Partnerships between government development organisations and social start-ups

Strategic guidance document

Contents

1 Overview

The following document presents a series of recommendations for governmental development organisations interested in piloting digital interventions with social start-ups designed for fragile contexts. This includes opportunities and challenges that come from the different structural and cultural prerequisites between these two sectors. Partnership guidance is framed within the four phases of programme design and implementation:

1. Programme inception

2. Design and development

3. Programme implementation

4. Monitoring and evaluation

New Perspectives through Academic Education and Training for young Syrians and Jordanians (JOSY)[1] is a scholarship GIZ-project for Syrian refugees and socially disadvantaged Jordanian students. They partnered with Kiron Open Higher Education gGmbH, a social start-up that provides online learning and higher education to refugees, to implement two pilots: a digital summer school programme and a digital mentoring programme (see Annex A for detailed descriptions of the pilots). This document was created as an output from the evaluation of these JOSY pilot programmes. Recommendations and guidance for designing and implementing similar projects can be found in two separate manuals, including recommendations for projects with comparable contexts and target groups.

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2 Background

The digital summer school and mentoring programmes piloted by JOSY and implemented by Kiron combine two emphases of German development policy: promoting refugees' access to education and employment, and digitalisation. The combination of these two areas potentially offers a scalable solution to address access and equity gaps in the provision of quality education and employability programming for refugees, and provides an effective approach to contribute to both lines of policy through simultaneous delivery. In 2017, the BMZ endorsed its digital strategy which sets out how challenges can be tackled and how digital opportunities can be leveraged. The topics of displacement and migration are important pillars of this strategy, particularly as forced displacement reaches unprecedented levels (65.3 million people worldwide[2]). This has created a significantly challenging environment to provide sustainable access to higher education and labour market integration for young refugees. A wide range of digital initiatives have emerged that offer online or blended learning[3] formats to address this challenge, with the specific aim to promote education and employment for refugee learners. It is increasingly recognised that online and blended learning models offer a unique opportunity for refugees pursuing higher education and employability skills development to access internationally recognised programmes, as well as quality materials and professional mentors for career goal development. These models offer increased flexibility for study time, access location, and options to determine their preferred depth of learning and interactions with mentors, depending on their goals and priorities. In addition, a greater number of programme participants can be reached, data can be monitored easily and used to make immediate improvements to the programme content and structure, and there can be substantial cost savings[4].

In this context, providing evidence of the outcomes of digital education and employability programmes designed for refugees becomes critical to inform the evidence base for 'ICT4Refugees'[5]. GIZ endorsed the Principles for Digital Development[6] in March 2018 and is therefore committed to a systematic process by which to ensure quality and rigour specific to digital programmes in developing contexts. Similarly, BMZ has a strong strategic approach to digitalisation in development partnerships, with the explicit aim to improve the digital inclusion of people in developing countries. To this end, the BMZ is committed to the increased use of innovative digital approaches and partnerships with actors from the technology and start-up scene.

2   UNHCR (2016). Missing out: Refugee education in crisis. Retrieved from: http://www.unhcr.org/57d9d01d0
3   Blended learning is a combination of online digital media with traditional classroom methods.
4   Toolkit – Digitalisation in Development Cooperation and International Cooperation in Education, Culture and Media. Retrieved from: https://www.giz.de/fachexpertise/downloads/bmz2016-en-toolkit-digitalisation.pdf
5   Mason, B. & Buchmann, D. (2016). ICT4Refugees: A Report on the Emerging Landscape of Digital Responses to the Refugee Crisis. GIZ publication. Retrieved from: https://regasus.de/online/datastore?epk=74D5roYc&file=image_8_en
6   The Principles for Digital Development (https://digitalprinciples.org) are nine 'living' guidelines to help practitioners integrate established best practices into technology-enabled development programmes.

Like Kiron, the implementing partner for the JOSY pilots, there are myriad start-ups that offer innovative approaches to education and employment promotion in fragile contexts (see Annex B for examples), offering the potential for more partnerships with government development agencies. Partnerships of this nature present a unique opportunity to provide a programme with the background experience of two different organisations. They offer value in their varied approaches, strength in their critical discussions of best practice, and force a substantial level of flexibility and adaptability within the programme model. In addition, they may be able to attract more students and volunteers (e.g. tutors, trainers and mentors for summer school and mentoring programmes) through their networks. In order for partnerships to efficiently and effectively deliver programmes of this nature, a number of considerations must take place during programme design and implementation. This guidance document shares the learning from the JOSY digital summer school and mentoring programme pilots with the aim to document best practice for the design and implementation of digital programmes within a strategic partnership between government development organisations and social start-ups.

3   Guidance for working in a strategic partnership

The following section presents guidance for designing and implementing pro-grammes in a strategic partnership with social start-ups. This is framed within the four key phases of programme operation:

Phase 1: Programme inception
Phase 2: Design and development
Phase 3: Programme implementation
Phase 4: Monitoring and evaluation

Each section presents the considerations needed while working in a partnership with a social start-up and draws on the learning from GIZ's partnership with Kiron for the JOSY summer school and mentoring pilots. Note that this document pro-vides strategic level guidance. For detailed guidance on designing and implement-ing digital summer school and mentoring programmes, please see the respective manuals developed in tandem with this document. In addition, Capacity WORKS[7] provides more general project management considerations.

Phase 1: Programme inception

Partnership considerations during the inception phase of the programme are bro-ken down into three areas, drawing on the learning from the JOSY pilots.

1. Steering committee formation

2. Key relationship considerations

3. Contract design

1.1   Steering committee formation and the development of clear communication pathways

During the inception phase, a steering committee should be formed and consist-ent meetings should be planned and agreed on in advance. The JOSY pilots part-ners felt that the steering group meetings provided an effective structure to their joint decision-making. Communication pathways should also be developed and a protocol put in place that has been agreed within the contract by all involved partners. This should also identify the data that will be shared, defining how it will be used, when, by whom and in what form is necessary (e.g. by providing a standard template for progress reports).

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7   Capacity WORKS (https://www.giz.de/expertise/html/4619.html) is the management model of GIZ. The
     model contains systematised knowledge on how cooperation targeting societal changes works between
     state, civil society and private-sector actors.

1.2   Key relationship considerations during the inception phase

A cooperative, open and transparent relationship is needed to develop and implement a programme inclusive of all partners priorities and needs. In the JOSY pilot, partners felt that there was a strong level of collaboration and flexibility within the strategic partnership between GIZ and Kiron. This collaboration proved fruitful with Kiron pushing creative and innovative processes, and GIZ bringing knowledge and expertise of the operating context.

During the inception phase of the programme, partners should consider to what extent the partnership is helping each other on their strategic path. All partners should have agency and creative freedom within their roles and responsibilities, and their skills should be built upon. They should not be forced to bend to the specific needs of another partner.

1.3   Contract design

During the design of the contract, there are a variety of considerations that should take place. The structures and incentives of start-ups are varied, and it is therefore important to understand and reflect the unique approach of each start-up with every new partnership. As the incentives may greatly differ from those in governmental development agencies, it is also important that a suitable contract to be drafted that is reflective of all parties' priorities taking into account the level of experience of start-ups. Responsibilities and access to information should be clearly defined and agreed on during the negotiation of the contract.

Partners should also come to an agreement regarding decision-making processes and ensure they understand one another's limitations. For the JOSY pilots, there were significant decision-making differences and speeds between GIZ and Kiron (hierarchy-based with different decision-making loops in GIZ versus a much flatter structure in Kiron).

Further contract considerations are summarised below:

- Ensure the contract type is appropriate as this will determine the influence around deliverables and the access to the implementing partner's data. Regarding the level of experience of start-ups, a contract type which clearly defines all deliverables within a certain timeline is recommended. The full implementation responsibility should remain with GIZ.

- Negotiate the proposal in a structured way whereby GIZ clearly communicates the deliverables needed from the project. This may include a workshop for developing a mutual understanding of the needs from each partner.

- Articulate where the cooperation ends and where the start-up's own business expansion starts.

- Contract forms should allow a certain amount of flexibility. E.g. if possible, keep the budget flexible so it can be altered following the needs assessment.

- Ensure that partners accept and understand what is needed from them in regard to resource allocation.

- Develop clear communication pathways and a protocol that has been agreed within the contract by all involved parties.

- The contract phase should be managed by an appropriate person at GIZ with a project management as well as technical perspective. This is helpful for the negotiation and development of the proposal and to ensure that the needs of all stakeholders are represented and included. In addition, the contract department should seek close collaboration with the responsible project manager during the contract preparation to ensure a good fit has been reached between the contract and content of the partnership.

Phase 2: Design and development

Partnership considerations during the design and development phase have been framed within two areas, drawing on the learning from the JOSY pilots:

1. Capitalise on previous experience and infrastructure, and

2. Assess resources within the partnership.

2.1   Capitalise on previous experience and infrastructure

The design and development of the programme components should be done in line with partner priorities and areas of strength and expertise. The programme research phase should include a rigorous exploration, documentation, and analysis of relevant literature and programmes in order to understand what has already been developed and what can be improved upon in future similar practice. In addition, literature and programmes aligned with the unique contextual considerations of the intended operating environment should be considered in order to ensure that the socio-cultural context is informing the design, as this plays a significant role in the ability to introduce technology infrastructure in a community. Experts and programme managers and staff of similar programmes should also be consulted.

Partners should be encouraged to engage with their wider networks in order to cast a larger net as to what has already been created, and who may be able to support. Similarly, instead of designing something new, programmes should consider what they may be able to reuse so as to leverage the gains from previous projects, using their learning to improve practice, such as for software, digital tools, content, data security protocols, etc. This may involve a steering committee meeting within the design phase whereby partners bring forward their previous experiences and the learning that can be carried over to the current project.

2.2   Assess resources within the partnership

Cost-benefit and resource assessment should also take place within the research and design phases and be appropriately documented and evaluated throughout the lifecycle of the programme. Assessing resources or resource planning refers to determining the inputs needed and programme budget on the basis of the intended interventions. It is important to remember that cost-benefit is not necessarily only about the amount of money or resources going into a programme, but also whether the resources are being used responsibly. As such, the budget should be accompanied by a clear rationale for each expense. Digital programmes offer challenges for assessing cost-benefit, so it is important to include such components like scalability which may raise the value of the initiative. Support and capacity building activities, for example, should not be underestimated because they can offer longer-term cost savings through building local capacity.

Resource planning should include the following steps for partners:

- Identify resources needed for programme development and implementation and costs for both the medium and long term. Include direct and indirect costs.

- Identify which interventions will be most beneficial with the resources available.

- Ensure that partners understand and agree with what is required of them with regard to resource distribution.

- Evaluate scalability within resource costs – e.g. platform costs are high but able to scale to x number of programmes in x number of contexts.

This step should result in a programme budget by the end of the design phase of the programme. The budget should be realistic and agreed on by all partners. For the JOSY pilots, most partners found the budget overly ambitious but still noted that they took significant learning from the pilot. A more comprehensive cost-benefit review should take place following the completion of the programme.

Phase 3: Programme implementation

Partnership considerations during the programme implementation phase include consistent communication between partners throughout implementation. This may involve monthly or quarterly meetings to discuss a pre-set agenda or for responsible parties to present the results of the progress reports. Expectations should also be consistently managed on the part of the partners regarding their roles and responsibilities. Partners should be aware of what updates or communication are required from them.

Working effectively with partners includes the following four considerations during programme implementation, drawing on the lessons learned from the JOSY pilots:

1. Consider the balance between having enough partnership meetings while not spending too much of the budget on the cost of time and travel. Make these meetings as efficient and structured as possible with all partners having specific responsibilities for the development and delivery of these meetings. The JOSY team described the steering committee meetings as effective and useful but also noted their expense, mentioning that this was considered an investment in the relationship.

2. Make reporting for partners clear and concise and not just concerned with numbers but also with impact and outcomes. Updates should be used as a source for fruitful discussions.

3. Continue collaboration and flexibility within the strategic partnership, as established in the inception phase. Collegial and collaborative relationships among partners were identified to be key strengths of institutional cooperation within the JOSY pilots.

4. Collaborate with other projects, organisations and sectors through sharing information, insights, strategies and resources as well.

   a) Take advantage of innovative collaboration, communication and data exchange tools.

   b) Ensure communication methods are accessible and used by all parties.

Phase 4: Monitoring and evaluation

Partnership considerations during the monitoring and evaluation phase have been framed within three steps, drawing on the learning from the JOSY pilots:

1. Establishing programme learning cycles

2. Programme monitoring

3. Evaluation of the programme

4.1   Establishing programme learning cycles

Programme learning cycles should be documented and agreed on by all partners during the design phase to identify how learning will be used to inform changes where necessary. This should include:

- Refining the programme objectives and developing a clear Theory of Change and logical framework (log frame matrix) that documents indicators and how they will be measured, which is agreed by partners and aligned with their individual priorities;

- Documenting how learning will be collected during programme implementation and the responsibilities of doing so by each partner;

- Ensuring assessment tools are non-invasive and sensitive to the characteristics of students and contextualised to their environment;

- Ensuring that there is no overlap between surveys and interview requests from different partners;

- Collecting feedback from off-boarding students, tutors, trainers, or mentors who have dropped out of or left the programme; and

- Ensuring that all stakeholders understand how their voices will be incorporated into programme learning.

4.2   Programme monitoring

Throughout the lifecycle of the programme, the steering group should assess the programme structure and content for relevance, effectiveness and efficiency in accordance with the agreed monitoring plan developed while establishing programme learning cycles. This involves examining programme activities, user response and change. The resulting progress reports produced for the steering group meetings will inform whether or not the interventions need to be changed or adapted as the programme evolves. This should take advantage of simple and cost-effective digital tools like online mini questionnaires to receive immediate feedback from beneficiaries about their experience in the programme that can easily be shared among partners. In particular, the steering group should discuss the following:

- Appropriateness and relevance of programme structure and content for the unique characteristics of beneficiaries,

- Learning priorities, viewing the programme as a step in a longer trajectory of the students' career and personal goals,

- Usage behaviour on the platform and within the offline course components, and

- Time or other constraints students may be experiencing, such as access to internet or language barriers.

Adaptations to the programme may be necessary as a result of the monitoring (e.g. developing more Arabic content or offering more study hubs), as well as available support. It is important that the responsible parties collect data carefully and document any challenges in reference to collection (e.g. students are not responding to surveys sent out via the platform). The monitoring plan, like the entirety of the programme structure, may need to remain flexible and adaptive to the needs of the stakeholders.

4.3   Evaluation of the programme

While it can be difficult to show direct impact in projects of this nature, monitoring and evaluation tools should measure the programme against the OECD DAC criteria[8]: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. Samples for post-processing must be representative for the full population, and the evaluation should be as systematic and objective as possible.

Engagement and attainment according to the indicators should be assessed against student demographics, considering data and anonymity restrictions. It is critical that data collection instruments be assessed for reliability and validity, and all data collection be explained well to participants and administered in a standardised and objective way. The results of the evaluation then complete the cycle and inform new planning processes, whether for the continuation of the same programme or the implementation of a new intervention. All partners should participate in the programme evaluation.

Guidance for partnerships during the evaluation, including lessons learned from the JOSY pilots, are summarised below:

• Develop a realistic, clear, and detailed log frame to apply to an evaluation with reasonable numbers for indicators (i.e. not too low or high) and clear language (i.e. steer clear of vague language such as "sufficient number" and instead try to be as detailed as possible).

• Anonymise student data while not forsaking being able to track engagement across demographics and by each student. The JOSY evaluation struggled with being able to disaggregate by demographics as these were not included in the data provided to the external evaluator.

• Do not over-communicate with the students by sending too many requests for feedback. There were concerns from staff and students in the JOSY pilots regarding this oversaturation of requests.

• Ensure there is enough time during the evaluation to adequately measure impact (i.e. it will have to be after the project closes). A challenge of the evaluation of the JOSY pilots was the timing since there had not been time for changes to fully manifest since the mentoring pilot programme had not yet been completed at the time of qualitative data collection.

Concluding remarks

This strategic guidance document presents a series of recommendations for designing and implementing a digital programme pilot in partnership with a social start-up. It incorporates the lessons learned from the JOSY and Kiron partnership in which they successfully implemented two pilot programmes: a digital summer school and digital mentoring programme in Amman, Jordan. These pilots presented a unique opportunity to learn from the strategic partnership of a government development agency and a social start-up to identify particular strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The JOSY / Kiron partnership was a fruitful exchange of ideas and expertise and actively sought to document its learning for future programmes and partnerships of this nature. It is recommended that learning from similar projects be widely shared to build on the experiences presented in this guide.

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8   OECD DAC criteria: http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm

Annexes

Annex A: Summary of JOSY digital summer school and mentoring pilot programmes

JOSY digital summer school pilot	**Timeline:** The programme was live for students from June to August 2017, with full programme design, delivery and evaluation from January 2017 to December 2017. **Objective:** This pilot was designed to enable its students to acquire additional life skills and academic competencies. These were meant to serve as an important proof of qualifications for the job market and at the same time build up competencies related to individual vocational and academic pathways. Participants included Syrian refugees and socially disadvantaged Jordanians living in Jordan. **Programme provision:** The specific courses were chosen by the students individually, following the inception phase according to their learning needs. These classes were offered through a blended learning format, with the online element delivered through massive open online courses (MOOCs[9]), developed by renowned universities and hosted on an online platform. Additional projects and skills training were offered to students in physical spaces in Amman called study hubs. These study hubs also provided computers and internet access to students.
JOSY digital mentoring pilot	**Timeline:** The mentoring programme followed the summer school and was live for students from November to December 2017. **Objective:** While the summer school aimed to foster the growth of confidence in academic skills, the mentoring programme aimed to build professional confidence, communication and interpersonal skills. It offered students an opportunity to be coached by skilled professionals in their field, thus better preparing the transition from the academic to the professional world. Because of the fragile working context and uncertain employment futures for the students, the programme intended the mentors to encourage developing alternative and creative approaches regarding pathways to employment. **Programme provision:** The mentoring platform was opened to students to use to complete eLearning exercises and set up individual mentoring sessions with the mentors they had been matched with. Students were also able to search through jobs that were posted on the platform.

9   MOOCs are online courses aimed at unlimited open and global participation via an online platform (e.g. Coursera (https://www.coursera.org), edx (https://www.edx.org), Futurelearn (https://www.futurelearn.com)).

Annex B: Sample of relevant start-ups

The following start-ups incorporate digital components with specific aims to strengthen lifelong learning / employability skills in the context of forced displacement and migration. They operate out of Africa and the MENA region. These start-ups have not been assessed against a prescriptive set of criteria, but rather serve as an example of the types of programmes currently in operation.

Start-up	Description
InZone	InZone[10] "pioneers innovative approaches to multilingual communication and higher education in communities affected by conflict and crisis". Projects are located in three different regions: Horn of Africa, Middle East and Europe, and globally.
Jusoor	Jusoor[11] is a non-profit organisation that is "a group of Syrian expatriates supporting the country's development and helping Syrian youth realise their potential through programmes in the fields of education, career development, and global community engagement".
JWL	JWL[12] offers blended tertiary education at the margins. They provide "regionally and globally accredited, high-quality curricula through virtual, blended and on-site learning experiences".
RBK	RBK[13] is a career accelerator that accepts refugee students and is "the first code bootcamp in the Arab world". Silicon Valley based Hack Reactor, the leading code bootcamp in the States, is a cofounding partner and provides the curriculum. The training is in 2 phases: A 4-week preparatory phase followed by a 12-week immersive phase. Additionally, RBK runs a 3-week English bootcamp prior to Phase 2 for those with low English ability.
Refugee Code Academy	Refugee Code Academy[14] is a technology start-up based out of Morocco that aims to build coding schools inside refugee camps so that they can join the tech workforce remotely.
SPARK	In cooperation with several universities, SPARK[15] is setting up a higher vocational programme on Crisis Response and Early Recovery. "The programme will enable Syrian youth to implement activities in Syria by improving their skills and educating them about reconstruction and rehabilitation strategies."
Techfugees	Techfugees[16] is a non-profit coordinating the international technology community's response to the need of refugees. They organise conferences, workshops, hackathons and meetups around the world "in an effort to generate tech solutions for and with refugees."

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10   http://www.unige.ch/inzone/who-we-are
11   https://jusoorsyria.com
12   https://www.jwl.org/en/home
13   http://rbk.org
14   http://refugeecodeacademy.org
15   http://www.spark-online.org/projects/higher-education-for-syrians-hes
16   https://techfugees.com/about

Annex C: Contact details

For questions or concerns regarding this guidance document, please contact a member of the team:

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17 https://kiron.ngo
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