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DEUTSCHE GESELLSCHAFT FÜR INTERNATIONALE ZUSAMMENARBEIT (GIZ)
G M B H

EVALUATION OF SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 1 OF THE EU ACTION RESICODI IMPLEMENTED BY GIZ (BACKUP INITIATIVE)



Summary

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EVALUATION OF GERMAN BACKUP INITIATIVE – EDUCATION IN AFRICA AS PART OF THE EU ACTION RESICODI

Specific Objective (SO1)	Digital solutions to improve the quality and continuation of education services are implemented
Region	Africa regional project (Botswana, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, Rwanda, Zambia)
Commissioning Party	BMZ & EU
Value	6,100,000 EUR
Partner	African Ministries of Education (MoE), national civil-society organizations (CSO), and regional networks
Project Term	November 2020 - October 2023

Context

The EU Action RESICODI is a multi-country Action using digital technologies for the COVID-19 response, commissioned by the **European Union** (EU) and the **German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development** (BMZ). It was jointly designed and has been implemented from November 2020 to October 2023 by **GIZ** and **Enabel**. This evaluation focuses on the Action's Specific Objective 1 (SO1) "Digital solutions to improve the quality and continuation of education services are implemented" which GIZ is responsible for, using the established project "German BACKUP Initiative – Education in Africa".

Brief description of the project

SO1 aimed to support African partners (Ministries of Education, civil-society organizations, and regional networks) in addressing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic for basic education with a focus on digital solutions.

Beside SO1's **saim to support partners** to react to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic for basic education it also addressed long-lasting changes in the education sector with a focus on digital solutions. Hereby, the African partners across eight Sub-Saharan African countries (Botswana, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, Rwanda, Zambia) were eligible for assistance through a demand-based fund. The services provided by SO1 encompass:

- financial support
- technical and financial advice
- support for regional and global networking

Financially, partners could apply for grants up to €100,000, while technical assistance went beyond administrative support, focusing on developing project content based on partners' ideas and needs.

Moreover, the SO1 exclusively responded to the needs of partners. Through quality checks and feedback from local structures, including Local Education Groups and EU delegations, SO1 ensured that approved applications were well-suited to the specific digital ecosystems within each country.

The project encompassed the following five outputs:

- **Output 1.1 (Access):** Learners and education professionals have access to digital education services.
- **Output 1.2 (Digital Solutions):** Ministries and civil society organizations are supported to plan and implement digital solutions in education.
- **Output 1.3 (Digital Skills):** Learners and education professionals have taken part in measures to improve digital skills.
- **Output 1.4 (Cooperation):** Cooperation agreements between the public sector, or civil society organizations and the private sector to foster digital solutions for education services are established.
- **Output 1.5 (Network):** Learning and network building among the partner countries and internationally in the area of digital solutions for education and COVID-19 resilience (in general) are supported.

Approach & Methods of Evaluation

SO1 was evaluated using a **theory-based evaluation** design that relied on the theory of change as a basis for analysis. The evaluation team, among others, implemented a contribution analysis in which the extent of observed (positive or negative) results can be related to a given intervention. Data were collected in a **primarily qualitative way** through a strategic analysis of the project's documents and qualitative interviews. The collected data were documented using the evaluation questions in the evaluation matrix. Researcher, data and method triangulation took place during data collection and analysis. The evaluation took place remotely between October 2023 and February 2024 and followed a participatory approach.

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Assessment according to OECD-DAC criteria

Relevance

The relevance of SO1 is rated as **highly successful**.

Policies & Priorities

SO1 aligns **globally** with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, emphasizing SDG 4's goal of inclusive, equitable, and quality education. Focusing on Target 4.1, it aims to ensure universal access to free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education by 2030.

In the context of **European development cooperation**, the project addresses the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on education continuity and resilience in partner countries. It contributes to reducing the digital divide and aligns with the European Education Area's strategic framework for digital transformation in education in the context of a Team Europe approach.

Moreover, as a **regional project** in Africa, it aligns with Pan-African strategic objectives in education and the Joint Vision for 2030 by the African Union and EU. Focused on digital transformation, SO1 supports the Joint Vision's goals of boosting digital skills, inclusive and equitable quality education, and addressing learning gaps resulting from the pandemic.

Needs & Capacities of Target Group

The primary developmental challenge addressed by SO1 is the insufficient availability and lack of quality in basic education during the COVID-19 crisis in numerous African countries. The project addresses the needs of education professionals and learners primarily at a meta-level, enabling MoE and CSOs to provide digital solutions for teachers and learners.

SO1 effectively addresses the needs of **MoE and CSOs** (direct target group of the SO1) in the face of COVID-19 challenges by providing flexible and demand-oriented support, encompassing both technical assistance and financial aid. This approach ensures local ownership from the project's inception. In addition to individual support, SO1 actively promotes knowledge sharing through network building and facilitates regular regional exchanges, fostering learning from good practices and

connecting with the private sector to address digital infrastructure needs. In addition, the project's alignment with the **needs of education professionals and learners** (indirect target group of SO1) is grounded in the overall relevance of the demand-based approach and works through intermediaries and multipliers (MoE and CSOs).

To guarantee on-the-ground relevance, the project further employs various **quality assurance and safeguarding mechanisms**, ensuring that funding applications target specific developmental issues within the population, for example the inclusion of local actors, such as locally grounded CSOs, the local education groups (LEG), EU-Delegations or international actors like Oxfam, GPE in the quality check process of modes.

When it comes to the alignment with the needs of the stakeholders, the evaluation of the project also highlighted certain **limitations** when it comes to the **size of the funds** and the **digital prerequisites** in the countries. Given that the modes represent a small-scale, one-off approach, it is unlikely that they can comprehensively tackle the scale of developmental challenges and fully cater to the substantial needs of the recipients, especially the need for digital infrastructure, or establish enduring structures. However, it is essential to note that the project was specifically designed as a rapid COVID-19 response, planned within a short timeframe to provide quick and targeted support to partners to face the pandemic. Therefore, the projects anticipated developmental impact and sustainability were expected to be limited.

Appropriateness of the Design

In its entirety, the evaluation team deemed the **project's design as very appropriate and relevant**. Given the short-term and urgent need of any COVID-response, the SO1's approach was a well-chosen approach for the EU response to deliver timely, demand-based and flexible support to partner countries.

Adaptability

SO1 characterized by a highly **flexible and adaptable** demand-based fund, demonstrates a notable **ability to respond to change**. The success factors contributing to this adaptability include the project design's logic, allowing easy adaptation to regional contexts, sectors, and thematic foci. The current project

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team has effectively navigated challenges and pandemic phases by leveraging the streamlined administrative concept and providing partners with extensive flexibility. CSOs exhibited quicker responses, directly submitting concept proposals and initiating planning processes, in contrast to the challenges faced by state institutions during the project's implementation amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Coherence

The coherence of the project is rated as **successful**.

Internal

SO1 was committed to maintaining internal coherence and synergy with **bilateral projects, particularly in the basic education sector**. However, due to the withdrawal of German bilateral DC in basic education and shift to multilateral support, there are less bilateral projects for SO1 to connect and harmonize with.

The project also aligns thematically with "**Generation Digital! – Supporting Digital Skills for the Next Generation**" project, a regional project initiated in 2022. In some respects, SO1 can be understood as a pioneering and pilot project for the GD! project, commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), which has the same approach and similar thematic focus of aiming to promote digital skills among children and youth. However, GD! operates more long-term and without EU co-financing.

Intra-agency coordination

The **intra-agency coordination** between GIZ and Enabel within the project is characterized by separate spheres of interventions and complementarity of actions, leveraging existing structures for effective implementation. However, this separation limited potential synergies during implementation due to distinct focuses on basic education and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). Challenges in achieving closer cooperation and coordination were identified, despite the Team Europe approach combining the forces of both agencies. The coordination role assigned to Enabel faced occasional difficulties, indicating room for improvement in enhancing collaborative efforts, effective coordination, and steering intra-agency collaboration.

External

SO1 has effectively complemented **other interventions of international donors**. The project's foray into the novel field of digital education involved successful network creation, showcasing commendable efforts. Despite its small-scale nature, there exists promising potential for increased synergies at the local level, fostering connections with other interventions. The project's opportunity to further enhance its positive influence by facilitating knowledge exchange with other donors and interventions to improve quality and identify synergies, could have been maximized further.

Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the project is rated as highly **successful**.

Goal Achievement

Overall, the project **successfully attained its anticipated outcome**, even surpassing almost all indicators. Consequently, the implementation of the

Implementation of 49 digital solutions in eight countries, reached over 3.5 million learners and education professionals.

project can be deemed very effective. **Cross-cutting Aspects**

Gender-mainstreaming was incorporated in nearly all applicants' proposals, however not displaying a strong focus and high level of ambition. SO1 fostered a **rights-based approach** through its focus on CSOs, aiming to strengthen duty bearers and empower rights holders (e.g., learners). There is room for improvement in terms of adopting a more gender-responsive or -transformative approach within SO1.

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Contribution Analysis (Outcome)

The evaluation confirms the contribution of SO1 by **supporting ministries and CSOs with advice and funds** to digital solutions that improve continuity and quality of education services. Through the project's support, African partners were enabled to improve the continuity and quality of education services and therefore deal with challenges in the education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Also, the contribution **through organizing regional and national regular knowledge sharing events, learning and network building among partner countries** to develop digital solutions that improve continuity and quality of education services was confirmed. Interviewed African partners acknowledged the relevance of peer-to-peer exchange and identified evidence for effective and institutionalized national and regional exchange that would also continue beyond the project duration.

Quality of Implementation

SO1 demonstrates effective communication and relationship-building, supported by a robust steering **structure** and a service-oriented project design. The inherent motivation and trust-building nature of the BACKUP approach empower partners to take action. The clear and simple application forms developed by SO1 were highlighted as facilitators, but there is room for improvement in promoting more exchange among partners, donors, and stakeholders for enhanced collaboration and knowledge sharing. While ensuring high-quality implementation, SO1 effectively manages its activities through detailed annual operational plans and the use of the Wiki monitoring system. This

approach allows for targeted and impact-focused management, with the Wiki serving as a tool for both overall goal attainment and specific monitoring of mode characteristics related to civil society, regional formats, or cross-cutting topics.

Impact

The impact of the project is rated as **successful**.

The evaluation primarily focuses on lower-level impacts of the EU Action RESICODI, given the indirect and challenging nature of the Action's contribution to mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic's impact. Although SO1 indirectly influences the pandemic's incidence rates in Eastern and Southern Africa, it predominantly examines impacts at lower levels in the results model.

Higher-level Impacts

In terms of education objectives, the project contributes plausibly to **national education goals** and **SDG 4**, "Quality Education," on a global scale and supports African partner countries to achieve their national objectives. Recognizing promising impacts, it is crucial to note that the small-scale funds provided by SO1 alone have constrained broader impact, and the causal chain is lengthy.

Contribution Analysis (Impact)

The evaluation results confirmed a clear link between SO1's support, that contributed to continuity and quality of education services, thereby increasing the resilience of partner countries' education systems and **contributing to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis** in partner countries.

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- In this regard, partners were able to link their results achieved in their projects to their **ability to strengthen the resilience of their organization and education systems**.
- It is plausible that through increasing the resilience, SO1 contributed to **mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis** in partner countries in the area of education services. While in many countries, immediate health response was prioritized, the support by SO1 for keeping the education system running was effective, even though on small scale.

The evaluation findings affirmed a distinct connection between SO1's contribution to the implementation of digital solutions to improve continuity and quality of education services and the **contribution to digital transformation of the education sector in partner countries**.

- SO1 has plausibly contributed to heightened awareness for the importance of digital education and skills among education professionals and government officials, fostering a positive shift towards digitalization.
- However, one limitation to the hypothesis becomes apparent as it must be noted that the project's duration and its pilot character cannot **achieve systematic digital transformation**. While heightened digital skills training and awareness alone are good progress, the current lack of digital infrastructure and devices in partner countries to advance digitization in schools on a broad scale does not enable a transformation yet. Nevertheless, SO1's approach to support MoE and CSOs thus provides an initial move for digital transformation to materialize in the future.

Sustainability

The impact of the project is rated as **successful**.

Capacities of the Beneficiaries & Stakeholders

At the level of direct target groups, positive assessments were made in terms of developed capacities of ministries and CSOs in line with SO1's objectives. Through the project's targeted advice and financial assistance, SO1 was able to contribute to capacity building at various levels: for example, the individual (e.g., professionalization of representatives), organizational (e.g., needs analysis) and national level

(e.g., advocacy and more effective planning of digital solutions). With its dual approach to fund MoE and CSO, the project also plays a pivotal role in consolidating and **sustaining the activities of civil society** in the national and regional discourse. This is highly relevant for CSOs as they are often underfinanced and dependent on external funding.

However, **questions of resilience and sustaining capacities for partners are closely associated with sufficient and sustainable financing** and capacities. It is important to note that maintaining digital solutions and capacities requires substantial means in partner countries, including increased government involvement, higher budget allocations, and plausibly multilateral and international funding. While it is acknowledged that advocacy for digital education and digital skills have to be set up in parallel to advancing digital infrastructure, the current lack of digital infrastructure, connectivity access and devices in partner countries to advance digitization in schools on a broad scale remains a risk for the sustainability of obtained capacities.

At the level of indirect target groups, the evaluation showed positive developments for teacher digital skills trainings and their ability as multipliers to reach final beneficiaries. Digital skills and teacher training was a dominant theme in applications and common way to reach final beneficiaries.

Contributions to Supporting Sustainable Capacities

SO1 aimed to foster sustainability through various strategies:

- The involvement of African partners in implementing measures themselves, through SO1's **demand-orientation**, fosters individual and organizational capacities, reinforcing sustainability.
- The **participatory and holistic approach** involving civil society and public sector actors promotes a systemic approach to digital transformation, ensuring sustainable effects on education sector processes.
- SO1's technical support and advisory services **incentivize partners to consider sustainability strategies** early in the application stage, crucial given the project's short duration.
- Establishing **long-term networks** between African partners facilitates the exchange of good

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practices, contributing to sustained capacities and solutions, although it might be too early to fully assess this impact at the evaluation's timeframe.

Durability of results over time

The evaluation data indicates that the sustainability and utilization of SO1's results in the short and medium term depend on the context. While there are **opportunities for continued implementation** of piloted modes, some partners have identified approaches for sustaining successful initiatives. The project's support in enhancing organizational capacities fosters the ongoing implementation of project modes. However, **challenges exist in sustaining or scaling activities** on the ground, as increased capacity among the direct target group is constrained by the financial capacities of national structures. The limited financial resources of partners are significant hindrances to sustaining and expanding activities. Success is closely tied to national policy processes and available funding perspectives. Follow-up funding is deemed essential for the continuation of all activities.

Conclusion & Lessons learned

SO1 was **overall evaluated as successful** - across the five OECD-DAC criteria—relevance, coherence, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability. **Highly relevant** to international, European, and national development agendas, it effectively addressed the needs of target groups through collaborations with the Ministry of Education (MoE) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Its success in relevance stemmed from its adaptable approach, combining project funding with technical and financial advice. The project demonstrated **strong coherence**, coordinating well with bilateral GIZ projects, though opportunities for improved collaboration exist and successful in complementing interventions by international donors, especially in digital education. However, the potential for increased synergies at the local level suggests room for continued growth and enhanced connections with other ongoing interventions. Strategic alignment and coherence contributed to the highly successful goal achievement as well as high-quality implementation and effective management playing key roles. While gender was mainstreamed, it wasn't the project's primary focus. The project's **impact was considered**

successful, contributing to overarching impacts, particularly in mitigating the COVID-19 crisis's impact and advancing digital transformation in partner countries' education sectors. Despite **encouraging sustainability**, the limitations of small-scale funds and challenges in sustainable institutionalization were acknowledged, considering limited financial capacities in national structures and digital infrastructure.



Factors of Success

The evaluation highlighted critical lessons for success emphasizing factors contributing to positive outcomes:

Targeted and Flexible Support during COVID-19

Leveraging the established BACKUP approach facilitated rapid and flexible support during the pandemic, utilizing existing contacts and project management structures.

- **Recommendation:** Scaling and adapting the BACKUP approach for other intervention areas, particularly in emergent fields like digital education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Demand-Oriented

The project's success was attributed to its demand-oriented approach, effectively meeting a diverse range of partner needs, and ensuring relevance on the ground.

- **Recommendation:** Upholding and potentially expanding the demand-orientation for other interventions, aligning with German Feminist Development Policy.

Targeted Capacity Building

The combination of high-quality technical and financial advice, coupled with the funding mechanism, supported multidimensional and targeted capacity building for African partners.

- **Recommendation:** Scaling the modality of combining technical and financial advice for effective and holistic capacity building of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Ministries of Education (MoEs).

High-Quality Implementation

The project's flexibility, adaptive management, and responsiveness to change, coupled with established personal networks, facilitated timely and appropriate

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responses to the evolving contexts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Recommendation:** Continued investment in and continuation of elements contributing to high-quality implementation by the project team.

Complementarity of Team Europe Approach

The collaboration between Enabel (TVET) and GIZ (digital education) showcased complementary actions, providing holistic support to education sectors and professionals during the pandemic.

- **Recommendation:** Encouraging the EU to sustain Team Europe approaches to capitalize on European agencies' strengths, diverse experiences, and ensure complementarity between actions.



Opportunities & Recommendations

Lessons Learned from GIZ SO1 Implementation in the EU Action RESICODI also suggested important factors for (future) projects in the digital education sector:

A. Lessons for the Current Project:

Leveraging Synergies

There is some untapped potential to realize synergies in partner countries with other interventions, with small-scale SO1 modes not always sufficiently coordinated with other education sector interventions.

- **Recommendation:** Enhance coordination among involved entities (GIZ, EU, BMZ, Enabel), leveraging their networks to connect grant recipients with existing interventions and encouraging sustained synergies.

Gender Equality

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a setback for gender equality, particularly affecting girls in the education sector.

- **Recommendation:** Emphasize gender equality in digital education, supporting specific modes with initiatives aligned with the German Feminist Development Policy for a gender-responsive and transformative approach.

Limitations of the Team Europe Approach

Intra-agency cooperation and coordination, as well as connecting fields of action between GIZ and Enabel,

faced challenges due to an unsatisfactory coordination role.

- **Recommendation:** Allocate sufficient resources and define clear responsibilities for effective intra-agency cooperation, enforcing the coordination role and implementing trust-building activities to strengthen Team Europe outcomes.

B. Lessons for Conceptualizing Future Projects in Digital Education:

Digital Infrastructure as a Challenge

Insufficient digital infrastructure poses a challenge for digital transformation projects in many African countries, necessitating parallel advocacy for digital education and skills development.

- **Recommendation:** Emphasize cooperation agreements with the private sector, leveraging donor influence to connect (small) NGOs with private sectors for enhanced connectivity, infrastructure, and device provisions.

Limitations of a Small-Scale Fund

The project highlighted the benefits and limitations of a small-scale fund, emphasizing challenges and benefits in project duration, funding period, and network building efforts.

- **Recommendation:** Short-term projects should focus on sustainability and exit strategies, incentivizing partners early on. Additionally, support in attracting follow-up funding is crucial for digital transformation projects, and connecting grant recipients with multilateral donors and international organizations can leverage further funding at the intersection of digital and education.

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