Digitalisation for development: reducing poverty through technology

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The Committee on Development adopted the own-initiative report by Bogdan Brunon WENTA (EPP, PL) on digitalisation for development: reducing poverty through technology, following the Commission's document of 2017 entitled Digital4Development: mainstreaming digital technologies and services into EU development policy'.

The need to support digitalisation in developing countries: Members recalled the huge potential of digital technology and services in the achievement of the **Sustainable Development Gaols** (SDGs), notably SDG 4 on education; SDG 5 on gender equality; SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth; SDG 9 on infrastructure, industrialisation and innovation. However, despite the increase in internet penetration, many developing countries and emerging economies **lag behind in benefiting from digitalisation**, many people still have no access to ICTs, and major disparities exist both between countries and between urban and rural areas. The committee stressed that digitalisation can be a powerful development tool in a number of policy areas, such as governance, education, health, gender equality, economic growth and agriculture.

It called for sufficient **funding under the Multiannual Financial Framework** (MFF) for 2021-2027 to enable the streamlining of digital technologies into all aspects of development policy. It also called for the implementation in EU external action of the principles embodied in the Digital Single Market for Europe (DSM) strategy adopted in 2015, through support for EU partners' regulatory frameworks.

Whilst warning that action should be taken to address the disruptive effects of technologies, such as automation of jobs, digital exclusion and inequality, cybersecurity, data privacy and regulatory issues, Members called for the following:

- an action plan for technical innovation for **humanitarian assistance**, especially in the context of forced displacements;
- digitalisation to be featured prominently in the future **post-Cotonou** agreement as an enabler of inclusive development, in accordance with the negotiation guidelines;
- further **joint actions in digital infrastructure cooperation**, as this should become one of the key activities in the EU's partnerships with regional organisations, particularly the African Union;
- digitalisation to be incorporated into Member States' **national strategies** for development;
- more concerted cross-sectoral effort from the **international community** to ensure that the shift towards a more digital economy leaves no one behind and contributes to the achievement of the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- increased efforts to address the challenges of digital exclusion through **education and training** in essential digital skills, giving due regard to the importance of e-learning and distance learning in reaching remote areas and people of all ages;

Digitalisation: a tool for sustainable development: Members welcomed the EU's External Investment Plan promoting investment in innovative digital solutions for local needs, financial inclusion and decent job creation. They called on the Commission to:

- launch **new initiatives** with a special focus on developing digital infrastructure, promoting e-governance and digital skills, strengthening the digital economy and fostering SDG-centred start-up ecosystems,

- further **mainstream** digital technologies and services into the EU's development policy, as outlined inter alia in the D4D agenda;
- **increase investment** in digital infrastructure in developing countries, in order to bridge the significant digital divide in a development-effective and principle-based manner.

The committee pointed out that whilst **agriculture,** the largest sector of the African economy, may potentially benefit from digital technologies (e.g. by informing farmers about market prices and linking them with potential buyers), digital agriculture could also have a huge social and environmental disruptive effect in developing countries, as access to the latest technology may remain restricted to big and industrialised farms. EU funding for agriculture in developing countries must be in line with the transformative nature of Agenda 2030 and the Paris Climate Agreement.

Members pointed out that ICT tools could be used for information dissemination, which can be crucial during both **natural and technological disasters and emergencies**, as well as in fragile and conflict-affected areas.

Lastly, the report highlighted the fact that digital technologies can enable low-income communities and other vulnerable communities to have access to **quality basic services** (e.g. health, education, water, sanitation and electricity), as well as to humanitarian relief and e-government services.