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PROGRAM PROOF OF  
CONCEPT

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Final Evaluation

# Executive Summary

This report represents the final evaluation of the Proof of Concept (PoC) phase of the Rwanda Digital Ambassador Program (DAP). It was completed by the Research and Learning team at Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT) in mid-2018 and it follows the DAP Impact Assessment report carried out by the Rwanda Ministry of Information Technology and Communications (MITEC) earlier in the year.

The Digital Ambassador Program is an ambitious national program, led by MITEC and implemented by DOT, to increase the digital literacy of five million Rwandan citizens, and their resulting access and use of online systems and services. Responding to the reality that the penetration and use of digital technologies and services remain low, DAP is an important component of the government's Digital Talent Policy within the umbrella ICT strategic plan – the Smart Rwanda Master Plan. DAP also aligns with the World Economic Forum's Internet for All initiative.

Based on DOT's unique youth-led model and its proprietary Youth Leadership Program content, the PoC phase was conducted by DOT under its Digital Livelihoods project that is funded by the Government of Canada. The DAP model delivers a double impact – the expansion of a digitally literate citizenry and the empowerment of youth as leaders of digital transformation.

From late 2017 to mid-2018, DOT recruited 50 young Rwandans (a balance of women and men), trained them to become Digital Ambassadors (DAs), and deployed them to five districts (Nyagatare, Nyarugenge, Rulindo, Gisagara, and Huye) where they delivered DAP programming to over 17,000 citizens.

The goal was to determine the effectiveness of the DOT DAP model in both increasing the adoption of digital technology by citizens and in situating young Rwandan women and men as socio-economic changemakers in their communities. The PoC phase provided the important visibility, key experience, and learnings that underpin the expansion of DAP as a national project that will be rolled out throughout the country.

A sophisticated approach has been followed for the evaluation. It follows the OECD-DAC recommended methods for evaluating development interventions and uses a mixed-methods approach to evaluating effectiveness, relevance and impact and sustainability. Given the inherent bias to internally led evaluations, an external reviewer was commissioned to assess the recommendations, identify limitations, and situate the results in global evidence of the impact of ICTs on drivers of personal, social and economic development.

The results and representative findings are organized under the following major groupings:

#### Impact on citizens

- ICT use and attitudes: 75% report that their skills and use of mobile technology improved “a lot”.
- Uptake of e-services: Use of IREMBO increased 129%

#### Impact on lives and livelihoods

- 55% report that their employment skills greatly improved.
- 87% report increased income.

#### Impact on business creation and growth

- Over 50% report that their businesses are experiencing increased profits.

#### Impact on Digital Ambassadors (youth leaders)

- Over 90% of DAs report improvement in digital skills and leadership confidence.
- Over 90% report greater ability and passion to contribute to community socio-economic growth.

#### Gender disaggregation

- 75% of women report greater motivation and confidence to use digital technology.
- 58% report improved family incomes.
- 60% of women entrepreneurs report business expansion and improved profits.

#### Peer-to-peer learning

- Citizen Digital Community Clubs have formed to sustain continued peer-to-peer learning and support.

The report also observes lessons that the PoC experience offers to future phases, including:

- Public promotion and community outreach by district leaders are keys to participation at scale.
- Public messaging needs to distinguish between digital literacy and the use of technology from the technical aspects embedded in technology and coding.
- Internet access, particularly pricing, remains a barrier for citizens.

- The diverse knowledge and experience of unconnected citizens requires continued attention to localization of content and personalization of delivery.
- Citizens will benefit from linkages between DAP and an ecosystem of support services and programs for such things as smartphone acquisition, airtime access, microloan access, establishment of Digital Community Clubs, etc.

Based on the evidence, the report draws the following conclusions as to the development effectiveness of DAP:

- DAP is effective in terms of achieving or exceeding objectives related to enhancing digital skills and confidence to use new technologies, increasing awareness and uptake of e-services, creating demand for ICTs, increasing daily access and use of digital technologies and services, and improving household livelihoods and management of finances.
- As a direct result of their participation in the program, DAs have developed skills related to leadership, entrepreneurship, digital literacy and problem-solving that are leading to greater employability, particularly in sectors that require digital skills, and the ability for them to design, test and launch social impact ideas that stand to benefit the social and economic development of their communities.
- The evaluation provides sufficient evidence that the DAP model is effective in addressing the unique barriers to digital literacy, including use and access, faced by women, and, in particular, women in rural areas.
- DAP holds the potential to ensure that vital digital services are reaching people typically excluded due to low skills levels, and low levels of education and literacy.
- The program also demonstrates impacts related to closing the gender digital divide, in particular, the effect of digital skills training and confidence building on the participation and inclusion of women in hyperlocal economies.
- With the uptake of e-services, DAP is demonstrating early stage impacts related to saving time and resources at the local government level, as citizens request government services online rather than at a service center at exponential rates.
- DAP also demonstrates unintended impacts, in particular, related to the club structures, and how convening spaces for peer support and for developing collaboration and connection with others is helping both citizens and DAs overcome barriers that may have otherwise negatively impacted the success of the program's objectives. These unintended impacts also contribute to the program's sustainability.

Based on these findings, the evaluation also provides a number of lessons learned and

recommendations, including:

- Access to affordable internet remains a barrier for many citizens: An important challenge for DAP is internet connectivity, which continues to be an issue for many citizens. Despite the fact that internet penetration in Rwanda is among the highest on the continent, with 4G networks reaching 90% of the population, many citizens still cannot access the Internet due to the cost of data bundles, or lack of access to devices.
- Access to Relevant Content: The evaluation draws attention to the fact that a lack of locally relevant content and applications poses a barrier to the adoption and use of ICTs. This is particularly true for women. Rwanda is currently developing its local content promotion strategy to address this gap, but this is not enough. Efforts need to be made to give women an opportunity to become content producers as well as consumers, thereby increasing the relevance of content to their everyday lives.
- Cultural norms: Socio-cultural norms in society have a powerful influence on women's access to and use of the internet, and often explain why women experience certain barriers more acutely than men. Insights from the evaluation demonstrate that, in order to facilitate greater attendance, especially among women, training schedules need to be adapted to accommodate women's daily activities.
- Robust Longitudinal Evidence Linking Digital Access and Use to Economic Development: While the DAP program demonstrates self-reported and anecdotal evidence of positive shifts in household income stability and resilience, it highlights the lack of robust systems for measuring long-term impacts; in particular, the impact of digital uptake on micro- and macroeconomic development. Additional efforts should be made to assess the effect of digital inclusion on the social and economic inclusion of women.

## Background

The Digital Ambassador Program (DAP) is a large-scale initiative led by the Rwandan Ministry of Information Technology and Communication (MITEC) that will increase the number of digitally literate citizens and their use of e-government and e-business services. In alignment with the Rwanda Digital Talent Policy and the World Economic Forum's Internet for All initiative, DAP will increase Rwandans' digital literacy, drive digital adoption, bridge the ICT skills gap, and improve livelihoods. The Digital Talent Policy seeks to enhance digital literacy across all levels of Rwandan society, with emphasis on women and youth, in order to prepare a digitally competitive workforce that responds to the needs of the local, regional and global economy. The Government of Rwanda envisions that DAP will mobilize five thousand young leaders to transform the lives of five million citizens through digital skills and adoption of e-services, driving inclusion and growth.