

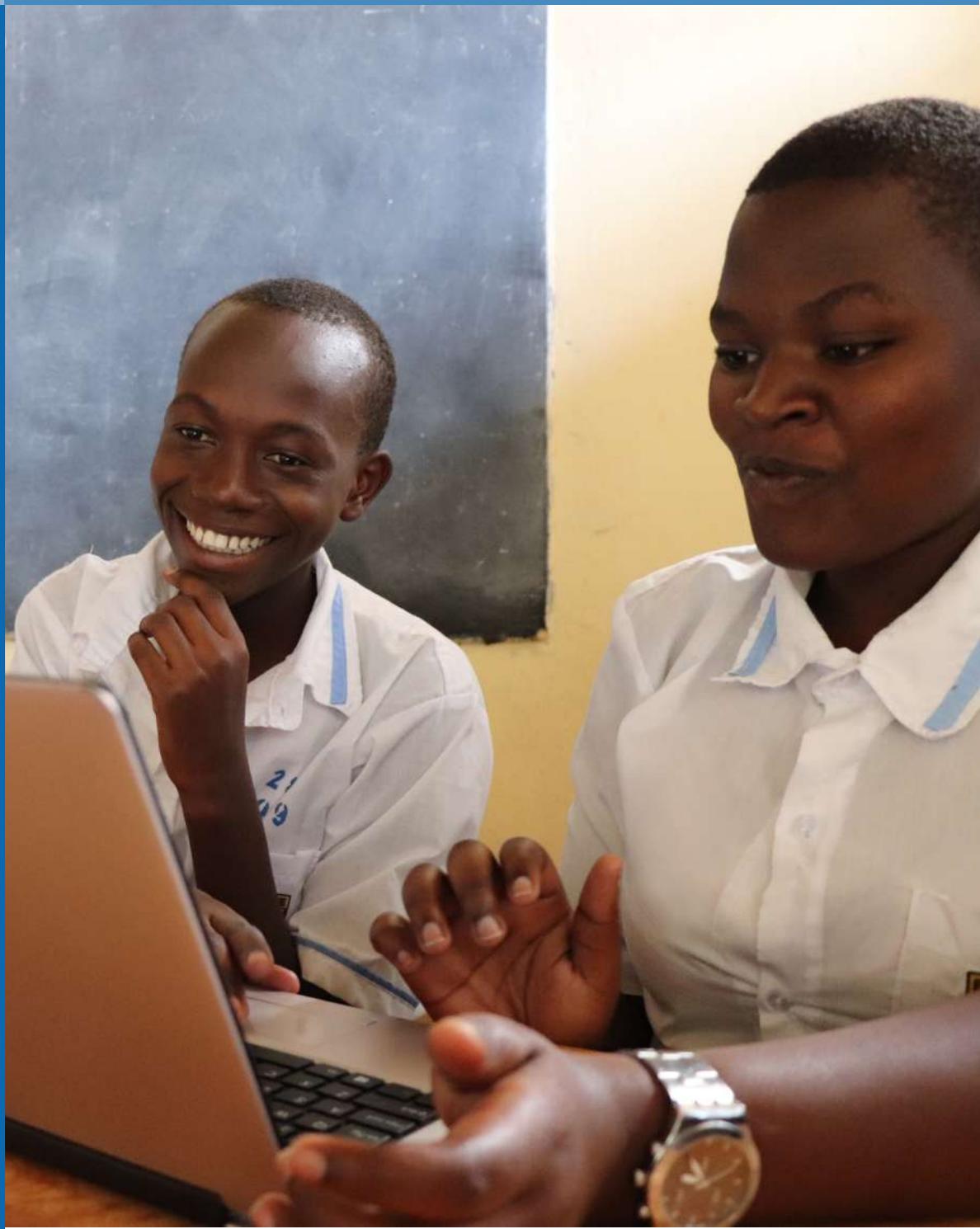


KINGDOM OF BELGIUM
Federal Public Service
Foreign Affairs,
Foreign Trade and
Development Cooperation

September 2021

'DIGITAL FOR DEVELOPMENT' (D4D), FOLLOW-UP STUDY

What are the developments related to the
Covid-19 context? - *Executive summary*



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September 2021

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The summary is available in pdf format in French, Dutch and English (the final report is in French) on the website https://diplomatie.belgium.be/fr/politique/cooperation_au_developpement/nos_methodes_de_travail/service_evaluation_speciale/rapports or at the Special Evaluation Office.

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Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development
Cooperation

Special Evaluation Office of the Belgian Development Cooperation

'Digital for Development' (D4D), Follow-up study, What are the developments related to the Covid-19 context?



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Executive summary

September 2021

The study has been conducted by EY and supported by the Special Evaluation Office. The Special Evaluation Office ensured that the study complied with the terms of reference.

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

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1. Objectives, scope and approach of the study

1.1. Objectives and scope of the study

Objectives

As a follow-up to the Digital for Development evaluation, the Special Evaluation Office (SEO), in agreement with the members of the accompanying committee, expressed interest in an additional study to consider developments related to the Covid-19 pandemic, which emerged at the end of the evaluation.

The objectives of this study are:

- ▶ **To provide analytical and evaluative evidence on the mobilisation of D4D in times of Covid-19** on the one hand, **and on the effect of the crisis at the level of D4D interventions** on the other hand (ongoing/new interventions);
- ▶ **Drawing lessons from the ongoing experience of mobilising D4D and formulating strategic and operational recommendations** based on this analysis and lessons learned. These recommendations will be useful both:
 - to better understand the impact of the crisis on digitalisation strategies in the countries of intervention and to identify the effects of the crisis on the implementation of projects with digital components;
 - to improve, through the role and opportunities offered by D4D, the response strategy of the Belgian Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic;
 - to strengthen D4D interventions and define the best recommendations to make them more useful and effective in times of Covid-19.

Scope

The scope of the study is specified as follows:

- ▶ **In terms of time**, the study considers recent developments since the emergence of the Covid-19 crisis (early 2020), taking care to isolate the changes induced by the Covid-19 crisis. The evaluation interviewed and consulted a variety of actors, from Belgium headquarters and in the field including actors from governmental cooperation, non-governmental cooperation (Civil Society Organisations CSOs, Institutional Actors IA), humanitarian aid, private sector aid (BIO) and Global Citizenship Education.
- ▶ **Geographically**, the study covers all the countries/sectors of intervention of the Belgian cooperation in a transversal way, while carrying out three in-depth studies, two of which are at the country level (Uganda and Senegal).
- ▶ **Thematically**, the study covers in a transversal way the different channels of cooperation and areas of intervention using D4D in response to the Covid-19 crisis. In addition to the country case studies, a thematic deepening was carried out in the area of the Global Citizenship Education.

1.2. General approach and timetable

The evaluation followed an approach structured around 2 main phases from November 2020 to July 2021:

- ▶ **An inception and collection phase including:**
 - **A documentary review:** on the one hand, at strategic level (from headquarters and at country level); on the other hand, at project level.
 - **Interviews conducted in/from Belgium: 18 people interviewed through 12 individual and group interviews**, both with governmental actors (DGD/SPF Foreign Affairs, Cabinet of the Minister), Belgian cooperation operators and instruments (Enabel, BIO) concerned with D4D implementation, actors in charge of implementing D4D flagship initiatives (Wehubit), non-governmental cooperation actors (ACODEV, ngo-federatie, CNCD-11.11.11).
 - **Two online surveys** (in French, Dutch and English) among governmental cooperation actors (DGD/Embassy, Enabel HQ and field) and non-governmental cooperation actors (Civil Society Organisations, institutional actors). The number of respondents was 108 in total, of which 47 were from the survey of governmental cooperation actors and 61 from the survey of non-governmental cooperation actors.
 - **Three in-depth studies:** two at the country level (Uganda, Senegal) and one at the thematic level (Global Citizenship Education). These studies included **10 individual or group interviews** (including 2 focus groups with non-governmental cooperation actors) allowing **24 people** to be interviewed (including Embassy Heads of Cooperation, Enabel Representative and/or D4D Expert, non-governmental cooperation actors).
- ▶ **A second phase of analysis, drafting and finalisation:** leading to the submission of a draft study, whose provisional conclusions and recommendations were discussed at a meeting of the support committee and to a final study incorporating the comments received.

This method sought to capitalise on the approach adopted during the previous evaluation (by re-interviewing several stakeholders and by again carrying out a case study in Uganda in order to ensure a follow-up), while including another country case study (Senegal) and taking care to balance the relative weight of governmental and non-governmental cooperation actors in the analyses (a dedicated survey for each of these actors, a case study on Global Citizenship Education highlighting the role of non-governmental cooperation actors). The conclusions of this study also follow up on the issues that remain from the previous evaluation.

1.3. Evaluation questions

In order to meet the objectives of the study and the expectations formulated, the following questions were selected, covering both a strategic level (D4D strategy, response strategies to the challenges posed by the pandemic, mechanisms, etc.) and a more operational level (interventions and projects).

EFFECTS of the crisis at the level of D4D interventions

- 1- What consequences (positive/negative) has the Covid-19 pandemic had on the D4D interventions of the Belgian cooperation? (in their sizing, pace of implementation, new interventions, additionality compared to a non-Covid-19 context, etc)? Has the crisis led to an acceleration/increase in D4D projects? Has it led to a shift in their objectives or in the conditions of project implementation?

- 2-** Has digital technology been used by Belgian cooperation actors in the adaptation measures taken to respond to the challenges posed by the pandemic and to enable the continuity/ continuation of development projects? To what extent has digital technology made it possible to mitigate the effects of Covid-19 on the proper implementation of projects and the achievement of the expected development results?

RELEVANCE (strategy)

- 3-** To what extent is digital a relevant lever to respond to the needs, opportunities and challenges related to Covid-19 in developing countries (including partners and beneficiaries) and to the priorities of the Belgian cooperation? Are there any good practices? Has the Covid-19 crisis brought out (or made more apparent) risks specifically linked to digital? (e.g. exclusion)
- 4-** To what extent does D4D constitute an opportunity and/or a threat/risk for the Belgian cooperation during the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly in terms of its mobilisation in favor of the concept of "Leave no one behind" and in taking gender issues into account?
- 5-** Does the DGD's strategic response to the Covid-19 pandemic sufficiently consider the potential of D4D and digital solutions? Does it take sufficient account of digital risks? To what extent should D4D be prioritised (as a lever or area of intervention) in times of Covid-19 crisis?

RELEVANCE, EFFECTIVENESS, COHERENCE, IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY of D4D interventions in crisis response

- 6-** To what extent has D4D been a strategic and operational lever effectively activated by the Belgian cooperation and its different actors in response to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic?
- 7-** In times of crisis in Covid-19, what D4D interventions (in a development/humanitarian context) does the Belgian cooperation prioritise, by actors/channels (or would benefit from doing so in the future)?
- 8-** Are there internal / external articulations including D4D (at headquarters / field level) to respond to the Covid-19 crisis (including other bilateral, European or multilateral technical and financial partners) ?
- 9-** Do Belgian cooperation D4D interventions related to Covid-19 meet the needs of partner countries (including partners and beneficiaries)? Are they justified if the context returns to normal ?
- 10-** What are the results and impacts (real / expected) of D4D interventions in times of crisis? What are the chances of sustainability in a subsequent context? Has the crisis helped the capitalisation process ?
- 11-** Has D4D had a positive effect on the response to the crisis, in mitigating its effects or in accelerating expected development outcomes?

EFFICIENCY

- 12-** Did the Covid-19 crisis require additional D4D-related investment?
- 13-** If so, which ones? Are they justified? (value for money, sustainability of the investment)

2. Conclusions and lessons learned

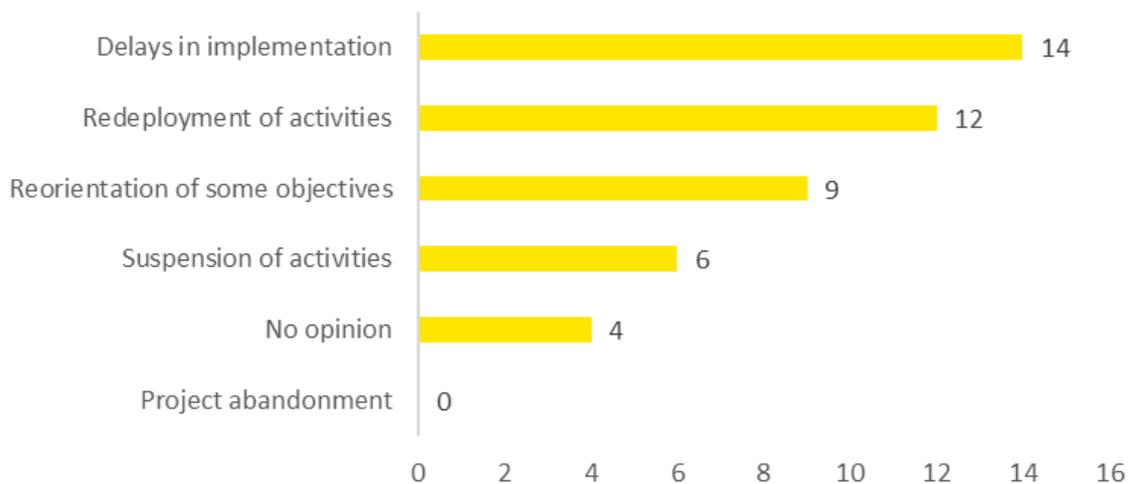
2.1. Specific conclusions of the study

The study leads to **several conclusions and lessons learned**:

1) In terms of effects of the crisis on D4D interventions

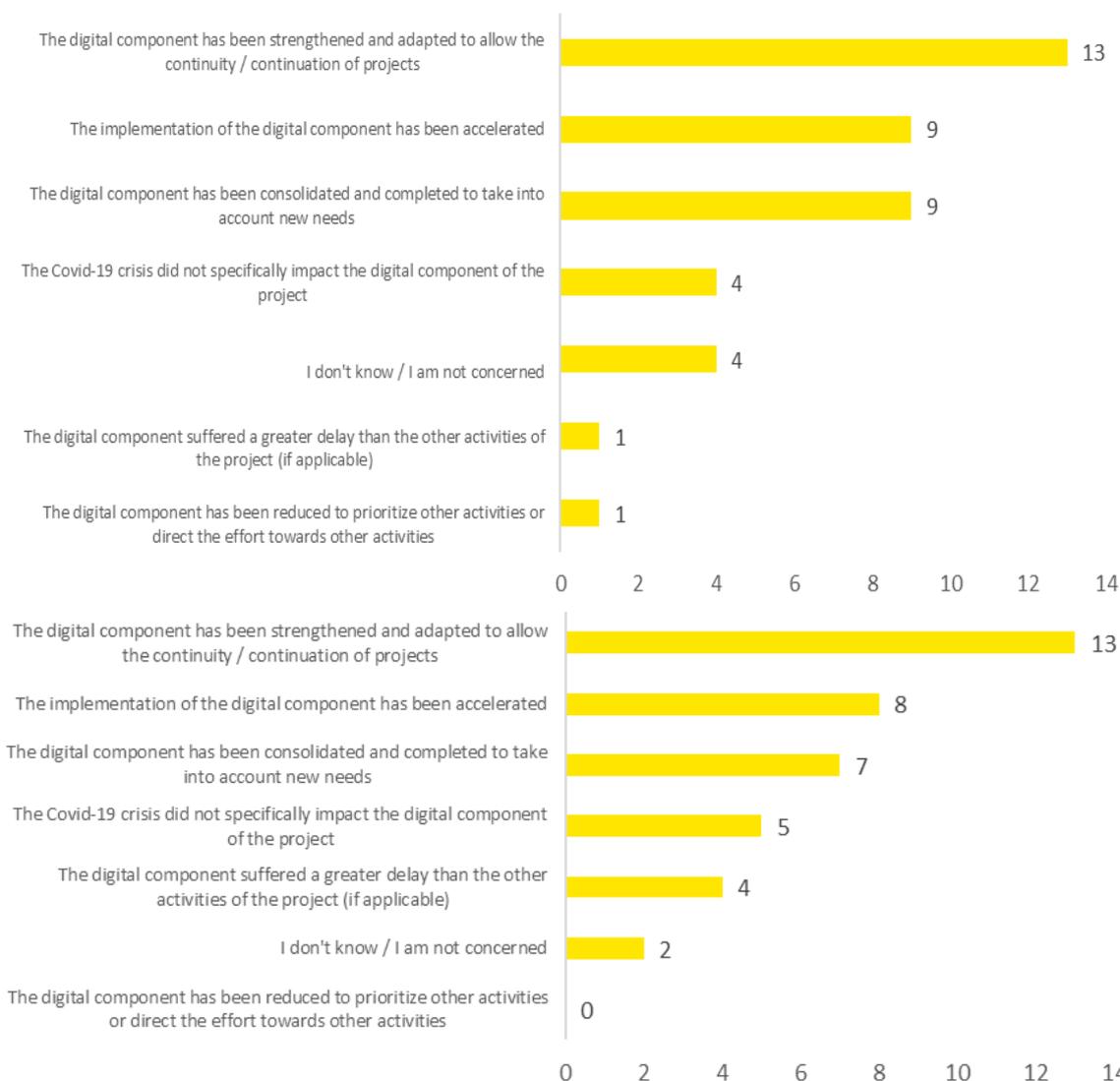
The Covid-19 crisis has had a cross-cutting impact on the pace of implementation of projects, most of which have been delayed or even suspended, both for governmental and non-governmental cooperation actors.

Figure 1 Consequences of the Covid-19 crisis on the implementation of D4D interventions among governmental cooperation actors (Q5, 25 respondents, multiple choice question)



Source: Governmental cooperation actors survey –EY production

Figure 2 Consequences of the Covid-19 crisis on the digital component of D4D interventions among governmental (Q6, 28 respondents, multiple choice question, top) and non-governmental (Q6, 30 respondents, multiple choice question, bottom) cooperation actors

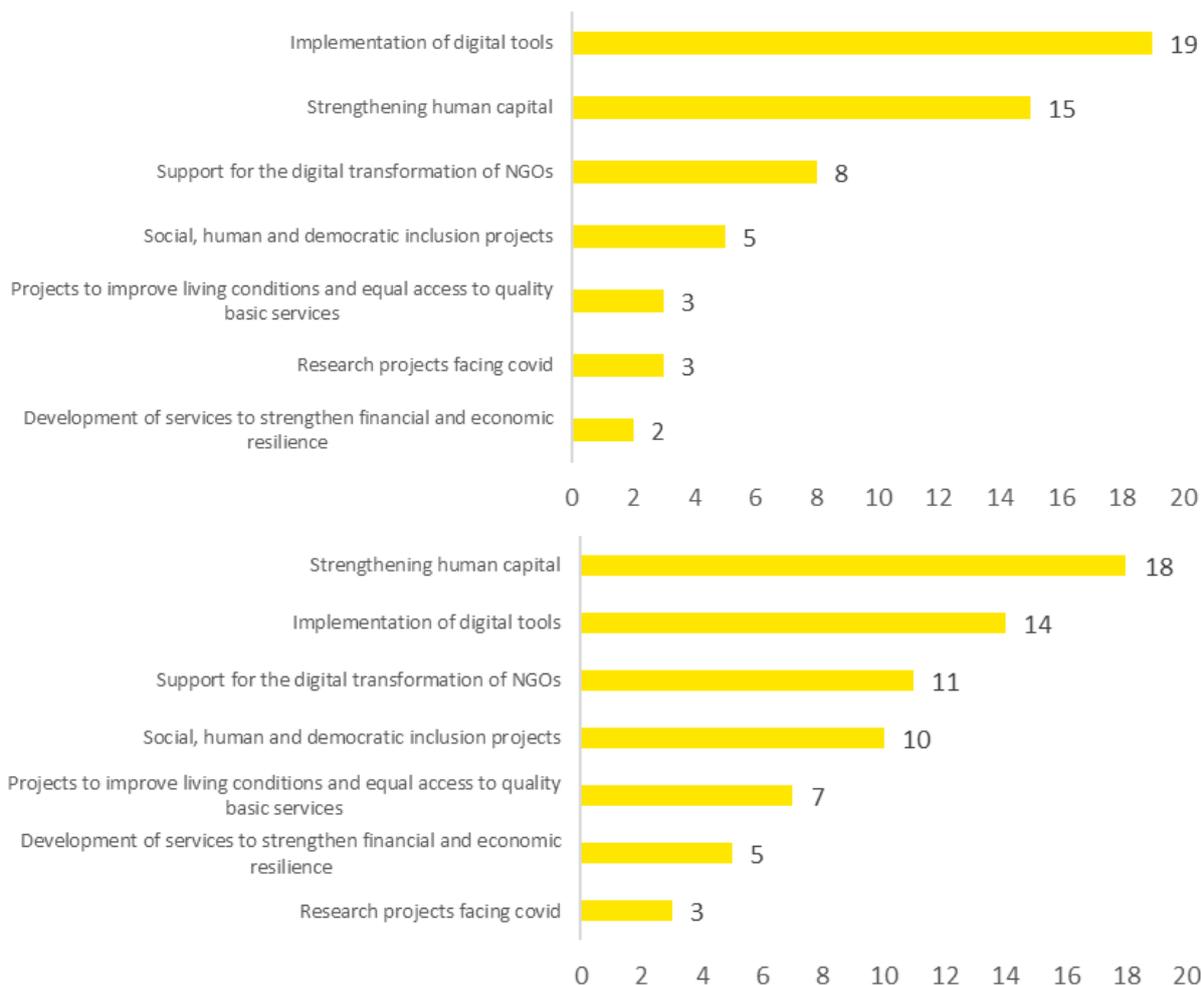


Source: Governmental and non-governmental cooperation actors surveys – EY production

During this period, it has increased the use of digital technology by these actors, but this increased integration of D4D has not been uniform and consistent among them. Digital was crucial in the response to the health crisis because it allowed some programmes to continue their activities but also to express creativity in the service of development that would not normally have had the opportunity to develop in this way.

The increased mobilisation of digital technology was mainly for the benefit of strengthening human capital, and the creation and/or use of digital tools, both for existing projects with a digital dimension and for new activities.

Figure 3 Examples of interventions by Belgian governmental (top) and non-governmental (bottom) cooperation in response to the Covid-19 crisis (multiple choice question)



Source: Governmental cooperation actor survey (23 respondents) and non-governmental cooperation actors survey (26 respondents) – EY production

2) In terms of taking digital into account in the strategic response of the Belgian cooperation to the Covid-19 crisis

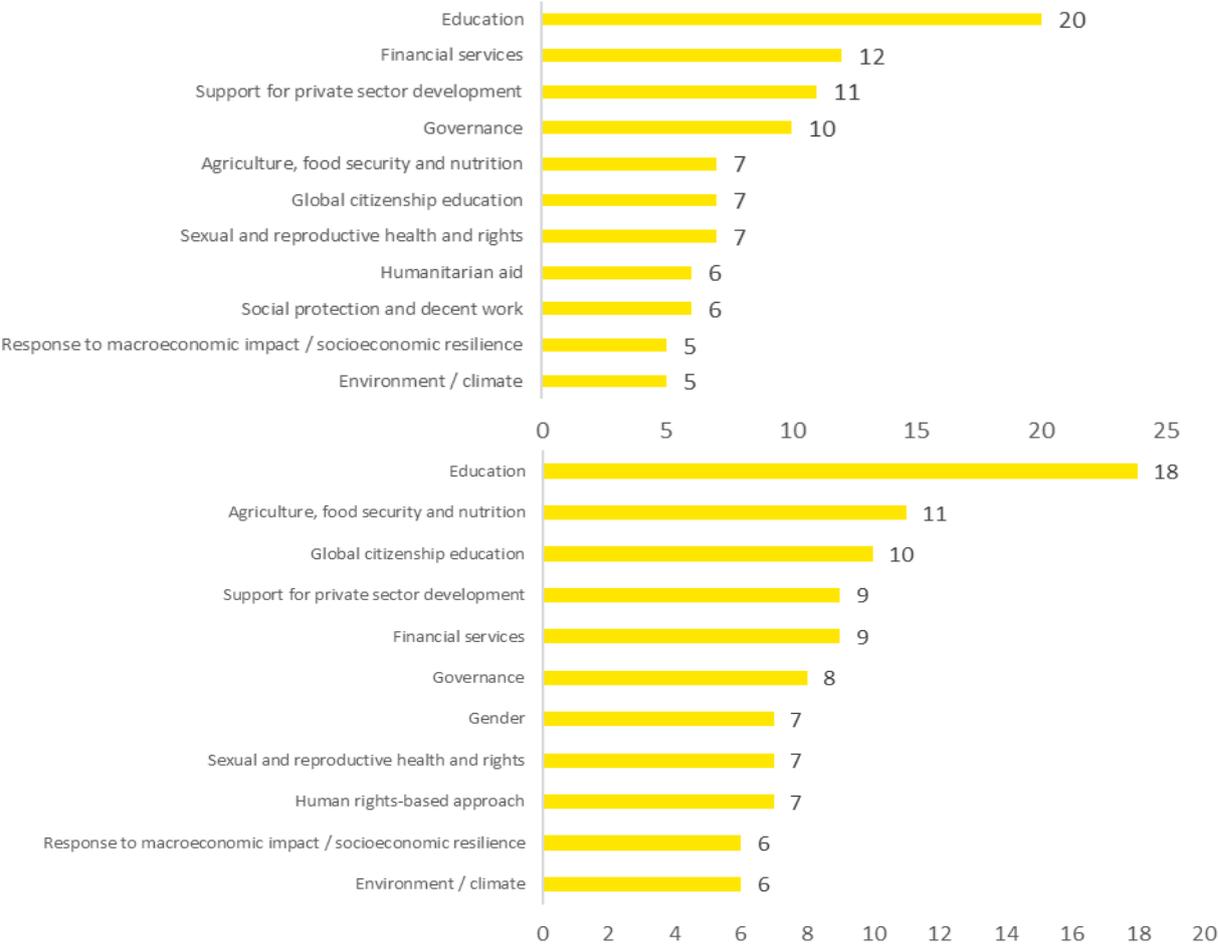
D4D has been taken into account to a limited extent in the DGD's strategic responses, but to a greater extent by Enabel, notably through a specific note entitled "*Digital for Development COVID Response Enabel*" drawn up in May 2020.

Beneficiary countries have adopted different strategic digital responses depending on their national context. Many partner countries have adopted a digital transformation vision. Nevertheless, the general trend in recipient country responses is to prioritise the health sector over other sectors (notably economic). The response at the level of the countries of intervention of the Belgian cooperation has taken place on a case-by-case basis but is moving towards an overall trend of greater use of D4D.

Numerous opportunities have emerged in the context of the health crisis, both within beneficiary countries through increased use of digital (strengthening of the digitalisation dynamic, increasing adoption of a digital vision, emergence and adoption of new digital solutions, catalytic effect of certain fields such as digital finance), and in terms of D4D for the Belgian cooperation (increased dialogue, new partnerships, lowering of costs, digital fundraising).

The nature and importance of these opportunities differ, however, according to the sectors of activity where the added value of digital technology may be expressed more (education) or less clearly.

Figure 4 Sectors where digital brings the most added value in terms of development in times of Covid-19 crisis for governmental cooperation actors (top) and non-governmental cooperation actors (bottom) (multiple choice question, top 11 sectors in terms of importance)



Source: Governmental cooperation actor survey (24 respondents) and non-governmental cooperation actors survey (24 respondents) – EY production

The theme of education has been targeted more than the other sectors by D4D responses, both by the partner countries and the Belgian Cooperation due to its high added value linked to digital technology and its social importance. Health was also logically very much invested in by the countries and the Cooperation in this context of health crisis, even if to a more variable extent than education.

However, the increasing integration of digital into D4D interventions involves both existing risks that have become more pronounced (e.g. environmental) and emerging ones, notably social (e.g. exclusion of certain audiences and Leave No One Behind) and political (infringement of internet access by political decision), linked to the effects of containment, digital over-supply and over-solicitation, and digital fatigue linked to over-exposure to digital tools. Moreover, digital does not fully mitigate the effects of the crisis.

Focus group Uganda

D4D risks - Unanimous feedback on the existence of social risks

« *The biggest risk at this stage is clearly the risk of social inequality. I have already seen this, for example in the education sector, where students have suddenly been excluded from the training system because they did not have mobile data or computer equipment [...] If we start to digitalise everything, then there is a great risk of exclusion of a large part of the population.* »

Africalia



« *We saw the reality of this risk of exclusion right from the start of the digitalisation of our activities: many people dropped out because they did not have the necessary equipment to continue the online training. We had to provide phones and tablets to compensate for this. There were a lot of problems at the beginning.* » VVOB Education for Development

« *Setting up digital communication platforms excludes those who do not have phones, laptops etc. and there are many of them in Uganda. Another issue that came to light when we analysed the data from our IT tools was gender inequality in access to digitalization. In fact, men had more access to our platforms overall than women.* » Barefoot Law

3) At the level of D4D interventions in the crisis response

External articulations have been noted in the face of (or in time of) the Covid-19 crisis, especially at the European level, for example in the framework of the Team Europe Initiative. The (current) renewal of the multi-annual programming of the EU at the regional level and in the countries of intervention of the Belgian cooperation may open the way for new Team Europe Initiatives in the field of D4D.

At the country level, linkages with other actors were also observed in different forms (webinars, partnerships).

Based on the in-depth country studies carried out, the D4D interventions of the Belgian cooperation seem to have met the great majority of the needs of these same countries.

The interest in starting now to think about the evolution of the strategy of digitalisation of programmes (total or partial sustainability, etc.) in order to optimise its long-term impact and to anticipate as much as possible the characteristics of a return to normal is real. In most of the cases and sectors studied, the digital tools and activities put in place nevertheless seem to be intended to last over time, even beyond the health crisis context. Digitalisation is, if not a major axis of these future strategic frameworks, at least an important cross-cutting axis and, in so doing, it is part of a long-term dynamic.

4) In terms of resources mobilised

Little additional funding was mobilised. Reallocations of funds have mainly taken place as a D4D response to the Covid-19 crisis. The monitoring of operations linked to Covid-19 and D4D is incomplete. The absence of an inter-actor mechanism in the Belgian cooperation for monitoring the response to Covid-19, including D4D, is to be noted. A need for more flexibility in the administrative procedures of Enabel was expressed, including in projects with a digitalisation component, in order to reduce the steps involved in decision-making (purchase of equipment, reorientation of objectives, public contracts).

2.2. Shared conclusions with the previous D4D evaluation

At the end of the study, some conclusions highlighted in the previous evaluation of the D4D strategic note on the Belgian cooperation remain. Among them, the challenge of identifying priority fields of action, areas of excellence or niches to be prioritised remains, particularly in the response to the Covid-19 crisis and beyond.

Debates continue to emerge in this period, including on cross-cutting issues related to Leave No One Behind (including the gender dimension) or the environmental impact of the increasing use of D4D. There is also a need to support the D4D strategy and the response at the local level. There is still a need for more consultation between cooperation actors, including in times of Covid-19 crisis on D4D issues.

Finally, the need to consider sustainability in D4D is all the more acute in this period in order to 'build back better' and work towards a more inclusive, resilient and sustainable recovery.

3. Recommendations

This study is complementary to the D4D evaluation of the Belgian development cooperation. It includes the Covid-19 context in the consideration of D4D at the strategic level and highlights risks that have increased during this crisis. Echoing the evaluation's recommendations to strengthen leadership on D4D issues as well as monitoring, it also highlights the value of enhanced harmonisation through Team Europe initiatives, which emerged in the face of Covid-19, while recommending improved monitoring, this time with a Covid-19 lens. Finally, the study suggests considering whether to include (or not) D4D in post-Covid-19 strategies. Based on the findings and lessons learned, the study makes the following **recommendations**:

Recommendation 1: Strengthen the consideration of digital at the strategic level to participate in the efforts of an inclusive, sustainable, and resilient economic recovery (at least as a means)

Rationale:

- D4D has been taken into account to varying degrees in the strategic responses of Belgian cooperation actors at headquarters and country level.
- Accelerating the digital transformation (particularly in Africa) can help promote stronger, sustainable economic growth and reduce the digital divide (according to the World Bank and the United Nations, for example).
- A more inclusive 'build back better' requires maximising the effects of D4D while limiting its unintended effects, including an emphasis on digital inclusion and digital protection of human rights¹.

Recommendation: Strengthen the consideration of digital at the strategic level to participate in the efforts of an inclusive, sustainable, and resilient economic recovery (at least as a means)	Actor(s)	in	charge	Priority
	DGD			Medium

Recommendation 2: Strengthen the consideration of issues associated with D4D risks, in particular those related to digital exclusion (Leave No One Behind), the gender dimension and environmental impacts

Rationale:

- The increasing integration of digital into D4D interventions involves both existing risks that have become more pronounced (e.g. environmental) and emerging risks, notably social (e.g. exclusion of certain audiences and Leave No One Behind) and political (e.g. undermining of internet access by political decision), linked to the effects of lock-down,

¹ Source : [A new consensus for the post-Covid19 world: Building Back Better Inclusively - Paris Peace Forum](#)

digital over-supply and over-solicitation, and digital fatigue linked to over-exposure to digital tools.

<p>Recommendation: Strengthen the consideration of issues associated with D4D risks, in particular those related to digital exclusion (Leave No One Behind), the gender dimension and environmental impacts Strengthen this consideration at strategic and operational level and in the European agenda</p>	Actor(s)	in	charge	Priority
	DGD-Enabel Actors of non-governmental cooperation			High

Recommendation 3: Identify future opportunities (Team Europe Initiatives) in the framework of the future EU multi-annual programming (regional and country level) in priority geographical areas of the Belgian cooperation

Rationale:

- The (ongoing) renewal of the EU multi-annual programming at regional level and in countries of intervention of the Belgian cooperation may pave the way for new Team Europe Initiatives in the field of D4D.

<p>Recommendation: Identify future opportunities (Team Europe Initiatives) in the framework of the future EU multi-annual programming (regional and country level) in priority geographical areas of the Belgian cooperation</p>	Actor(s)	in	charge	Priority
	DGD-Enabel			Medium

Recommendation 4: Strengthen the monitoring arrangements for the digital response during the Covid-19 crisis

Rationale:

- The monitoring of operations linked to Covid-19 and D4D is incomplete.
- The absence of an inter-actor mechanism in the Belgian cooperation for monitoring the response to Covid-19, including D4D, is to be noted.

<p>Recommendation: Strengthen the monitoring arrangements for the Covid-19 digital time response -Improve monitoring of Covid-19 operations - Provide for a task force dealing directly or indirectly with the D4D response to the Covid-19 crisis</p>	Actor(s)	in	charge	Priority
	DGD			Medium

Recommendation 5: Plan post-Covid-19 strategies, including considering whether or not to integrate D4D

Rationale:

- The interest of starting now to think about the evolution of the strategy of digitalisation of programmes (total or partial perpetuation) in order to optimise its long-term impact and to anticipate as much as possible the characteristics of a return to normality is real.

Recommendation: Plan post-Covid-19 strategies, including considering whether or not to integrate D4D

- Identify priority areas of excellence and niches

- Couple support for human capital development with support for the entrepreneurial ecosystem (e.g. support for online training, mobilising the support of start-ups and private companies in the sector)

Actor(s) in charge

DGD and Cabinet
Actors of non-governmental cooperation

Priority
High



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