2023
DIGITAL DOWNLOAD

Technology Division
Innovation, Technology, and Research Hub
Bureau for Inclusive Growth, Partnerships, and Innovation

Photo Credit: Ismail Folaranmi Odetola

USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

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Christopher Burns
Chief Digital Development Officer
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MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

We are entering a new era of digital development.

The digital revolution of yesterday has been replaced by a period of digital transformation that has fundamentally changed the world in which we live. The increased adoption of smartphones, faster and more affordable internet connectivity, and the rise of artificial intelligence and machine learning have transformed all sectors of government, economy, and society, leading to a historic digital transition and generating new opportunities for people around the world to live freer, healthier, more prosperous lives. We must harness the power of digital for good and shape a digital transformation that is rights respecting, inclusive, secure, and competitive for the benefit of all.

One exciting change that is emblematic of this shift is the rise of digital government. Ministries of Information and Communication Technology around the world are rebranding themselves to Ministries of Digital Transformation, committing to revolutionizing access to public services and increasing government transparency and accountability through digital technology. Countries are naming Cyber and Digital Ambassadors to foster greater connectivity with other countries, and in some cases to revolutionize work across government in public health, climate, energy, agriculture, and other sectors.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a variety of sectors, including government, had to digitize services seemingly overnight. While this was a challenge for some, we learned that governments that embraced digitalization pre-pandemic were far better equipped to make this pivot. Ukraine is a great example of this.

After Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine in March of 2022, we saw how digital technology holds not only the power to improve lives, but to save lives.

The Diia app, created in 2019 by the Ukrainian Ministry of Digital Transformation in partnership with USAID and other donors, initially provided a groundbreaking way for Ukrainians to access government services and engage with their government online in a one-stop-shop, from applying for benefits and government programs to paying taxes, and registering and running businesses.

With support from USAID, the digital government services on the Diia platform launched new functions for wartime, including ways to provide emergency funds to displaced and vulnerable Ukrainians, document property damage for future compensation, and streamline government unemployment benefits, among other critical features.

In mid-2023, USAID announced the next stage of its collaboration with the Ministry of Digital Transformation, which includes sharing learnings from Ukraine's digital government success through technical assessments and customized consultations for partner countries to localize and accelerate digital transformation.

We are motivated by Ukraine's digital successes not just because of the Diia app itself, but because of the digital public infrastructure the country put in place pre-war to accelerate their digital transformation journey and allow the local digital ecosystem to flourish.

However, not every country was as prepared for the accelerated pivot to digital technologies and services. In many cases, COVID-19 actually exacerbated digital divides.

Our Division is working hard to close these digital divides by ensuring that countries around the world have robust digital ecosystems that are open, inclusive, secure, and of benefit to all. How?

Last year, the Technology Division led efforts to create the Digital Public Goods Charter (the DPG Charter), a multi-stakeholder campaign that drives a shared vision for digital public goods and their role in driving safe, trusted, and inclusive digital public infrastructure at scale. Through the DPG Charter, governments, donors, nongovernmental organizations, academia, and the private sector will work together to invest in open digital platforms, policy frameworks to protect individuals' data and privacy, and digital infrastructure for all.

USAID is partnering with NetHope, Okta, and the CyberPeace Institute to establish a Humanitarian Information Sharing and Analysis Center (ISAC), a first-of-its-kind cybersecurity collaboration platform for nongovernmental organizations and think tanks, which are the second most targeted entities in nation state cyber attacks according to a recent Microsoft report. This Humanitarian ISAC will be the central platform to enable governments, funders, technology companies, and other providers to support the cyber security needs of nonprofit agencies and the world's most vulnerable communities.

The Technology Division, in partnership with the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Hub, also launched the Women in the Digital Economy Fund (Wi-DEF), a joint effort between USAID and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to accelerate progress on closing the gender digital divide. Wi-DEF will scale evidence-based, proven solutions, including women-led solutions that improve women's livelihoods, economic security, and resilience. Building on the success of the Fund, USAID announced the Women in the Digital Economy Initiative in late 2023. The Initiative will bring together governments, private sector companies, foundations, civil society, and multilateral organizations to accelerate progress towards the closure of the gender digital divide through a focus on access and affordability, relevant products and tools, literacy and skills, safety and security, and data and insights.

These are just a few examples.

To achieve our goal of building an inclusive digital future that empowers all people, we must continue to work closely with governments, civil society, the private sector, and local communities in our partner countries to maximize the potential of digital transformation and minimize its risks.

I hope you'll take a few minutes to read through this report and learn more about how we've been prioritizing digital transformation at USAID recently and what's still to come.

Thank you,

Christopher Burns

Chief Digital Development Officer
& Director for Technology, Technology Division
Innovation, Technology, and Research Hub

OUR WORK

WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

The Innovation, Technology, and Research (ITR) Hub's Technology Division, within the USAID Bureau for Inclusive Growth, Partnerships and Innovation is home to 63 staff members across eight teams. As the Agency's experts in digital development, the Technology Division works to address gaps in digital access and adoption and advance the use of technology and geospatial analysis in development and humanitarian assistance, while also managing the risks that digital technology introduces into the lives of the communities we serve.

Through the USAID Digital Strategy, we promote the responsible use of technology in everything we do. Guided by the Principles for Digital Development, we deliver technical expertise and provide practical tools to USAID staff and our partners to help maximize the benefits of technology while mitigating its risks. We work with governments, the private sector, and civil society to eliminate barriers to digital inclusion, use data for decision-making, deliver financial services, analyze issues with geographic data, and responsibly leverage emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and digital identity.

Taking a multi-pronged approach, the Technology Division leverages resources across the Agency through its implementing partners and other actors in four main ways:

1. Catalyzing open, secure, and inclusive digital ecosystems
2. Building USAID capacity
3. Accelerating USAID programming
4. Engaging with the private sector

Photo Credit: Morgana Wingard

OUR FOCUS

Cybersecurity - The Cybersecurity team advances USAID's understanding of cyber as an emerging development sector critical for nearly all of our programming. The team provides insight, analysis, and resources—including technical assistance, primers, toolkits, and training—to help Missions, Sectors, and Bureaus better understand how cyber issues affect development priorities and incorporate cyber capacity-building into their programmatic portfolios. The team also liaises with the National Security Council (NSC), the U.S. Department of State, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), implementing partners, and intra- and inter-governmental partners to promote cyber awareness, capacity, and coordination between USAID and other development stakeholders.

Digital Societies and Governments - The Digital Societies and Governments team works to advance robust, inclusive, and resilient digital societies and governments through responsible data governance and digital government. The team does this by collaborating with stakeholders to build knowledge and address risks and opportunities, as well as providing technical support and resources with the end goal of empowering people to achieve better development outcomes through a more equitable, digitally-enabled world.

Digital Finance - The Digital Finance team works to overcome barriers preventing access to digital financial services, like mobile money and agent banking, by partnering with governments, donors, the private sector, and underserved communities around the world to support financial systems and policies that increase transparency, open new and inclusive markets, and address our most pressing humanitarian and development challenges.

Digital Inclusion - The Digital Inclusion team works to expand connectivity and close digital divides by providing technical assistance to Missions and partner country governments, promoting inclusive policy and infrastructure development, and helping the private sector and civil society invest in new connectivity business models and initiatives that advance an open, inclusive, and secure internet worldwide.

Digital Strategy - The Digital Strategy Implementation team coordinates, advances, and creates digital development activities with the Technology Division across USAID and, more recently, across multiple United States Government agencies, including the Department of State. The team has promoted digital adoption across the Agency and piloted the adoption of national and international charters (e.g. the Digital Public Goods Charter). Internally, the team works to align budget needs and resources with initiatives across a range of digital development activities.

Emerging Technologies - The Emerging Technologies team serves as a thought leader in understanding and addressing the implications of increasing use of emerging digital technologies (e.g. Artificial Intelligence and Quantum Computing) and associated trends in developing country contexts. The team explores and offers guidance on how emerging technologies offer value, disrupt digital ecosystems, and shift power to inform how they can be thoughtfully and responsibly leveraged to address development and humanitarian challenges. The team builds on this thought leadership to launch programs and partnerships that promote responsible emerging technology practices and drive collective action.

USAID GeoCenter - The USAID GeoCenter is an internal team of geographers and geospatial data analysts that directly support USAID staff in Washington, DC, and in Missions around the world. The team generates geospatial insights to help USAID make data-informed decisions that improve the strategic planning, design, monitoring, and evaluation of USAID programs. Through the YouthMappers program, the GeoCenter also empowers thousands of university students in over 70 countries with digital mapping and leadership skills.

Knowledge and Insights - The Knowledge and Insights team works to implement comprehensive communications and engagement strategies to strengthen internal and external awareness of digital development programs and build the capacity of USAID staff. Through coordinated efforts, K&I galvanizes support for the Technology Division's work through a number of targeted activities, including trainings and workshops, communications toolkits and resources, communities of practice, the annual Digital Development Awards program, and in-person and web-based events.

Photo Credit: Riaz Jahanpour for USAID

USAID DIGITAL STRATEGY

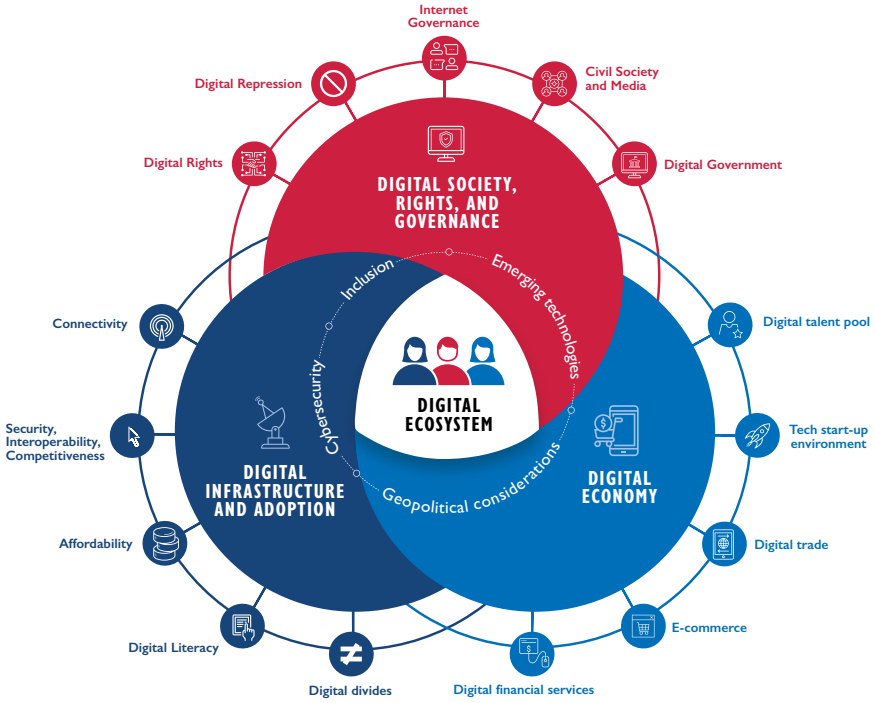
In April 2020, USAID released its first-ever Digital Strategy, charting an Agency-wide vision for development and humanitarian assistance in the world's rapidly evolving digital landscape. The Digital Strategy sets a path to equip staff, empower partners, and shape effective programming that supports the development of open, inclusive, and secure digital ecosystems in our partner countries.

The five-year Digital Strategy (2020-2024) is being implemented in two phases: *Foundation* (years 1-2) and *Scale* (years 3-5). During the *Foundation* phase, we created tools and resources to help USAID staff understand and develop programs in key sub-sectors of digital development, established Agency-wide coordination, and built interagency, donor, and private sector collaboration. The *Scale* phase, which began in April 2022, focused on expanding piloted activities, further developing interagency, donor, and private sector partnerships, and increasing staff, training, and funds for programming.

Strategy Goal

To achieve and sustain open, secure, and inclusive digital ecosystems that contribute to broad-based, measurable development and humanitarian-assistance outcomes.

Digital Ecosystem



Definition: Stakeholders, systems, and enabling environments that together empower people and communities to use digital technology to gain access to services, engage with each other, or pursue economic opportunities.

Recent highlights related to Digital Strategy implementation include:

Completing Digital Ecosystem Country Assessments (DECAs) in the Eastern and Southern Caribbean, Libya, Moldova, Peru, Uzbekistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Tanzania, Georgia, Tajikistan, Mali, Bangladesh, Zambia, Burma, Ukraine, and Nicaragua to help inform country-level strategic planning.

Working with a number of USAID Bureaus on Digital Strategy Action Plans to help staff identify priority issues and develop future programming: In 2022, the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance and the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean joined the Bureau for Global Health and the Bureau for Resilience and Food Security in completing their Digital Strategy Action Plans.

Launching the Digital Ecosystem Evidence Map (DEEM) to highlight resources on digital development interventions and digital ecosystems around the world.

Photo Credit: Jack Gordon for USAID

DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM COUNTRY ASSESSMENTS

The DECA, a flagship initiative of the Digital Strategy, identifies development opportunities and risks in a country's digital ecosystem. It informs decision-making about digital programming and investments for USAID and partner governments, donors, the private sector, and civil society. The DECA is approximately a five-month research process with three phases: desk research and planning; interviews; and analysis and report writing.

In 2023, USAID completed DECAs in Georgia, Tajikistan, Bangladesh, and Nicaragua. Additional DECAs in the Eastern and Southern Caribbean, Libya, Moldova, Peru, Uzbekistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Tanzania, Mali, Zambia, Burma and Ukraine were finished in 2022.

Examples of outcomes achieved through the DECAs include:

- USAID/Colombia has worked with Microsoft, civil society partners, and the Government of Colombia to develop two connectivity centers to expand digital access to underserved communities–women and indigenous peoples—in the country's Northwest.
- Through the Media Innovation Project (2022-2027), USAID/Serbia worked with the Swedish International Development Agency to increase the capacity of independent media outlets to mitigate digital repression. The project works with digital media outlets and communication providers in Serbia to develop innovative, sustainable, and forward-looking business models that accelerate growth and revenues, increase access to cutting-edge technologies, and prepare media organizations to be investment ready.
- USAID/Nepal supported the formalization of a private sector association of digital service providers (DSPs).
- USAID and the U.S. Department of State supported the Kenyan government's adoption of the Data Protection Act by staffing a Data Protection Commissioner and officers in different counties. USAID/Kenya also worked with the Communications Authority of Kenya on their 5G network strategy and helped them promote the use of Open Radio Access Networks.

To engage with the DECA team, request more information, or discuss starting a DECA in your operating unit, please reach out to digitaldevelopment@usaid.gov.

DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM FUND

The Digital Ecosystem Fund (DEF) equips USAID Missions with flexible, catalytic financing to design and implement activities that foster open, inclusive, and secure digital ecosystems. Since 2020, 16 Missions have received funding for interventions that ranged from building digital skills for youth to leveraging e-commerce for business growth. These small direct investments, subject to available funding, are complemented by Mission-level training and capacity building on the Principles for Digital Development.

Recent results suggest that these grants are an effective way to jumpstart improvements in digital ecosystems:

- **New opportunities for youth ICT employment in Kenya:** DEF funding in Kenya sparked two new initiatives to promote youth employment in the information and communication technology (ICT) sector. First, Generation Kenya scaled-up the initial DEF ICT training and employment program, reaching more than 2000 youth in its first year post-USAID funding with training and job placement. At the same time, based on DEF-supported research, the Mission identified the need for targeted ICT programs throughout the country and launched an open call for new partnerships for youth ICT employment with 20 times the funding of the original DEF grant.
- **Improved interoperability and scale-up of digital health information systems in Ethiopia:** Digital ecosystem funds enabled USAID/Ethiopia to multiply the impact of its existing health programming. An assessment identified which features of the digital health ecosystem needed the most support, including the policy, regulation, and interoperability of health systems, data quality and use, and management and workforce needs. Using this information, the Mission has operated a community of practice for health systems improvement. This community fosters partnerships between experts from universities and the Ministry of Health to support improved electronic health architecture. For the Mission, there is no question that this community—and the interaction with experts across digital health fields—has increased the capacity of the Ministry of Health leadership to navigate digital transformation. As a result of the funding, the government and partners expanded an essential health management information system (DHIS2), strengthened a core registry, and adapted tools to respond to COVID-19. These efforts allowed both the public and private health sector to use data to improve health resource utilization and make more timely decisions in logistics.
- **New insights through digital data collection in Bangladesh:** Misinformation is not unique to Bangladesh. Yet—as with any development project—unique characteristics of the local environment require a tailored response. BRAC International and USAID/Bangladesh worked together to understand the information ecosystem around COVID-19 and developed targeted responses to address misinformation. They created a digital data collection tool to survey individuals across Bangladesh, directly reaching half a million people across 40 districts. This information was visualized in a "Rumor Map," which describes the quantity and types of COVID-related misinformation across districts, revealing striking differences across geographies. The country used this information in communication campaigns to counter misinformation and provide credible sources of information tailored to local needs. BRAC is now exploring using this digital data collection tool to gather public sentiment about vaccinations, gender-based violence, and other important topics.

For more information, please contact digitaldevelopment@usaid.gov

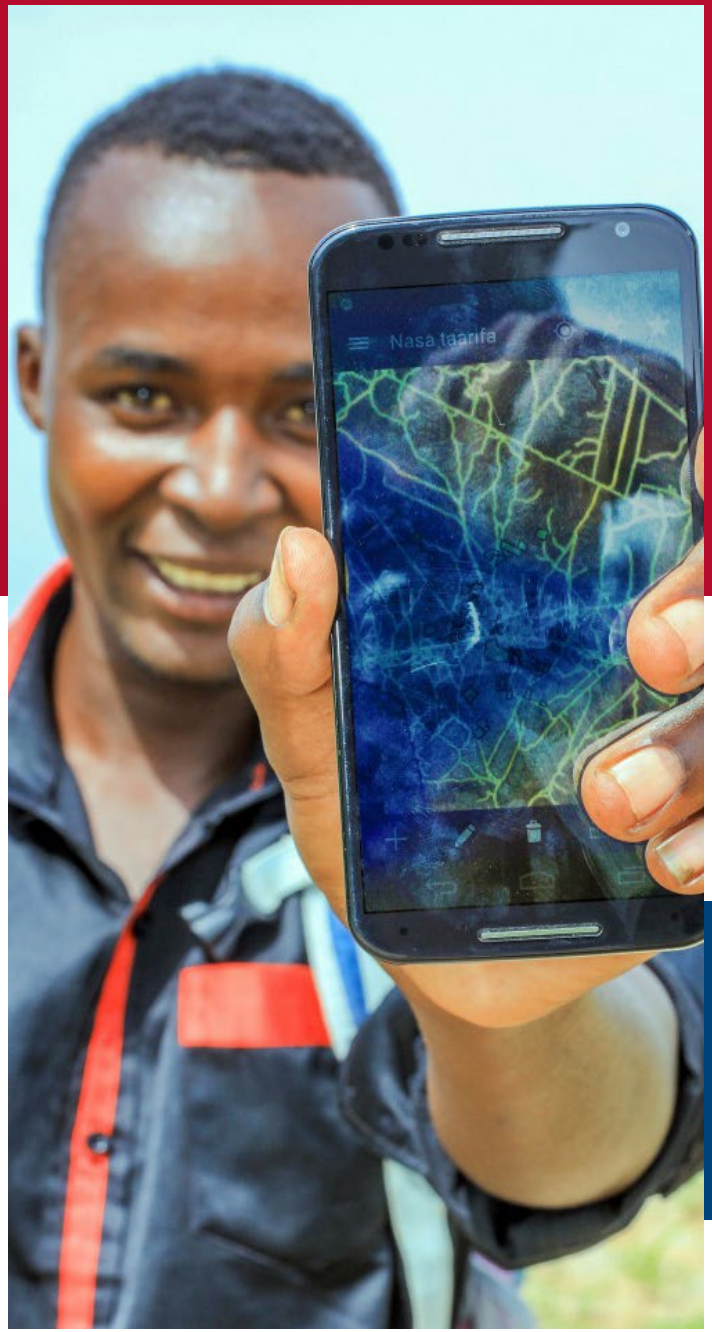


Photo Credit: USAID/Zambia

TECHNOLOGY DIVISION HIGHLIGHTS

Launch of the First-Ever USAID Geospatial Strategy

In November 2023, USAID released its first-ever Geospatial Strategy, aimed at leveraging the power of geospatial data and technology to target the delivery of international programs.

"We have seen **the power of geospatial technology** to make USAID's humanitarian and development assistance more effective – from creating interactive maps and dashboards to inform disaster response to using satellite imagery to analyze climate impacts. Analysis of geospatial data allows us to uncover insights about local needs, make more informed decisions, and better target life-saving assistance."

- Administrator Samantha Power

The Strategy envisions a future in which a geographic approach empowers USAID and its partners to apply all forms of data more effectively to advance international development and humanitarian assistance outcomes. The approach brings together geospatial data, mapping technology, and analytical expertise to illuminate where development needs are concentrated, track where programs are currently being implemented, and measure the effectiveness of USAID's programs by geographic location.

The Geospatial Strategy will help expand USAID's access to geospatial data and tools; strengthen Agency capacity to use geospatial insights for decision-making; integrate geographic information into our policies and practices; and provide global leadership in applying geospatial solutions for development and humanitarian assistance.

Celebrating USAID's Digital Development Award Winners

USAID is working toward a future where digital technology promotes inclusive growth, fosters resilient and democratic societies, and empowers everyone, including the most vulnerable and marginalized – a true vision of inclusive development for a digital age. In an effort to recognize colleagues and partners that are collaborating with countries and communities to work toward sustainable growth and resilience, the Technology Division announced the last round of the Digital Development Awards (the Digis) in November 2022.

The 2022 winners showcase USAID's work in digital development around the world:

- **USAID/Colombia:** Rural Finance Initiative, implemented by Chemonics, for developing a mobile phone-based system for rural smallholders and urban-based, low-income groups to conduct real-time, peer-to-peer financial transactions.
- **USAID/Regional Development Mission for Asia:** Digital Asia Accelerator, implemented by DAI's Digital Frontiers and part of the Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership, for educating and training businesses and individuals, especially youth, on digital safety and cybersecurity best practices in Southeast Asia and Mongolia.
- **USAID/Zambia:** U.S. President's Malaria Initiative VectorLink, implemented by Abt Associates, for deploying a suite of digital tools to support map-based data collection, monitoring, and capacity building to improve malaria control programs at the sub-district level.
- **USAID/Georgia:** Economic Security Program, implemented by DAI, for providing training on information and communications technology to the country's workforce and connecting local artisans to online markets.
- **USAID/Nepal:** Building Hope Along the Karnali River Basin, implemented by MercyCorps Nepal, for customizing mobile phone applications and interactive voice responses to manage, monitor, and educate remote farmers and low-income individuals about cash and voucher assistance programs during emergencies.

The application for the 2023 Digi Awards was launched in mid-2023 and the next round of winners will be announced in early 2024, so make sure to stay tuned for updates.

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Photo Credit: Valerie Caldas, Suaahara

CATALYZING OPEN, SECURE, AND INCLUSIVE DIGITAL ECOSYSTEMS

Closing the Gender Digital Divide

Announced by the White House in March 2023, the Women in the Digital Economy Fund (WiDEF) is a joint effort between USAID and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to accelerate progress on closing the gender digital divide. WiDEF will accelerate progress to close the gender digital divide by scaling evidence-based, proven solutions, including women-led solutions that improve women's livelihoods, economic security, and resilience. This work will focus on programs that support digital access and affordability; relevant products and tools; digital literacy and skills; online safety and security; and sex-disaggregated data and research.

Building on the success of the Fund, in response to the G20's historic commitment in the New Delhi Leaders' Declaration to halve the digital gender gap by 2030, USAID launched the Women in the Digital Economy Initiative in September 2023. The Initiative brings together governments, private sector companies, foundations, civil society, and multilateral organizations to accelerate progress towards the closure of the gender digital divide.

Launching the Asia Open Radio Access Network (Open RAN) Academy

In July of 2022, with our partners in USAID's Bureau for Asia, the Technology Division launched the Asia Open RAN Academy ("the Academy"). The Academy is an alliance of academic, government, and industry stakeholders in the Philippines and the broader Indo-Pacific region that share a common objective to advance an open, interoperable, reliable, and secure Internet and vibrant digital ecosystem through increased cooperation, competition, and choice.

The Academy seeks to accelerate the adoption of open radio access network architecture (open RAN), an innovative approach to

network design that is modular, interoperable, and offers competitive choices of secure equipment, by operators in developing countries. The Academy has developed a curriculum and facilitated technical exchanges in the Indo-Pacific region between operators so as to train the workforce needed to test and deploy open network architectures. The curriculum, with both foundational and technical courses, was rolled out across five universities in the Philippines and, subsequently, across a consortium of learning institutions throughout the region. To date, the Academy has trained over 15,000 engineers and policymakers in the Philippines on open RAN Technology.

In addition to launching the Asia Open RAN Academy, USAID's Digital Inclusion team also launched three open RAN pilots in rural villages in Peru. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Open RAN Initiative continues to collaborate with local operators to design country-specific open RAN programming and build bilateral relationships with partner countries, initiatives, and donors.

Supporting Digital Public Goods

The use of digital platforms by governments is essential in today's digitally-connected world, yet they can be expensive to build, license, and maintain. The costs of such platforms can be prohibitive for low-resource societies. Digital public goods can address this gap: they are open-source technologies and approaches designed for the public good. They are vital for enabling countries to build transformative digital public infrastructure, solutions, and services that meet their contextual needs, improve engagement with citizens, and enable collaboration

Photo Credit: Riaz Jahanpour for USAID

and cooperation across countries.

The Technology Division led efforts to create the Digital Public Goods Charter (the DPG Charter), an agreement between governments, donors, nongovernmental organizations, academia, and the private sector to invest in open digital platforms, policy frameworks to protect individuals' data and privacy, and digital infrastructure for all. Through a coordinated effort, mobilizing high level stakeholder commitments, investments, and actions, the Charter will advance the use of digital public goods, enabling countries to build safe, trusted and inclusive digital public infrastructure at scale, improving outcomes for people.

The charter represents a commitment to advancing the use of digital public goods as countries build safe, trusted, and inclusive digital public infrastructure at scale. When done well, digitalization allows governments and the private sector to develop and deliver solutions that address urgent global challenges such as hunger, pandemics and climate change. The charter is an opportunity to showcase how the public and private sectors, including the United Nations, can work together to accelerate the ability of countries to use technology to attain the Sustainable Development Goals.

In addition to endorsing the DPG Charter, USAID also demonstrated its commitment to supporting digital public goods and digital public infrastructure approaches by joining the Digital Public Goods Alliance (DPGA) in June 2022 and announcing an intent to join the GovStack initiative in December 2022. Founded to help achieve the 2021 vision set forth in the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General's Roadmap to Digital Cooperation, the DPGA is 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. GovStack is a multi-stakeholder initiative founded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, the Government of Estonia, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the Digital Impact Alliance to support governments to digitally transform their services and processes. The Government of Ukraine also joined GovStack in 2022.

Photo Credit: Jack Gordon for USAID

Addressing Gender Inequity in Artificial Intelligence

As the use of AI proliferates, more instances of the inequitable design, use, and impact of AI-enabled tools in developing countries are coming to light. Many of these tools and approaches can generate inequitable outcomes across genders due to bias embedded in AI technology through data collection, model design, or end-use applications. These tools often pose the greatest risk of harm and missed opportunities to those who have historically been subject to bias.

To source approaches to prevent and respond to gender inequity in AI, the Technology Division's Emerging Technologies team launched the Equitable AI Challenge in 2021. In 2022, we announced the five winners of the Challenge:

The **Accion Center for Financial Inclusion,** a United States-based international nonprofit with extensive expertise in finance and fintech, developed a due diligence tool to help investors make better, gender-informed decisions about where and how to invest their money and establish means to verify whether any algorithmic tools perpetuate women's historical marginalization within the financial sector in developing countries.

The **University of Lagos** and **Nivi** partnership created a gender-aware auditing tool within their existing health chatbot technology deployment in Nigeria. The tool evaluates customer interactions with the chatbot (in English and Hausa), along with how the bot interprets each conversation and then responds.

The **University of California-Berkeley, Northwestern University, University of Houston,** and **RappiCard Mexico** developed an AI model that differentiates credit worthiness between men and women, aiming to increase fairness and credit scoring efficiency.

Itad, Women in Digital Transformation, PIT Policy Lab, and **Athena Infonomics** worked with the Mexican State of Guanajuato's Ministry of Education on a pioneering initiative called Educational Paths, to identify and mitigate gender bias within Guanajuato's new AI-based early alert system that identifies higher education students who are at-risk of failing or dropping out of school.

William and Mary University's AidData and **the Ghana Center for Democratic Development** evaluated the impact of gender bias on poverty estimates generated using AI and USAID's Demographic and Health Surveys data to inform AI developers, researchers, development organizations, and decision-makers who produce or use poverty estimates.

Through the Challenge, USAID generated evidence, synthesized lessons, and built a community to support a diverse and more inclusive digital ecosystem where everyone can benefit from emerging technologies like AI and most importantly ensure that no demographic group is harmed by these technologies. You can keep up with the Equitable AI Community of Practice by joining the LinkedIn Group.

Photo Credit: ifc.org

Photo Credit: Riaz Jahanpour for USAID

Unlocking Economic Growth through Smart ICT Policy

Promoting American Approaches to ICT Policy and Regulation, or ProICT, is an activity under the Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership, which provides technical assistance and capacity-building through embedded experts to country governments to establish ICT policy and regulatory frameworks that enable inclusive digital economies. In Liberia, Colombia, Peru, and the Philippines, the program is contributing to legal, regulatory, and market level changes that are paving the way for more open, inclusive, and secure digital ecosystems and unlocking new opportunities for trade and business growth.

- In Liberia, ProICT technical experts identified strategic ways that the Liberia Telecommunications Authority (LTA) could strengthen connectivity efforts, develop the nation's fiber backbone, and maximize the use of Africa Coast to Europe (ACE) submarine cables to promote competition and expand internet coverage. As a direct result of the ProICT engagement, the LTA successfully negotiated an amendment to its national backbone licensing agreement with CSquared that authorizes the deployment of fiber optic cables anywhere in the country, including rural areas. This clears the way for new broadband infrastructure that is expected to connect up to 1 million people with high speed internet.
- In **Colombia**, a ProICT consulting team worked closely with the national radio spectrum management authority (Agencia Nacional del Espectro - ANE) to help strengthen that agency's understanding and application of the concept of social welfare as a critical aspect of spectrum license assignments. This engagement was prompted by a legislative mandate designed to protect the public interest and to emphasize digital inclusion by directing ANE to conduct detailed analysis on these social welfare effects as part of the spectrum assignment process. After conducting a number of sessions and circulating deliverables that outlined the topic, the team worked with the regulatory staff to develop a techno-economic analytical tool that the staff can use in upcoming auctions across a wide range of local geographies and frequency spectrums. At the conclusion of the engagement, ProICT was asked to provide follow-on support to the Colombian Ministry of Information Technologies and Communications (MinTIC) in designing a competitive auction framework for the 5G auctions which started in December 2023.

Promoting Consumer Protection and Competition in Africa's Digital Economy

In October 2022, USAID announced a partnership with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to launch a new initiative to help protect consumers and increase competition in countries across Africa. This initiative strengthens legal and regulatory frameworks and the institutional capacity to ensure that the benefits of the digital economy are not undermined by anti-competitive, unfair, or deceptive practices.

Robust frameworks for competition and consumer protection are indispensable foundations for partner countries seeking to promote inclusive economic growth, sustain economic competitiveness, promote gender equality and equity, support resilient democratic institutions, and strengthen the rule of law.

This initiative advances USAID priorities outlined in the USAID Digital Strategy to strengthen inclusive, open, and secure digital ecosystems in countries where USAID works. This initiative also aligns with and advances broader U.S. Government strategies, programs, and initiatives, including the Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership (DCCP), Declaration for the Future of the Internet, U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa, the Initiative on Digital Transformation with Africa, and National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality.

Investigating Country-level Artificial Intelligence Policies

Governments across Southeast Asia (SEA) are increasingly recognizing the importance of digital technologies to propel economic growth, address social challenges, and strengthen public governance. Specifically, many are turning to algorithmic platforms, systems, and technologies to drive economic recovery, sustain economic growth, and make their digital economies more dynamic and competitive. Despite these promising advancements, a number of challenges remain for SEA.

To support SEA economies as they develop and drive responsible AI, USAID--in collaboration with Access Partnership--is examining the unique dynamics that are shaping AI ecosystems within and across the region. This includes the government policies and regulations that enable the rise of data-driven technologies; the principles and frameworks ensuring that AI is developed and leveraged in a fair, ethical, unbiased, and sustainable manner; the businesses and start-ups that are driving investment and innovation across key sectors and industries; and the academics and not-for-profit organizations that are studying the many ways in which AI can have a real, meaningful impact on people's abilities and communities' livelihoods.

Photo Credit: Bobby Neptune for USAID

Photo Credit: USAID

BUILDING USAID CAPACITY

Applying a Geographic Approach to Development

Over the past two years, the USAID GeoCenter also expanded its capacity to provide remote sensing services to the Agency. USAID is now a principal member of the Civilian Applications Committee and this membership will increase access to more satellite data assets. Recent examples of how the GeoCenter and our implementing partners have used satellite imagery include locating refugee settlements, removing legacy land mines, assessing forest loss, monitoring installation of solar panels for electricity generation, and evaluating the long-term impact of a large soil rehabilitation project. In total, imagery obtained through the GeoCenter has been used in more than 126 projects across 54 countries.

Training Staff on Responsible Digital Development

In 2022 and 2023, the Technology Division continued to support USAID workforce development and responsible digital development by conducting 44 training sessions, reaching over 1,200 staff members. We resumed in-person Digital Development Training, a five-day foundational course integrating digital tools and helping staff better understand how to strengthen digital ecosystems throughout USAID programming. Training was held at the Regional Development Mission for Asia and USAID/Zambia,

USAID/El Salvador, and Washington, DC, reaching 98 staff across 30 Missions and operating units.

At the same time, we socialized the basic tenets of responsible digital development with 400 USAID staff and implementing partners through online workshops on the Principles for Digital Development and released self-paced courses on digital principles in agriculture, health, election and political processes, and economic growth. We developed a Digital How-to Note for USAID staff to use when designing activities. In 2023, 433 USAID staff tuned in to a webinar to learn about the How-to Note and hear advice from Mission-based staff who design digital interventions.

The Division also hosted eight Responsible AI Training sessions for USAID staff in 2022 and 2023, reaching over 300 colleagues across 30 operating units, Missions, and partners. Responsible AI Trainings unpack the opportunities and challenges posed by AI for USAID's work, and offer resources and guidance for those interested in further exploring responsible implementation of this technology.

Empowering the Next Generation of Digital Development Professionals

At USAID, we recognize the importance of young leaders in achieving our development goals.

Professionals in the field of international development need to acquire skills and knowledge to successfully embrace the opportunities that digitalization brings and employ these skills to address global challenges. At the same time, they need to discern and manage the threats associated with technology, including cyberattacks, data privacy breaches, bias and discrimination, the rise in disinformation and misinformation, and the growing trend of digital authoritarianism worldwide. Currently, budget constraints, faculty composition, and the speed at which digital technologies change make it difficult for graduate programs to integrate digital courses and training into their curricula.

In recognition of this issue, USAID, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), and DAI created the Preparing International Development Professionals for the Digital Age brief to identify opportunities to overcome barriers to providing digital education. As a follow on to this activity, the Technology Division, in partnership with the Catholic University of America and Worcester Polytechnic Institute, hosted a Preparing International Development Professionals for the Digital Age workshop in October 2023. The day-long event included deep dives on artificial intelligence and the geopolitical considerations of technology competition and their implications for the development workforce. Participants represented a variety of stakeholders, including from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy, Georgetown University's School of Engineering, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, Ghana, National Association of Foreign Student Advisors, and Princeton University's School of International and Public Affairs. Among the significant takeaways were the importance of fostering interdisciplinary approaches within graduate programs to better equip future development professionals with the necessary digital skills, and the need for strategic investments to engage university leaders in recognizing the critical role of digital transformation in shaping the future of global development.

Elsewhere, the GeoCenter continued to support the YouthMappers program, which helps close the digital skills divide by training and engaging university students at over 380 institutions across 80 countries. YouthMappers have contributed more than 20 million edits to OpenStreetMap,

Photo Credit: YouthMappers

Photo Credit: YouthMappers

a web-based mapping platform that provides critical location data for the modern digital economy. For example, YouthMappers generated new mapping information to improve water management in Uganda, transportation networks in Malawi, and electrification in Sierra Leone. The YouthMappers Everywhere She Maps initiative also placed twenty-five women in internships last year, spanning private, government, and civil society organizations. In March, YouthMappers students from universities in Ghana attended the U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris' speech to youth leaders at the Black Star Gate in Accra. The White House Fact Sheet released during the Vice President's trip includes a new commitment that YouthMappers will make towards African development using satellite data and mapping technology.

And the Digital Societies and Governments team designed a Data Jam competition in November 2022 in partnership with USAID/Colombia and local universities to encourage students to use data and provide the Colombian government with policy change ideas. The competition culminated with awards to six winners. Three awardees received a total of $6,000 -- $3,000 for first place, $2,000 for second place, and $1,000 for third place -- from the Technology Division, and the Mission leveraged its Partners for Transparency (PfT) activity to grant $35,000 to three additional grantees. The grantees, who were chosen out of 347 participants, received funding from PfT to further develop their inventions. The winning prototypes were:

- A digital app for citizens to monitor the progress of public projects;
- An improved search engine for procurement processes carried out online;
- A search engine to identify the natural persons behind the companies contracted by the state to combat corruption;
- A search engine for citizens about the attendance, legislative actions, and voting records of congressional members;
- A trend analyzer and algorithm to detect fake news on X (formerly known as Twitter) and counter disinformation; and
- A mobile application that strengthens citizen participation and brings citizens closer to administrative entities.

The Data Jam was organized in close collaboration with the Government of Colombia's Ministry of ICT, and helped the government comply with country commitments to prevent and combat corruption by partnering with the Inter-American Open Data Program (PIDA).

Co-hosting the Global Digital Development Forum, the Frontiers of Digital Development Forum, and Roundtables with the Center for Strategic and International Studies

In April 2023, the USAID Technology Division co-hosted the annual Global Digital Development Forum (GDDF) with Chemonics, Deloitte, DAI, IBM, Google, RTI International, Save the Children, TechChange, and

the Interledger Foundation. The event reached 1,859 people across 123 countries. USAID Deputy Assistant Administrator Mark Meassick hosted a keynote discussion with representatives from IBM and Deloitte on the global state of play of digital transformation and how development actors can work together to for a positive digital future; Carrie Stokes, the Agency's Chief Geographer and GeoCenter Director, participated in a fireside chat with Microsoft's AI for Good Lab Director on harnessing AI and geospatial technologies to tackle global challenges; and Secretary-General Doreen Bogdan-Martin of the ITU and Dumitru Alaiba, Moldova's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economic Development and Digitalization led a keynote discussion on catalyzing sustainable digital transformation in practice. Other USAID staff participated through lightning talks on quantum computing, cybersecurity, and e-government; breakout sessions on machine learning, digital literacy, and digital public infrastructure; workshops on building open and participatory digital research, and more. Last year's event also featured an exclusive, in-person Tech Xperience, which included workshops on ChatGPT and the Principles for Digital Development and live demos from Meta, Google Earth Engine, Starlink, and Zipline. The keynotes are available on YouTube and the rest of the content is accessible via the online GDDF platform.

To complement the 2022 and 2023 GDDF, the team also co-hosted the first-ever Frontiers of Digital Development Forum (FDDF) in November 2022. At FDDF, we focused on cutting-edge technologies and critically examined their applications for international development. Over 700 people participated representing 55 countries and more than 60 organizations attended. The innovative hybrid format included watch parties in Tanzania, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan and Jordan led by FDDF Ambassadors who are community leaders and local tech entrepreneurs. Popular sessions included "Skepticism, Aspiration, and Progress: A Long Conversation on Frontier Tech and Digital Development," led by USAID Deputy Assistant Administrator Mark Meassick, workshops on AI perspectives from the Global South, and lightning talks on measuring gender-based violence in Latin America.

Last year, USAID also partnered with CSIS and DAI to host a series of workshops on digital transformation in low and middle-income countries. The roundtables brought together more than 100 participants across 63 organizations and 16 universities to discuss shared priorities in digital literacy and workforce development; government capacity and change management; policy-related topics such as data governance, privacy protection, and building public digital infrastructure; and the integration of digital in university curriculum.

Growing the Digital Development Executive Fellowship

The world is swiftly digitizing, and this transformation presents both challenges and opportunities for companies, governments, and civil society organizations to adapt, learn, and collaborate. How low- and middle-income countries adapt to this digital transformation will determine both the economic and social future of these countries. Growing open, inclusive, and secure digital ecosystems is the largest development problem facing these countries today. It is also one of the largest challenges for companies and the international non-profit sector.

At USAID, we recognize that this challenge can only be faced together, with governments, businesses, civil society organizations, and other partners working together to create open, inclusive, and secure digital ecosystems. USAID has developed the Digital Development Executive Fellowship as part of the larger USAID Digital Strategy. The Fellowship represents an opportunity for the Agency and private sector partners to

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collaborate and leverage one another's unique resources, assets, and skill-sets, and to learn from one another to better address global humanitarian and development challenges — while also working towards a future where digital technology promotes inclusive growth, fosters resilient and democratic societies, and empowers all, including the most vulnerable.

The Fellowship is a three-year professional development tour in which a career USAID Foreign Service Officer focuses on the intersection of technology, cybersecurity, and digital development:

- The first year is spent rotating through teams in the Technology Division of USAID's Innovation, Technology, and Research Hub to develop a foundation in the Agency's digital development work.
- The second year includes an externship with a premiere technology or cybersecurity company or organization, where the Fellow will serve as a member of an executive-level team.
- The third year is spent incorporating knowledge and skills acquired from the previous two years into the Agency's development practice.

Fellows are highly trained and experienced mid-career Foreign Service Officers who represent the United States at home and abroad. Fellows have served USAID for at least 10 years overseas and have experience managing complex, multi-million-dollar portfolios that require extensive negotiation and consultation with partner governments, international donor organizations, the private sector, and civil society, among others. They are international affairs experts with deep technical skills in one of the following sectors: Agriculture and Food Security; Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance; Economic Growth and Trade; Education; Environment, Energy, and Infrastructure; Global Health; or Humanitarian Assistance. Each Fellow is a rising leader at USAID and are selected through a rigorous application process.

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ACCELERATING USAID PROGRAMMING

Engaging Responsibly with Artificial Intelligence in USAID Programming

AI technologies are increasingly prevalent in our lives—from digital voice assistants to personalized advertising and entertainment or advanced medical diagnostics. AI's projected impact on the global economy by 2030 is equivalent to an increase in global GDP by 16 percent, and it is predicted to play a role in addressing each of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals. As AI proliferates across a broad range of markets, sectors, and country contexts, so too will AI's benefits, but also misuse and AI-related harms. For example, increasing use of AI without deliberate efforts to think about inclusion and safety can lead to entrenching existing social prejudices and worsening inequality. Development actors have a responsibility to ensure that appropriate measures are taken to promote AI's positive potential and to protect those most at risk of being negatively impacted by its use. To underscore this responsibility and provide key recommendations on the promotion of responsible AI, USAID released the first-ever AI Action Plan in 2022. As part of operationalizing the Action Plan, USAID also contributed to the USG-wide Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights, which outlines five principles that should guide the design, use, and deployment of automated systems. USAID also contributed to the White House's Executive Order on Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy AI, released in October 2023, through which we are tasked with two actions to build and strengthen partnerships and ensure that the global AI conversation reflects international development issues and priorities. Through dialogues with experts and stakeholders from USAID partner countries, we will work with interagency colleagues to develop a *Global Development Playbook* to support the National Institute for Standards and Technology's AI Risk Management Framework, as well as a *Global AI Research Agenda*.

As the leading international development donor, USAID must continue to prioritize the rights-driven, responsible use of digital technologies and data in our work. When we turn to AI, we must commit to do so with full appreciation of the technology's potential for benefit and harm. For AI, this includes constructing appropriate

safeguards, investing in relevant talent, and understanding how AI is connected with the broader digital ecosystem and the different stakeholders therein. It also includes working closely with digital rights partners and experts to help determine when AI technologies should not be used in our work — and when the rights-infringing use of AI by others may merit USAID lines of effort to address potential harms. Our approach is, and must continue to be, aligned with the two mutually reinforcing objectives of the USAID Digital Strategy: promoting the responsible use of digital technology for development, and working toward more inclusive, open, and secure digital ecosystems.

Working with Digital Development Advisors to Drive the Agency Forward

The Digital Strategy calls on Missions and Washington-based operating units to establish a Digital Development Advisor (DDA) position to serve as the experts on digital ecosystems and provide guidance on anticipating, recognizing, and reacting to changes and opportunities in these ecosystems. The DDAs are the Mission's primary resource and support for understanding the partner nation's digital ecosystem, and helping Missions create open, secure, and inclusive digital development programming.

In USAID/Vietnam, the DDA manages several digital activities to integrate technology into USAID programming, and organizes training for Mission staff and partners on digital development topics. The work of the DDA has begun to make an impact in Vietnam through the launch of the National Public Service Program (NPSP), a single sign-on portal for all public services, which is a major milestone in e-government development efforts. By supporting deployment of NPSP, USAID is helping enable Vietnam's transition from analog to digital, which expands access to digitized systems, increases transparency and accountability of government officials, and saves time and cost for citizens and businesses.

In USAID/Ukraine, the DDA has been instrumental in USAID's support of Ukraine's digital transformation through the management of the Transparency and Accountability in Public Administration and Services activity, which supports Ukrainian citizens and the Government of Ukraine to reduce or eliminate corruption in key public administration functions and services. The project introduced e-procurement for the Ukrainian government, instituted open data standards for government agencies, and digitalized certain public-facing and intra-governmental services, including supporting the development of the Diia ecosystem. Diia, a mobile app and web portal for government services, allows Ukrainians access to 120 government services and the ability to engage with their government online in a one-stop-shop—from applying for benefits and government programs to registering a business. Ukrainians in war-affected regions are using this e-government app to receive social support, while displaced Ukrainians are using the app to access aid and other critical services.

This October, USAID/Ukraine also established a new Digitalization Unit within the Office of Democracy and Governance (ODG). The Digitalization Unit will function as a hub for Mission-wide digital services, consolidate key Mission roles and programs focused on digital and cyber issues, and work across offices to institutionalize the Mission's partnership with the Government of Ukraine to provide best-in-class

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digital services to increase transparency and economic efficiency, support exports, reduce corruption, leverage the private sector, and further integrate Ukraine into Europe. This stand-alone team within ODG will be led by a U.S. Direct Hire in close collaboration with the Mission DDA, with the support of two Project Management Specialists.

Empowering USAID Missions to Protect Partners from Cyber Threats through Digital APEX

In 2022, Digital APEX completed engagements with five Missions and continues to support USAID portfolios in seven other countries. Since its inception, Digital APEX's work has supported over 348 organizations through digital security training, provided in-depth cybersecurity assessments to over 90 organizations, and trained (including the training of trainers) over 2,674 individuals. During the past year, APEX provided cyber-hygiene training for over 1,000 partner staff in 51 different sessions. Digital security assessments identified 2,542 distinct cyber vulnerabilities across teams assessed.

USAID also partnered with Okta and NetHope to establish a Humanitarian Information Sharing and Analysis Center (ISAC), a pioneering step for improving cyber awareness and cooperation in the humanitarian sector. The ISAC brings together cybersecurity leaders from USAID, the private sector, and the nonprofit sector to provide training, tools, and a platform for coordination to help humanitarian organizations identify, analyze, and mitigate cybersecurity risks.

As the central platform that enables governments, funders, technology companies and other trusted providers to support the spectrum of information security needs of nonprofit agencies and the world's most vulnerable communities, the ISAC is a fundamental step forward to confidently advance the nonprofit sector on the journey to digital resilience.

The ISAC design is optimized to meet the maturity state of each nonprofit's primary focus area and it factors in geopolitics, digital ethics, and disinformation risks. This last is crucial as nonprofits work in the world's most complex situations and must contend with conflict, volatile politics and legal frameworks, and fast-shifting on-the-ground realities as they work to save people and the planet.

Photo Credit: USAID

ENGAGING WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Utilizing Blended Finance to Expand Internet Connectivity and Digital Financial Services

Digital Invest is a blended finance program that seeks to mobilize private capital for digital finance and internet service providers serving traditionally excluded consumer populations. Digital Invest provides technical assistance, fund capitalization support, and direct portfolio engagement to help financiers support earlier-stage, higher-risk projects and technology startups with clear development impact.

In June 2022, President Biden announced that Digital Invest would be a flagship project of the Administration's Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII). With funds from the DCCP and several USAID operating units, the Digital Invest program has launched thirteen public-private partnerships that strengthen open, interoperable, reliable, inclusive, and secure digital ecosystems in emerging markets.

To date, Digital Invest partners have mobilized over $275 million in investment capital for digital finance and internet service providers, and have invested in over 60 technology companies across 38 markets.

Partnering with Mastercard to Expand Digital and Financial Inclusion for Women

In partnership with Mastercard, the USAID Digital Finance team continued to promote women's economic empowerment through Start Path Empodera and Project Kirana.

Start Path Empodera, co-managed by USAID and Mastercard, is a business accelerator for women-led technology startups across Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador. The program, which ended in mid-2023, has provided 40 women-led companies with training, mentorship, technical guidance, and financing support. 80 percent of the participating women entrepreneurs saw a moderate to substantial increase in business connections, including new clients and potential investors, and 52 percent attracted additional investments, many directly resulting from their participation in the program. Additionally, more than 50 percent of the businesses involved in the program were profitable and, in total, the supported companies amassed over 350,700 new customers. The entrepreneurs even created their own network for women in fintech, called *Mujeres en Fintech,* which will continue independently of the project.

Project Kirana works to increase revenue streams, expand digital financial inclusion, boost digital literacy, and encourage digital payments adoption of small kirana shops that are owned or operated by women in India. To date, the program has supported over 2,500 women micro entrepreneurs and more than 80% of those entrepreneurs reported an increase in business revenue.

Creating More Responsible and Ethical Digital and Data Ecosystems with Mozilla Foundation

The Emerging Technologies team is supporting the Mozilla Foundation to expand its Responsible Computing Challenge (RCC) outside the United States, into Kenya, India, and beyond. Against the backdrop of the increasing power that technologists wield in all aspects of our life, this Challenge is built on the recognition that the technology industry must shift toward more responsible, risk-aware practices. The RCC aims to shift existing curricula of computer science, data science, software engineering, and related computing fields towards a more ethically rooted, interdisciplinary, and human-impact centered pedagogy. Through this challenge process, USAID and Mozilla are identifying and working collaboratively with computing training institutions in USAID partner countries to adapt existing curricula, and ultimately instill a much needed ethical shift in the computing industry. In 2023, we announced winners of the RCC in Kenya and launched the Challenge in India. Through additional support from the Digital Transformation with Africa initiative, we look forward to 2024, when we will add more countries, including Ghana and South Africa, to this work. To continue to scale worldwide, the team will also work with Mozilla to establish a Responsible Computing Institute.

Also in partnership with the Mozilla Foundation, the Digital Societies and Governments team has launched the Strengthening Data Ecosystems (SDE) activity to support the coordinated use of data in the education sector for better education outcomes. In India in particular, the right to primary education coupled with post-pandemic increases in the use of EdTech, have provided new challenges for education stakeholders related to data collection, interoperability and analysis. SDE places particular emphasis on the data literacy of school-based personnel in utilizing data to measure learning benchmarks and trajectories, as well as on engaging students who tend to be the most directly impacted, yet least consulted in the collection and use of their data. The goal of the project is therefore to support transparency, as well as the development of strategic and procedural frameworks through the development of toolkits that enhance protocols for responsible data governance, stewardship and decision-making in India's public schools.

The SDE activity stood up five working groups to explore actionable solutions for improving data governance, including:

- Developing a comprehensive guide and website to help government officials and functionaries navigate the complexities of using educational data for planning, quality improvement, and creating a culture of "data-mindedness,";
- Using comics to humanize data workers and capture issues such as overburdening and the challenges of centralization in data management, which are often overlooked in technical discussions about data;
- Piloting a Data Assessment Tool in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh to evaluate educational data, including learning outcomes, teaching practices, and parental engagement;
- Improving data management in schools utilizing the Government of India's Unified District Information System for Education, by addressing limits on internet access, database interoperability, informed consent by data subjects, and introducing a school-based scoring system on data utility; and


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- Creating a data-centric educational platform for students and teachers in Kerala to foster deeper understanding and critique of responsible data practices like data empowerment and minimization, particularly in the vernacular language.

The Working Group projects, which were presented at the SDE Summit in India in December 2023, will serve as key examples of how data ecosystems can be strengthened across sectors and countries where USAID works.

Serving as a Member of the Better Than Cash Alliance

USAID continues to support the Better than Cash Alliance (BTCA), a partnership of 80 governments, companies, and international organizations, that accelerates the transition from cash to responsible digital payments to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. BTCA works by providing advisory services on digital financial services, based on members' priorities, commissioning and sharing research on responsible digital economy practices, and conducting digital payments policy advocacy at national, regional and global level. In total, BTCA's efforts have benefited more than 7.5 million clients through digital financial services. Much of this work is driven by households in Colombia and Rwanda receiving cash transfers and pension payments digitally, workers in Bangladesh receiving COVID relief payments digitally, and Indian entrepreneurs using digital tools and payments. Additionally, through BTCA's advocacy work, five legal instruments that strengthen the digital economy were adopted by governments in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Côte d'Ivoire, Philippines, and Burkina Faso.

Empowering Women Around the World Through Expanded Access to the Internet

The USAID/Microsoft Airband Initiative aims to address the gender digital divide by bringing meaningful connectivity and Internet access to women in remote areas of the world. This public-private partnership between USAID and Microsoft creates sustainable and gender-equitable connectivity offerings that unlock the power of the internet to improve healthcare, spur business growth, and empower youth, women, and other underserved groups. The initiative has already connected 559,290 people to the internet in 2023, providing women around the world with access to economic resources, workforce development programs, and more.

The USAID/Microsoft Airband Initiative partnered with Bluetown, an Internet service provider in Ghana, to bring connectivity to three rural areas—Adonkwanta, Akode, and Supreso—and two semi-urban areas—Kyebi and Koforidua. Through this partnership, over 16,400 people across Ghana now have access to the internet. So, how has this internet access helped change lives?

In rural areas, Bluetown partnered with The Hunger Project (THP), a global, non-profit organization focused on building community-based mobilization programs through a strategy of targeting areas called "Epicenters" and helping them transition into self-sufficient communities. Using these established Epicenters, Bluetown introduced Community Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Centers (CICs), which are public spaces where community members can access the Internet, computers, and workspaces, and receive ICT support from trained local representatives at each center. Members gain access to educational digital content at no cost through the THP Portal, a resource hosted by the Bluetown Local Cloud that contains information on health, nutrition, farming, financial management, and women's reproductive and legal rights. The Bluetown model also offers lease-to-own mobile phone purchase plans, allowing women and girls to fully own the devices in six to twelve months and access the Internet from their homes.

Similarly in semi-urban areas, Bluetown partnered with the Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communication to establish CICs. The women in these areas are mostly recent college graduates, entrepreneurs, and business owners who have prior digital knowledge, but want to learn to use digital tools to advance their job prospects and economic opportunities. The project conducted a series of workshops on employment, job seeking, digital marketing, and business management to encourage women to fully participate in the digital economy and explore new avenues to earn an income. These workshops were designed and delivered with local partners and subject matter experts, including the Girls in Excellence Movement, an organization that focuses on empowering girls by providing trainings in STEM; Circumspecte, an African digital platform and development consultancy; and JidiTrust, an organization focused on facilitating the growth of small businesses in Africa.

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LOOKING AHEAD

As you can see, last year was an incredibly busy year for our Division. However, there is always more work to be done. So, what's next?

In the coming months, we will begin to implement USAID's first-ever Geospatial Strategy. Using an approach that brings together geospatial data, mapping technology, and analytical expertise to illuminate where development needs are concentrated, where development programs are implemented, and the effectiveness of our programs by geographic location. The Strategy will guide the Agency in applying a geographic approach to help target and prioritize placement of our international programs and improve outcomes.

In partnership with governments, donors, non-governmental organizations, academia, and the private sector, we will advance access to digital public goods through the USAID-endorsed Digital Public Goods Charter, which will empower people and communities, spark private sector innovation, and facilitate cross-border collaboration to address urgent global challenges such as hunger, pandemics and climate change. We will also continue to collaborate with Ukraine's Ministry of Digital Transformation to model their digital public infrastructure in partner countries, including the award-winning digital government platform Diia, and support Ukraine's efforts to make Diia open source.

Through programs such as Digital Invest, which mobilizes private capital for digital connectivity infrastructure and digital financial services that strengthen open, interoperable, reliable, inclusive, and secure digital ecosystems in emerging markets, we will reduce the digital divide by serving traditionally excluded communities. Our Digital Invest partners are supporting the growth of resilient and secure digital ecosystems in developing countries by establishing an open-access fiber backbone network in Liberia to bring Internet access to one million people, using financial technology to improve financial well-being across underserved populations in Egypt, empowering tech entrepreneurs to drive access to affordable and responsible financial and digital health services across South and Southeast Asia, and so much more.

As a component of USAID's Policy Framework, the Agency will transition from its five-year Digital Strategy to a ten-year Digital Policy. This all-of-Agency effort will establish norms and expectations for USAID's continued expansion of both internal and external digital development activities. The Digital Policy, which will be completed in late 2024, will serve as a guiding document for USAID staff to reference when including digital development activities into all appropriate USAID projects and programming.

Finally, in coordination with USAID Missions around the world, we will continue to expand the Agency's network of Digital Development Advisors. These advisors serve as their Mission's primary resource for responsibly integrating digital technologies in their development and humanitarian assistance programming and guiding investments and partnerships that support open, secure, and inclusive digital ecosystems. In the coming year, we look forward to adding six new DDAs.

Our commitment to making digital development more accessible, equitable, and responsive to the needs of every individual, including the most marginalized and vulnerable, remains steadfast, but we need your support.

Every single one of us has a responsibility to help shape our digital future and ensure that it is a force for good. Together, we can harness the power of digital technology to build a brighter world, one that allows for inclusive growth, fosters resilient and democratic societies, and guarantees security, dignity, human rights, and justice for everyone, everywhere.

LEARN MORE

Have questions or want more information on the latest digital development tools and programs? Stay in touch to learn more about our latest projects, resources, and updates:

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