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Practical guidance for promoting digital inclusion

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Innovations in digital technology as a result of COVID-19 are leaving some vulnerable groups even further behind

COVID-19 is creating rapid and dramatic shifts in the global economy and how business is transacted, especially digitally. Many PSD / MSD programmes are pivoting to digital solutions: encouraging greater adoption and more diverse use of digital technology among business partners, staff and poor women and men.

How do we minimise the unintentional exclusion of vulnerable groups in this process?

The rapid reinvention of PSD/MSD programme interventions, partnerships and processes in favour of more digital solutions is impressive. For example, the Australia-Indonesia Partnership PRISMA programme (Palladium) in Indonesia, is providing technical assistance to agribusinesses to increase their presence and engagement with farmers (women and men) on digital platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp.

Programmes are also finding novel uses of technology to continue existing activities. In Mozambique, the Business Women Connect programme (TechnoServe), modified the content and delivery channel of their five-month in-person entrepreneurship training programme so that it could be shared in short videos via WhatsApp.

In Kenya, theVoice for Change Partnership (SNV), reported adapting their advocacy work to digital platforms including webinars and e-posters to share on social media.

They have also approached media houses to partner with in holding virtual forums that could be aired on national television.

In addition to digital pivots in interventions and partnerships, PSD/MSD programmes are also testing digital solutions for monitoring and evaluation activities.

Yet, in the rush to be responsive, there is a risk that programmes may unintentionally exclude vulnerable groups if practitioners do not keep top-of-mind the inequities in internet and mobile phone access, use and skills across different demographic groups (e.g. age, geographic location, socioeconomic status), and across gender lines particularly.

Together with Josh Woodard (Impact's Edge), The Canopy Lab put together this quick reference guide to equip practitioners with practical and actionable guidance to optimise digital outreach and engagement while minimising unintentional exclusion.

The guide provides lists of practical resources related to a range of suggested actions that MSD programmes can do now with partners. Examples include:

› How to develop a digital strategy that maximises representative engagement
› Digital design principles
› How to plan to engage with less-connected customer segments
› Adapting monitoring activities to digital interventions

Read the full guide: Opportunities & imperatives arising from COVID-19: guidance on more inclusive digital adoption