DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM COUNTRY ASSESSMENT (DECA)

USAID'S DIGITAL STRATEGY CHARTS AN AGENCY-WIDE APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT in a rapidly evolving digital age and seeks to achieve and sustain open, secure, and inclusive digital ecosystems that contribute to broad-based, measurable development and humanitarian assistance outcomes.

The Digital Ecosystem Country Assessment (DECA), a flagship initiative of the Digital Strategy, identifies opportunities and risks in a country's digital ecosystem to help the development, design, and implementation of USAID's strategies, projects, and activities. It informs USAID Missions and other key decision-makers about how to better understand, work with, and support a country's digital ecosystem.

WHAT IS A DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM? USAID frames a country's digital ecosystem around three pillars:

Digital Infrastructure and Adoption: the resources that make digital systems possible and how individuals and organizations access and use these resources. *Topics include:*

- Geographic network coverage, network performance, internet bandwidth, spectrum allocation
- Security, interoperability, and competitiveness of the telecom market
- Behavioral, social, and physical barriers and opportunities for equitable adoption (digital divides, affordability, and digital literacy)

Digital Society, Rights, and Governance: how digital technology intersects with government, civil society, and the media. *Topics include:*

- Internet Freedom: how digital rights are protected, repressed, and governed
- Civil Society and Media: key institutions and how they report on, advocate for, and influence freedoms online
- Digital Government: how the government *manages* internal IT processes and systems, *delivers* citizen- and business-facing e-services, and *engages* the public through digital channels

Digital Economy: the role digital technology plays in increasing economic opportunity and efficiency, trade and competitiveness, and global economic integration. *Topics include:*

- Digital financial services, inclusion, regulation, and the FinTech enabling environment
- Digital trade, e-commerce, tech startup environment
- Digital talent pool including supply and demand of ICT talent

Cross-cutting topics: Inclusion, Cybersecurity, Geopolitical Positioning, and Emerging Technologies
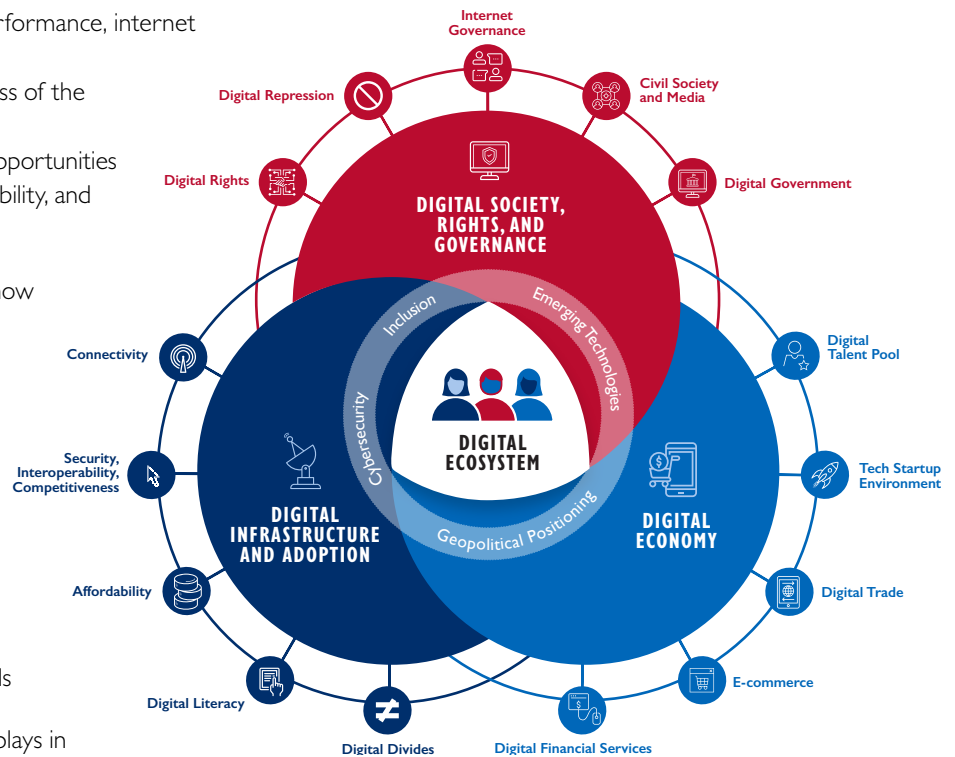
DECA RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are the most important part of the DECA. They are targeted and help USAID Missions remedy specific challenges in the country's digital ecosystem. *Example DECA Recommendations include:*

CHALLENGE	DECA RECOMMENDATION
Access to the internet is prohibitively expensive, especially in rural areas. A multi-stakeholder alliance focused on cross-sector digitalization exists and has a strong reputation. However, members are not yet focused on improving affordability.	**Mission advocates with the government to create an internet affordability working group, and provides technical assistance to develop affordability policies.** The working group should include policymakers, regulators, internet service providers, civil society, and private sector actors to promote fair rules for a competitive and diverse broadband market. Mission provides technical assistance to the government through a buy-in mechanism.
Civil society organizations (CSOs) are at high risk for cyber harms (e.g., data breaches, surveillance, ransomware) and have minimal capabilities to mitigate or prevent them. They want to protect themselves and the people they serve, but often don't know where to start.	**Mission develops a cyber hygiene training program** for CSO partners as part of the Mission's existing civil society portfolio. Monitoring and evaluation of this pilot will help develop the cybersecurity evidence base and encourage broader uptake among civil society.
Private-sector financial service providers (FSPs) face a number of barriers in offering digital financial services to rural customers. These include supply-side issues of high perceived and real risk, as well as demand-side issues like mistrust and unawareness of digital tools.	**Mission creates partnerships with local and international FSPs** to help them expand digital finance offerings to last-mile customers. To help them improve their product offerings, USAID could offer robust market research, along with innovative financial instruments that de-risk market entry.

Four pilot DECAs were conducted in partnership with USAID Missions in Colombia, Kenya, Nepal, and Serbia. Read the publicly available DECAs from Colombia and Kenya (Serbia and Nepal forthcoming).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: How long is the research period?
A: Five to six months. This is a large and complex assessment of an emerging development area that covers multiple sectors, and tends to take longer than a traditional USAID assessment. It will create a baseline of information in areas where USAID may have little to no expertise. The DECA is conducted in three phases: desk research and planning (5 weeks); interviews (2-7 weeks); and analysis and report writing (7 weeks writing; 5 weeks finalization).

Q: Whom do you interview?
A: Interviewee lists are tailored to each country based upon desk review results and the Mission's CDCS. Interviewees may include individuals from civil society, media, think tanks, academia, NGOs, global development institutions, private sector companies, government agencies, Embassy staff, other donors, and USAID implementing partners.

Q: Who conducts the DECA?
A: A research team hired and managed by the Mission. Given the highly technical nature of the research, Missions should hire a research team from local universities or think tanks, or use existing mechanisms in the Mission or Washington. The Technology Division in USAID's Bureau for Development, Democracy, and Innovation (DDI), Innovation, Technology, and Research (ITR) Hub can provide guidance and assistance to interested Missions: digitaldevelopment@usaid.gov

Q: What is the Mission's role?
A: Missions provide in-depth guidance and management throughout the DECA. Missions should create a cross-Mission DECA team led by the Program Office, with participation from each technical office. This team meets biweekly with the research team to ensure Mission equities are incorporated into the research and to provide guidance. Mission staff should also participate in interviews whenever appropriate as a professional development opportunity.

Q: What is included in the final report?
A: The report provides an overview of the three ecosystem pillars and sub-sections, focusing on areas relevant to the Mission, along with concrete recommendations for Mission action.

Q: Will the report be public?
A: There will be both public and internal versions of the report. The external version will omit any information the Mission deems sensitive. Some Missions have opted to translate the report into the local language to reach a wider audience.
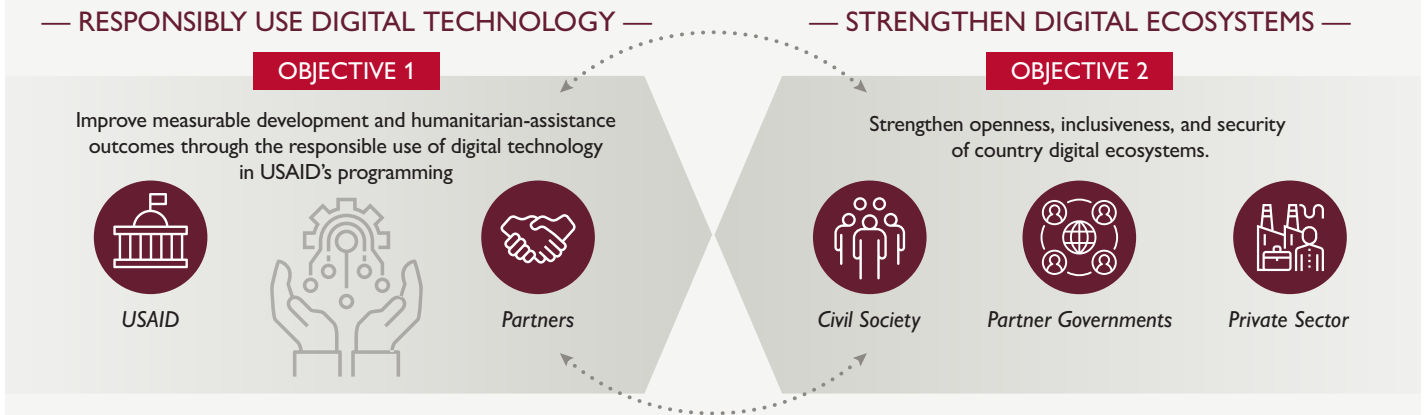
Q: What is the potential impact?
A: Missions are increasing digital programming in a knowledge vacuum. The report will enable Missions to make informed decisions about the responsible use of digital technology in assistance programs, opportunities to strengthen the partner country's digital ecosystem, and risks that if not addressed or mitigated could undermine national security and development objectives. The DECA may reveal opportunities for new partnerships or projects, and identify critical areas for Mission intervention.

USAID DIGITAL STRATEGY 2020-2024

STRATEGY GOAL

To achieve and sustain open, secure, and inclusive digital ecosystems that contribute to broad-based, measurable development and humanitarian-assistance outcomes and increase self-reliance in emerging market countries.

The Strategy centers around two core, mutually reinforcing objectives:

— RESPONSIBLY USE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY —

OBJECTIVE 1

Improve measurable development and humanitarian-assistance outcomes through the responsible use of digital technology in USAID's programming

USAID

Partners

— STRENGTHEN DIGITAL ECOSYSTEMS —

OBJECTIVE 2

Strengthen openness, inclusiveness, and security of country digital ecosystems.

Civil Society

Partner Governments

Private Sector

To achieve the overall goal of the *Strategy*, these objectives will be executed through four tracks:

ADOPT AN ECOSYSTEM APPROACH ▶ **Develop tools and resources** necessary to deliver development and humanitarian assistance effectively in a digital age

HELP PARTNERS NAVIGATE RISK AND REWARD ▶ **Build capacity of our partners** to navigate the unique opportunities and risks that digital technology presents across USAID's Program Cycle

SHIFT TO "DIGITAL BY DEFAULT" ▶ **Support implementing partners** in adoption of digital technologies

BUILD THE USAID OF TOMORROW ▶ **Invest in our human capital** to guide the Agency through the digital age

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT USAID'S DIGITAL STRATEGY

— EMAIL —
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usaid.gov/usaid-digital-strategy

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