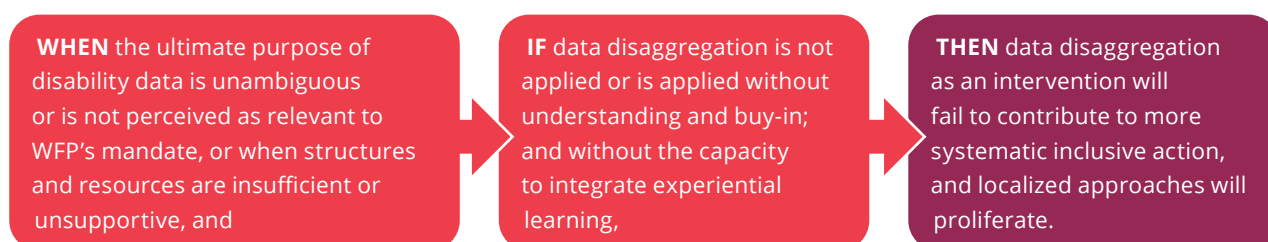
# Output

Here, we demonstrate our theoretical proposition of how appropriately implemented data disaggregation can support inclusive programming and outcomes for food insecure persons with disabilities. The output is packaged in a theory of change format to support familiarity. A more detailed paper published as a precursor to these findings is available online.

✓ **OPPORTUNITIES**

| **WHEN** the purpose of disability data is unambiguous and perceived as relevant, and when structures and resources can facilitate actioning data, and | **IF** data disaggregation is applied by key staff according to this rationale, with system flexibility to allow for improvement according to experience, | **THEN** implementation of data disaggregation can sustainably proliferate, AND over time will contribute to more systematically inclusive action. |
|---|---|---|

Conversely, where these elements are not in place, there is a risk that disability data disaggregation will not work, i.e., will not contribute to, or may hinder, positive outcomes for food insecure persons with disabilities.

✗ **RISKS**

| **WHEN** the ultimate purpose of disability data is unambiguous or is not perceived as relevant to WFP's mandate, or when structures and resources are insufficient or unsupportive, and | **IF** data disaggregation is not applied or is applied without understanding and buy-in; and without the capacity to integrate experiential learning, | **THEN** data disaggregation as an intervention will fail to contribute to more systematic inclusive action, and localized approaches will proliferate. |
|---|---|---|

To remove this learning from the realm of abstract theory and render it practically operational for WFP, we divided these theory statements into five key elements, matching each to a guiding question for anyone considering whether to implement disability data disaggregation using the WGQ-SS. As noted previously, these questions are designed to provide guidance alongside the judgement and expertise of the WFP personnel wielding them, and ultimately making, or advocating for, a particular decision.

# Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| **CAR** | Central African Republic |
| **CCA** | Common Country Analysis |
| **CFM** | Community Feedback Mechanism |
| **CO** | Country Office |
| **DI** | Disability Inclusion |
| **HQ** | Headquarters |
| **INGO** | International Non-Governmental Organisation |
| **OPD** | Organisation of Persons with Disabilities |
| **RAMAN** | Research, Assessment, and Monitoring (Needs Assessment and Targeting Unit) |
| **OPD** | Organisation of Persons with Disabilities |
| **TCD** | Trinity College Dublin |
| **UNCT** | United Nations Country Team |
| **WG** | Washington Group |
| **WG-SS** | Washington Group Short Set of Questions |
| **WFP** | World Food Programme |

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