Digitalisation for development: reducing poverty through technology

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The European Parliament adopted by 499 votes to 48, with 108 abstentions, a resolution on digitalisation for development: reducing poverty through technology.

The **2017 European Consensus on Development** highlighted the importance of information and communications technologies and services as enablers of inclusive growth and sustainable development. According to the 2017 update of the World Bank database Identification for Development Global Dataset (ID4D), an estimated 1.1 billion people worldwide cannot officially prove their identity, including their birth registration, and of those 78 % live in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.

The need to support digitalisation in developing countries: Parliament welcomed the Commission's D4D strategy, while stressing 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. Members 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.

Parliament 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.

While insisting that measures be taken to address the disruptive effects of technologies, such as employment automation, digital exclusion and inequality, cybersecurity, data privacy and regulatory issues, Members called for, *inter alia*:

- 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.

Concerned about **technological dependence** on a few players, including the GAFAs (Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon), Members called for the development of alternatives to stimulate competition, noting that such an aim could be pursued in partnership between the EU and Africa.

Digitalisation: a tool for sustainable development: Parliament 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.

Members stressed the need to **facilitate cross-border e-commerce** as SMEs in developing countries make up the majority of businesses and employ the majority of workers in the manufacturing and services sectors.

The resolution 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.