In practice

NORWAY’S STRATEGIC PROCESS TO CAPITALISE ON THE POTENTIAL OF NEW TECHNOLOGY

Key messages
Norway realised that its development co-operation was not fully capitalising on the potential of new technologies, due to a fragmented, uncoordinated approach to digitalisation. To deliver sustainable results in the long term and beyond the scope of individual projects, Norway set out to develop a strategy for digital transformation in development policy.

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Keywords
- Digital transformation
- Governance
- Innovation
- Policy and guidance

Key partner
Norway

Challenge
The adoption of technological advances and digital innovations is critical to achieving the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Reflecting strategically on this opportunity for development, Norway realised that its development projects were not fully exploiting the opportunities of new technology or unleashing its full potential. In 2018, Norway set out to develop a strategy for digital transformation in development policy that built on lessons learnt and aimed to deliver results beyond the scope of individual projects. The ad hoc projectised approach meant that the digital component was often fragmented or uncoordinated. Projects typically piloted single technologies and solutions, aimed only at end users with a short time horizon and without plans for scalability and reuse. Norway’s initiatives also lacked overall goals and a unified methodological approach that facilitated digital transformation.
**Approach**

Norway’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs set up a small project team consisting of 2-4 people exclusively dedicated to working on digital transformation and development policy.

Following consultation with academia and private and public sector actors, a set of eleven guidelines targeting Norway’s own administration were developed and included in the *Digital strategy for Norwegian development policy* (2018). These guidelines are designed to help integrate established best practices into all programmes. The strategy also outlines how to make digitalisation a part of *Norway’s thematic priorities*, where a broader, more elaborate and politically inclusive approach is needed.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented the “*Digital transformation and development policy*” white paper to parliament, which defined the greatest barriers to digitalisation (i.e. access, regulation, digital competence and inclusion of marginalised groups), along with opportunities and risks in certain focus areas. The ministry would be accountable for a total of 72 measurable goals and action points outlined in the paper.

Each of the steps in the policy-making process was accompanied by communications activities to inform internal and external stakeholders of progress, to ensure buy-in across the ministry and raise awareness and understanding of the role of digitalisation in Norway’s development co-operation.

**Results**

- Having clearly defined goals has made it easier to monitor progress and ensure that projects follow a methodological approach, better facilitating digital transformation in partner countries. This has contributed to a stronger organisational understanding of the potential of new technologies and their importance for the SDGs.

- Digital innovations and new technologies are now considered early on in the strategy development and project planning process, with opportunities and potential barriers considered and addressed. There has been a better co-ordination of efforts, resulting in less fragmentation and greater impact.

- Norway is also fronting the agenda of digitalisation in development policy in international fora and organisations. It has participated in the establishment of the *Digital Public Goods Alliance*, a multi-stakeholder initiative with a mission to accelerate the attainment of the sustainable development goals in low- and middle-income countries by facilitating the discovery, development, use of, and investment in digital public goods.

**Lessons learnt**

- **Facilitating digital transformation is a new expert area for most development actors and requires a different approach.** Creating awareness, including an understanding and acceptance of the risks and uncertainties by all partners and within the relevant ministries is crucial to its success.

- **It’s not just about the technology.** It is easy to overestimate the impact of technology in the short term and underestimate its effect in the long run. Working with digital transformation requires dedication to capacity building to enable sustainable technology-driven change.

- **Advancing digital transformation requires establishing new forms of partnerships and challenging established ways of working.** Development organisations and partners need time to learn and adapt. However, early involvement by all is strongly recommended.
Norway’s strategic process to capitalise on the potential of new technology

- **Defining clear measurable goals** has made it is easier to monitor, evaluate and learn.

### Further information


### OECD resources


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