

Summary of the key points discussed during the Digitalisation Webinars in English

September 28 and 30 & October 2 2020

Q1. You are currently in the programming process for the next phase of development cooperation. From your perspective, what needs to be put in place for digitalisation (and digital projects) to be effectively and efficiently mainstreamed and implemented? (consider internal and external factors)

The main thread around this question and across webinars was the question of the relevance of investing in digitalisation in light of more urgent, primary needs. As mentioned, this necessitates thinking of digitalisation as a process of transformation. It is not only about the digital technologies and associated data produced, it is also about thinking of creating solid evidence bases to make decisions, to advance a 'digital mindset'.

The EUDs are well aware that it is necessary to integrate digital into their programming and that from a geopolitical point of view, it makes sense for Europe to invest in digitalisation. However, there needs to be a better reconciliation of how these can also translate into something that is tailored and useful to the country's needs.

Barriers:

External:

- **Country's level of digital development:** Some countries are further behind than others in their digital transformation and this defines how the EU should engage with local actors. For example, in Kenya the sector is already more advanced and engagement with the public sector is considered to be crowded in.
- **Structural constraints linked to country's low level of development:** There are structural constraints in the countries, such as the lack of access to electricity, the low rate of coverage of telecommunications infrastructures, in some cases telecommunication monopolies. More importantly, perceptions are that digital is not a priority over more pressing, urgent, primary concerns such as sanitation, education, economic empowerment. In light of these constraints, some delegations conclude that it is not strategic or a priority to engage in digitalisation.
 - It makes more sense to prioritise these over digitalisation from a programming and stakeholder perspective. Drawing pro's and con's between digitalisation and other areas, the more obvious priority will be the other more pressing, urgent need area.
 - Infrastructure and connectivity as the stepping stones to tackle digitalisation.
 - and the "essential" needs are so glaring that it is difficult to focus interventions on digitalisation as a priority.
- **Presence of other (more) important actors:** It is difficult to fight the influence of external actors, such as China. It is even more difficult to advance the EU's values in countries with an already important footprint from these countries.
- **Others**
 - Sustainability of donor funded innovations
 - Lack of interoperability

Internal:

- **Lack of knowledge and information at EUDEL level:**
 - The EC's "churning" of priorities, makes anticipating the needs of the region and designing projects with experts in the area very challenging.
 - EUDs clearly lack resources and expertise to both navigate the DEVCO frameworks, but also the subject overall. However, people are generally excited to learn and seem to be willing.
 - Absence of staff capacities were clearly repeated and acknowledged by the participants. They also recognise that there isn't specialised knowledge at the 'top' of the organization, and that in order to speak with authority outwardly, internally this lack of applied knowledge has to be strengthened.
- **Green deal and environmental impact.** Dissonance between EU objectives around green deal and heavy environmental footprint that investing in digitalisation entails.
- **Resistance to change** at EU level and lack of enabling attitudes internally to further advance digitalisation.

Needs:

- Consider reframing the EU's regulatory inclinations if in fact DEVCO is interested in working in contentious environments, for example in Uganda. For example, thus far China has worked closely with the private sector and has supplied connectivity and systems; most importantly, they have advanced in implementing a government-centric approach to surveillance that does not align with EU values.
- Engage in more economic diplomacy.
- Understand how digitalisation and some specific sectors could be synergized, for example with the tourism sector.
- There is a real need to understand the digital ecosystems of each country in order to more accurately gauge how the EU could materialize its added value.
 - One stepping stone is to really get to know the ecosystem -- what are others doing? Important to identify synergies.
 - Invest more resources in the pre-programming stage. Think through how to structure the identification of needs.
- Need for coordinated planning between the EU and its Member States
- Need to develop expertise and an internal digital culture.
 - Participants showed interest for more training and also more engagement between delegations and digital focal points to learn from each other about success factors in programming and implementation of projects.
 - Need to think through more synergies at the planning stage.
- Introduce digitalisation in the country via e-governance programmes.
- Embed preoccupations that more developed countries have -- around ethical frameworks, data protection and privacy -- into infrastructures/systems created by the EU.

Q2a. What is DEVCO's most significant added value in your region in the field of digitalisation?

Overall, most participants do acknowledge why from a geopolitical perspective, it is important to prioritize digitalisation. Participants understand the stakes of the 'digital development' race and the role that Europe can play, in particular when upholding strong values. DEVCO's most significant value added could be centered around a shared voice that reflects its advances around the GDPR, the digital single market, and other productive initiatives.

DEVCO's added value in digitization:

- Important to distinguish between what DEVCO can do vs. what the European Union 'as a whole' and large institution can. This is an important distinction to draw since the power to influence is very broad. It would be interesting to see what the European Commission can create and facilitate in this context, investing in places where public institutions can be impacted as a low risk.
- Human-centered approach and model in terms of regulation and harmonization, eg. : data protection regulation
 - However, there is sometimes doubt about the interest of partner countries (less interest in governance than interventions in infrastructure, or even entrepreneurship). m
- Ability to intervene at different levels at the same time: regional and sub-regional
- Different financial instruments that can meet different needs

Q2b. Which stakeholders do you consider your delegation should partner with in future digital projects?

Potential actors for future cooperation in digitization:

- MS DevAgencies like GIZ -- emphasize more coordinated, strategic work.
- World Bank seen as a key actor
- State Agencies, Ministries and bodies are seen as some of the EU's most 'obvious' partners.
- Telecommunication companies are seen as important actors to engage with.
- Private sector repeated constantly

Q3. From your perspective which recommendations are / should be prioritized?

Write down one piece of advice you would have for DEVCO to inform current and future cooperation strategy and delivery on digitalisation

Obstacles

European Union:

- The EU must find a way to reclaim digital means (eg do not continue to use foreign resources), to then put them at the service of Africa.
 - Need to develop a digital culture for European society, which would make it possible to strengthen the digital sector within Europe, in order to then be able to offer European digital solutions in other regions of the world.

DEVCO and Delegations:

- Worried that on the programming side, there aren't enough partners aware of the DEVCO approach.
- Need to prioritize TAs that enable assessments and evaluations of what is being done in the region and in the country of the delegation by other actors. Digital studies were identified as a crucial recommendation especially useful and targeted to the programming phase.
 - More resources to conduct studies for evidence-based decision making for programming.
 - Establish digital diagnostics in countries in order to better target priorities, and see how digital and the EU can contribute to these priorities
- Need to have a more synchronized and collective vision from MS States, more coordination and enabling role from DEVCO in order to promote digitalisation via these agencies.
 - Strengthen links with development agencies in other Member States, in order to learn from their experiences . One respondent noted that it'd be interesting to think about grouping all MS Agencies under a EU Development Bank.
- Develop a culture and in-house digital expertise, through training and the exchange of best practices and digital success stories, for different regions and different sectors. Create EUDEL fora on digital programming and implementation focused of 'business management of digital projects'
 - Develop a process that streamlines in EUDs the knowledge about the benefits of digitalisation
- Think through synergies between priority pillars of the strategy, the ideal would be to do a holistic programme as is possible.
- Emphasise greater collaboration with other DGs