Daring to Shift: Young Women at the Centre of Inclusive Growth Project - Final Evaluation Brief

January 2024

1. Context and Background

Daring to Shift (D2S) was a multi-country, four-year innovation project delivered by Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT) and implementing partners, and funded by Global Affairs Canada. The project was launched in November 2019 and ended in December 2023, and it has focused on the digital inclusion and economic empowerment of young people, particularly young women.

The main programming occurred in the DOT core countries of Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania, Jordan, and Lebanon, with selected programming in the expansion countries of Uganda, Malawi, Zambia, and Ghana via local partners.

The goal of D2S was to place young women at the centre of inclusive social and economic growth both by growing economic empowerment and opportunity, and facilitating a wider community mindshift regarding gender norms and equality. In doing so, D2S focused upon enhancing

resilience and economic inclusion among participating unemployed and underemployed youth (aged 18 to 35) and their communities in the Sub-Saharan Africa and Middle East regions.

To achieve this over the course of four years, the project set out to use a gender transformative approach, entrenched through developing and supporting the leadership, and decision-making power of young women, alongside encouraging a positive mindset shift, to enable them to thrive, despite the barriers that they face, and take advantage of economic opportunities. D2S took an innovative approach, using a multi-faceted approach incorporating technical skills training, networking opportunities, community coordination and mindset shift coaching, to scaling-up youth empowerment, leadership, and social entrepreneurship, and was contextually sensitive in its innovations.

D2S offered, among other activities, the following support:

- Gender-sensitive and youth-led livelihood training programmes that include critical soft and digital skills, such as Digital Business, Digital Jobs, Social Entrepreneurship, and Community Leadership.
- Access to peer networks.
- Links to partner opportunities for enhancing leadership, social innovation and entrepreneurship skills.

- Enhanced enabling environments for young women through Communities of Practice (CoPs) that strengthened partner capacity in gender-sensitive and gender-transformative approaches.
- Technical and financial support to Youth Champions and Social Innovators driving change in their communities.

The project worked towards the following outcomes:

- **Ultimate Outcome**: Enhanced economic inclusion and resilience among participating unemployed and underemployed youth and their communities in countries of focus.
- **Intermediate Outcome 1100**: Increased participation of young women and men in gender equitable and sustainable social or economic development in countries of focus.

- **Intermediate Outcome 1200**: Strengthened enabling environments supporting young women-led social innovation and economic empowerment in core countries of implementation.
- **Intermediate Outcome 1300**: Increased scale and gender-inclusiveness of social or economic impact led by youth in core countries of implementation.

Ultimately D2S reached 44,681 direct youth participants across all programmes (29,256 women and 15,425 men); including 43,504 Community Participants (28,521 women and 14,983 men) and 1,177 Youth Leaders (735 young women and 442 young men). Additionally, the project engaged 167 Community of Practice Partners and reached a total of 111,205 indirect beneficiaries.

2. Evaluation Objectives

Bodhi Global Analysis was commissioned by DOT to undertake the final evaluation of the D2S project.

Bodhi Global Analysis is a UK based international development research consultancy firm, with subsidiaries in Nairobi and Singapore. As an organisation, Bodhi is committed to producing high-quality research, through academic rigour and objective analysis to enable international development stakeholders to develop responsive interventions and effective outcomes through evidence-based strategy recommendations. Bodhi's clients range from intergovernmental organisations including the UN, (i)NGOs and non-profit organisations.

Bodhi used a gender-responsive, inclusive and participatory approach to the final evaluation, and the assignment objectives were to:

A. Evaluate the contribution to the programme's ultimate outcomes and identify drivers of possible future impact in these areas;

B. Assess and break down the pathways to the long-term impacts experienced by programme participants, particularly in relation to the project's intermediate outcomes;

C. Assess the long-term impacts programme participants experienced, specifically in relation to the project's immediate outcomes;

D. Identify any barriers to success, including gender-related barriers, and inequitable access to digital technologies;

E. Conduct a qualitative analysis of the impact of the development of the project's Community of Practice for local partners;

F. Assess the potential scale and sustainability of the programme outcomes;

G. Extract lessons learned and possible adaptations.

The temporal scope of this evaluation was November 2019 - November 2023, the full duration of the project. The geographical scope covered all nine of the project's implementation countries across the core and expansion countries - Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Jordan, Lebanon, Uganda, Malawi, Zambia and Ghana - with a mix of data collection methods used to ensure insight was collected for all countries.

3. Methodology

In conducting the endline evaluation, Bodhi worked with DOT to adopt a mixed-methods approach encompassing both qualitative and quantitative methods, as well as a thorough review of existing documentation and data collected in relation to the project. The following methodologies were used as part of this evaluation:

- **Quantitative household survey**: 4,826 youth were surveyed (3,027 women and 1,700 men).
- **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)**: 38 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with DOT programme staff, country partners and expansion partners, and Community-based Organisations and Community of Practice partners.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**: 45 Focus Groups Discussion were conducted with project participants, and with control groups (that is, community members who had not directly benefited from the programme).

- **Gender-Transformative Accelerator (GTA) workshop**: This workshop was held with D2S project and partner staff in September 2023, the purpose of which was to gain additional insight on the extent to which the project had achieved its gender equality objectives.
- **Case Studies**: From the data collected, Bodhi identified two Case Studies and three Stories of Change, to provide additional qualitative insight on the real-life changes experienced by the people who participated in the project.

4. Key Project Results

Quantitative findings from the evaluation yielded numerous positive results and trends across programme initiatives illustrating the success of D2S in creating meaningful and sustainable change across project countries:

- Results for the ultimate outcome yield that D2S reached 111,205 indirect beneficiaries, well over the target of 80,376, with high success across all project countries. This strong result demonstrates the power of the project's ripple effect.[1]
- Results from the econometric study reveal that D2S leads to a 14% more likelihood of seeing income being increased; a 10% more likelihood of income being more stable; and a 13% increase in likelihood of improvements to one's economic situation.
- Project wide, almost half of youth participants, 46% (44% for women and 48% for men), said their economic situation improved following their engagement with D2S.
- For the Digital Business programme, 88% (88% for women and 88% for men) of youth increased their business profits by 20% or more, 28% higher than the target of 60%. All countries achieved a rate between 81% and 100%.
- For the Digital Jobs programme, 88% (89% for women and 86% for men) of youth increased their monthly income by 20% or more, 28% higher than the target of 60%. Remarkably, all countries achieved a rate between 77% and 94%.

- Among Social Enterprise participants, 43% of youth have a sustainable social enterprise (40% for women, 49% for men), demonstrating the positive social impact that youth are having in their communities, following the critical skills and networks gained through the project.
- D2S was also found to have contributed to high levels of empowerment for youth in all countries, with an endline score of 87% project-wide (87% for women and 89% for men), surpassing the target of 80%. Targets were also reached for all countries, all reaching scores between 80% and 94%.
- At the end of the project, program-level resilience levels for youth participants was 94% (93% for women and 94% for men). Qualitative data supports this finding, with youth citing that the project had been highly effective in building their resilience by providing them with support which increased their decision-making capacity and community involvement.

5. What made Daring to Shift work?

Relevance:

Relevance relates to the suitability of an intervention and is a fundamental and essential requirement for the success of any project.

The project was highly relevant to the needs of its target groups, in significant part due to the needs assessment and co-design process. The detailed co-design process undertaken for the D2S project as a whole helped ensure its relevance to target groups via its inclusive and participatory design approach, for example, women were heavily involved and consulted during the co-design. The project's flexibility and learning approach allowed for contextual adaptations during implementation and addressed the growing global demand for digital skills. It successfully adapted to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic by delivering remote training rather than in person training. In cases where certain programme elements were less relevant or in demand, DOT pivoted to prioritise the most relevant components for a specific country context. Additionally, the CoP was highly relevant to partners' efforts in promoting gender equality, supported by co-design and community-based research. Overall, the project aligned well with national development plans.

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1   This value represents the indirect beneficiaries from the ultimate outcome indicator 1000.2 only, and does not represent the extent of indirect beneficiaries reached in the project.

Coherence:

Coherence ensures that interventions offer complementarity and fill new gaps rather than duplicating efforts.

The project was collaborative and complemented other youth-focused digital inclusion and economic empowerment initiatives in the project countries. The project's focus on young women and promoting gender equality was particularly valuable, empowering women in a traditionally male-dominated sector. D2S also aligned with global and regional efforts on youth-focused digital inclusion and economic empowerment, establishing cross-sectoral links including work with private sector partners and INGOs. The CoP provided a platform for partners to connect with like-minded organisations, fostering learning and coherence in promoting gender equality.

Effectiveness:

Effectiveness is contingent upon the project successfully meeting its targets.

D2S's delivery methods were highly effective in large part due to their close collaboration with local partners. DOT's decision to work closely with local partners to deliver the project was critical. These partners added significant value to the project by ensuring interventions were contextually appropriate, providing training spaces, and mobilising and recruiting participants. The use of a CoP was also beneficial in supporting partners' motivation and ability to promote gender equality.

The pairing of hard skills and soft skills training proved particularly effective for young women, as the soft skills boosted their self-belief and confidence to apply their hard skills. There were also several enablers which supported the project's success including the co-design process, the CoP's role in supporting partners to promote gender equality internally and within communities, and the motivation and interest of project participants.

Efficiency:

Efficiency is attained when projects strike the right equilibrium between quantity and quality, taking into account the resources available, and consistently adapt to the operating environment.

Despite some delays caused by COVID-19, the project executed the majority of its activities on time and to a high quality. In several instances the project team adapted the planned approach in order to make up for time lost during COVID-19 (for example, reducing the number of Street Teams cohorts yet growing the number of participants for each). The project was also able to complete its activities within budget. The CoP was a good use of partners' resources, with the majority of those participating in this evaluation reporting that the CoP had responded well to their needs and that their involvement in the CoP had been highly beneficial and valuable.

Impact:

Impact is achieved when the beneficiaries' circumstances experience tangible improvements, which necessitates interventions that offer comprehensive and profound support.

The Digital Jobs activities have significantly contributed to livelihood improvements, especially in countries like Kenya where job opportunities are available. Additionally, the Digital Business programme has been highly beneficial in supporting participants to incubate and grow their own businesses, particularly in areas with limited job prospects. Across the countries in which D2S was implemented, digital technology skills were noted as crucial for the economic empowerment of young people, with numerous examples demonstrating positive impacts. Soft skills training was noted as playing a vital role in boosting the confidence and self-belief of female participants, empowering them to pursue their business ideas. Male participants have also shown increased awareness of gender barriers and a greater inclination to hire women. The Community Leaders programme also had a significant impact on the development of participants' soft skills.

The project's CoP was well-regarded by local partners, with positive impacts engendered on their motivation and ability to promote gender equality. The CoP has facilitated valuable linkages and networks with like-minded organisations and provided knowledge and technical guidance.

Sustainability:

Sustainability occurs when the benefits of the intervention project continue beyond the temporal life cycle of D2S.

Partners have shown evidence of adopting the project's training programmes, indicating the value and ownership they place on the approaches. Some expansion partners are even pushing to do more, and deliver more digital skills training, which indicates the value in the approaches for them and their communities. They are also making efforts to implement the project's policies, particularly those related to gender equality, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and safeguarding.

The results of the Digital Jobs, Digital Business, Social Entrepreneur, and Community Leaders programmes are all very likely to be sustained. Beneficiaries of these programmes have acquired basic ICT skills, and can use computers and phones in new ways and expressed their intention to continue using technology to support their businesses or job applications. Social Entrepreneur participants are implementing the learned skills to grow their businesses, whilst Community Leaders have gained lasting hard and soft skills that they actively utilise, ensuring the retention of knowledge imparted through D2S. The project's focus on confidence building and creating mindset shifts regarding gender equality has given participants the opportunity to expand their conceptions of the opportunities available to them, and their capacity to engage with them.

Cross-cutting - Gender:

How and where does the project incorporate and consider gender and gender equality?

The D2S project is found to have been gender responsive, with some elements of gender-transformative work. This is the case across multiple areas, including its work to tackle gender norms and inequalities, promote women's skills, agency and empowerment, address masculinities and engage men, and create an enabling environment for gender equality through family and community mobilisation. The key enablers which supported this work included the 70 per cent female participation target, the fact that women were heavily involved in the co-design process, the presence of a gender expert and country-level gender focal points to provide technical support, and the various modalities in which training was delivered (online and in-person) which afforded flexibility for women with childcare responsibilities.

Cross-programme results saw women overwhelmingly report that the training they received helped grow their confidence and self-belief. This finding was seen throughout business, hard and soft skills training across different countries and contexts. Young women who participated in the D2S project emphasised that they felt better able to take up space within traditionally male spheres, such as in the digital technology space, and felt less reliant on male members of their family, for instance with regards to making themselves heard within their communities.

6. What lessons were learned from DS2?

The evaluation revealed that DS2 had several successes, key lessons and takeaways, which can be used for future DOT project's within these country contexts:

Lesson #1: Achieving results in the pursuit of gender equality and women's empowerment. A core, cross-cutting element of the D2S project's work was the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. The key learning is that, to achieve this, multiple approaches and interventions are often required to meet the needs of different target groups. This was integrated in a number of ways throughout the project's implementation. First, a CoP was established by DOT in 2022, to support its local partners and expansion partners to promote gender equality both in their work, and in their ways of working. Second, DOT encouraged its D2S local partners and expansion partners to seek to recruit 70 per cent women participants to their training programmes and interventions under D2S. Third, the project sought to tackle harmful gender norms in the digital technology space and engage men as gender champions by training them together with women to help them see that women have just as many skills and just as much knowledge to bring to the table as men. Together, these approaches have created significant impact in the promotion of gender equality through the project.

Lesson #2: Programme participants have a wider impact in their households and communities. D2S's approach of supporting wider impact by investing in the skills development and businesses of passionate, socially-minded youth has been effective. Furthermore, the results of this work are likely to be sustainable as it has left the youth with lasting, relevant skills which they have been able to embed in support of their careers, businesses and local communities. D2S sought to create social and economic empowerment for project participants and direct beneficiaries, and also within the wider communities in which it was implemented. To achieve this, it delivered a number of programme streams, including the Social Entrepreneur, Street Teams and Community Leaders programmes, which sought to promote young people's skills as community leaders and to help them grow their enterprises with an eye to social benefit.

Lesson #3: Encouraging positive mindset shifts within participants and the wider community is integral to long-term success. Alongside providing training, a critical aim of D2S was to encourage a positive mindset shift amongst participants and their wider communities. This approach was implemented across different project programmes, with attitude shifts being observed across country contexts. For example, D2S sought to engage men as gender champions via its peer-to-peer model, which saw men and women trained together to help them see themselves beyond their traditional roles as grooms, husbands, fathers and brothers, as well as see women as having just many skills and just as much knowledge to bring to the table as men. Such initiatives aimed to enable young women in particular to thrive despite external barriers and take advantage of the opportunities presented to them, both economically and socially. The result of this was that a majority of participants highlighted that their perceptions and mindset had been changed regarding equality between men and women, and the importance of equal opportunities and support for both.

Lesson #4: A networked approach to change via the CoP is important for ensuring the sustainability of efforts to promote gender equality. CoP partners have noted that the CoP has been effective in its work to support them in the promotion of gender equality. The CoP's networked approach in particular was highly valued by its members. This approach allowed partners to regularly meet in facilitated meetings to share challenges, learn from success stories, and create a supportive environment that encourages ongoing efforts. CoP partners' steps to establish their own WhatsApp groups indicates that they are taking ownership of this work, and intend to continue to support one another in the promotion of gender equality

even when DOT's support comes to an end or reduces once the Daring to Shift project finishes.

Lesson #5: Digital skills and access to digital technology is important in supporting youth empowerment and livelihoods. The success of D2S has highlighted that digital technology skills are critical to the economic empowerment of youth, and their ability to capitalise on livelihood opportunities. Contextually, the burgeoning shift to digital jobs and the corresponding growth in the demand for digital skills among employees indicates why this is the case globally, and in each of the countries in which Daring to Shift was implemented. As such, this indicates the value of the approach pursued through the project for young people who may lack access to even the most basic digital skills training. To achieve true youth empowerment through digital technology, local partners who have such technology must be identified, and local youth afforded the opportunity to use their resources.

Lesson #6: Pairing hard skills and soft skills training is a valuable enabler of youth empowerment and achieving livelihood impacts. The pairing of hard skills and soft skills training is especially impactful for young women across different contexts who may need additional support and confidence to believe in themselves, and implement their hard skills training. These newfound hard skills enable them to act as mentors and pass on knowledge within their communities, which has increased many participants' social standing as they are viewed as role models. This approach is particularly valuable for the promotion of women's empowerment in the use of digital technology for economic and social impact.

Lesson #7: Context plays an important role in the effectiveness of Digital Business and Digital Jobs. D2S aimed to increase the participation of young women and men in gender-equitable and sustainable social or economic development. This was achieved in part via the Digital Business programme and the Digital Jobs programme. The Digital Business programme supported existing business owners by enhancing their visibility through online marketing, improving operational efficiency with digital tools, and providing coaching on business and soft skills. The Digital Jobs programme focused on empowering vulnerable youth with the skills needed to access new job opportunities arising from digital transformation in their communities. The project allowed a shift in focus in delivery of these programmes, according to the contextual realities and participants' demand. This learning indicates that, for future such programmes, a similar flexibility should be adopted - particularly as transformation in digital technologies, and digital skills needs, can change rapidly.