



World Food Programme

INNOVATION

WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME
INNOVATION
strategy

2026 *to* 2028



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Introduction

“The priorities are clear: increase our resources, improve our effectiveness and scale up partnerships and innovation to bring modern solutions to those most in need.”

Cindy McCain, Executive Director, WFP

Hunger is surging to unprecedented levels: 318 million people now face acute food insecurity – more than double the number in 2019. Conflict, extreme weather events and economic instability are converging to create a global food crisis that demands not just action, but the most effective and efficient solutions harnessing innovation.

WFP is committed to ending hunger, saving lives in emergencies, reducing humanitarian needs and enhancing people’s resilience. Innovation is not a luxury. It is a necessity. To meet rising needs with limited resources, WFP must fundamentally rethink how humanitarian and development work gets done, making it faster, smarter and more local than ever before.

WFP has a long-standing commitment to innovation in all its country offices and a track record of innovating and scaling up solutions for modern, more efficient programmes that serve people better.

Since 2015, WFP has invested in building a global innovation infrastructure, from the Global Accelerator and Ventures team, regional and country-level innovation teams to the Business Innovation Unit and innovation specialists in other global functions. These efforts have already delivered impact, shaping how WFP delivers assistance, builds partnerships and unlocks ways of taking new solutions to scale. And the time has come to go further.

The WFP innovation strategy for 2026–2028 is a bold step forward. Rooted in WFP’s core values of humanity, integrity, collaboration, commitment and inclusion, it charts a path towards making innovation a force multiplier across the entire organization. This is a strategy designed not just to support individual projects - but to systemically scale innovations across WFP, with an integrated innovation portfolio approach, placing innovation at the heart of every employee, every programme, every country office and every partnership.

Innovation is identified as a critical enabler within the WFP Strategic Plan (2026–2029). The WFP Innovation Strategy ensures that innovation is a systematic, organization-wide mechanism to advance WFP’s three Strategic Outcomes and cross-cutting priorities for the country offices. As an example, cash-based transfers, once considered revolutionary, are now mainstream. Similarly, other types of innovation – whether they are breakthrough innovations, systemic or incremental – have allowed WFP to serve people better, operate more efficiently and effectively and raise more funding. By adopting new approaches, WFP continues to improve its ability to meet the needs of the people it serves.

Drawing on insights from consultations held around the world with WFP field staff, leaders, partners and innovation experts, this strategy reflects a shared vision: that scalable, sustainable innovation becomes one of WFP’s most powerful tools to achieve lasting change.

The innovation strategy is closely aligned with WFP’s vision to empower country offices through one global headquarters, with policies and frameworks, including its Strategic Plan 2026–2029, the people policy, the Management Accountability Framework, the Duty of Care Accountability and Governance Framework, the Information and Technology Strategy for 2023–2026, the Global Data Strategy for 2024–2026, the Global Artificial Intelligence Strategy for 2025–2027, the Innovative Finance strategy for 2025–2026, the Private Sector Strategy for 2020–2025, the Localization Policy, the Resource Mobilization Strategy, various Nutrition Strategies and the Personal Data Protection and Privacy Framework, as well as with UN 2.0 agenda. Building on WFP’s normative frameworks, the innovation strategy enhances WFP’s efforts to use technology, partnerships and innovative solutions to address hunger and drive operational efficiency. The strategy also leverages innovation objectives within Country Strategic Plans (CSPs) and guides the development of future CSPs, where innovation-driven approaches can offer new solutions while maximizing the impact of programming. The priority areas for innovation will be aligned with WFP’s strategic plans for 2022–2025 and 2026–2029.

The direction is clear: amplify WFP’s innovation DNA by empowering WFP country offices and turn today’s challenges into the breakthrough innovations to end hunger.

Vision for innovation

WFP's commitment to innovation is focused not only on advancing its mission but also on fostering efficiency and effectiveness across the entire humanitarian and development system. As a leading partner in the United Nations system and beyond, WFP aims to make its innovative improvements available as a public good, enhancing the global response to hunger and humanitarian challenges.

Defined through a consultative process, WFP's shared vision for innovation provides a clear direction towards this common goal:

“WFP catalyses scalable, sustainable innovations and transformative business solutions to achieve zero hunger and address critical humanitarian challenges for the people WFP serves. By empowering employees, embracing human-centred approaches, promoting localization and collaborating with other United Nations actors and partners from the public and private sector, WFP aims to achieve long-term impact through scalable approaches and build resilience in a changing world to save lives in emergencies and sustainably end hunger.”

Four elements of this vision are fundamental: the people served by WFP, innovation, WFP employees and scale.

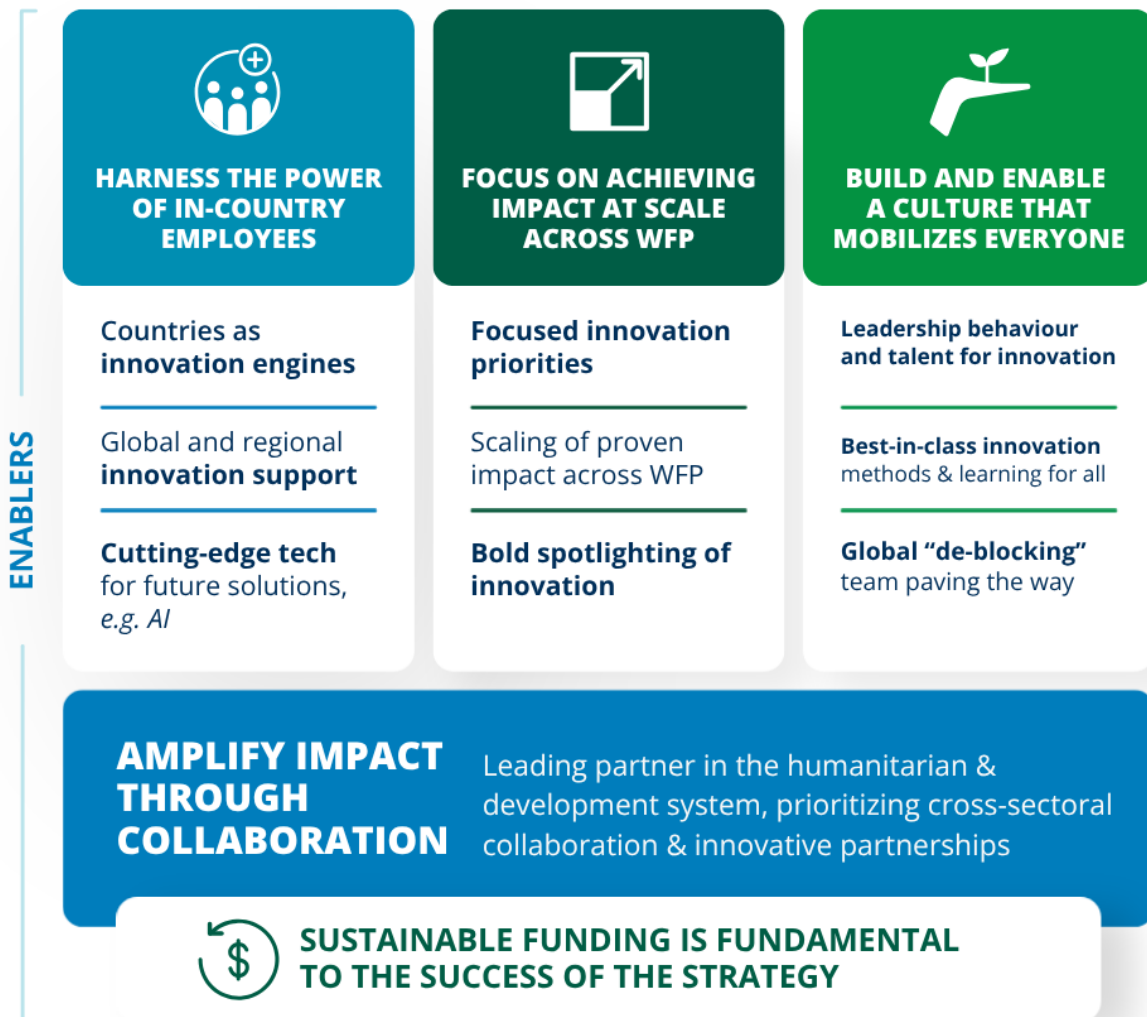
- 1. People served by WFP:** WFP's work on innovation is driven by the needs of the people it serves. They are at the heart of its work, and their experiences and feedback guide the design, implementation and scaling of innovations. By placing the people that WFP serves at the centre of its innovation strategy, WFP ensures that solutions are co-developed and that innovations are not only effective, but also responsive to the realities on the ground.
- 2. Innovation:** At WFP, *innovation* is defined broadly - from incremental and breakthrough innovation to business transformation efforts, it encompasses everything from individual solutions to systemic changes. Innovations are used to build, enhance and sustain value chains in the ecosystems that WFP is active in. It includes process, product, and digital innovations as well as innovations that improve efficiency and effectiveness. Innovation means improving WFP's enabling functions and programmes by solving problems in ways that are replicable, scalable and cost-effective.

- 3. WFP employees:** This strategy is relevant to all WFP employees irrespective of contract type, role or location, from field officers to the Executive Director. Successful implementation will mean that innovation is not limited to single divisions or innovation projects, but that all employees are given the means and encouragement to innovate with intention in their role. Leadership plays a critical enabling role and must be consistently engaged and empowered to champion innovation across WFP.
- 4. Scale:** WFP takes a multifaceted approach to scaling up innovation. *Scaling out* refers to expanding an innovation from one country office to others; *scaling functionally* involves enhancing the capabilities offered by an innovation; and *scaling deeply* focuses on deepening the potential impact of an innovation in a specific context. WFP aims to spread the use of high-impact solutions across its operating environments and the broader humanitarian system, extending its impact to benefit as many people as possible in a sustainable way. Solutions must be cost-effective and focus on areas in which WFP has considerable influence. Scalable solutions need to be adapted to different operational settings, particularly in challenging realities. Technology is pivotal to scalability and must be thoroughly understood to be used to maximum effect.

Strategic goals and enablers

VISION

WFP INNOVATES TO ADDRESS CRITICAL HUMANITARIAN & DEVELOPMENT CHANGES



The innovation strategy is designed to address critical humanitarian and development challenges by leveraging innovation across all levels of the organization. The strategy has five strategic goals: harness the power of in-country employees; achieve impact at scale across WFP; build and enable a culture that mobilizes everyone; amplify impact through collaboration; and mobilize and secure sustainable funding.

These goals, supported by key enablers, shape the necessary frameworks, tools and partnerships to drive innovation and improve operational efficiency. Together, they form the foundation for transforming WFP.

Harness the power of in-country employees

Purpose: Empower WFP employees to act as innovation engines, driving innovation throughout the organization.

Enablers: WFP and its Innovation Division will encourage and enable employees at country offices to become engines of innovation, transforming them into catalysts for change. Localization will continue to be a guiding principle, ensuring that solutions are driven by local expertise, ownership and the needs of the communities that WFP serves. Technical innovation expertise will be made available to country offices at a global level. The WFP Global Accelerator and Ventures team will promote the adoption of innovations, facilitate partnership building with national and regional stakeholders and represent WFP innovation in global fora. In addition, investments will be made in cutting-edge technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain and quantum computing, in order to develop and implement future-ready solutions that address the challenges faced by WFP.

Metric goal: Implementation plan developed by the end of 2026: Develop a phased plan to ensure that all country offices have the necessary tools and resources to drive and enable innovation efforts, including through the establishment of region-specific innovation roadmaps and hubs.

Focus on achieving impact at scale across WFP

Purpose: Create awareness and visibility on existing innovations and invest in scaling up high-impact innovations that can be applied globally to address hunger.

Enablers: WFP and its Innovation Division, through the WFP Global Accelerator and Ventures team will define priority areas where innovation can have the most significant impact, ensuring that efforts are concentrated on those areas. A structured governance

framework for scaling successful innovations will be developed, ensuring that proven solutions are implemented at scale.

The WFP Global Accelerator and Ventures team will, as part of a corporate portfolio management approach, have systematic oversight of WFP's global innovation investments to ensure alignment with the new WFP Strategic Plan (2026-2029) and to direct resources toward innovations with the greatest potential for impact, efficiency and scale. Elements of the portfolio management approach include: project assessment based on pre-defined criteria (such as relevance and strategic feasibility from a cost cost-efficiency perspective and performance and decision-making mechanisms to extend, scale or suspend innovation investments).

Priorities will be defined through a structured, evidence-driven process that begins with the strategic directions set out in the Strategic Plan and will be further shaped by consultations with country offices and headquarter functions to ensure that innovation responds to operational needs and field realities. The WFP Innovation Advisory Group will advise on this topic by reviewing thematic focus areas, advising on strategic fit and validating priority choices in light of global trends and donor expectations. This approach will ensure that the innovation portfolio reflects corporate priorities, strengthens decision-making and maximizes the value of innovation across WFP's programmes and operations.

As part of this effort, WFP and its Innovation Division will define a scalability assessment framework. In addition, WFP will expand awareness and visibility platforms on existing innovations and share information and learnings about innovation efforts globally.

Metric goal: Success under this goal would mean the following: 1) A reduction of between 10 and 20 percent in the operational cost of assisting people for country office programmes, achieved through scaled innovations that streamline delivery processes, supply chains or other activities; or 2) A 20 percent increase in the number of people served, achieved by replicating or scaling up innovations; or 3) A 20 percent improvement in operational efficiency achieved by incorporating innovations into programmes (dependent on CSP planning).

Build and enable a culture that mobilizes everyone

Purpose: Create an organizational culture that encourages and sustains innovation at every level.

Enablers: Leadership at all levels will play a crucial role in promoting and encouraging innovative behaviour, creating an environment in which new concepts and initiatives can flourish. WFP and its Innovation Division will foster a culture that sees responsible risk-taking as a fundamental aspect of mainstreaming innovation in everyday work. Recognizing that innovations are inherently new and hence riskier than established processes, the strategy emphasizes the importance of risk-adjusted experimentation and scaling as a necessary requirement for building the WFP of the future. To facilitate this, a global “de-blocking” team will be established to remove internal obstacles to innovation implementation and scaling. Innovation processes will be designed to achieve results while learning and iterating quickly and limiting risks. Access to best-in-class innovation methods and learning opportunities will be provided to all employees, ensuring that they have the tools and knowledge to contribute to WFP’s innovation goals. Individual and team recognition at all levels is a crucial part of creating a culture of innovation. In addition, WFP will prioritize identifying and nurturing talent, funnelling skilled individuals into roles where they can drive and sustain innovation efforts.

Metric goal: WFP will develop and roll out innovation leadership and employee training through its global innovation capacity. The number of significant de-blocked processes will be tracked and reported on. Engagement in innovation will be used as one of the criteria in the staff reassignment process. WFP will use innovation challenges and awards to recognize innovations and teams around the world.

Amplify impact through collaboration

Purpose: Collaborate with private-sector companies, scientific institutions, governments, global partners, local partners, investors, individuals, other United Nations entities and International Financial Institutions to co-create and scale high impact solutions.

Enablers: WFP will continue to position itself as a leading innovation partner in the humanitarian and development system, thereby fostering stronger collaboration and

enhancing its capacity for innovation. Cross-sectoral partnerships and opportunities to influence the ecosystem will be actively pursued to maximize the reach and effectiveness of innovation, ensuring that collaborative efforts yield substantial benefits for those WFP serves. Innovative solutions will be used to engage partners and strengthen WFP's ability to respond as an agile and efficient organization. Sustainable funding and capacities are crucial for long-term impact, and WFP will secure diverse and reliable funding sources to catalyze and scale innovation initiatives.

Metric goal: By 2028, WFP operations and global headquarters secure USD 50 million in funding and capacities from various partners, to support high-impact innovation in countries.

Ensure sustainable funding for innovation

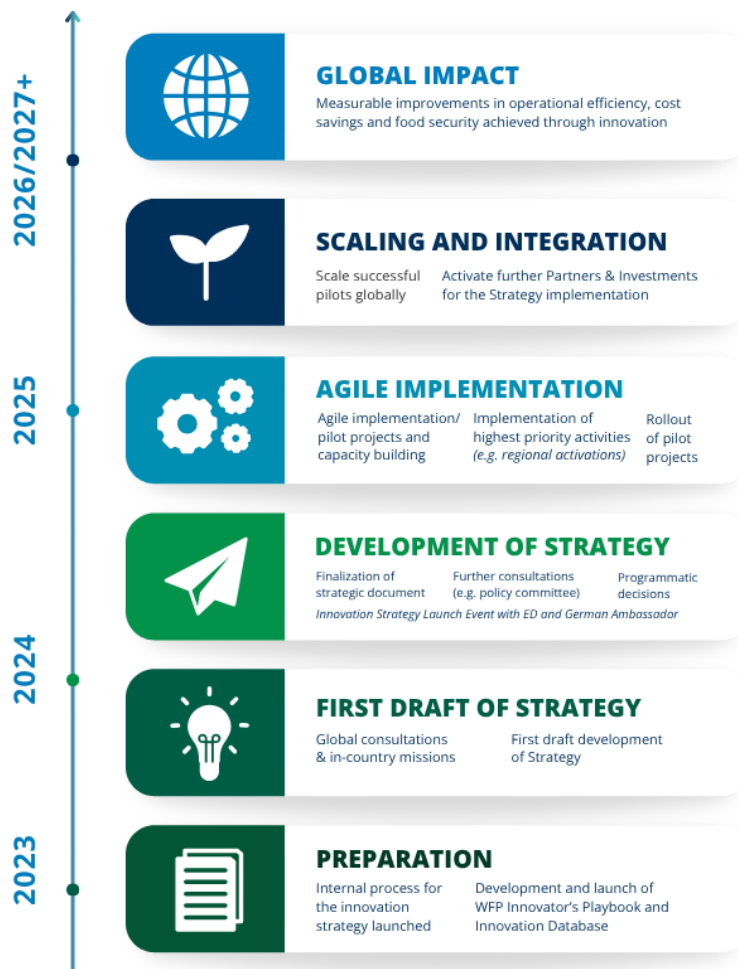
Purpose: Secure adequate basic funding for innovation infrastructure, activities and new approaches across WFP, which will be essential for achieving the objectives of the strategy.

Enablers: Specific funding and partnership capabilities are required to ensure that WFP has the necessary innovation-focus at the global, regional and country levels, including critical capabilities needed to unlock new partnerships and new approaches and to amplify and implement solutions at scale. All relevant proposals made to partners will position WFP as a modern and innovative organization. In addition, innovative partnership approaches will be explored for their potential to further strengthen WFP's capacity to fulfil its mission.

Metric goal: Secure USD 17.5 million in annual funding for the implementation of the innovation strategy, in addition to the funding required to implement innovations at scale across WFP operations.

Implementation road map

The innovation strategy is the product of a highly consultative development process, with engagement from stakeholders across the organization to ensure alignment with WFP’s mandate and priorities. The strategy will be implemented in an agile manner, with pilot projects and capacity-building initiatives rolled out early on. Over time, innovations will be scaled and integrated into WFP's operations around the world. The goal is to achieve measurable improvements in operational efficiency, cost savings and food security by 2028 through innovation, continuously adapting efforts to meet evolving needs and challenges.



Innovation processes and methodologies

To achieve transformational outcomes in food security and humanitarian and development assistance, WFP will adopt and refine a range of innovation processes and methodologies that ensure agility, efficiency and measurable impact. These approaches will foster a culture of experimentation and rapid learning across the organization, ensuring that new concepts and solutions are tested, iterated and scaled successfully.

Human-centred design: At the heart of WFP’s innovation process will be human-centred design at the country office level, ensuring that the needs of the people WFP serves are at the core of every innovation. This involves engaging directly with communities, understanding their specific challenges and co-creating solutions that are contextually relevant and culturally appropriate. These insights will guide the design of technological and programmatic innovations to ensure high adoption rates and sustainable outcomes. Privacy, recognized as a fundamental human right, will remain a foundational principle of this process as a component of responsible innovation.

Lean and agile innovation: WFP will use lean and agile methodologies to accelerate the pace of innovation, allowing for rapid prototyping, testing and scale-up. These approaches emphasize flexibility, quick feedback loops and iterative development, which are critical in allowing the organization to keep pace with the ever-changing landscape of global food security. Through short innovation cycles, teams will be able to adjust their projects based on real-world feedback and data. The de-blocking team will establish further lean and agile processes.

Acceleration, venture building and scaling: To maximize impact, WFP and its Innovation Division will advance the most promising scalable and transformative innovations, inside and outside the organization. Through the WFP Global Accelerator and Ventures team, WFP will continue to enable entrepreneurs and innovators in developing sustainable innovations and ventures. Such assistance includes mentorship, funding and operational expertise. Innovations can be enabled by technology like AI or by new business models like innovative finance, or they can arise through working with the private sector. To further advance this, responsible AI-driven solutions that can enhance food security and humanitarian operations will be identified and scaled in a dedicated “AI Accelerator”. WFP will prioritize proven innovations with potential for global expansion.

Business innovation, transformation and change solutions: Supported by its Business Innovation and Change Unit, WFP will transform strategies into action, planning and executing transformation and organizational change, increasing efficiency, effectiveness and simplification. To do so, WFP will promote collaboration with other United Nations entities to co-create innovative solutions, cultivating cross-fertilization of approaches and enabling the development of successful innovation initiatives by promoting best practices.

Knowledge sharing and management: The WFP Innovation Network – comprised of a growing network of global headquarters and country-based innovation teams and champions – will play a crucial role in knowledge management, promoting the roll-out of field-driven programmatic guidance, evidence-based toolkits and lessons learned, successful innovations and fit-for-purpose models and approaches from one region to another, fostering cross-country learning, innovation uptake and promoting best practices.

Co-creation and stakeholder engagement: New collaborative approaches, frameworks and spaces will be developed and continuously cultivated to engage diverse stakeholders effectively in the problem-solving process. This will enable WFP teams, clusters and coalitions to lead and be engaged in co-creation processes in meaningful and impactful ways.

Innovative partnerships and innovative finance: Recognizing the power of partnerships and cross-sector collaboration in driving disruptive change, WFP will expand its collaboration with the global innovation ecosystem. The organization will continue to explore and build partnerships and collaboration with global, regional and local organizations, from the private (including early-stage companies), academia, civil society and the public sector. WFP will use partnerships and innovative finance approaches to further integrate funding and know-how from the public and private sector and international financial institutions into efforts toward achieving WFP's strategic goals.

Risk considerations and mitigation

Innovation inherently involves uncertainty, and responsible risk-taking is essential to unlocking transformative change. WFP recognizes that innovative approaches often come with higher levels of uncertainty compared with established practices. To ensure that risks are proactively managed while maintaining agility, the innovation strategy will be implemented in close alignment with WFP's broader risk management framework and

policies. This includes identifying potential risk factors throughout innovation lifecycles, such as operational feasibility, financial sustainability and ethical considerations, while developing mitigation strategies early on. WFP will empower innovation teams through guidance, tools and risk-adjusted decision-making that enables them to be bold while maintaining accountability. By embedding structured risk management into innovation governance and portfolio steering, WFP aims to scale impactful solutions responsibly, maximizing the benefits for the people it serves while minimizing unintended consequences.

Key performance indicators and success metrics

As part of the implementation of the Innovation Strategy, it is essential to define key performance indicators (KPIs) at the global headquarters, regional office and country office levels, ensuring that the success of innovation is measurable at every stage of the process. Metrics by which WFP will measure success will be developed for each dimension and continuously refined in collaboration with country offices. These KPIs will provide a comprehensive view of WFP's innovation performance and ensure alignment with broader organizational goals. The KPIs will also enable WFP to monitor and drive the success of innovation at all levels, ensuring a unified and strategic approach to transforming WFP's operations.

Way forward

The innovation strategy is more than a road map – it is a commitment to bold, systemic change.

By 2028, WFP aims to unlock the full potential of innovation to enhance operational performance, cut costs and – most importantly – improve outcomes for the millions of people it serves. WFP will strengthen its capacity to innovate and to scale what works. It will empower country offices with the right tools to lead innovation locally. WFP will build a global network of partnerships and collaboration to enable the co-creation of the next generation of humanitarian innovation.

This can only be achieved with more partnerships and collaboration with governments, technology leaders, academic institutions, International Financial Institutions, private-sector companies and innovators around the world. This is a collective call to action – to disrupt hunger with the same urgency, creativity and conviction.

For WFP, innovation is not optional – it is how the organization maximizes the impact of every dollar it receives and ensures that it stays agile in a rapidly changing world. This strategy unlocks a bold new approach that will see promising new concepts and initiatives turn into real-world innovation breakthroughs, driving lasting change for the people who need it most.

