ENHANCING KOBOTOOLBOX
A Global Public Good for Data Collection and Analysis

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Developed by the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, KoBoToolbox is a free, open-source platform for collecting, analyzing and visualizing data in challenging contexts, such as humanitarian emergencies and fragile contexts. KoBo Inc., a non-profit organization, was established in 2019 to host and maintain KoBoToolbox.

KoBoToolbox is widely used by humanitarian and development organizations to collect primary data. Both the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) have adopted KoBoToolbox for humanitarian data collection, to harmonize needs assessments and to promote an evidence-based approach to humanitarian programming.

The KoboToolbox is also used by the World Bank for its Geo-Enabling initiative for Monitoring and Supervision (GEMS) initiative, which aims to enhance remote supervision, monitoring and evaluation in fragile contexts. It has been implemented in approximately 850 projects in over 90 countries.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

The objective of this activity was to strengthen the sustainability and functionality of KoboToolbox as a global public good for data collection and analysis of forced displaced populations.

To achieve this, JDC supported the development of oversight mechanisms and a business sustainability plan for Kobo Inc, development of certain KoBoToolbox features and strengthened knowledge building and sharing.

RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

The activity achieved several results and outcomes, including:

- **KoBo Inc. is now an operational, legally advised, and financially monitored entity**. When the activity started, Kobo Inc. had only just been established and recognized as a 501(c)(3) under United States tax law. There was uncertainty around Kobo Inc.'s future. JDC's supports provided catalytic funding for a governance review and a sustainability plan that the organisation has already begun to implement. People with relevant expertise were invited to join Kobo Inc.'s Board of Directors, costs were restructured, different fundraising approaches taken and increasing support across different organizations. These are solid foundations that will support the organization over many years.

- **Improved functionality of KoboToolbox.** Previously, there was limited funding to improve the platform's features. JDC enabled additional design work that improved the interface to the benefit of thousands of users.

- **Expanded training capacity of Kobo Inc**. Kobo Inc was able to hire training specialists and start building online training courses that covered basic and advanced features. These courses will be available and promoted so that organizations can be trained directly by Kobo Inc. The World Bank's GEMS initiative will also benefit from this training, as it currently devotes substantial resources to training to Bank staff and counterparts in government and partner organizations.

- **Indirect outcomes of this activity:**

  - **Usage of KoboToolbox has grown substantially**. By June 2022, monthly and cumulative submissions had grown by around 400 percent (15 million and 400 million respectively). Usage had also grown across major displacement situations. The number of weekly users in Ukraine has grown from 827 to 11,700, over the past year. While not all of this is attributed to

JDC-supported activities, Kobo Inc. acknowledges that this growth would not have been possible without JDC support.

- **Expanded interest from development organizations in using KoboToolbox in forced displacement settings to benefit affected populations.** The French Development Agency, KfW Development Bank, African Development Bank, and GIZ have expressed interest in using KoboToolbox for monitoring and are keen to establish a shared European server for KoBoToolbox. The World Bank is also working on full accreditation for KoBoToolbox and is establishing an internal server. The strengthened governance and oversight has reassured development organizations of the credibility of KoBoToolbox.

CHALLENGES

During this activity, the team encountered several challenges:

- **Delays at inception due to procurement issues**. The procurement process took time due to the complexity of for the Bank to single source contract for more than US$50,000. However, despite initial delays, implementation proceeded smoothly once the activity started.

- **Unforeseen complexity of the governance and sustainability plan activities**. The preparation of the governance arrangements and the sustainability plan was more complex and time consuming than anticipated. It required more time to identify suitable consultants and carefully assess and consolidate all the technical inputs. This was ultimately beneficial as Kobo Inc. became immersed in the preparation of the sustainability plan which in the end was delivered only a month later than anticipated. Likewise, the team experienced a four month delay in completing the governance review.

LESSONS LEARNED AND JDC'S ROLE

- **Support for institutional development activities is critical**. Donors tend to want to fund specific projects or activities and it is difficult to secure support for institutional development, and hence JDC's support for institutional development was very much appreciated. In particular, JDC recommendation for a governance and a sustainability plan has paved the way for the strong growth of the platform's use; the team claims that "Kobo Inc … would not be where it is now without that support".

- **Consistent support from the JDC focal point**. When the JDC focal point changes, the office should ensure that the project is consistently supported. Relevant stakeholders should be made aware of the change (copied on all communications), so that they can ensure that knowledge is transferred to the team and the project is seamlessly continued.

- **Procurement capacity**. Procurement issues at the beginning of this activity highlighted the importance of fully understanding the World Bank procurement policies.

- **Realistic timeframes that accommodate complex deliverables**. Smaller, achievable, intermediate milestones (upon which progress can be tracked and payments made) are recommended to allow major deliverables to be completed, particularly those that require specialized consultants. These should be aligned to World Bank contracts

- **Flexibility in response to delays**. The need for flexible timeframes for deliverables that allow teams to adjust to delays or changes.

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