



DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION TIPS TOOLS INSIGHTS PRACTICES

In practice

LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND IN A DIGITAL WORLD: THE UNITED KINGDOM'S DIGITAL ACCESS PROGRAMME

Key messages

United Kingdom's Digital Access Programme (DAP) works to promote the digital inclusion of underserved communities and excluded groups in partner countries. The DAP adopts a holistic and agile approach and uses adaptive delivery models to catalyse affordable, safe and secure digital connectivity, promote digital literacy and skills, locally relevant digital content and services, and support the inclusive growth of the local digital ecosystem and economy.

This content, alongside its companion on [the UK's digital development strategy and policy framework](#), is part of [In Practice series on digital transformation](#) developed in collaboration with the [Development Co-operation Report 2021: Shaping a Just Digital Transformation](#).

Keywords

[Digital transformation](#) | [Gender equality](#) | [Innovation](#) | [Partner countries](#) | [Partnerships](#) | [Poverty and inequality](#)

Key partner

[United Kingdom](#)

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Challenge

Prior to 2016, the United Kingdom had a predominantly sectoral approach to promoting digital technologies in international development programmes, focusing on digital financial inclusion, digital health, ed-tech, agri-tech, etc. While these interventions yielded useful results, their scalability and sustainability were constrained by lack of connectivity, digital skills, digital content and services for underserved communities, safety and security in the cyber space, and support for local digital enterprises.

The World Bank's [2016 Digital Dividends World Development Report](#) marked a turning point in international thinking on digital development. It highlighted the importance of resolving fundamental

barriers such as the connectivity gap, while also working on the analogue complements – such as regulatory frameworks and digital skills – for the adoption of digital technologies. Following its publication, the UK's former Department for International Development (DfID) and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) (merged since September 2020 to form the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office or FCDO), along with the Digital, Culture, Media & Sports Department (DCMS) joined forces to promote digital transformation as a cross-cutting issue. The joint challenge was to design, develop and roll-out a cross-government initiative that would leverage the expertise needed to promote digital development in an integrated, holistic manner and support inclusive, responsible and sustainable digital transformation in partner countries.

Approach

- o The Digital Access Programme (DAP) started in 2018. Its current phase is expected to continue until March 2023. The following steps were taken to address the challenges linked to setting up a complex, cross-government programme:
 1. **Raising awareness across government** on the need for a cross-cutting view of digitalisation as a key enabler of inclusion and transformation. The DfID's Digital Strategy for 2018-2020, [Doing Development in a Digital World](#), helped raise this awareness, but a dedicated programme was needed to demonstrate a cross-government, holistic approach to digital development in practice.
 2. **Developing a joint programme** using the technical expertise and programme design and delivery skills from each department. The programme was developed as part of the cross-government Prosperity Fund portfolio and was focused on middle-income countries, which typically display a significant digital divide, whilst having the basic infrastructure and institutional capacity needed for digital adoption.
 3. **Assembling a cross-departmental (DfID-FCO-DCMS) team with expertise** in digital inclusion, cybersecurity, digital entrepreneurship and programme delivery. The team conducted five in-depth digital access country diagnostics in Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Brazil and Indonesia over nine months, to consult with key stakeholders and assess the needs and potential strategic direction for a holistic intervention on digital development. Preparation for the diagnostic missions included detailed desk reviews of available evidence and questionnaire design.
 4. **Using the digital access country diagnostic reports to design a country-specific programme business case** and advocate for support from senior leaders and ministers for this innovative and yet untested type of programme.
 5. **Delivering pilots in two partner countries to reinforce buy-in**, rapidly demonstrating the programme's potential by providing evidence and visibility with minimum investment. The pilots were used to refine the programme's **adaptive delivery model**. The latter included outsourcing the cybersecurity capacity building; working with embassy-based "tech hubs" to support digital entrepreneurship; and using a hybrid model of in-house, direct and outsourced delivery for the more complex and larger component focused on digital inclusion (i.e. connectivity, digital skills, content and services for underserved communities).
 6. **Obtaining ministerial approval for the DAP and its rollout in the five partner countries**. After the initial diagnostic and piloting phase, the implementation phase started in July 2019. This included building specialist programme teams in embassies or high commissions, engaging directly with key stakeholders in-country (e.g. telecommunications regulators and information communication technologies [ICT] authorities) and co-designing projects with a range of local and international partners.

Results

- According to its official [2021 Annual Review](#), the DAP scored A+ for exceeding delivery expectations and strengthening digital ecosystems. It scored A in the [2019](#) and [2020](#) reviews.
- Through testing and demonstration of 73 scalable models for inclusive, safe and secure digital access across five partner countries, the DAP reached over 2.3 million people in 286 underserved communities enhancing their connectivity, digital skills and access to locally relevant digital content and services in 2020-21.
- The DAP has enabled the development of 18 national plans, policies, strategies and regulations, including for example the [National ICT plan](#) and [TV White Space regulations](#) for last-mile connectivity and [shared spectrum framework](#) in Kenya, a community networks policy framework in Brazil, the [National Broadband Plan](#) in Nigeria and the Digital Inclusion in Telemedicine Strategy in Indonesia.
- In Indonesia, successful DAP initiatives include an online safety website in Bahasa Indonesia language and a project to raise awareness of online gender-based violence with Indonesian NGO SAFEnet.
- In Nigeria, the DAP trained over 6 000 individuals from over 3 000 small and medium-sized enterprises in cyber security essentials, and a successful cyber hygiene awareness campaign reached over 46 million people through social media and radio.
- The Government of Kenya and the DAP Tech Hub launched the [Business Regulatory Tool-Kit](#) to enhance local digital entrepreneurs' access to clear, user-friendly information on the regulatory environment. The online toolkit had over 300 000 hits in the first three months and over one million by June 2021.

Lessons learnt

- **The digital access country diagnostics proved useful for building new evidence** for a novel area such as digital development through context-specific interventions.
- The laborious approval procedures needed for innovative programmes required the team to **break down the process into diagnostic, piloting and implementation phases**. Check-in moments throughout the evolution of the programme and demonstrable impact of the pilot projects were key to winning support from senior leadership and ministers.
- **An adaptive and innovative delivery model was needed** to respond to the rapid changes in the digital space. This was achieved by combining outsourcing to specialist organisations with novel ways of using cross-government digital development, cybersecurity and tech expertise as well as by co-designing specific projects directly with local stakeholders and implementing partners.
- **Central programme management** was important to ensure coherence (across countries, components and policies) and provide advisory and strategic steer, facilitate cross-country learning and enable participation in the global dialogue on digital development. However, it was also essential to set up country teams in embassies to ensure contextual knowledge, close monitoring of projects and day-to-day contact with key stakeholders.
- **The DAP's hybrid and flexible delivery model** allowed it to rapidly pivot and leverage digital inclusion as a key enabler of the COVID-19 response and mitigation, by quickly designing and deploying short-term projects on inclusive connectivity, digital literacy, cyber hygiene skills, telemedicine and distance learning, which greatly helped many underserved or remote communities during the pandemic.

Further information

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To learn more about United Kingdom's development co-operation see:

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