



Coordinating Digital Transformation Overview

Ethiopia, Nepal, and Tanzania provide examples of what is possible when governments and donors come together through a strong coordination process. By developing national strategies or plans, each country provided a structure around which stakeholders could align to support nationally identified health and development priorities. Ethiopia's *Information Revolution Roadmap*, Nepal's *e-Health Strategy*, and Tanzania's *Digital Health Investment Road Map* help guide current and future donor, government and implementing partners coordination on digital health systems in these countries. Through these case studies, we gathered key lessons for both donors and governments that can help foster successful coordination in other countries or sectors.

Key lessons

Coordination should be government-led

Governments should be the focal point for coordination, with donors and implementing partners encouraging and supporting the government in this lead role. As the focal point, governments set the priority investment areas, bring together a wide range of stakeholders, and guide coordination through defined governance structures.

Shared understanding of the digital health ecosystem

Everyone involved with coordinating digital health systems should share a common understanding of a country's digital health context. This can be accomplished by conducting a digital health landscape analysis and/or developing a realistic costing model for digital health interventions.

Shared vision

A clearly articulated vision of digital health should set the direction for coordination through frameworks such as a theory of change and/or an investment roadmap. Governments should lead the development of this vision, supported by donors and implementing partners. Donor organizations also have a role to play in engaging in donor-donor discussions in order to align with the government-led vision while limiting duplicative investments.

Strong governance

Coordination requires well-defined governance structures. As the focal point for coordination, governments are in the best position to define and lead a governance structure and ensure the appropriate stakeholders are involved, including donor organizations, implementing partners, representatives from all levels of the health system, and relevant government agencies.

Unique position of donors

Donors should go beyond financial support when encouraging coordination between partners. Donor investments and activities should be designed to reinforce government ownership and leadership. Donors should use their position to advocate for resourcing and coordination amongst their global peers and with the implementers they work with. Donors can support capacity building activities and peer learning, and utilize their influence to amplify the voices of national champions.



Suggested Actions for Donors

Support country capacity strengthening.

- » **Provide additional subject matter experts**, including individuals with experience in other countries, to extend government capacity
- » **Encourage the use of global resources**, such as the National eHealth Strategy Toolkit, the Classification of Digital Health Interventions, the WHO Guideline on Digital Interventions for Health System Strengthening, and the Principles of Digital Development
- » **Advocate with key government leaders** to advance the digital health sector

Align investments to the shared vision once it is set.

- » **Review and adapt existing activities** to better correlate with priorities and gaps identified by the government
- » **Plan future investments** to meet the priorities and gaps identified by the government
- » **Follow the Principles** of Donor Alignment for Digital Health

Encourage participation of additional donors and implementing partners in the coordination process.

- » **Provide initial investment** into the coordination process to reduce the perceived risk of investment by other donors
- » **Share the successes and lessons** from coordination with other donors and implementing partners
- » **Encourage the broad adoption** of the Principles of Donor Alignment for Digital Health

Mobilize additional resources for digital transformation.

- » **Advise governments** on new ways to pursue additional investment opportunities with new and current donors
- » **Support the development** of public-private partnerships
- » **Share existing gaps** in resourcing when coordinating with other donors
- » **Consider national priorities** when setting internal policies and strategies

Reduce duplication of activities between donors and implementing partners.

- » **Align activities** to any existing data or technology standards and architecture utilized by the country
- » **Define the segments** of an investment roadmap or strategy that mostly closely match donor interest in order to indicate potential areas of funding
- » **Share strategies**, plans, and interests with other donors and implementing partners to prevent duplication

Provide support for communication, advocacy, knowledge sharing, and capacity building activities.

- » **Support the dissemination** of national digital health strategies and/or roadmaps
- » **Assist with advocacy** activities to create buy-in and uptake of the digital health strategy or roadmap
- » **Encourage peer-to-peer** learning exchanges, either directly or through regional networks
- » **Fund capacity building** activities for both decision makers and service providers
- » **Enable the development and sharing** of lessons from coordination efforts



Suggested Actions for Governments

Promote digital health as a fundamental component of health system progress.

- » **Ensure digital approaches are represented** within the strategies and policies of all health verticals to create a platform for advocacy across the health system
- » **Identify national-level champions for digital** (i.e., minister of health, Prime Minister, etc.)

Align digital health strategies and roadmaps to existing health sector priorities and strategies.

- » **Connect the process and intended outcomes** of digital transformation to existing health priorities (i.e. Universal Health Coverage)
- » **Articulate the role** digital health can play in achieving health system priorities within a digital health strategy and/or roadmap

Align digital health strategies and roadmaps to global norms, priorities, and strategies developed by the World Health Organization, International Telecommunications Union, and others.

- » **Utilize globally available resources**, such as the National eHealth Strategy Toolkit, the Classification of Digital Health Interventions, the WHO Guideline on Digital Interventions for Health System Strengthening, and the Principles of Digital Development to design and strengthen national digital health strategies and roadmaps

Conduct a detailed landscape analysis of existing digital health strengths and weaknesses.

- » **Assess the current digital landscape** including internet connectivity, mobile coverage, and other infrastructure considerations
- » **Map existing digital health activities**, information systems, and donors and implementing partners in the country in order to identify duplicative or non-interoperable systems that will need to be addressed

Ensure costing models are realistic, and account for costs such as capacity building and long-term maintenance.

- » **Conduct a costing exercise** that includes tangible costs (software licenses, hardware, infrastructure improvements) and intangible costs (capacity building, maintenance, ongoing system improvements)

Define governing bodies with specific roles, responsibilities, and membership.

- » **Set up an institutional home** for directing digital health activities within the ministry of health
- » **Set up advisory bodies** that include donors and implementing partners, ensure appropriate stakeholders are involved on the advisory bodies in the right capacity so they are inclusive but no unsustainable
- » **Provide clear terms of reference** to define the roles, responsibilities, activities, and cadence of any advisory bodies, define accountability measures for all stakeholders.
- » **Formalize partnerships** using memorandums of understanding with each donor and implementing partner to build trust and common understanding of the roles and responsibilities in the coordination



Suggested Actions for All Stakeholders

Ensure internal governance supports transparency, communication, and flexibility.

- » **Review and update** internal policies and procedures to reflect the coordination principles
- » **Identify guidelines** and regulations on information sharing and external communication
- » **Include guidance** on transparency and communication in Memorandums of Understanding

Develop a common workplan and M&E framework that can be shared by the government, donors, and implementing partners.

- » **Create a common workplan** that is shared widely with donors and implementing partners
- » **Support a common set of indicators** to be shared with donors and implementing partners
- » **Conduct annual assessments** alongside other donors and implementing partners in order to measure collective progress across all partners

Taking Coordination Further

New advances in the digital health sector, and new perspectives on the global approach to public health will require unprecedented levels of coordination between governments, donors, traditional implementing partners, and the private sector. In order to set the stage for future success, governments, donors, and partners should strengthen coordination now in preparation for the quickly advancing future.

The lessons outlined in these case studies arise from coordination carried out within the traditional development paradigm. For example, many digital interventions are developed within the confines of a health vertical (such as a logistics information system focused specifically on the vaccine supply chain). However, true digital transformation of health systems requires coordination mechanisms that cross these historic boundaries. Digital health can serve as a bridge between health verticals by developing a sector-wide systems architecture with common data and technology standards and interoperable software tools and approaches. Similarly, the strategies, roadmaps, and other policies developed to catalyze digital transformation can encourage a policy environment that moves beyond silos and addresses the health sector as a whole.

Digital Square is a partnership of the world's leading digital health experts from 40+ organizations working together with countries to strengthen digital health systems.

Digital Square offers a new way to invest in digital health—providing a space where countries and members of the global community can gather to think big and do good, together. By convening government officials, technological innovators, donor and implementation partners, and others across borders and boundaries in the Digital Square, we can grow possibility into reality by focusing on our common goal: connecting the world for better health.

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