



KNOWLEDGE PLATFORM ON INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

Call for country case studies:

Digital divides or dividends? Including basic services in Africa's digitalisation agenda.

This research programme has been designed to gather important information to support the digitalisation of basic services in Africa, a topic which has received much less attention than digital entrepreneurship, mobile money and e-commerce, but is equally crucial for inclusive digital transformation and broader inclusive development. There has been a steep rise in digital basic services interventions in recent years (especially since the COVID-19 outbreak), with many governments using online platforms and technologies to provide education, deliver cash transfers and hold elections. But knowledge of these interventions is insufficient and fragmented, and the impacts on inequality are unknown and highly contested. Moreover, progress on the critical enabling conditions for digital transformation, which are laid out in the African Union [Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa \(2020-2030\)](#), is not well documented, particularly at the national and subnational levels, making it difficult to guide policy in this area.

These knowledge gaps form the starting point for our new research programme, '*Digital divides or dividends? Including basic services in Africa's digitalisation agenda*', which will run from Oct 2021-June 2022 and consist of 4-5 country case studies and a concluding synthesis report. The research will focus specifically on services between governments and citizens, as well as inter-governmental services, which help to increase the wellbeing of the poorest and most vulnerable groups, for example, households below the poverty line, rural populations, youth, women, and people with disabilities. The [foundation document for this programme](#) contains a full background analysis which conceptualises the core issues of the research and can be used to underpin/frame the case studies.

Issue date: 8th July 2021

Deadline for submission of proposals: 2nd September 2021

About INCLUDE

The Knowledge Platform on Inclusive Development Policies ([INCLUDE](#)) was conceived in 2012 by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to promote evidence-based policymaking for inclusive development in Africa. Its members consist of African and Dutch researchers, academics, policymakers, diplomats and representatives of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector. The Secretariat of INCLUDE is coordinated by the African Studies Centre at Leiden University and run together with the African Economic Research Consortium in Nairobi and The Broker in The Hague.

Since its inception, INCLUDE has supported or led 6 research programmes with over 50 projects on topics related to inclusive development. The research framework for the current phase of the platform, which runs from 2019-2022, is centred around four core areas: economic growth with structural transformation, decent work and income for women and youth, access to and use of basic services, and meaningful political participation and empowerment. This programme will create and disseminate knowledge on the third theme, 'Access to and use of basic services', with linkages to the other themes.

Aim and key themes

The main goals of this research programme are:

1. To take stock of digital basic service interventions in different African countries (especially since the boom in digital services in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic).
2. To assess how inclusive these interventions are in terms of reaching and improving the wellbeing of poor and vulnerable citizens.
3. To analyse progress in the enabling environment for inclusive digital transformation (incl. physical infrastructure, digital skills, regulation, political economy, and institutional capacity) to see where efforts and investments could be prioritised.
4. To extract lessons and best practices for scaling digital basic services and making them more inclusive in order to reach and support those furthest behind.

Key elements of the research should include:¹

- A focus on government-to-citizen services which affect the poorest and most vulnerable people in Africa – education, social protection, healthcare – as well as inter-governmental services like digital administration and identity.²
- A look at the how existing continental and national policy frameworks for digital transformation are playing out on the ground to help narrow the gap between vision and reality.
- Going beyond access to basic services, to also look at usage, affordability, relevance and participation – the different aspects of inclusion which might explain why certain interventions do not work and can help to guide action in this area.
- Disaggregated evidence on the impacts of digitalised services on rural and urban populations, women, youth, the elderly, and people with disabilities, to help guide localised/flexible implementation.
- An examination of the political economy aspects of digitalisation, to understand the impacts of democracy, transparency and data privacy, the importance of online civil space, and the role of donors and the private sector.

¹ See the foundation document for elaboration on the key elements, for example, pp.3 for a typology of digital basic services; pp.13 for the various aspects of inclusion.

² Intergovernmental services are especially important to look at in contexts with more decentralised governments.

Structure and research questions for case study papers

Final papers are expected to include all of the following elements:

PART 1. Context assessment

- 1) Analysis of the extent to which the conditions for inclusive digital transformation are being met within (country).
 - a. How does (country) perform with regard to the following indicators, and how has this changed over time? (Where possible, these indicators should be examined at sub-national level).
 - i. Infrastructure development (electricity, mobile, and broadband penetration; the Telecommunications Infrastructure Index (TII)³)
 - ii. Digital literacy (Human Capacity Index (HCI), literacy rates, prevalence of IT skills)
 - iii. Regulation (affordability of internet, existence and implementation of data privacy regulations and rights to information laws)
 - iv. Institutional capacity (fiscal situation, technical capacity)
 - v. The e-Readiness index & the Online Services Index (OSI)
 - b. In which areas should investments/policy efforts be prioritised?
 - c. Are there other important conditions/indicators to consider for supporting progress towards the goals of continental/national digitalisation strategies and enabling transformation of basic services in (country)?
- 2) Analysis of the political context surrounding digitalisation in (country).
 - Where does digitalisation and, in particular, digitalisation of basic services sit on the policy agenda? How is it viewed/discussed/organised among different stakeholders?
 - Is there a national strategy for digital transformation, and (how) is the digital transformation of basic services addressed in it? If no strategy exists, why not?
 - Are there issues to do with transparency, openness, censorship, digital security, digital democracy, online civic space or electoral processes? How do these impact digital transformation processes and outcomes within basic services?

PART 2. Mapping of digital service interventions

- 3) Mapping of digital basic services in (country), focusing on services between governments and citizens (G2C) and inter-governmental (G2G) services.
 - How are interventions distributed in terms of location, sectors, providers/stakeholders, the types of technology used? What other trends are apparent?
 - Are developments currently at the project/city level, or more system-wide/scaled up?
 - Is there a focus on integrating data, delivery mechanisms, and management across programs/sectors?
 - In the absence of well-developed G2C and G2G services – are there any other digital interventions (more private) that manage to reach a large number of citizens that could potentially be scaled up and used for government services?

³ This is one component of the e-Government Development Index (EGDI)

PART 3. Inclusion analysis of digital service interventions

- 4) Analysis of the inclusiveness of digitalised basic services in (country).
(Choose a few good examples from the mapping exercise to help answer the following)
- i. For which main purpose is the intervention (e.g. to improve information, implementation, or participation)?
 - ii. Who was the initiator? Who supported the development and implementation?
 - iii. What percentage of the population is covered by this intervention? What is their profile (location, gender, age, socioeconomic status)? (How) has this changed since the introduction of digital technologies?
 - iv. (How) is the potential for exclusion explicitly addressed (e.g. through local context assessment, participatory design, targeting/eligibility criteria or outreach/training)?
 - v. How does the intervention affect access, usage, and affordability of the service, as well as safety and participation? Can this be linked to changes in poverty, inequality and other development outcomes?

Concluding reflections:

- Which digital interventions (or aspects of interventions) are most conducive to improving basic service provision for the poor and vulnerable in (country)?
- Which reforms would most help to address gaps in access, affordability and usage for different population groups? How could successful programs be made more accessible and cost-effective at a broader scale without excluding vulnerable groups?
- What are the lessons and best practices for managing the transition to more digitalised basic services (from a government / donor perspective?) How can policymakers help to form a stronger link between digitalisation and inclusive development?

Format of country case study papers

The country case study papers should not exceed 30 manuscript pages (A4), excluding references (APA style, 6th Edition) and annexes. The font should be Calibri, size 11 point, line height 1.15, and standard margins. Papers should be structured in three parts (according to the framework laid out above) and include an introduction and methodology section. Case studies should be accompanied by a two-page summary with key points, main policy recommendations and future research directions.

Methodology of case studies

Given the range of quantitative and qualitative data needed to answer the research questions, we endorse a mixed-methods approach to the case studies. Part 1 will involve using secondary data on specific cross-country comparable indicators (or suggested alternatives if data is unavailable), as well as literature on the political context and development sector within that country. Parts 2 and 3 will require some primary data collection through interviews with local stakeholders (both service providers and service beneficiaries) in addition to statistics on digital basic service interventions. The operationalisation/way of measuring inclusion (access, usage, affordability, safety and participation) may be suggested by applicants in their proposals.

Given the persistence of the COVID-19 situation, it is at the researchers' discretion whether they undertake travel and face-to-face interviews or acquire their data through distanced calls (to be specified in the proposals). In-person fieldwork is by no means a mandatory part of the research process. After completion and language editing, the different country case studies will be used to conduct a synthesis report. Therefore, the questions and structure listed in this call should be adhered to as much as possible in order to ensure consistency and enable comparison.

Eligible countries

INCLUDE is seeking some case studies from countries with high a e-government development index score in order to highlight good examples and extract valuable lessons.⁴ However, it is desirable to study a range of contexts including those with lower e-governance scores, to help draw valuable lessons and extrapolate findings. We invite applicants from different regions (East, West, Central and Southern Africa), as well as cultures/languages (Anglophone and Francophone countries). We also invite countries which stand out in terms of their political context to see how political factors play a role in the pace and inclusiveness of digital transformation (e.g. open, transparent, democratic versus closed, repressive, undemocratic).

Funding scope and duration

The budget available per paper is EUR 25,000 (including VAT), depending on the scope of the paper. The writing process should not exceed eight months (see timeline below), including all activities and production of the final paper.

Format and content of proposals

Proposals for case study papers should provide a sufficiently detailed summary with a preliminary outline of the proposed paper on the identified topics, clearly indicating sound knowledge of the matter and the direction the authors plan to undertake. It is possible for (a group of) authors to conduct more than one country case study.⁵

Proposal should contain the following information:

- Name and affiliation of author(s)
- A justification of why the proposed country is interesting to study, for example, due to the performance in e-governance or the political context around digitalisation.
- An abstract (max 250 words) summarising how they will go about addressing the key questions and highlighting preliminary examples or statistics.
- Authors are encouraged to propose additional questions or refine questions (within the scope of the call), for example, context specific questions.
- A short note on the proposed methodological approach – suggestions for how to gather and present findings and how the author(s) would operationalise the different inclusion criteria (access, affordability, usage, relevance, participation).
- An overview of preliminary identified sources.
- Annexes:
 - Budget allocation (including wages, travel, equipment/materials, transcription of interviews, but excluding copyediting or translation – these are subsidised by INCLUDE)
 - Short two-page CV and list of major publications of the author(s)
 - General statement by the applicant that they endorse and follow the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which is aimed at strengthening data protection for all individuals within the European Union (see www.eugdpr.org). In the Netherlands, the regulation is implemented as the Algemene Verordening Gegevensbescherming (AVG).

⁴ African countries with a high e-government score include Algeria, Botswana, Cabo Verde, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Africa, Tunisia and Zimbabwe.

⁵ African authors/institutions (with local presence) should be in the lead.

Submission and selection process

Proposals must be submitted via email in English or French **before 1200 CET on 2nd Sept 2021**, to Hannah Itcovitz (hannah@thebrokeronline.eu). Proposals received after the deadline will not be considered.

Proposals will be reviewed by the INCLUDE Secretariat and selected using the following criteria:

- Quality and scope of the proposal
- Scope of available sources for the paper
- Qualifications and relevant experience of the author(s)

Proposals will be selected which generate a balanced programme with complementary case studies. This is done to ensure a range of contexts and provide sufficient evidence for the synthesis report. Priority will be given to local organisations and African authors, in line with INCLUDE's aim of promoting African scholars and strengthening local knowledge production.

Successful applicants will be notified by 23rd September 2021.

Timeline of the call

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| Deadline applications | 2 nd September 2021 |
| Selection & informing successful proposals | 23 rd September 2021 |
| Kick-off meeting | Mid-end October 2021 |
| Progress meetings with research groups ⁶ | Mid December 2021, end January 2022, and beginning March 2022 |
| Deadline first draft case studies | April 2022 |
| Deadline final case studies | May 2022 |
| Results workshop and publication of case studies* | June 2022 |

*This will be the final formal workshop, however, follow up activities may be scheduled that researchers will be invited to attend.

All country case study papers in this series will be published under Creative Commons Attribution-International (CC BY), version 4.0.

Permission for use and disclosure of information

By way of submitting an application under this call for papers, the applicant consents to the disclosure of the documents submitted to the reviewers involved in the selection process, both within INCLUDE and externally. The applicant further consents to the disclosure of the name of the applicant/lead researcher in any announcement of selection of proposals or other INCLUDE supported activities. Moreover, the applicant consents to publishing the country case study on the INCLUDE website, after which authors are allowed to publish the paper elsewhere under the condition that they refer to INCLUDE as the funder and add that the country case study was previously published on the INCLUDE website.

Contact

For questions about this call please contact:

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⁶ These progress meetings are there to facilitate exchange between the researchers, help overcome obstacles, align expectations and provide feedback on the research conducted thus far.