



Rights based digitalisation

to reduce poverty and furthering human rights

Inclusive, sustainable and gender equal digitalisation is not only a goal in its own right, falling under SDG 9 to “increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries”, it is also a lever and accelerator for solving development challenges in all other sectors. It offers new innovation opportunities for poverty reduction. The availability of data opens up for optimisation of resources, transition to sustainable forms of energy, circular business models, tracking of supply chains and strengthen democratisation processes. Along with climate change, it constitutes one of the greatest transformative forces in society today.



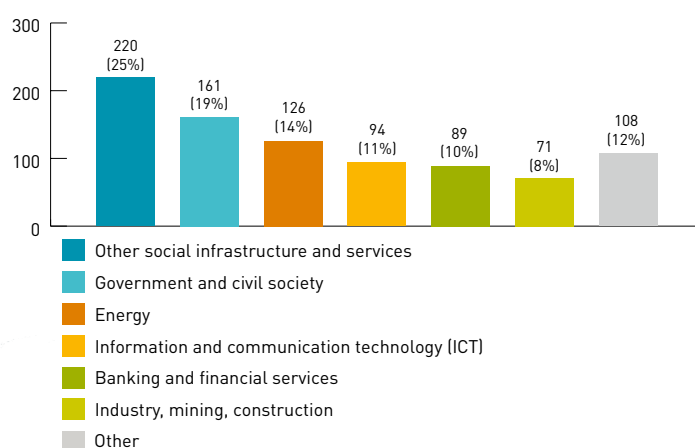
DEVELOPMENT IN THE WORLD

Digitalisation holds a potential to strengthen development in areas including democracy and human rights, agriculture, education, health and climate and the environment. In Sub Saharan Africa the mobile economy alone contributed with 8 percent to GDP in 2022¹. At the same time, only 36 percent of the population in Least Developed Countries (LDC) used the Internet in 2022, compared with 66 percent globally. 17 percent of people in LDCs still lives outside any internet coverage.² This digital divide risk exacerbating inequalities – increasing economic and social gaps. Women’s use of mobile internet decreased with household incomes during the pandemic – widening the digital gender gap³. Digitalisation can also pose risks to the climate and ecosystems. It requires use of energy, and materials that are hazardous to health and the environment. It can also pose a risk to human security through for example gender based violence on-line⁴, and technology can be used for repression and violation of human rights. The risks with digitalisation can also further increase, given its rapid development, not least in Artificial Intelligence (AI).

The main barriers for people living in poverty to being connected and benefiting from digitalisation are high consumer costs for mobile devices and data, lack of access to electricity, lack of knowledge, skills, and relevant and safe services.

Another obstacle is the lack of available capital for digitalisation in Sida’s partner countries.

FIGURE 1: DISBURSEMENT BY SUB-SECTOR WITHIN DIGITALISATION 2022 (MILLION SEK)



1 GSMA, 2022, The mobile economy, London, United Kingdom.

2 ITU, 2023, Measuring digital development Facts and figures: Focus on least developed countries, Geneva, Switzerland

3 GSMA (2023) The Mobile Gender Gap Report, London, United Kingdom.

4 Sida, 2021, BRIEF Gender-Based Violence Online GBVO 2021

THE GLOBAL GOALS

The Global Goals for Sustainable Development include everyone - and we can all contribute. The goals are interdependent and therefore indivisible. Sida’s main contribution is to implement development cooperation, thereby reducing poverty and saving lives. Together we can build a better future where no one is left behind.



Results

MAIN AREAS OF SUPPORT

Sida seeks to “increase digitalisation in development cooperation and work for a rights based digitalisation that improves the lives of poor and vulnerable populations”.⁵ It does this both through bi-lateral, regional and thematic strategies. To further this it also implements a strategic development programme in digitalisation. This includes digitalisation in the organisation, its partnerships, and in development cooperation. Digitalisation at Sida is approached both by:

1) strengthening the digital ecosystem, and 2) using digitalisation as a method to strengthen development across all thematic areas.

The digital ecosystem includes the basic elements of digitalisation, like infrastructure, handsets and skills, and also governance to ensure security and human rights on the internet. It is a precondition for using digitalisation as a method to accelerate inclusive, sustainable and rights based development.

Many Swedish development strategies include digitalisation. The thematic strategies for sustainable economic development and for human rights and democracy spearhead the work with the digital economy and human rights on the internet respectively. Another priority area is digitalisation in environment and climate.

Sida engages in global policy dialogues to shape normative frameworks in support of a rights based digitalisation. One example is the Global Digital Compact that aims to form a shared global framework for digital development, at the Summit of the future in 2024. This UN initiative is also co-facilitated by Sweden and Rwanda. Every two years Sida also hosts the conference Stockholm Internet Forum. The conference has a focus on a free, open and secure internet. In 2023 the thematic focus was on the role of the Internet and ICT during crises, conflicts and disasters. Sida also works with internal capacity building and methodological support such as challenge funds and guarantees to support digitalisation in all our operations.

SIDA'S SUPPORT

During 2022, Sida had an estimated 70 programmes, with disbursements of SEK 868 million, including different degrees of work for an inclusive, sustainable and rights based digitalisation.⁶ Since work with digitalisation as a method is integrated in other areas, this work is spread across a number of sectors with large programmes in social protection and sustainable energy. The large “other” area consists of more than 15 sub sectors including in

health and education. (see fig). More than half (53 percent), went to sub Saharan Africa, one third to thematic and global initiatives (29 percent) and the remainder (19 percent) to Latin America and Europe.

Civil society organisations and multilateral organisations received the largest share of the support. Other partners include public institutions, research institutions and the private sector. As the distributors of internet, the private sector has an important role to play in digitalisation.

Examples of areas of work and partners include:

- **Inclusive and affordable internet access:** partners such as the World Bank's Trust Fund, Digital Development Partnership (DDP). In 2022, the bank's loans within digitalisation was SEK 110 billion in over 80 countries; and The Association for Progressive Communication (APC), who works with internet governance and the establishment of local community networks.
- **Human rights and democracy:** partners such as Access Now. Their goal is to reduce and manage threats against defenders of human rights, and to ensure that human rights on the internet are protected.
- **Environment and climate change:** work on clean energy and digital innovation to counter climate change. For example Global Energy Transformation's work with PROSPECT, a public open source database to analyse energy data. This is used by national rural electrification agencies and energy service providers for energy efficiency. It also includes the GSMA innovation fund, which support start-ups using satellite data, blockchain technology, and mobile data to develop solutions for ecosystem recovery and climate resilience.
- **Gender equality and countering gender based violence on- line⁷** is integrated in all Sidas partnerships in digitalisation. To promote the rights of women and girls in all areas of digitalisation it also includes targeted work like GSMAs programme “connected women”, and APC's women's rights programme.
- **Private sector development:** partners such as Chemonics in Moldova, implementing “Promoting Innovation Through New Technologies”, and UNCDF in Uganda where work on improving regulation and financial inclusion has provided 700,000 people with improved digital skills, and increased use of mobile payment methods.
- **Innovation and frontier technology** is supported through innovation funds such as the Global Innovation Fund and Innovations Against Poverty. Through the Artificial intelligence for development initiative Sida also seeks to strengthen AI research in sub-Saharan Africa.

⁵ Sida, 2022, *Operational plan 2023-2025*, Goal 6.1.

⁶ The figures are only indicative of the scale and distribution of Sida's work with digitalisation, and have been obtained using a key word search in the system. The sector code data for ICT does not apply to digitalisation as a method, hence it's too limited.

⁷ Sida, 2022, *A human rights based approach and digitalisation*.

SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY

Visiting address: Rissneleden 110, 174 57 Sundbyberg
Postal address: Box 2025, SE-174 02 Sundbyberg, Sweden
Telephone: +46 (0)8-698 50 00. Telefax: +46 (0)8-20 88 64
E-mail: sida@sida.se Web: sida.se/en

