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ICT4D Brief: Digital Response in the COVID-19 Environment

USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES TO ADAPT PROGRAM DELIVERY DURING COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic elevated the use of digital technology in programming from an opportunity to a fundamental need. The social distancing required to stave off the virus has made technology an essential means for the continuation of service delivery. As such, many CRS country programs, together with local and national partners, expanded and adapted their programming using technology.

This report presents an overview of how CRS country program teams in Guatemala, Myanmar, Cambodia, Egypt, Haiti, Rwanda, Iraq, Vietnam, Benin, and Senegal have used digital tools to continue to achieve program impact while also protecting staff, partners, and project participants by adhering to COVID-19 social distancing protocols and other preventive measures. The data was collected through a survey circulated to CRS country programs (CPs) in December 2021.

KEY INSIGHTS FROM FINDINGS

- Instant messaging tools such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Viber, and Telegram were used extensively in COVID-19 adapted program delivery across CPs
- Only a small number of programs reported the use of offline technologies such as radio, SMS, and IVR
- MS Teams was used both for engaging with program participants and partners, as well as for internal communication and collaboration
- Connectivity was a key challenge across CPs, particularly in reaching program participants as not all have access to the internet and relevant devices

SURVEY FINDINGS

The table below provides an overview of the different types of digital platforms used by CPs to adapt their programming and ways of working to the COVID-19 context. Overall, digital technologies were used primarily to communicate with program participants, deliver social behavior change messages, and provide access to training material, including lessons for students. Some of

the same tools used to reach program participants were also used by CP teams for internal communication. In addition, staff leveraged standard agency tools like MS Teams.

Digital tools used by CP	WhatsApp	Facebook Messenger	Radio	Direct Phone Calls	Telegram	SMS	IVR	Viber	Zoom	MS Teams	MS Forms	Mentimeter	Skype	Telerivet	Videos	Others
GUATEMALA	■		■			■									■	
MYANMAR				■											■	■
CAMBODIA				■	■					■		■			■	■
EGYPT	■	■		■		■			■	■					■	■
HAITI	■	■	■	■												
RWANDA	■		■	■		■	■			■			■			
IRAQ	■				■	■		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
VIETNAM									■	■	■	■				■
BENIN	■						■			■						
SENEGAL	■		■						■	■					■	

USES OF DIGITAL TOOLS IN DIRECT PROGRAMMING

Online Digital Technologies

The majority of responding CPs used some kind of **instant messaging tool** to reach program participants, such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Viber, or Telegram. WhatsApp was the most commonly used messaging tool, most likely reflecting its dominant market position in many contexts. The Benin CP used WhatsApp to facilitate remote work between colleagues and program participants. In Rwanda and Senegal, CPs created WhatsApp groups for Savings and Internal Lending Community (SILC) projects to keep engagement with youth leaders, field agents and private service providers; to share daily project activities; as well as to request support. Some CPs used a combination of tools: in Haiti, the CP health team used both WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger to share digital graphic messages on stress management and referral information to Haiti immigrant and refugee students.

In the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) education project in Iraq, the CP used WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Telegram and Viber to form project groups for delivering virtual remedial class orientations for IDPs and returnees. Another messaging application used was Zalo. This was used by the Vietnam CP in the Vietnam disability program for talking to project participants, sending photos and files from local participants to staff and sending instructions and messages to large project groups.

Some CPs used **Videos** to develop sensitization messages and to deliver virtual training. A good number of CPs, like Guatemala, Myanmar, Iraq, Senegal, Cambodia and Egypt, used videos to deliver social behavior change (SBC) messages aimed at informing and sensitizing program participants on COVID-19 preventive barrier measures. Programs shared videos on SBC through the internet across social media apps like Facebook and WhatsApp. In Myanmar, SBC video messages on COVID-19 were loaded on memory sticks and distributed by COVID-19 emergency workers to program participants. In Myanmar, community volunteers shared SBC video clips when carrying out home visit activities. The Guatemala CP developed videos on COVID-19 prevention for Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), volunteers, and teachers for their Learning for Life McGovern Dole Food for Education Project. They developed videos on psychosocial support and COVID-19 prevention for clinic staff as part of their COVID-19 emergency response program. Other CPs, like Myanmar, Cambodia and Egypt developed instructional videos to deliver training online in different languages through YouTube. In Egypt, the CP created educational videos with teachers that were uploaded to the online Learning Passport platform, and **tablets** loaded with educational content were distributed to schools.

CPs also used **Microsoft Teams** for training purposes. For example, CPs in Vietnam, Iraq, and Cambodia used Teams to conduct online training and capacity-building workshops for program participants including local partners. In Egypt, the Livelihood business training for refugee business owners was also delivered online through MS Teams.

CRS trained Community Health Workers (CHWs) using smartphone technology to monitor the distribution of insecticide-treated bed nets in Kurmi Road, Yola, Adamawa State, Nigeria.

In response to the rising food prices and loss of livelihoods caused by the pandemic, the Rwanda CP also carried out unconditional cash transfers for food for 19 000 of the most vulnerable households supported by the Gikuriro project, entirely through digital technology such as text and voice messaging, mobile money transfer mechanisms, and hotlines for PDM and provision of feedback. Through initial text and voice alert messages informing recipients of the incoming mobile money cash transfer and avenues for providing feedback, reminders for recipients to decide jointly as a family how to best spend the money, either on nutritious food, boosting their IGA, or paying for essential basic health services, for ex Community-Based Health Insurance (CBHI), and then using mobile money networks to transfer money to participant wallets, the project provided critical support to vulnerable

households including women and youth-led households in line with Rwanda's social protection goals.

Other digital tools used by CPs included Jamboard and Miro, **online collaboration tools** that enabled CP teams to work effectively together to brainstorm, plan and manage program activities. The Iraq CP used Miro as a tool to engage with its participants in the Shared Future project, bringing youth, community and religious leaders together to support the durable return for internally displaced persons. The Cambodia CP also used the National Center for Parasitology, Entomology and Malaria Control (CNM) application in the Global Fund Malaria project in Cambodia to collect data on Malaria through health facilities and village malaria workers (VMWs) using tablets and mobile phones.

The Vietnam CP used Mentimeter and Kahoot in the Vietnam Unexploded Ordnances (UXO) Mine Risk Education program. Kahoot, an online game-based learning platform, was used as an educational technology to reach and engage with program participants (children). Mentimeter, also an online interactive tool, was used in the Vietnam UXO program to engage with program participants through live polls and quizzes. This raises the question of why both platforms are being used in the same program.

Offline Digital Technologies

Some CPs, like Guatemala, Haiti and Iraq, leveraged **Radio**, using it primarily to transmit tailored SBC mini-radio dramas and instructional programs to share lessons with students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Haiti CP developed radio programs to share lessons with students who were unable to go to school and had no access to the internet. In Rwanda, the CP used radio programs in the Orora Wihaze project as a medium to spread SBC messages through local religious radio channels.

Three CPs (Guatemala, Rwanda and Iraq) mentioned the use of **SMS** to reach program participants. In the Savings and Internal Lending Community (SILC) program in Rwanda, SMS was used to provide support and advice to SILC groups as well as youth leadership groups. The Iraq CP used SMS in the Transitional Assistance project to share the link of the registration form for the collection of data of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Through the link shared via SMS, IDPs were able to register online and access critical services, including cash assistance and support for developing strategies for safe and successful reintegration. Since SMS is often a more inclusive medium than an instant messaging service, as it does not require smartphones or connectivity, it is somewhat surprising that it was not used more extensively by CPs.

Only two CPs, Rwanda and Benin, leveraged **interactive voice response** (IVR) technology. In Rwanda, Viamo was used to send SMS messages on SBC to parents in the Orora Wihaze project. The Benin CP used IVR to collect feedback remotely from program participants and responses were sent to participants within 90 days.

A radio program broadcasts messages on COVID-related threats to social cohesion, such as stigma and mental well-being, and provides messages of encouragement, unity, solidarity, and self-care in the Central African Republic.

DIGITAL TOOLS FOR COMMUNICATING WITHIN PROGRAM TEAMS

Many of the instant messaging tools used in direct programming were also used for communicating within program teams. Their use contributed to better coordination, participation, and engagement amongst team members and helped track the progress and challenges encountered during project implementation.

In Cambodia, some of the CP projects like the Global Fund HIV (GF HIV) project, the Global Fund Tuberculosis (GFTB) project and the Global Fund Resilient and Sustainable System for Health (RSSH) project set up Telegram groups. Using the Telegram platform, the team was able to communicate and hold regular weekly virtual meetings to track the progress of activities, update work plans, and identify and address issues/challenges.

The Myanmar program used instant messaging app features – sharing photos and videos, voice recordings, and live video calls within the team – to remotely monitor progress in the health infrastructure improvement of Catholic clinics.

In Rwanda and Senegal, the CP teams created WhatsApp groups to stay in touch with teams in the field and those working remotely, to receive daily

updates on project activities and to support project participants when required.

Across CPs, **MS Teams** was frequently used for remote meetings and SharePoint was used for document sharing.

COUNTRY PROGRAM CHALLENGES

Switching to digital program delivery was not without its challenges for the CPs. **Poor and limited internet connectivity** was highlighted as a challenge, particularly in reaching remote communities. Given that many of those CRS and its partners aim to reach are likely to be unconnected or only have limited access to connectivity and relevant devices, there is a risk of not reaching those most in need when leveraging digital technologies requiring connectivity, such as instant messaging tools. As such, it is somewhat surprising that the survey responses did not show wider use of technologies such as radio, SMS, and IVR, the use of which do not require internet connection.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The use of digital technologies in programming spurred by the Covid-19 pandemic is undoubtedly here to stay. This overview represents a first effort to document and learn from the experiences of CP teams over the past couple of years. It should be noted that the uptake of most of the tools outlined in this brief was organic and based on local needs. A key next step for the ICT4D team (GKIM) is to build on these experiences and provide increased support and guidance to ensure CRS's use of particularly the newer and program participant facing technologies is safe, effective, and impactful.

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Have questions or feedback about this document? Contact Rose Betanga, ICT4D Communications and Knowledge Management Specialist (rose.betanga@crs.org)

AT A GLANCE: ADAPTED PROGRAMMES HIGHLIGHTED BY CPs AND THE DIGITAL TOOLS USED

	Programs/Projects	Digital Tools Adapted
Guatemala	• COVID-19 response Emergency Programs • The McGovern Dole Food for Education program • Kemon Chabal bilingual literacy program	Radio spots/mini radio programs, videos, audios, WhatsApp, SMS
Myanmar	• Support to Myanmar Catholic Clinics • COVID-19 Awareness for Communities and excluded groups (IDPs, Orphans, Aged, and disabled) • Psychosocial Support for COVID-19 volunteers • Community Health, Agriculture, Nutrition and Gender Empowerment (CHANGE)	Direct phone calls, Memory sticks, digital loudspeakers, videos, audios, Microsoft Teams
Cambodia	• The EpiC project • Healthy Kids Project (HKP) • Global Fund (GF) Malaria • Global Fund Resilient and Sustainable System for Health (RSSH) • Global Fund HIV • Global Fund Tuberculosis (TB)	Direct phone calls, videos, Menti, Jamboard and Telegram, MS teams, smart phone/table data collection app, YouTube
Egypt	• Livelihood business trainings • Online Learning Passport platform	WhatsApp, Messenger, Signal, SMS, Phone calls, Facebook page, Teams, Zoom
Haiti	• Lessons for students via radio • Online training program for extension agents	Direct phone calls, WhatsApp, Facebook, Radio
Rwanda	• Savings and internal lending Communities (SILC) project • The Orora Wihaze project	WhatsApp, Facebook, Direct phone calls, SMS, IVR, MS Teams, Skype, Twitter
Iraq	• Transitional Assistance project • Shared Future project • PRM Education project • BHA Livelihoods • MEAL TSU	WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Viber, Telegram, SMS, CommCare, Zoom, Direct phone calls, MS Forms, YouTube playlists, Telerivet
Vietnam	• Vietnam Disability program • Vietnam UXO program	MS forms, MS Teams, Zoom, Zalo, Mentimeter, Kahoot G-meet, videos, YouTube
Benin	• Insecticide Treated Nets (ITN) Mass distribution Campaign	WhatsApp, CommCare, IVR and YouTrack
Senegal	• Savings and internal lending Communities (SILC) project • CDC Strengthening Community Surveillance	Teams, Zoom, WhatsApp, Pear Deck, SMS, video and radio