



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES  
CHANGING LIVES

REGIONAL BUREAU FOR **EASTERN AFRICA**

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## Innovation and Digitization

2021 Regional Achievements & Outlook

**MAY 2022**

Technology and innovation have become golden assets in a socially distanced world. Delivering what is needed was already a challenge before the pandemic. In 2021, we turned a difficult operational context into a springboard to help grow, strengthen and expand our services to NGOs, Partners, Governments, beneficiaries and WFP itself.

## Regional Achievements

### Innovation:

#### *IGNITE Innovation Hub*

RBN continues to be the region that is defining WFP's digital transformation and innovation agenda, being home to WFP's first Regional Innovation Hub and a leader in introducing new digital products to know and serve our beneficiaries better. RBN launched the IGNITE Innovation Hub for Eastern Africa in 2020. Since then, the hub has been nurturing and scaling up sustainable innovations for increased food security in Eastern Africa by leveraging WFP's brand, partnerships, and expertise. The hub has launched 2 major programs:

#### NextGen East African Innovators programme

WFP partnered with the Hult Prize and the Danish Technical University's (DTU) SkyLab FoodLab to support nine Eastern African student teams in a bootcamp to learn business modelling and human-centred design skills. Three winning teams from **Ethiopia, Uganda, and Kenya** participated in a month-long program at DTU's FoodLab to prototype their solutions and receive mentoring and advice from entrepreneurs and experts. Several of the innovators in the program have gone on to receive further support in their projects. One team has been accepted into a prestigious program for global innovators at MIT. The program was made possible with funds from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.

### IGNITE Food Systems Challenges

This flagship program was launched in 3 COs – **Rwanda, South Sudan, and Uganda** – in partnership with local implementing organizations. Its goal is to support East African food systems start-ups and MSMEs with training, technical support and growth funding. In 2022, 5-7 entrepreneurs in each country's cohort will receive up to \$50,000 in non-dilutive seed capital to scale their businesses as collaborators, in WFP's efforts to increase regional food security.

**In 2022**, the hub will continue to learn from and expand its flagship programmes. It will continue to provide technical support to the Milken-Montseppe Agritech Prize and to **Kenya's** projects in aflatoxin reduction and youth innovation. The hub will also launch an advisory committee composed of other regional units and partners to identify more ways to support innovation in WFP's regional COs and explore potential exchange opportunities between regional COs in implementing innovation programming.

### Digitization

#### Demonstrating leadership through piloting and scaling products

**Service Market Place:** In 2021, Service Market Place is deployed across the region. It has streamlined how partners access and track services from WFP, the use of School Connect in **Burundi**, and Conditional On-Demand Assistance (CODA) in **South Sudan**. Approximately 249 service requests were processed in the region.

**School Connect:** School Connect digitises school attendance data and food stocks. It has been deployed to over 800 schools in **Burundi**, and will be scaled up to a further 249 schools. Future implementation is ongoing in **Ethiopia, South Sudan and Sudan**.

**CODA:** CODA is a digital application that helps schools monitor food stocks and student attendance on a phone or tablet. The tool also mitigates supply problems by automatically calculating stock availability and food distribution quantities, and helps staff identify issues that could impact children's attendance in class. To date, CODA has registered over 25,000 beneficiaries in **South Sudan** compared to 8,957 as at end of year 2020.



## Knowing and serving people

RBN served more people than ever in 2021 with its flagship beneficiary information and transfer management platform, SCOPE, delivering over USD \$440 million worth of transfers in cash and vouchers across nine countries. The ambition and outlook for 2022 is to use technology as a lever to help us know and serve people in need better. This will be achieved through the proactive digitisation of our programme cycle and a dedicated effort to standardise and expand Customer Feedback Mechanisms (CFMs).

The Bureau is also taking increasing responsibilities in supporting local Governments with digitising their own social protection programmes. In 2021, a critical discovery exercise was undertaken to understand the landscape of the social protection information systems across the region to support the definition of how and where WFP can bring value to this space.

### Innovation and technology in action:

#### *EMPACT Deduplication and Adjudication Centre (DAC)*

Through EMPACT, WFP trains young people in developing relevant digital skills and connects them to jobs online through its EMPACT initiative. The skills offered in 2021 spanned digital microwork, storytelling, computer programming and freelancing. While in the programme, participants are exposed to frontier technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and blockchain as well as being trained on soft skills to improve their employability and entrepreneurial skills. Here is what some of the participants had to say about the EMPACT programme:

"EMPACT has had a lot of impact in my life. I managed to pay all debts I had and even started an online business. With the skills acquired I continued working online and earned even more. Before EMPACT I can say I was jobless, but now I have a lot to do that I put some aside or even offer employment to my friends".

**Tellvinch Imani (M)**, 19,  
Kibera resident

"Before I got enrolled in the (EMPACT) microwork training, I had lost my job and my house, and I went to stay with a friend and life wasn't easy and I was also depressed at that time. When I received a link to apply for the training, I decided to make a choice of changing my life in a positive way for me to get back on my feet again. During the training, we were earning, and I managed to save some cash and started settling some few things in my life".

**Boniface Gichuhi (M)**, 25,  
Kibera resident

Graduates from the EMPACT programme are now working in the **Digital Deduplication and Adjudication Centre** where they support the reduction of duplicate beneficiaries registered into WFP programmes. Results to date show significant savings in South Sudan and Sudan through reducing duplicates to below 2 percent.

"I upload the number of children attending school and the app helps me to calculate how much food to prepare for them"

**Sandrine Keza,**  
Canteen Manager at *Budahunga Primary School in Burundi*

## Challenges & Lessons Learned

### Infrastructure: making the connections that matter

By December 2021, 94 percent of WFP locations in Eastern Africa have migrated or upgraded to the Marlink satellite network. This translates to more flexible connectivity options, enabling WFP to quickly adapt bandwidth in case of an increase in staff, or during emergencies and political instability. Field staff enjoy smoother use of corporate digital tools for calls, meetings and messaging apps, and stable access to cloud-based documents and platforms.

### Doing no digital harm

The growing reliance on digital tools brings its own challenges, not the least of which is protecting the large volume of sensitive data they generate. WFP has been strengthening its data protection capabilities through policies, tools and training, continuing a journey toward a more consolidated and centralized approach to data that benefits WFP, its beneficiaries and the wider humanitarian community.

### Prioritizing innovations

There are many different, and often competing, definitions of innovation. The regional innovation hub's biggest challenge is to understand CO priorities, pain points, and operational modalities to design a safe space for new ideas to be tried and tested in the service of our mission. Balancing a focus on innovation happening within WFP's core operations with our work supporting innovators in the ecosystem that share our same goals is a challenge we will continue to navigate with support from Donors, Partners, and COs alike.

## CO Highlights

### Burundi

**Forecast-based Financing (FbF) initiative:** WFP engaged with BRC to continue the pilot phase of the FbF initiative. The initiative aims to capacitate the BRC to establish an AA system ahead of floods. As a result, a draft flood early action protocol was developed, and 12,835 people at-risk of further flooding of the rising Lake Tanganyika received anticipatory cash, and were able to take preventive measures. In June 2021, WFP managed to scale up a multi-hazard anticipatory system that also includes droughts, epidemics, and man-made disasters.

**School Meals going digital in Burundi:** As a result of a successful collaboration between WFP Burundi, the Digital Transformation Unit (DTU) and the School Feeding Division, the digital platform "School Connect" is deployed in over 500 schools in seven provinces under the School Meals Programme. The platform provides real-time data on school meal days and stock levels, dropout rates from daily attendance data, food consumption inputs and commodity deliveries. School Connect's online monitoring is paving the way for the digitization of other schools by leveraging the digital footprint: the Supply Chain Last Mile solution will be deployed in connected schools using the same digital devices and capitalizing on the tech literacy built by School connect. By June 2022, 259 additional schools will be covered by the programme.

### Ethiopia

Under a **Food Commodity Management Improvement Project (FMIP)**, a Commodity Allocation and Tracking System (CATS) was developed to assist the Ethiopia Disaster Risk Management Commission (EDRMC) to track food commodities. The system was rolled out in four main regional hubs across Ethiopia. WFP implemented a Bag Marking Solution (BMS) to improve the visibility and traceability of commodities, using EBS inkjet with food grade ink to stamp customized codes, identifying origin, destination, transporter and date on each commodity bag before dispatch. Through its Innovation Accelerator, WFP implemented a solution called Roabee, a real-time shipment monitoring platform which provides insights, predictability and efficiency in logistics using sensors. WFP also assisted the Federal Transport Authority (FTA) to implement a Global Positioning System (GPS) to support its fleet management initiative.

## Rwanda

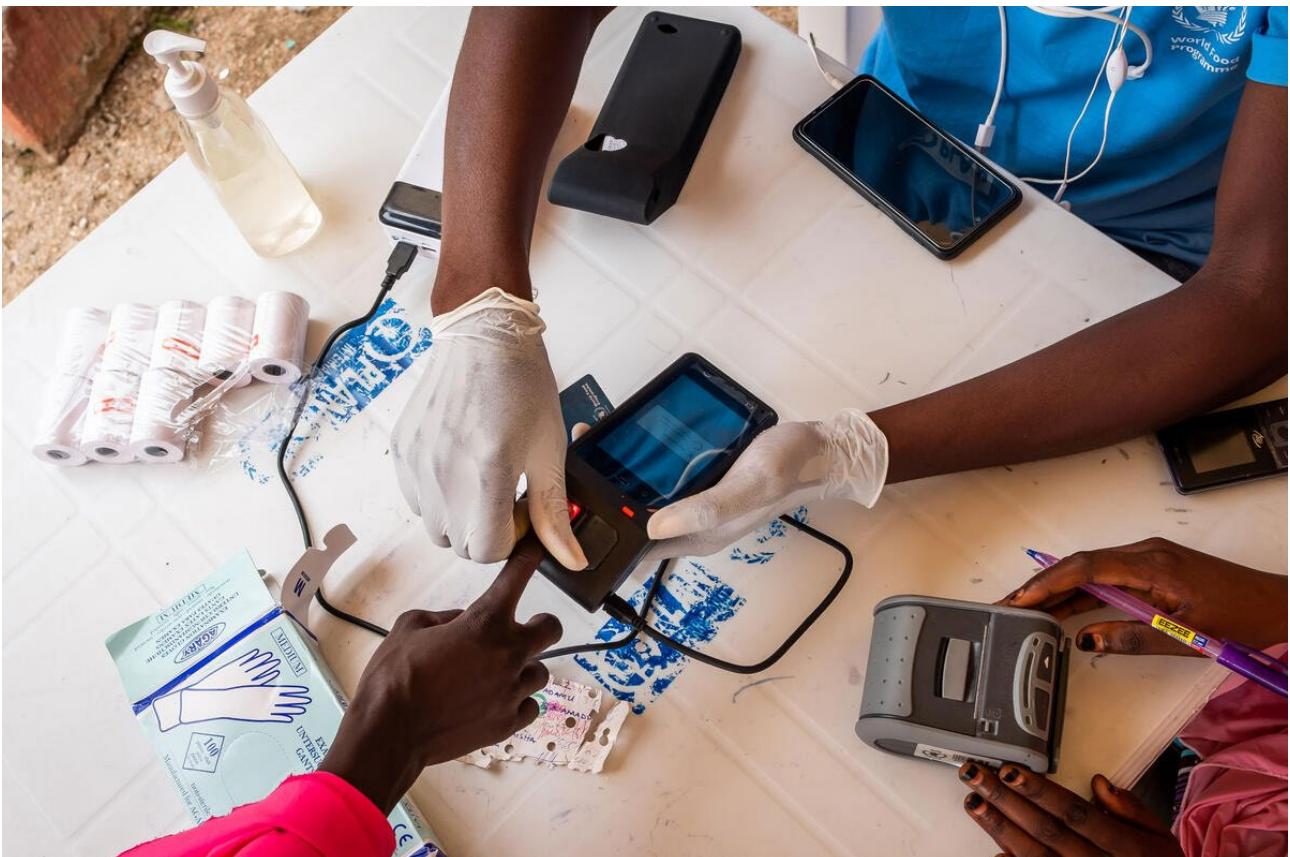
With the support from WFP INKA, and in collaboration with local agro-processor, **Aflasight**, WFP Rwanda launched a one-year innovation pilot. The pilot uses technology to identify and remove aflatoxin-infected maize from the food supply, to bridge the quality gap at the last mile of the value chain, aiming to increase food safety and provide farmers with access to wider markets and better prices for uncontaminated maize. Based on the pilot's success, the technology could be scaled-up across Rwanda in 2022.

## South Sudan

Through the **Post-Harvest Loss Venture**, WFP through the Innovation Accelerator, supported the Government and Private Sector in scaling up the promotion of low-cost hermetic storage, such as cocoons, coupled with training to mitigate against losses.

## Uganda

WFP utilized the **Mobile Operational Data Acquisition (MoDA) platform** to distribute food assistance to school-going children through digitising the class registers. Each learner was assigned a unique identifier that translated into a coupon to receive assistance. This WFP innovation improved efficiency in service delivery, reaching the rightful beneficiaries and significantly reducing wait-time at the food collection points.



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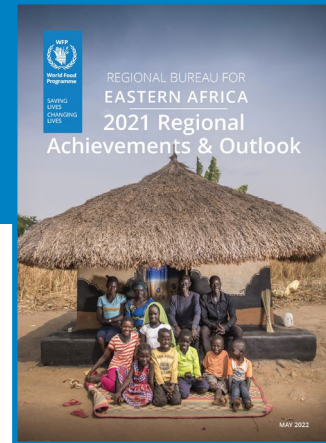
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## PHOTO CREDITS

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