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# USAID DIGITAL STRATEGY 2020-2024 DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM FUND 2020 ACTIVITIES

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**THE DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM FUND (DEF)** is an initiative under [USAID's Digital Strategy](#) that equips the Agency's Operating Units with catalytic financing to design and implement activities that foster open, inclusive, and secure digital ecosystems. The DEF supports two types of interventions:

1. **Emergent opportunities to harness or shape the digital ecosystem in any sector, and**
2. **Strategic initiatives to strengthen or improve the digital ecosystem.**

In March 2020, USAID held a beta-round call for proposals. After receiving 21 submissions entailing programming in all sectors from 16 Missions, the DEF review committee made up of sectoral and digital experts drawn from across USAID, evaluated proposals on technical merit, feasibility, relevance to the Digital Strategy, and Mission priorities. Further fund rounds will support Mission engagements across all sectors, subject to the availability of funds. Activities funded in the initial round include the following:

## USAID/BANGLADESH

- ▶ **Challenge:** It is critical to communicate reliable, accurate, and updated information about COVID-19 to the public as the virus becomes more widespread. Rumors and misinformation about the virus undermine public health efforts and disproportionately affect the marginalized groups.
- ▶ **Contribution:** To help bridge the information gap between decision-makers and the public, USAID/Bangladesh will disseminate COVID-19 information in a manner that promotes digital inclusion of vulnerable, underserved, and at-risk groups.
- ▶ **DEF funds will be used to:**
  - Build capacities of non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations in data management, tracking and monitoring, and help them in forming networks to ensure dissemination of accurate COVID-19 information;
  - Counter false, misleading, or inaccurate information on COVID-19 and support the Government of Bangladesh with crisis communications; and
  - Strengthen existing digital data systems to leverage public information.

## USAID/KENYA AND EAST AFRICA

- ▶ **Challenge:** Despite rapid growth and uptake of technology in Kenya, several barriers have led to a digital skills gap—unreliable internet connectivity, limited access to hardware, and a lack of digitally-literate instructors. As a result, there is a small talent pool within the digital sector, despite young people's eagerness to learn.
- ▶ **Contribution:** USAID/Kenya will leverage private sector IT training opportunities to advance, scale, and sustain digital skills and connect youth to economic opportunities in Kenya's emerging IT sector.
- ▶ **DEF funds will be used to:**
  - Assess existing private sector IT training opportunities for youth;
  - Analyze gaps and consult stakeholders on the assessment findings; and
  - Pursue partnerships with IT firms for training and employment opportunities for youth.

## USAID/RWANDA

- ▶ **Challenge:** Women in Rwanda face several barriers to entering the marketplace. These barriers include limited access to resources, education, and skills. E-commerce platforms are rising in popularity and are seen as potentially transformative opportunities for entrepreneurial women to start and scale a business quickly. However, many women lack the digital skills necessary to be successful.
- ▶ **Contribution:** In collaboration with the Rwandan Chamber of Women Entrepreneurs (RCWE) and their female members, USAID/Rwanda will build the capacity of the RCWE members to use digital tools to enable business expansion.
- ▶ **DEF funds will be used to:**
  - Increase RCWE staff and members' digital literacy through training, using existing curricula where possible; and
  - Improve RCWE's online community and digital platform so that members can share information. The platform will include an information-sharing portal and hub for members to support and learn from each other. An e-marketplace will assist customers to find business information and securely purchase products from members.

## USAID/SAHEL REGIONAL OFFICE

- ▶ **Challenge:** Ethnic conflicts and a fragile socio-political situation in the region mixed with the proliferation of internet access have increased the risk of hate speech and bad actors sowing divisions online. Thus far, digital tools for development in the Sahel have been siloed in individual activities and had limited coordination or collaboration across implementing partners.
- ▶ **Contribution:** The USAID/Sahel Regional Office will establish a digital working group to coordinate USAID digital activities in the region. The working group will harmonize existing digital efforts and foster coherence of future digital interventions such that the risks of hate speech are minimized.
- ▶ **DEF funds will be used to:**
  - Establish a Digital Working Group for all activities in the region, where USAID will invest roughly \$700 million over 5 years through the RISE II project. The working group will comprise implementing partners and its main purpose will be to ensure the coherence of current and future digital interventions.

## USAID/AFRICAN UNION

- ▶ **Challenge:** In 2021, negotiations will commence for a dedicated protocol on digital trade and e-Commerce within the recently ratified African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Digital trade in Africa is rapidly growing and is expected to constitute a growing share of trade under the AfCFTA, so the outcome of these negotiations will have lasting economic effects. African Union (AU) Member Heads of States are expected to take part in negotiations, and have limited experience doing so.
- ▶ **Contribution:** With co-funding from the Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership (DCCP), the Mission will deploy a long-term technical advisor within the AU Commission who will build capacity of AU Member States in digital trade and e-Commerce.
- ▶ **DEF funds will be used to:**
  - Build the digital trade and e-Commerce capacity of staff in the AU Commission Department of Trade and Industry and negotiators from AU Member States;
  - Help draft a digital trade protocol to be used as the basis for negotiations; and
  - Engage with and directly support the parties when they negotiate the AfCFTA digital trade protocol.

These activities strengthen critical components of the digital ecosystem and support progress toward the achievement of Mission development and humanitarian assistance objectives.

### CONTACT US/LEARN MORE

To learn more, please reach out to the Digital Ecosystem Fund Team ([digitalfund@usaid.gov](mailto:digitalfund@usaid.gov))