



DIRECCT

Digital REsponse Connecting CiTizens



PRESS KIT

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DIRECCT

The Covid-19 crisis has shown that digital services can reduce the impact of pandemics and crises for citizens, patients, students and businesses: staying connected with institutions and partners is an effective response to crises.

Aware of the importance of digital technologies for health and socio-economic response, the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OEACP) and the European Union have launched an ambitious programme: the DIRECCT - Digital REsponse Connecting CiTizens Programme. The DIRECCT programme supports the connectivity and digitalisation of health, education and small business actors to better cope with current and future shocks.

Funded by the EU, it is jointly implemented by Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and Enabel, the Belgian development agency. The 15.4 million euro programme is managed by AFD

Digital to build health and socio-economic resilience

Health, education and the economy are three fundamental pillars of development and well-being for people in every country. The crisis has weakened them, all over the world. Although the responses of countries in the ACP regions have been rapid and effective, the impact of the pandemic has disrupted these sectors, mainly affecting the most vulnerable populations.



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THE CHALLENGES OF CONNECTIVITY AND DIGITAL SERVICES



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In 2019, only 47% of households in developing countries were connected. Investments in digital infrastructure in recent years have improved overall connectivity but are not sufficient to meet the needs of small or fragile markets and to fully cover rural areas. On the other hand, where networks are available, especially for professionals in health, education and small and medium-sized enterprises, the lack of computers, equipment and the price of services limit access to the Internet.

THE COMPANIES

Weakened by the restriction of the circulation of goods and merchandise, entrepreneurs have seen their trade fall and have weakened the weakest, particularly the Micro, Medium and Small Enterprises (MMPE): the difficulty of appropriating digital tools by economic actors are recurrent problems that the COVID crisis has highlighted by causing a sharp slowdown in economic activity in the ACP zone and the impoverishment of populations.

EDUCATION

Worldwide, an estimated 1.25 billion learners have been affected by the pandemic. Away from their study centres, students and teachers have lost the daily interaction that creates the link and quality of education and, in fact, several months of classes have been lost. Each day, each week of school closure implies a massive loss in the development of human capital with important long-term economic and social implications.

HEALTH

Isolated and often ill-equipped, community health centres suffered more than they coped with the pandemic, in the absence of easy and regular communication with central institutions. With limited numerical resources, national and regional public health agencies and laboratories have had to deal, year in and year out, with imperfect data on the evolution of the epidemic, even though this information guides the urgent responses of health institutions and the decision-making of public authorities.

DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT, A NEW EUROPEAN AMBITION

The DIRECCT programme is a result of this new ambition, intervening in the extension of connectivity and digital services in three sectors:

HEALTH

the development of digital technology should make it possible to better monitor epidemics. For example, COVID 19 highlighted the urgent need to promote the exchange of important and sensitive data in order to monitor the epidemiological situation in countries and allow effective coordination at regional level. For health centres, digital technology should also be a tool for opening up isolated health centres: establishing connectivity and access to digital services will improve the quality of care (electronic patient records, digital clinical guidelines, online consultations and referrals), and strengthen the management of health centres (accounting, automatic invoices).

EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

access to e-learning is urgent and indispensable to avoid losing one or more classes of students. Today, more than ever, technology must enable education and training to continue. Online education has moved from being an option or a privilege to being a necessity, and we are likely to see the emergence of models that combine face-to-face and online learning in the coming years.

SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES

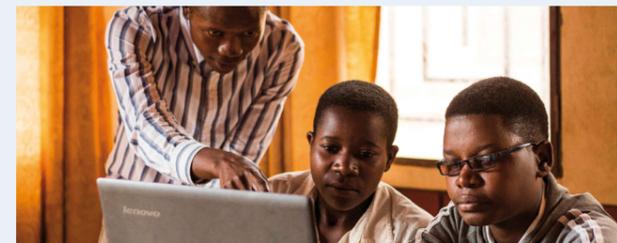
The programme's actions aim to promote access to the Internet for MSMEs, to encourage the appropriation of e-commerce, to promote digital tools and platforms to ensure business continuity in the context of an economic slowdown. The most disadvantaged populations will be particularly targeted by the projects, especially women, to enable them to access new business opportunities.

CONNECTIVITY

Although the DIRECCT programme is not designed to structurally improve public broadband access, AFD and ENABEL are implementing complementary actions to improve connectivity for end-users and administrations, in particular for university networks, regional and national health institutions and to provide data on network coverage.



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The European Union is one of the largest international organisations implementing a concrete policy to bridge the digital divide by supporting projects for key sectors in ACP countries:

"The European Commission is working around the clock to address the coronavirus crisis. We are funding research, we are funding the development of vaccines, we are supporting businesses and people who are at risk of losing their jobs." Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, explains at the launch of the D4DHub digital platform (<https://eufordigital.eu>)

The EU has set itself a new ambition, one of whose priority objectives is to develop access to digital services and tools in developing countries. This is done through several levers, including

- Capacity building of all actors: public institutions, the private sector, development partners, designers and users.
- Encouraging partnerships between European and ACP public and private organisations, in particular with the planned creation of a "digital connectivity fund" and actions combining investments in Europe and cooperation actions.

Which digital to build with the DIRECCT programme?

Through these projects, the European Union wishes to clearly assert its vision of digital development through three guidelines:

Gender.

The digital divide is marker of gender inequality, and one of the cross-cutting objectives of the programme is to pay strong attention to digital access and use of services by women, in all three programme sectors.

A human-centred programme.

Digital technology is a tool that must be at the service of women and men, not the other way around... The services deployed must respect people and benefit all citizens equally. Great care will be taken to respect people's rights and privacy. An inclusive approach for vulnerable populations (young people, the elderly, people with disabilities, people in precarious situations, people living in rural areas) is necessary for the development of digital technologies.

Preparing for the future

Beyond the current crisis, 19 digital technologies are gradually transforming our economic, social and cultural exchanges. They are already important bridges between citizens from all over the world, they represent opportunities for commercial exchanges, indispensable tools for a large part of businesses and for the development of knowledge.

ALL PROJECTS

These projects are developed in more than 55 ACP countries and involve several dozen partners.

HEATH

✓ **In the Caribbean**, the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) is setting up a unified system for collecting and managing public health data in the countries of the Caribbean community. The aim is to standardise, store and make available to States health data, the current heterogeneity of which prevents a global and relevant analysis of the evolution of pandemics and the implementation of a coordinated response by Caribbean States.

✓ **In Senegal**, Oxfam will strengthen access to digital networks for health centres, especially those located in areas far from cities, whose lack of communication with decision-making centres has a strong impact on supply and information exchange.

✓ **11 African fablabs* in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal and Togo**, will be equipped with digital production machines and consumables to manufacture covid-19 protection, prevention and detection devices on site, as well as to train beneficiaries to use the machines. The project leader, RBS (Réseau Bretagne Solidaire) will work with its French-speaking partners and, through its intervention, the organisation promotes open and free access to health tools, as well as their design close to their recipients, notably hospitals in the South.

* Fablabs: a workshop that provides the public with tools for making objects with the help of computers.

✓ **In the Pacific, 22 members countries and territories of the Pacific Community (SPC)** will benefit from the project to strengthen their technical and human capacities. The project is being implemented by SPC through the Pacific Public Health Surveillance Network (PPHSN) with the aim to strengthen surveillance systems and capability across the Pacific Island countries and territories to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, as well as other emerging public health threats in the future.

✓ **In Senegal**, Enabel is intervening in the health sector by strengthening the connectivity of health centres in several isolated regions and the capacities of the health personnel in these centres, as well as by launching 3 prototype applications integrated in the national Health Senegal plan.

EDUCATION

✓ The project consists of supporting the National University of **Vanuatu** in developing its digital offer to prevent future health or environmental crises, notably by setting up digital infrastructures and developing e-learning course offers. Furthermore, the region is made up of many islands and, although the universities of the English-speaking South Pacific and French-speaking New Caledonia have pooled their resources, there is a lack of distance learning courses and training that will enable students to avoid major migrations.

✓ **In Burkina Faso and Benin**, innovative e-learning courses will be set up in partnership with the virtual university of Burkina Faso and the digital agency of Benin. This training operation, led by the Institute of Research for Development (IRD), aims to test an economic model for the production of e-learning that could be disseminated to other sub-Saharan countries.

✓ **In Haiti**, the main objective of the project is to facilitate access to culture, education and information for those who are far from it. Intervening in Haiti after the social, economic and environmental crises that the country has recently experienced, the project leader, Bibliothèques Sans Frontière (BSF) will train and equip local partners through the provision of libraries and access to educational networks. BSF thus pursues a double objective: to provide content and to strengthen the capacities of local actors.

✓ **In Niger, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda**, the Belgian cooperation programme Wehubit is implementing 5 projects in conjunction with DIRECCT. Wehubit supports education and teaching projects offering hybrid approaches (distance and face-to-face) particularly aimed at the most disadvantaged environments.

MICRO, SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

✓ **In Senegal**, Enabel will support 200 SMEs active in the green economy (agriculture, waste recycling, etc.) to follow a training programme on digital transformation.

✓ **In Senegal**, the Oxfam-led project works in rural areas, particularly with organisations run by women's groups. The aim is to set up several market access and payment systems as well as financing methods to enable these groups to continue their activities.

✓ **In Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Togo and Ghana, as well as in the 15 States of the Caribbean Community**, the project consists of supporting the digital transformation of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in order to facilitate the continuity of their activities during pandemics or other shocks. Expertise is in charge of the implementation of the project. It relies on the national chambers of commerce and will develop the project in 3 phases: identification of the needs of businesses, design of tools appropriate to their needs and their implementation through technical training of users.



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