The transformative power of digital for LDCs in the 2030 Agenda

How can LDCs harness the transformative power of the digital age?

Wednesday 6 April 2016, 10:30am-12:30pm

Concept Note for Workshop I

The workshop is part of the DCF Belgium High-level Symposium on “Rethinking development cooperation for the SDGs: country level perspectives and lessons”, to be held in Brussels from 6-8 April 2016.

Digital transformation has proven to be a powerful driver of economic growth, social change and human rights
- The lowering of the transaction costs in social or economic interactions enables new business models, based on peer to peer collaboration, crowd sourcing, open sources where actors using old technologies become obsolete and new actors become major players, blurring the traditional divisions of labor;
- New social models of individual empowerment and collective engagement also emerge via the use of social media or the investment in user-centric government practices;
- The explosion of data production will accelerate with the generalization of the internet of things which causes challenges of privacy and transparency but also offers new insights for decision making at all levels.

Some of these transformative trends are already shaping lives in developing countries
- Mobile money in Eastern Africa is becoming the norm faster than it is in developed countries;
- Big data analysis has played a significant role in the fight against Ebola by mapping population movements and verifying the enforcement of quarantines;
- Performance based financing of social services is improving services delivery based upon user feedback;
- Innovative digital and mobile technologies have provided access to education and health care in remote and under-served regions.

Development cooperation initiatives have taken stock of the effectiveness and efficiency gains that can be made through the use of new technologies. But are we doing more of the same with new tools or are we really harnessing the transformative power of the digital age for international development?

The World Bank states that digital dividends have not spread beyond the digital divide. It is true that 4 billion people still lack access to the internet, but over the last 15 years the penetration of new technologies has grown at such a rate in developing countries that the infrastructure gap will probably continue to narrow down at a fast pace. The World Bank identifies three challenges to harness the dividends of the digital age: digital skills, supportive regulations, and greater accountability of governments.
Questions to be raised

- Can digital really play a positively disruptive role in the LDCs (i.e. help LDCs close the development gap in an unconventional way) and the 2030 agenda, or is this rather the dream of techno-geeks?
- What are the specific challenges and opportunities in LDCs?
- How do international development actors need to adapt? Which roles could development cooperation play?
- Which types of alliances are needed with the private sector to leverage these new opportunities? How to ensure that such alliances are not meant just to serve the interests of the private sector?
- What are the risks to take into account when promoting digitization for development in LDCs and how can we manage them?

Panelists

- Moderator: H.E. Mr. Alexander De Croo, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Development Cooperation, Digital Agenda, Telecom and Post, Belgium

- Panelists:
  - Ms. Elaine Weidman-Grunewald, Vice President of Sustainability and Corporate Responsibility, Ericsson
  - Mr. Ben Ramalingam, Leader, Digital & Technology Cluster, Institute of Development Studies
  - Ms. Ornella Nsoki, NGO Nzolani
  - Mr. Eddy Hartog, Head of Unit International, DG CONNECT, European Commission
  - Mr. Alain Wirtz, CEO, Zetes

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