MVAM

2016 Nominet Trust 100 Winner

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MOBILE SURVEYS CHART FOOD NEEDS IN DISASTER AREAS

By World Food Programme

Project URL: http://mvam.org/
Project Twitter: @mobileVAM

Organisations Involved World Food Programme
CISCO Foundation
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Humanitarian Innovation Fund
Kingdom of the Netherlands
The Belgian Development Cooperation

- Health
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It's hard for the humanitarian community to know exactly who has been affected and where, when disaster strikes. Speed is of the essence if food packages are to be delivered in time to those who need them the most.

Traditionally, the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) provided this information through its vulnerability analysis and mapping (VAM) system, but the process relied on face-to-face interviews, which could take weeks.

With increasing mobile phone usage in developing countries, the time was ripe for the WFP to launch the mobile VAM (mVAM) in 2013, led by the WFP's Chief Economist Arif Husain.

Individuals are contacted directly through short phone surveys, SMS, live telephone interviews and the Interactive Voice Response system. This allows real-time data on local market prices, food availability and consumption patterns of the local population to be shared with humanitarian workers, who can distribute aid fast and effectively.

The system at first encountered its fair share of challenges. In Yemen, people initially feared answering their phones during conflict. Politically sensitive questions therefore had to be carefully avoided, and care was taken to ensure that communication history can be removed from the recipients' phones.

Today, mVAM has vastly contributed to improving aid distribution. While traditional surveys took anywhere from four to six weeks, mVAM takes only one week and at 40% of the cost. The initiative has grown rapidly. mVAM is now in place in 15 countries, with plans to expand to 30 in the next two years. It has contributed to aid work in Central African Republic, Iraq, Yemen and during the Ebola outbreak in Liberia.

The mVAM methodology and data are freely available to the academic, humanitarian and global development communities to use. To learn more, visit http://mvam.org

Image courtesy of mVAM

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