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EVALUATION 'DIGITAL FOR DEVELOPMENT' (D4D)

To what extent can the potential of digital technology be unleashed for/by Belgian Development Cooperation? - *Executive Summary*



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Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Brussels

Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development
Cooperation

Special Evaluation Office of the Belgian Development Cooperation

Evaluation of the “Digital for Development” strategic note for the Belgian Development Cooperation



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Executive Summary

November 2020

The evaluation has been carried out by EY and has benefited from the support of a reference group in Brussels. The Special Evaluation Office ensured that the evaluation complied with the terms of reference.

The opinions expressed in this document represent the author’s point of view and do not necessarily reflect the position of the FPS Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Objectives, scope and general approach of the evaluation

In 2019, the Special Evaluation Office (SEO) requested an **evaluation of the "Digital for Development" (D4D) strategic note** developed by the Belgian Development Cooperation in 2016. EY was commissioned to carry out this evaluation with two main objectives:

- ▶ **Objective 1: Appreciate the integration of "Digital for Development" into the programs**, including through the identification of good practices and any missed opportunities. Indeed, the D4D strategy considers digitalization not as an objective, but rather as a vector to be integrated across all interventions. It constitutes a means and a lever at the service of development programs to make them more effective.
- ▶ **Objective 2: Appreciate the first results of interventions, notably through case studies and a meta-evaluation.** It was a question of assessing the extent to which the integration of digital technology is effectively relevant and brings added value for the target populations, in accordance with the objective of the D4D strategy which considers digital as an accelerator in all sectors in which the Belgian Development Cooperation is active.

More specifically, the evaluation focused **on the implementation of the strategic priorities of D4D and the achievement of the objectives of integration and appropriation**, notably through the eleven mechanisms of use and the resulting initiatives (objective 1 of the evaluation). It also covered **the implemented interventions** (i.e. programs, projects and actions), focusing on local contexts and needs, as well as the related risks (objective 2).

Moreover, it targeted **interventions that resulted in expenditure between 2014 to 2018**, which covers both the period of formulation of the strategic note (before 2016) and that subsequent to its adoption (after 2016), which allowed to implement the mechanisms and other planned operational aspects (risk management, partnerships and strategic management system). However, a more distant historical look or more recent historical perspective has been taken to carry out certain interesting analyses and to gain a wider perspective of the recent developments made.

It took place in **four phases between October 2019 and July 2020**:

- ▶ **A launching and inception phase** which made it possible to frame the methodology, notably structuring the evaluation framework and developing the collection plan.
- ▶ **A second phase and a third phase which made it possible to deepen the inventory and deploy all the data collection tools necessary for the conduct of the evaluation** (97 people questioned during interviews, a survey, literature review and meta-evaluation, collection of concrete interventions in the field through a mission in Uganda and two remote project case studies).

- ▶ **A final phase of consolidation, processing and cross-analysis of the collected data** which resulted in the conclusions of the evaluation and recommendations, included in the final evaluation report and taking into consideration the feedback formulated during a workshop to reflect on the recommendations.

In this context, the following activities were carried out:

- ▶ **Interviews: 97 people were interviewed through 73 interviews** (individual and in groups), both with government actors (DGD/SPF Foreign Affairs, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, BOSA), operators and instruments of the Belgian Cooperation (Enabel, BIO) concerned by the implementation of D4D, actors responsible for the implementation of flagship D4D initiatives (Royal Museum for Central Africa, Wehubit, Agoria, Close The Gap), actors of non-governmental cooperation (ACODEV, NGO.FEDERATIE, CNCD, 11.11.11., Via Don Bosco, Louvain Coopération) and other actors (EDUCAID, The Shift) as well as other European countries and technical and financial partners or international organizations (DG DEVCO, AFD, LuxDev, FAO, IDB, World Bank, African Development Bank, World Food Program, Digital Impact Alliance). Interviews also took place as part of the Uganda field visit and remote case studies.
- ▶ **A literature review** initiated as early as the inception phase which was deepened and completed by the analysis of documents at two levels: on the one hand, at the level of usage mechanisms and initiatives (with a focus on the Wehubit program, the D4D platform, the D4D prize, the DGD calls for projects); on the other hand, at the project level. It made it possible to take stock and establish an updated inventory of the implementation of the D4D strategic note, including with a critical look at the classification of D4D operations by the Belgian Cooperation.
- ▶ **A meta-evaluation** based on a review of interim evaluation reports (supplemented by a review of programs, documents/project sheets or activity reports) relating to a sample of programs/projects, both at the interventions by humanitarian aid from the DGD, non-governmental cooperation actors and Enabel.
- ▶ **Online survey** with different categories of stakeholders (DGD, Enabel, Civil Society Organization, Institutional Actor, others). This survey made it possible, notably, to analyze the perception of actors regarding the integration and appropriation of Digital for Development, and to gather a diversity of points of view according to different categories of respondents. The total number of respondents was 242.
- ▶ **Field visit to Uganda and case studies:** the field visit made it possible to question 52 people via 30 interviews, including actors from the Belgian Cooperation (embassy, Enabel, non-governmental actors), local and national authorities (ministries in charge of ICT, and education, NITA, KCCA, City of Gulu), donors (GIZ, UNCDF, EU), project leaders (Dalberg, BarefootLaw, ASF), partners (local communities) and final beneficiaries (teachers and students). Three projects (TTE, Mobile Data Analytics from UNCDF, Lewuti from the Wehubit program) were the subject of in-depth case studies during this visit, which also made it possible to make observations on D4D integration and ownership, and to cover other projects in a more transversal way. Finally, two other case studies (WFP UAS, Enabel's E-TAMKEEN) were carried out remotely to complete the analyses at the level of interventions relating to objective 2.
- ▶ **A reflection workshop with stakeholders:** this workshop had three objectives: to ensure that the recommendations are relevant, complete and well formulated and to identify other "out of the box" ideas; to obtain operational feedbacks of these recommendations, by identifying the persons responsible, the degree of priority feasibility and the associated deadlines; to discuss, ensure the ownership of these recommendations and facilitate their implementation. It was attended by around thirty participants from the DGD, Enabel (headquarters and field), BIO and the non-governmental cooperation.

1.2. General context: a growing place occupied by digital technology in the international aid agenda

The concept of D4D has gained increasing visibility since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015. Digital technology is not part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) but it constitutes a strong means to reach them. Digitalization is thus considered in a transversal way in all the SDGs, and notably explicitly in several SDGs (9, 4, notably target 4.4. and SDG17). The 2030 agenda effectively considers digital technologies as growth levers and a unique opportunity for development strategies, notably to facilitate access to quality services and their use by the most vulnerable populations.

The place of digitalization in development policies has experienced a growth and exponential rise in recent years among the donor community, within which a culture of cooperation has developed between the private sector, international and academic institutions and the governments. The governance of digitalization covers a variety of issues ranging from the development of digital infrastructure, to issues of connectivity and inclusion, or even respect and security of users' personal data. More broadly, **reducing the digital divide and digitalization occupies a preponderant place in the international agenda**, with a multitude of challenges, affecting both digital rights, digital skills, through regulatory frameworks, support for the digital economy, and the development of digital services notably.

A series of initiatives have been implemented, testifying **to the growing place occupied by digital technology in the international aid agenda**, for example, the World Summit on the Information Society launched in 2003, the UN Global Working Group for Big Data, the UN High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation, the World Bank's "Digital Moonshot" initiative to accelerate the digital transition from countries in the Middle East and Africa, a working group of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development to measure e-commerce and the digital economy, a G20 Task Force dedicated to the digital economy (launched in 2017) or the Digital Impact Alliance, a partnership launched in 2014 (between USAID, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Swedish government and the United Nations Foundation) to accelerate collective efforts to achieve a stronger digital society in emerging countries.

1.3. The D4D strategic note: contents and objectives

In this context, digitalization has been established as a priority by the Belgian Development Cooperation policy: a **Digital for Development (D4D)** strategic note, which aims to support the contribution of digital for development, was adopted in 2016. This note describes the vision and strategic priorities of the digital support policy for development. The D4D strategic note sets three main strategic priorities:

- ▶ **Better use of (big) data.** This priority echoes the need to improve the availability and quality of real-time data in order to produce useable information and strengthen the effectiveness and impact of development interventions, as well as accountability. Opportunities are also offered by the digital revolution which makes it possible to search, collect, analyze and reuse exploitable data and information (open data).
- ▶ **Digital technology for inclusive societies.** This priority aims to seize the opportunities offered by digital technologies to strengthen inclusion, in different forms, both democratic, financial and economic, or even in terms of equal access to quality basic services

- ▶ **Digital technology for inclusive and sustainable economic growth.** This priority reminds that the emphasis must also be placed on digital opportunities for the creation of (self) employment and the promotion of socially responsible entrepreneurship, or even to strengthen local digital ecosystems.

Beyond these three main priorities, for which the note specifies that they must apply to all sectors of intervention of the Belgian Development Cooperation, in compliance with the 9 principles for digital development¹, the strategic note specifies the operational aspects to ensure their concrete implementation, through elements to be taken into account (basic elements, risks and sustainability factors), partnerships to be set up and management methods to be planned.

The strategic note sets out notably **11 “concrete use mechanisms”** which should make it possible to promote both ownership and awareness of D4D, both among Belgian development actors and their external partners, and to strengthen the integration of digital in a transversal way or as a vector in development programs and projects.

¹ Design with the user; Understand the existing ecosystem; Design for scale; Build for sustainability; Be data driven; Use open standards, open data, open source and open innovation; Reuse and improve; Address privacy and security; Be collaborative.

2. Conclusions

Two types of conclusions were formulated at the end of the evaluation: transversal conclusions at the two levels examined and structured around the evaluation criteria and by D4D actor. The Covid-19 crisis that arose at the end of this evaluation gave rise to certain adaptations in the formulation of conclusions and recommendations. Its long-term implications could, however, induce greater changes in fundraising, revising development cooperation priorities and using digital technology.

2.1. Transversal conclusions

2.1.1. At the strategic level, mechanisms / initiatives

Positive points/successes	Limits/ ways of improvements
<p data-bbox="185 958 774 992">Relevance of the note and mechanisms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="185 1391 774 1485">▶ A relevant document which confirms Belgium's commitment and lays the foundations for a D4D intervention. <li data-bbox="185 1503 774 1630">▶ A good communication document, not very technical, which clearly demonstrates the added value of digital; a response to various need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="793 1010 1385 1137">▶ Methodological weaknesses in the note which weaken its operational and steering nature (e.g.: absence of a consensualized definition of D4D). <li data-bbox="793 1155 1385 1249">▶ A lack of operational implementation of the note, a priority "roadmap" project. <li data-bbox="793 1267 1385 1361">▶ The challenge of identifying priority fields of action, areas of excellence or niches to focus on. <li data-bbox="793 1379 1385 1442">▶ Partial coverage of some issues and risks. <li data-bbox="793 1460 1385 1523">▶ Needs insufficiently considered (in terms of expertise, support to teams). <li data-bbox="793 1541 1385 1765">▶ More and more D4D projects, but an unequal consideration of D4D depending on the country and not systematically supported at the level of some mechanisms and actors (non-governmental cooperation's actors, Enabel before bilateral portfolios); <li data-bbox="793 1783 1385 1973">▶ Other debates that have arisen with the rise of D4D and deserve clarification (links with the SDGs/ gender and heterogeneous consideration depending on the actors).

Effectiveness	
Internal ownership	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ A note presented internally, even if it has not been sufficiently promoted or broadcasted (notably in the field). ▶ Many initiatives to spread a digital culture. ▶ Effective mechanisms to sensitize the non-governmental cooperation's actors. ▶ Real sensitization and awareness of the opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Rather low level of knowledge of the strategic note and D4D priorities by the actors of the Belgian Cooperation. ▶ Mechanisms not or only partially deployed, a challenge of operationalization by some actors.
External ownership	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Belgium was a pioneer in the formalization of a D4D strategy and is considered active on this issue. ▶ Strong and recognized involvement at European level and a participation in several international initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ A more mixed involvement in international bodies: difficult to stand out, notably within international financial institutions (IFIs). ▶ Belgium is not seen as a leader in this area; it does not stand out specifically in the field of other donors. ▶ Expectations and a positioning at international level to be clarified, an active and pioneering role at European level to be perpetuated.
Integration	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ A growing consideration in strategies and interventions. ▶ An integration especially on a transversal way of D4D (rather than specific) which gives rise to a diversity of intervention methods depending on the purpose of the interventions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ A more difficult integration to support implementation in the field: a lack of local implementation of the strategy. ▶ A lack of support for local actors by the headquarters and a lack of relays, expertise and support (e.g. technical assistance) at the local level to strengthen the capacities of the network of embassies, due in particular to the absence of a specific budget dedicated to D4D.
Efficiency	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Growing coordination efforts. ▶ Several initiatives launched by headquarters to promote the sharing of information and knowledge, others at the initiative of the field. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ An implementation of the strategic note that is not based on overall steering and monitoring. ▶ Coordination challenges remain between Belgian actors and with technical and financial partners. ▶ Often insufficient resources in the face of significant capacity building needs and to promote broad ownership of D4D subjects among Belgian

Cooperation actors.

2.1.2. At the intervention level

Positive points/successes	Limits/ways of improvements
Relevance and coherence	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ D4D interventions that generally take into account the local context and needs (this is reinforced by identification visits and the mobilization of expertise). ▶ A good integration into the donor-landscape. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Room for progress in terms of coordination and search for complementarities. ▶ A lack of bodies between technical and financial partners around digital technologies at the local level.
Effectiveness	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ A diversity of results with a dominance for some types of actors/mechanisms and initiatives (DGD Innovation calls for projects, Enabel, non-governmental cooperation's actors). ▶ Several underlying advantages D4D (improving good governance, multiplier effect, lowering of the access threshold for vulnerable groups, etc.). ▶ Results that come back with more recurrence, others observed in an increasing way, others on a more experimental basis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Local risks in terms of D4D partially understood and insufficiently understood by some actors/mechanisms. ▶ Risks not sufficiently anticipated from the formulation to the implementation phase (e.g. dependence on paid services).
Efficiency	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ A generally satisfactory follow-up, with room for improvement (delegated cooperation). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ A sizing of resources regarding the results which is not always appropriate, either too contained, or questionable with regard to the economic model adopted
Sustainability	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Several factors/good practices contribute to sustainability (capacity building/ knowledge transfer, support for strategy formulation, continuation of partnerships). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Heterogeneous consideration of sustainability in terms of D4D and support for the SDGs by the different actors and throughout the project cycle. ▶ Recurring difficulties observed either specific to D4D (lack of capacity and funding, lack of ownership of the project or digital solutions by the counterpart, costs, etc.) or more general (strategic priorities, staff turnover, risks of political and security instability). ▶ A lack of capitalization at the level of

	the countries of intervention of the Belgian Cooperation.
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2.2. Conclusions by D4D actors

Regarding political actors

- ▶ A political positioning made necessary on several issues: updating of the note when the context is right, objective of D4D and place of D4D in the Belgian cooperation, scaling up of Wehubit, technical assistance fund, possible budget dedicated to D4D, ...

Regarding the DGD

- ▶ An operational implementation of the note to be found.
- ▶ A D4D mobilization in the face of the COVID-19 crisis to be continued iteratively with a holistic vision.
- ▶ An issue of strengthening the inclusion of D4D in the field of government cooperation in the letters of instruction.
- ▶ Issues of awareness and practical and operational exchange to be amplified at the local level.
- ▶ A lack of relays and support at the local level to be filled in order to strengthen the capacities of the network of embassies in D4D matters, ensure inter-actor coordination/facilitation and strategic dialogue with the counterpart and donors.
- ▶ Incentives by the DGD to integrate digital for the Non-Governmental Actors and a gradual appropriation of the issue observed, although it is uneven
- ▶ A lack of coordination during the call for projects regarding Human Rights and Digitization and scattered projects.
- ▶ Categories of results that came back repeatedly during the Innovation calls for projects in the field of humanitarian aid on which it will be necessary to capitalize for a better specification of calls for projects in the future in line with areas of excellence of Belgian cooperation and priorities at local level.
- ▶ The awareness of many actors (governmental and non-governmental) to increase Global Citizenship Education via digital means including through reinforced support from the DGD.
- ▶ The implementation of the strategic note is not based on overall steering, which underlines the importance of an inter-stakeholder body (to be created or by capitalizing on existing structures).

Regarding Enabel

- ▶ D4D is increasingly considered in strategies and at the level of interventions, notably through specific D4D projects.
- ▶ Numerous initiatives taken to disseminate a digital culture among staff, but a note which is insufficiently promoted/disseminated in the field
- ▶ Important needs for expertise and support should be underlined.
- ▶ Interventions in areas with high added value (education and training), recurrent support (support for systems/tools, strengthening of human capital) and pilot

projects to be replicated if proven to be successful (such as support of ecosystems, Innovation Hubs, etc.).

Regarding non-governmental cooperation's actors

- ▶ In relation to the above-mentioned DGD incentives, a gradual appropriation of D4D by the non-governmental cooperation's actors has been observed, although uneven.
- ▶ D4D is a source of new reflections, debates and advocacy actions among non-governmental actors in relation to the opportunities (role of gender in the strategic note, place of D4D within the SDGs) and related risks (confidentiality policy, working conditions, etc.).
- ▶ Non-governmental actors are insufficiently sensitized/associated with mechanisms/initiatives, notably the Platform.
- ▶ Poor overall monitoring for the moment of the factual D4D results by non-governmental actors (and very uneven amongst them), notably in relation with the low number of mid-term evaluations available to date.

Regarding BIO and the private sector

- ▶ A growing integration of D4D at the strategic (now at the heart of its mandate) and operational level, to be sustained with the new investment strategy.
- ▶ A place in the bosom of cooperation which remains to be found around D4D (inconclusive attempt on Wehubit) and a role at the level of (E)DFI to be continued to be played with potential operational collaborations.
- ▶ The Business Partnership Facility (BPF) is an underused tool at this stage despite the potential value it presents to support projects in the field of D4D.

Regarding Wehubit

- ▶ A program that allows the emergence of relevant D4D projects through the specific themes selected from each call for projects (in connection with the priority areas of the Belgian Cooperation), the allocated subsidy and the response to local needs.
- ▶ Scaling up which can be justified if stronger ambitions arise (political arbitration), subject however to reconsidering the architecture of the program (ie. the "window" with BIO).
- ▶ Good consideration of the context, risks and sustainability factors at the intervention level.

3. Recommendations

The evaluation makes four recommendations with specific recommendations, based on the conclusions of this evaluation.

#	Strategic and specific recommendations
1	<p>Strengthen the strategic framework and the operational implementation of the note</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arbitrate some strategic choices (update of the strategic note, objective of D4D and place of D4D in Belgian cooperation, scaling of Wehubit, technical assistance fund, possible dedicated budget). - Strengthen the strategic framework at different levels (from headquarters, local level, European and international level). - Strengthen the operational implementation of the D4D note, notably by accompanying it with a more operational roadmap, by better identifying the existing in terms of expertise and by including a technical assistance fund/budget. - Provide a holistic and iterative D4D response to the COVID-19 crisis as an extension of the strategic notes.
2	<p>Better exploit the potential of each channel of the Belgian cooperation, utilize mechanisms and D4D initiatives, capitalize on the competitive advantages and specificities already perceived by each, while supporting synergies and complementarities when relevant, notably:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In the field of government cooperation: notably, by continuing to intervene in areas where Belgian cooperation has a high added value (notably education and training), by replicating innovative pilot projects or even by continuing to support projects that participate in the development or deployment of digital strategies of the recipient country. - In the field of non-governmental cooperation: among others, by improving knowledge around D4D projects and interventions, by detailing the experience on this subject in the future program (notably the real results achieved during the last program) and in monitoring reports. - In the field of private sector development aid: by supporting, for example, collaboration with the private sector through existing mechanisms which may not be specific to D4D and exploring potential partnerships with other Belgian actors/mechanisms for this end (BPF, BIO, Wehubit, Platforms), by supporting D4D for the emergence of the private sector at the local level and by strengthening the capacities of companies through digitalization processes. - In the field of awareness in Belgium: by amplifying the actions of global citizenship and solidarity via digital means. - Regarding mechanisms and initiatives (Wehubit, DGD calls for projects): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • by perpetuating the Wehubit program’s action and by planning a scaling up if stronger ambitions arise, subject to rethinking its architecture (ie. the “window” with “BIO”) while setting up a call for projects on priority areas not covered so

#	Strategic and specific recommendations
	<p>far (basic infrastructure) by ensuring that the choice of this areas is articulated with a possible future call for projects of the DGD;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • by planning in the future Innovation call for projects in the field of humanitarian aid with more specific selection criteria linked to the recurrent D4D result categories observed so far, by aligning any other specific call for projects with priority areas of Belgian Cooperation and ensuring an overall selection and monitoring and well articulation of the choice of these themes with Wehubit. <p>Strengthen the monitoring and sustainability of D4D interventions, notably:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthen the consideration of sustainability from the design of projects (particularly regarding call for projects from the DGD and delegated cooperation projects) - Produce more reports on the capitalization of D4D interventions at the local level. - Increase the exchange of knowledge and the sharing of best practices, for example via the D4D Platform. - Increase the consideration of D4D in the evaluation processes of actors (governmental and non-governmental) of the Belgian Cooperation. - Strengthen the monitoring of D4D results (notably for non-governmental cooperation's actors and delegated cooperation) and better highlight expertise and inspiring experiences via communication vectors to be defined (newsletter, social networks, website, Platform site, etc.)
3	<p>Strengthen awareness-raising efforts, ownership and integration of D4D</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Foster wide awareness and ownership of D4D issues among the actors of the Belgian Cooperation , strengthen the relays and support at the local level. - Support the integration of D4D in interventions.
4	<p>Strengthen animation around D4D issues at central and local level, notably:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Set up an inter-stakeholder body (or by capitalizing on an already existing body). - Encourage the establishment of innovative platforms at the local level (on the model implemented in Uganda). - Promote formal/informal exchange meetings at local level around D4D with other technical and financial partners. - Coordinate better with counterparts to strengthen alignment with national, sectoral or D4D (digital transformation) strategies.



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