



DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION TIPS TOOLS INSIGHTS PRACTICES

In practice

DIGITAL-BY-DEFAULT: A NEW CONCEPT IN GERMANY'S DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION

Key messages

Challenges created by the pandemic and climate change require bold moves in development co-operation to fully tap into the potential of digital solutions. Germany, recognising this untapped potential, recently developed and launched a new “Digital by Default” strategy to maximise opportunities for digital solutions in development co-operation.

This content 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 | Global goods and challenges | Innovation | Learning and knowledge management | Partnerships

● Key partner

Germany

Challenge

Current global challenges such as the pandemic and climate change are requiring nations and people to join forces and use the full range of opportunities digitalisation provides to rapidly scale successful solutions. However, most development co-operation stakeholders supporting digital transformation have the tendency to follow their own agendas and often work in silos, meaning that resources and expertise are not fully exploited. Germany also recognised the need to maximise opportunities for digitalisation in its own development co-operation, where tailor-made, successful digital solutions often remain in their local contexts, or familiar analogue approaches are chosen over possible digital solutions. As such, Germany looked for new ways to tap into the potential of digitalisation in its development programmes.

Approach

Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) entered a new phase in its development co-operation with its [Digital by Default](#) concept. This approach is grounded in a simple principle: digital solutions must be the default position for projects to meet their objectives within German

development co-operation. To ensure broad implementation of this strategy, projects must identify and justify their reasons for not employing digital components. As a result, opportunities for digital technologies are consistently being considered by our implementation partners in the review process of any new or follow-up projects and then employed if they bring valuable advantages.

The Digital by Default approach ensures both the technical and methodological quality of the proposed solutions. It also aims to enable societies to make digitalisation sustainable. The focus is always on the practical benefits: which specific digital solutions can help make a project more effective, more efficient, or more innovative. Furthermore, successful projects under this strategy are scaled up in partner countries.

Results

In practice, the Digital by Default approach amplifies digital transformation in partner countries and mitigates its inherent challenges, by supporting the establishment and maintenance of structures that enable the sustainability of digital public goods and ensure access to digital opportunities. Germany will continue to assess and develop new projects toward this goal. Results already achieved include:

- **The digital learning platform [atingi](#)** which provides free access to high-quality digital learning, anytime and anywhere. The platform has already reached more than one million people with its innovative learning offerings, with plans to reach 20 million by the end of 2023. To achieve this goal, *atingi* needs to become the standard tool for digital learning opportunities in German development co-operation.
- Germany, along with Estonia, the Digital Impact Alliance (DIAL), and the International Telecommunication Union, is supporting partners to enable the delivery of digital public goods within the **international e-government initiative [GovStack](#)**. The next phase will involve creating a model digital government services platform – building on DIAL's existing [Catalog of Digital Solutions](#) – which will demonstrate scaling opportunities across services and sectors.
- An internal survey demonstrated that **most project owners within BMZ now want to use digital tools and approaches** in their work to increase their projects' effectiveness and reach. However, the survey also identified an ongoing need to further develop expertise on digital technologies within the BMZ.

Lessons learnt

- **There is no “one size fits all” solution.** Digital solutions need to be tailored to the local context in which they will be embedded, considering local circumstances and ecosystems. Open-source solutions play a crucial role with their availability and accessibility making them a strong tool for scaling digital solutions to different contexts.
- **Ongoing learning and investment in further capacity building.** With Digital by Default as the new guiding principle, Germany is committed to learning from its own experiences and spearheading digitalisation in a way that adds value. It is expected that the Digital by Default approach will support quick development of efficient digital solutions to scale, creating more best practices within its projects. Furthermore, Germany recognises the need to invest in capacity building, both within its development co-operation and in partner countries.
- **International partnerships are crucial to mainstreaming the vision of a fair digital future.** Joint action is vital to tackling global challenges. The BMZ already relies on its strong network of partners to exchange best practices and aims. In direct collaboration with its partner countries,

Germany is ready to take a strong role in shaping a human-centred and green digital transformation.

Further information

atingi, <https://www.atingi.org>.

Digital Impact Alliance, *Catalog of Digital Solutions*, <https://solutions.dial.community/products>.

GovStack (2021), Accelerating the digital transformation of government services, <https://www.govstack.global>.

Toolkit Digitalisierung (2021), *Digital Strategy - Digital by Default*, <https://toolkit-digitalisierung.de/en/digital-strategy/digitalisation-as-a-quality-feature/digital-by-default>.

OECD resources

OECD (2021), *Development Co-operation Report 2021: Shaping a Just Digital Transformation*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ce08832f-en>.

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

OECD (2021), *OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Germany 2021*, OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/bb32a97d-en>.

OECD (2021), "Germany", in *Development Co-operation Profiles*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/0079f636-en>.

Last updated: 17-12-2021