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EVALUATION OF SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 1 OF THE EU ACTION RESICODI IMPLEMENTED BY GIZ (BACKUP INITIATIVE)

Final Report

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Abbreviations

AU	African Union
ACCESSMAD	Association pour la Création de Centres d'Education Scientifique à Madagascar Axés sur le Développement
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CONAMEPT	Coalition Nationale Malgache pour l'Education pour Tous
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	(OECD)/Development Assistance Committee
DC	Development Cooperation
ESP	Education Sector Plan
EU	European Union
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
GCE	Global Campaign for Education
LEG	Local education groups
MoE	Ministry of Education
MPCA	Multi Party Cooperation Agreement
NANTU	Namibia National Teachers Union
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SO	Specific Objective
ZANEC	Zambia National Education Coalition

1 Evaluation objectives and questions

This chapter aims to describe the purpose of the evaluation, the standard evaluation criteria, and additional stakeholders' knowledge interests and evaluation questions.

1.1 Evaluation objectives

The EU Action RESICODI is a multi-country Action using digital technologies for the COVID-19 response. It was jointly designed and has been implemented from November 2020 to October 2023 by GIZ and Enabel. This evaluation focuses on the Action's Specific Objective 1 "Digital solutions to improve the quality and continuation of education services are implemented" which GIZ is responsible for, using the established project "German BACKUP Initiative – Education in Africa". Enabel will carry out a respective evaluation on Specific Objectives 2 and 3.

The **aim of this evaluation** is to learn from the project's experience and provide accountability and transparency towards its commissioning party the European Union (EU) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Furthermore, the evaluation should assess the project along - on the one hand - the OECD-DAC criteria and on the other hand further requirements such as rights-based approach principles as well as gender mainstreaming, as defined in the Description of Action of the MPCA. Finally, the evaluation focuses on the added value of the inter-agency collaboration between Enabel and GIZ. Based on the evaluations results, recommendations are developed that foster joint learning at various levels and indicate possibilities for scaling of the SO1's approach as used during the implementation of the Action.

1.2 Evaluation questions

The project is assessed on the basis of standardized evaluation criteria and questions to ensure comparability. This is based on the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)/Development Assistance Committee (DAC) evaluation criteria (updated 2020) for international cooperation and the evaluation criteria for German bilateral cooperation (in German): **relevance, coherence, efficiency**, **effectiveness**, **impact** and **sustainability**. Also, aspects regarding the rights-based approach principles as well as gender mainstreaming are included as a cross-sectional aspect in all OECD/DAC criteria. Specific assessment dimensions and evaluation questions have been derived from this given framework. These assessment dimensions and analytical questions can be found in the **evaluation matrix** that was developed specifically for this evaluation (annex 1).

2 Object of the evaluation

This chapter aims to define the evaluation object, including the theory of change and results hypothesis.

2.1 Definition of the evaluation

The project component of "German BACKUP Initiative Education in Africa – Phase II" as part of the EU Action RESICODI, was added to the BACKUP project in November 2020 and ran until October 2023 with a total commissioning value of 6,100,000 EUR. The EU Action RESICODI is jointly implemented by GIZ (with a focus on basic education – Specific Objective 1) and the Belgian development agency Enabel (with a focus on TVET and health – Specific Objectives 2 and 3) in the context of Team Europe Approach.

The part implemented by GIZ (hereafter 'project' or Specific Objective 1 (SO1) has the **aim to support partners** (African Ministries of Education, national civil-society organizations, and regional networks) to react to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic for basic education as well as its longer-lasting changes to the education sector with a focus on digital solutions. The African partners are eligible for assistance through a support mechanism that operates based on demand. The program exclusively responds to the needs of partners, ensuring alignment with their national processes and priorities by directly aiding in their implementation. Through a quality check system, SO1 verifies that incoming applications are in line with national education strategies or plans and avoid double-funding. Local structures, including entities like the Local Education Groups, EU delegations, and GIZ bilateral projects related to education, have a significant role in providing feedback on funding applications for quality assurance. They ensure that the approved applications are well-suited to the particular digital ecosystems within the respective country or countries. This ensures that only locally developed projects, deeply rooted in the local context, receive support. In addition, regional and international actors, such as regional civil society networks, or the Global Partnership for Education Secretariat are informed and asked to provide feedback.

The services provided by the SO1 are structured **around three key pillars**: financial support and guidance, technical advice, and support for regional and global networking.

1. Financial Support: Partners at the national or regional level can apply for grants of up to €100,000 to implement projects based on their context-based demand.

2. Technical and Financial Advice: The technical assistance provided to partners goes beyond administrative support for application submission. It focuses on developing the specific content of projects based on the partners' ideas and needs. Partners are closely guided and supported during the application for project funding and the subsequent implementation process. Initially, partners submit a preliminary project proposal, which is refined through extensive collaboration with the project team (both technical and financial teams) into a concrete set of activities with accompanying budget. The project team continues to provide guidance as needed during project implementation.

3. Networking Support: The BACKUP Initiative facilitates the creation of networks between partner countries and leverages its international network to help partner countries engage with global partners, exchange experiences, and learn from global practices.

Under the EU Action RESICODI, the BACKUP Initiative has supported 20 national and regional measures in eight targeted **partner countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Botswana, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, Rwanda, Zambia).**

2.2 Results model including hypotheses

The **project's specific objective as part of the EU Action** is to improve continuity and quality of education services through the implementation of digital solutions.

The project operates as a regional fund and provides funding to ministries (such as those related to Education) and civil society organizations (CSO) in selected partner countries in Africa. This funding supports their involvement in workshops or training, hiring external consultants, or carrying out their own small-scale projects. Therefore, the representatives of ministries and CSO are the **direct target group of the project** and act as intermediaries to reach the indirect target group.

Education professionals and learners are the **indirect target group** of the project as they benefit from improved digital skills of education professionals and the implementation of digital education solutions.
Indirect target groups at impact level are considered to be Covid-19 impacted population in the selected partner countries. In addition, local innovation ecosystems, including academia, civil society and private sector actors benefit from the digital solutions in education.

The **project's structure** – both conceptually and in terms of organization – is best understood along several dimensions that differentiate strands of support offered by the project:

- Financial and technical support
- Support to governmental actors (particularly Ministries of Education) and to civil society stakeholders
- Support of national and regional processes

These varying levels of differentiation will be taken into account during the evaluation process to illustrate the wide range of activities carried out by the project and to identify both the factors contributing to its success and the obstacles encountered in implementing a demand-based small-scale fund.

During the inception phase of this evaluation, we conducted a review of the results model with the project team. The revised results model is presented in Figure 1 and illustrates the relationship between activities and results, encompassing outcomes and impacts. The hypotheses in this section encompass those that connect outputs to the module objective (outcome) and those that link outputs to one another. The project team and the evaluation team collaboratively selected these critical hypotheses for further analysis, as detailed in chapter 4.

Output Level

The project encompasses the following five outputs:

- **Output 1.1 (Access):** Learners and education professionals have access to digital education services.
- **Output 1.2 (Digital Solutions):** Ministries and civil society organizations are supported to plan and implement digital solutions in education.
- **Output 1.3 (Digital Skills):** Learners and education professionals have taken part in measures to improve digital skills.
- **Output 1.4 (Cooperation):** Cooperation agreements between the public sector, or civil society organizations and the private sector to foster digital solutions for education services are established.
- **Output 1.5 (Network):** Learning and network building among the partner countries and internationally in the area of digital solutions for education and COVID-19 resilience (in general) are supported.

The BACKUP Initiative approach – technical advice and funding combined with regional exchange is the basis for Output 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5. The first four outputs follow the same logic in that needs for digital solutions are identified and implemented by partners which will depending on the focus of the intervention lead to digital solutions (1.2), access (1.1), digital skills (1.3) and cooperation (1.4).

Output 1.2 (Digital Solutions) focusses on the project's support to African ministries of education and civil society organizations to plan and implement digital solutions in education. To this end, the project's main activities include contact management, public relations, processing and supporting the development of applications as well as participation and consultation with international education networks. This output can be realized if potential partners are aware and informed about the fund and needs for digital solutions are identified by them. Also, the support by BACKUP allows partners to develop their own project ideas, which are quality checked by GIZ with the LEG, GPE and EU Delegations. They need to ensure to tackle cross-cutting aspects (gender mainstreaming, conflict sensitivity etc.). After the digital solutions in education are piloted, it is assumed that the applicants have improved their capacity for education planning and management with regard to digital solutions. This way, ministries and civil society organizations are supported to plan and implement digital solutions in education.

Output 1.1 (Access) aims to provide increased access to digital education services for learners and education professionals. The same activities as Output 1.2 are utilized, e.g., technical and financial support. Access to digital education services is seen in a broad sense and can be increased not only through physical access (e.g., devices) but also a more systemic level of access, e.g., increased awareness among the general public for digital education services and the importance of piloting digital solutions. Through these channels, learners and education professionals have access to digital education services.

Output 1.3 (Digital Skills) entails the same activities as Output 1.1 and 1.2 but has its focus on the improvement of quality of digital skills. This output can be realized if educational professionals and learners have access to devices and the internet and are equipped to use digital solutions. Education professionals and learners need access to relevant training to improve their digital skills. If this is the case, as an indirect outcome, the content of the digital solutions in education is implemented in a pedagogically and didactically meaningful way.

Assumption for Output 1.1 and 1.3 are that learners and education professionals have access to devices through alternative funding. For Output 1.2 a strategic approach is at least needed. Furthermore, educational professionals and learners receive remote technical support, i.e. online help desks during the training. Achieving the intended outcomes is also at risk if the funded activities are not in line with data privacy and the right to data protection as well as security.

Output 1.4 (Cooperation) focusses on increasing awareness and giving advice for possible cooperation between the public sector, or civil society organizations and the private sector to foster digital solutions for education services. If the public sector and civil society organizations are informed about cooperation possibilities with the private sector and as a next step, they are also connected to each other, then cooperation agreements to foster digital solutions in education can be established.

Output 1.5 (Network) entails the project's networking and outreach activities. This output can be realized, if regional and national regular knowledge sharing events are organized and applicants are aware of other approaches as well as partners are connected and share best practices and lessons learned. This results in the improvement of the educational actors' cooperation and creates synergies. This way, learning and network building among the partner countries and internationally in the area of digital solutions for education and COVID-19 resilience (in general) are supported. This output hereby rests on the assumption that stakeholders active in education are open to learning from other countries' experiences and cooperating – especially in crisis dominated times.

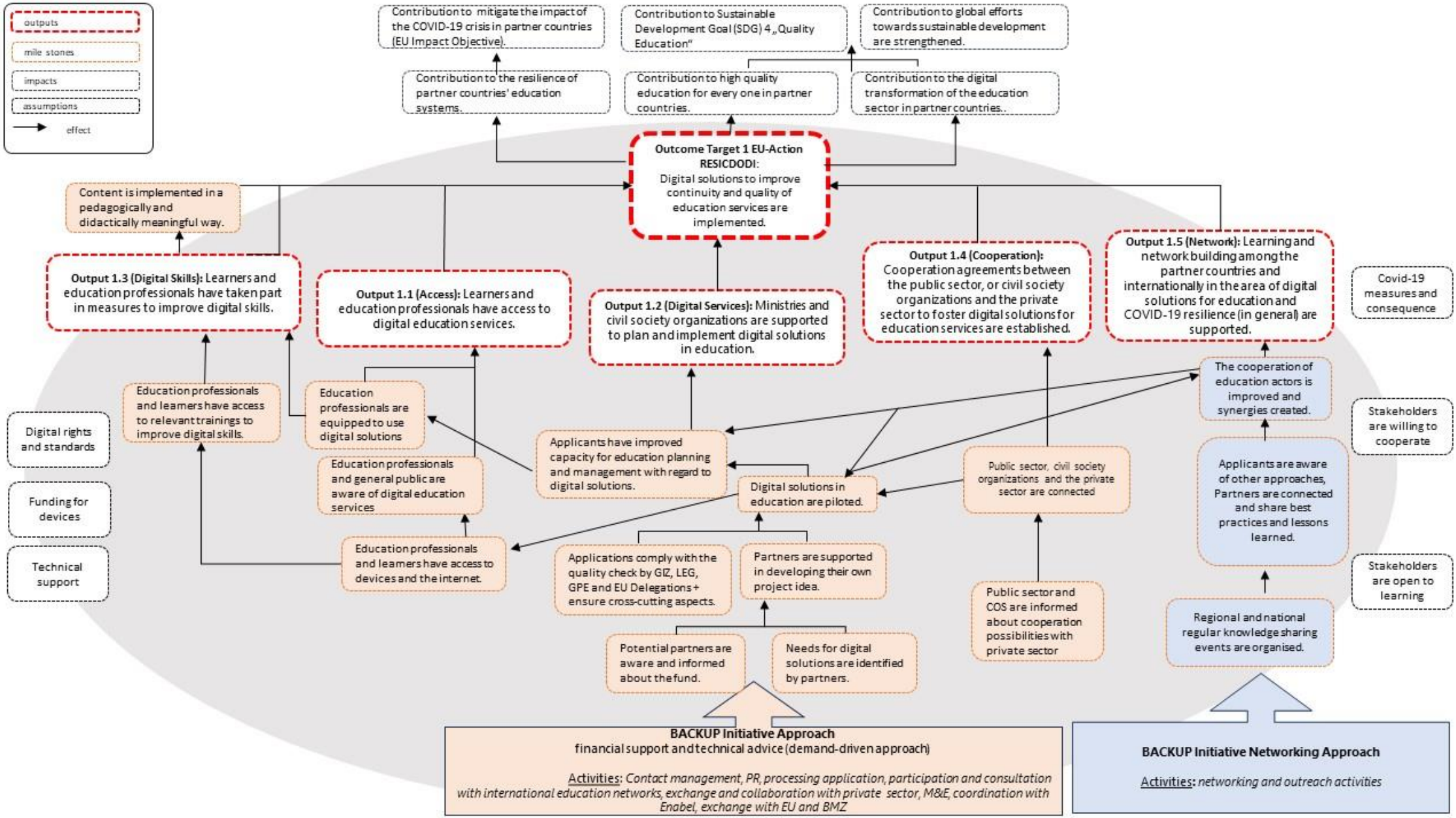
The results model is **interrelated**, meaning that the individual outputs build upon each other: If the ministries and civil society organizations are supported to plan and implement digital solutions on education (output 1.2) the access for learners and education professionals to digital education services can be improved (output 1.1). Also, if access to digital solutions is improved the next step is to improve the digital skills (output 1.3). The improvement of the cooperation of education actors and the created synergies (output 1.5) as well as the connection of the public sector and the civil society organizations with the private sector (output 1.4) in turn have an impact on the piloted

digital solutions and the improvement of applicants' capacity for education planning and management (output 1.2). Through regional exchange, partners' ideas can be picked up and generate new ideas.

Outcome & Impact Level

The project concept also aims to make several contributions to the outcome and impact level. Most importantly, all outputs are expected to contribute to **improving the continuity and quality of education services** in the eight African partner countries. It is expected that reaching this outcome will contribute to the resilience of partner countries' education systems. Moreover, with the support of EU and BMZ funds, the respective partner countries are expected to contribute to high-quality education for everyone as well as to the digital transformation of the education sector in partner countries. This in turn, will contribute to achieving the SDG 4 "Quality Education" and strengthening efforts towards sustainable development on a global level. It is considered plausible that this intervention also will contribute to the EU impact objective to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in partner countries, which was the defined impact objective of every COVID-19 response intervention. However, the impact chain linking the project to these impacts is very long and the size of the grants offered must be kept in mind. In combination with the project operating at a meta-level and therefore distantly from the population (i.e., the indirect target group), observable direct impacts at the societal level are expected to be limited. Furthermore, the intervention part of the BACKUP Initiative focuses on digital education measures, which is only one string of the COVID-19 mitigation strategy which is hard to validate precisely. The evaluation will thereby focus on impacts that lie closer to the sphere of influence of the project, namely up until the **contribution towards the resilience of partner countries' education systems** as well as the **contribution to the digital transformation of the education sectors in partner countries**.

The outputs lie within the **system boundary** (depicted graphically by a grey background in Figure 1). The module objective, namely the outcome, lies within the system boundary. By placing the objective on the upper end of the system boundary, the results model emphasizes the project's ability to reach its objective, while at the same time indicating that the corresponding outcome can be influenced by external factors, particularly due to the relatively small size of the funded activities in the larger framework of the countries' overall education processes and COVID-19 response. Beyond the system boundary, the impacts named above can be found. Since the impacts are located outside the system boundary, there are various external factors that may either foster or hinder their achievement; the further away from the system boundary they are displayed, the more they are likely influenced by external factors.


outputs
mile stones
impacts
assumptions
effect
Contribution to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in partner countries (EU Impact Objective).
Contribution to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 „Quality Education"
Contribution to global efforts towards sustainable development are strengthened.
Contribution to the resilience of partner countries' education systems.
Contribution to high quality education for every one in partner countries.
Contribution to the digital transformation of the education sector in partner countries..
Outcome Target 1 EU-Action RESICDODI: Digital solutions to improve continuity and quality of education services are implemented.
Content is implemented in a pedagogically and didactically meaningful way.
Output 1.3 (Digital Skills): Learners and education professionals have taken part in measures to improve digital skills.
Output 1.1 (Access): Learners and education professionals have access to digital education services.
Output 1.2 (Digital Services): Ministries and civil society organizations are supported to plan and implement digital solutions in education.
Output 1.4 (Cooperation): Cooperation agreements between the public sector, or civil society organizations and the private sector to foster digital solutions for education services are established.
Output 1.5 (Network): Learning and network building among the partner countries and internationally in the area of digital solutions for education and COVID-19 resilience (in general) are supported.
Covid-19 measures and consequence
Education professionals and learners have access to relevant trainings to improve digital skills.
Education professionals are equipped to use digital solutions
The cooperation of education actors is improved and synergies created.
Stakeholders are willing to cooperate
Digital rights and standards
Applicants have improved capacity for education planning and management with regard to digital solutions.
Public sector, civil society organizations and the private sector are connected
Applicants are aware of other approaches, Partners are connected and share best practices and lessons learned.
Education professionals and general public are aware of digital education services
Digital solutions in education are piloted.
Funding for devices
Technical support
Education professionals and learners have access to devices and the internet.
Applications comply with the quality check by GIZ, LEG, GPE and EU Delegations + ensure cross-cutting aspects.
Partners are supported in developing their own project idea.
Stakeholders are open to learning
Public sector and COS are informed about cooperation possibilities with private sector
Regional and national regular knowledge sharing events are organised.
Potential partners are aware and informed about the fund.
Needs for digital solutions are identified by partners.
BACKUP Initiative Approach
financial support and technical advice (demand-driven approach)
Activities: Contact management, PR, processing application, participation and consultation with international education networks, exchange and collaboration with private sector, M&E, coordination with Enabel, exchange with EU and BMZ
BACKUP Initiative Networking Approach
Activities: networking and outreach activities

3 Evaluability and evaluation process

This chapter aims to clarify the availability and quality of data and the process of the evaluation.

3.1 Evaluability: data availability and quality

This section covers the following aspects:

- availability of essential documents,
- monitoring and baseline data including partner data, and secondary data

Availability of essential documents. All essential documents were available to be assessed during the evaluation and are listed in the reference section of the report (see List of references). Overall, the project's documents showcase a very high quality and thus provided vital insights for the evaluation.

Monitoring and baseline data including partner data. The project provides for detailed annual operational plans that assign staff responsibilities and regularly monitors outcome and output indicators in line with GIZ standards for results-based monitoring through an online platform (GIZ, 2024). This Wiki serves as a knowledge management tool for the fund management of both the technical and financial team and therefore documents the entire application and implementation process and scope of grants. This overarching project-level monitoring system spans all grant-related project activities and connects them, whenever feasible, with project indicators providing clear links and evidence. Each mode[1] is categorised according to its (potential) contribution to the indicators, and assigned an implementation status (pending inquiry, under review, approved and ongoing, follow-up, and technically closed as well as dropped and rejected). Therefore, prognosis and achievement of output and outcome indicators are automatically updated. All verification sources (e.g. progress and final reports on the individual grants, sources of verification such as national education plans) are linked to this data base (GIZ, 2024). The technical team is responsible for the accuracy of the motoring data and for the periodic generation of reports.

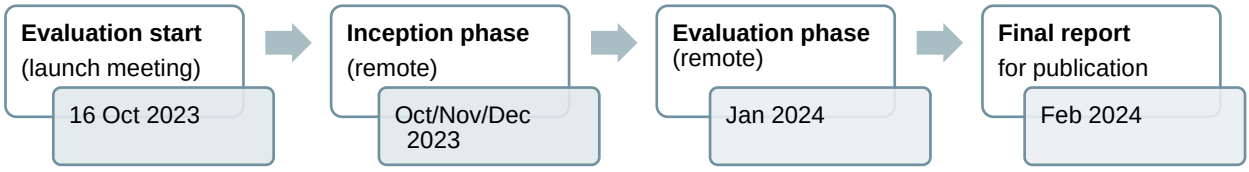
Project-related data collection and analysis belongs to the standard procedures of project staff; this relates mainly to budget and operational data, though those are linked to monitoring data since both relate to the grants and grant process central to the project. For steering purposes, financial indicators related to the grants are closely monitored and discussed weekly. Monitoring data on module objective and output indicators, which is collected continuously, is monitored regularly and discussed with the whole team twice a year and collated for the annual reports for BMZ and EU. Over the course of the evaluation, the data was subject to methodological and researcher triangulation and is assessed as accurate and reliable as an evaluation result.

[1] **Modes** are small interventions that represent bridge financing within a much larger framework of international education funding and processes. To this end, BACKUP offers support to its partners' intervention ideas (hereinafter referred to as 'grants' or 'modes'). They consist of a set of different activities, such as participation in conferences, training sessions or workshops, funds for hiring an external expert or consultant.

3.2 Evaluation process

This chapter aims to clarify the process of the evaluation.

Figure 1: Milestones of the evaluation process



Involvement of stakeholders

The evaluation team followed a **participatory approach** that fosters ownership for evaluation results and provides the basis for learnings that can be used in future interventions. The participatory approach entails that the evaluation team described the purpose of the evaluation to the project team and other interview partners and considered the questions that stakeholders would like to see addressed. Furthermore, it means that the evaluators were transparent on how evaluation results are derived from the data and gave stakeholders the opportunity to provide feedback on evaluation findings. According to our participatory approach, all interview partners, including external actors, have been informed about the objective of the evaluation when they have been. They have also received an interview guide before the meeting.

Selection of case studies

Given the many supported partner countries of the BACKUP Initiative, the evaluation set a focus **on four case studies** to allow for an in-depth analysis of the supported modes and contexts. The **criteria** that were agreed on with the project team for the selection were:

- geographical characteristics (e.g., at least one country in Southern and one in East Africa),
- variety of grant applicants (e.g., applications from both ministries and civil society organizations)
- regional characteristic (e.g., a regional mode that is supporting initiatives in various African countries).

Following these criteria, the following were jointly selected as case studies: **Zambia, Namibia and Madagascar** as well as the regional mode supporting the **Global Campaign for Education (GCE).**

Data sources

This evaluation builds on various sources of data: a **desk review of essential documents, monitoring data, qualitative data from interviews**. All essential documents, such as strategies, internal project contract documents, or application documents and reports from the given partners are available for this evaluation. The evaluation includes complementary secondary literature and data from selected countries, or regional data where needed.

Interviews

The final list of interviewees was based on a joint selection and prioritization of possible interview partners with the project's team prior to the evaluation mission. The final sample of interview partners is therefore most likely not to be a representative but purposeful sample, aiming at those interview partners likely to provide the most useful information. The focus of the interviews was set on a more in-depth engagement with grant recipients both from civil society and from Ministries of Education in selected countries (Zambia, Madagascar, Namibia and GCE as a regional mode, which have been identified together with the project team as suitable countries for the case studies).

Table 1: List of evaluation stakeholders and selected interviewees

Organisation/company/ target group	Overall number of persons involved in evaluation
Donors & implementing agencies	2
EU, BMZ, Enabel	
GIZ	5
GIZ project team; GIZ employees of different sectoral and global projects, and of bilateral projects active in (basic) education	
Partner organisations (direct target group)	9
Grant recipients on country level: Botswana, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, Rwanda, Zambia Regional NGOs (e.g., Global Campaign for Education)	
Other stakeholders	2
GPE, Oxfam	

Data analysis process

Through the continuing analysis of the project's documents, the knowledge base for the evaluation mission was further enlarged and enriched. All results arising from the data were consecutively documented along the evaluation's **analytical grid** (see Annex) that was developed. Researcher, data, and method triangulation took place at various points during data collection and data analysis including synthesis.

Remote evaluation

The evaluation was planned to be conducted fully **remotely**. Interviews were conducted as online interviews using videoconferencing software. As such, a direct conversation with the opportunity to ask questions and clarify misunderstandings was possible, and facial expressions and gestures were still part of the exchange. Under any circumstances, the evaluation mission would have involved a number of remote interviews, given the project's regional scope. The evaluation team had a suite of commonly used applications to meet the interviewees' preferences for specific platforms. At all times, the evaluation team coordinated closely with the project team to ensure that methods for reaching and surveying contacts fitted the target groups.

4 Assessment according to OECD/DAC criteria

The evaluation matrix (see Annex) provides a detailed overview of the evaluation dimensions and analysis questions that were examined under each evaluation criterion as well as indicators and available data sources. In the following section, a narrative description sums up key aspects of the analysis of OECD/DAC evaluation criteria and additional factors that are pertinent to the project's key characteristics as a regional project and its funding mechanism.

4.1 Relevance

The relevance criterion analyses the extent to which the objectives of a development intervention are consistent with stakeholders' needs and capacities and the extent to which the concept is appropriately designed to meet them. Additionally, the criterion assesses the project's adaptability to change.

Relevance – Dimension 1: Alignment with policies and priorities

At the **global level**, the project aligns with international policies and priorities, particularly emphasizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. The project strategically incorporates **SDG 4** as its primary framework, concentrating on Target 4.1, which seeks to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes by 2030. While SO1 primarily addresses basic education, it embraces the broader objectives of SDG 4, which, unlike its predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), emphasizes inclusive education, the quality of education, and lifelong learning opportunities.

Further, in the context of **European development cooperation (DC)**, the SO1 with its focus on digital solutions in education was part of the EU's global response strategy for addressing the COVID-19 pandemic in European partner countries (EU, 2020; European Commission 2020). Hereby SO1 took on an important and relevant role in supporting education continuity as well as resilience of the education system amidst public health and socioeconomic challenges, especially in times of schools' closures. Furthermore, the project aims to contribute to decrease the digital divide and towards a digital transformation in education which aligns with the European Education Area strategic framework (EU, 2024). Additionally, the project adheres to digital principles established by the development community (https://digitalprinciples.org/) to integrate best practices for successful digital-for-development (D4D) projects. Finally, SO1 also is part of a **Team Europe approach** fostering coordination and coherence within EU DC (EU, 2020).

As a regional project operating on the African continent, Pan-African strategic objectives in education are also considered by the SO1. Due to its focus on digital transformation in education, the project is strongly aligned with the **African Union and European Union's Joint Vision for 2030**. The Joint Vision outlines the aim to boost digital transformation, fostering digital skills as well as inclusive and equitable quality education, with a focus on enhancing access, and providing teacher training for education services (EU & AU 2022). The investment in digital education is poised to address learning gaps resulting from the pandemic. As SO1 aim is to improve quality and access to education through digital solutions and skill training it contributes to this Joint Vision.

Next to the regional perspective, **national strategic objectives and national education sector plans (ESP)** in education are also closely aligned with SO1 operating in different African countries. Improving access and quality in education is of high relevance in African countries also during the COVID-19 pandemic (AU 2020). Looking more closely in the strategies of the case studies suggests close alignment:

- **Namibia**: SO1 aligns with Namibia's education strategy by enhancing teacher motivation, professional development, and the provision of resources for quality education. It contributes to equitable access by addressing challenges in remote rural schools. The initiative also supports efficiency through prudent resource management, deployment of teachers, and fostering inclusive education, in line with Namibia's education goals. (MoEAC, 2017).

- **Zambia**: SO1 is aligned with Zambia's education priorities at the primary level outlined in the National Implementation Framework III (NIF III, 2011-2015). It supports the Zambian Ministry's goals by enhancing both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of education service delivery, addressing access, quality, equity, and efficiency within the education system. Additionally, the Initiative is consistent with Zambia's objective of introducing free and compulsory education for learners in Grades 1 to 7, as well as contributing to efforts to achieve a 100 percent Grade 7 completion rate and improving learning outcomes in National Assessment Surveys at Grade 5 (MESVTEE, 2010).

- **Madagascar**: Madagascar's education priorities as set out in the education sector plan (ESP – 2017-2022) mention digitalisation on several levels, e.g., matching the holistic approach to education: References are made in terms of adjusting training for teachers and pedagogical supervisors, developing digital content and installing a digital bibliography for schools (MEN, 2017).

Relevance – Dimension 2: Alignment with the needs and capacities of the beneficiaries and stakeholders

The second evaluation dimension deals with the suitability of the project design to match the **specific needs** of its target groups. According to the project team and to the documents, the project's target group **includes stakeholders from the educational sector from both state actors (predominantly by Ministries of Education) and civil society organizations (CSO) from African countries as well as education professionals and learners.** The needs of the education professionals and learners are addressed mostly via the MoE and CSOs (GIZ, 2024).

With regard to the needs of the **MoE and CSOs**, SO1 provides support to partners facing COVID-19 challenges including prolonged school closures in a flexible and demand-based way offering technical assistance and financial support. Due to the demand-based approach, partners can request assistance in ensuring access to digital education services, planning, and implementing digital solutions, and providing digital skills training according to their specialized needs. In contrast to more supply-driven instruments, a key advantage of this kind of demand orientation is ensuring local ownership from the outset. This is achieved by enabling partners to set their own priorities and thus acts as a safeguard for ensuring relevance in the given context. Interviewees widely appreciated SO1's approach in endorsing both state institutions and CSO involved in the education sector. The systemic strategy aimed at enhancing the entire education sector was viewed positively and deemed relevant by stakeholders on both sides. Next to the individual support, SO1 **promotes knowledge sharing through network building** at various levels and facilitates regular regional exchanges, enabling partners to learn from good practices. Moreover, network building that includes the private sector addresses the need for digital infrastructure and complements the funded activities of CSOs that focus on digital skills. Collaboration with the private sector on connectivity issues allows MoE and CSOs an improved provision of their digital solutions. Interviews conducted during this evaluation confirmed the partners' need for financial and technical support as well as networking activities. This holistic support is crucial for partners, as financial assistance ensures the feasibility of their projects, technical support focuses on co-creating content elements rooted in partners' ideas and provides ongoing support and exchange throughout implementation, while networking activities facilitate collaboration, resource-sharing, and increased project impact. Through the responsive and demand-driven design, the project picked up the needs and contributed to high-quality application and implementation process (Int_1, 2, 3 ,5, 6).

In addition, the project's alignment with the **needs of education professionals and learners is grounded in the overall relevance of the demand-based approach and works through intermediaries and multipliers**. The

primary developmental challenge addressed by SO1 is the insufficient availability and lack of quality in basic education during the COVID-19 crisis in numerous African countries (Int_11). This imperative arises from the observation that during multiple lockdowns in Sub-Saharan Africa, radio-based education potentially reached more students than the internet, particularly benefiting those without internet access, yet children in rural areas and from impoverished families faced great disadvantages. The project addresses the needs of education professionals and learners primarily at a meta-level, facilitated through intermediaries like the MoE and CSOs. The project enables MoE and CSOs to provide digitals solutions that address the need of teachers and learners for digital skills and connectivity as well as continuity and quality in education in general but also in the specific context of unforeseeable school closures and restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The demand-driven approach as well as the technical advice ensures that digital solutions supported by SO1 matches the needs in the specific local contexts. In Zambia, with the support of SO1 the CSO ZANEC conducted a study to identify the status quo of digital literacy among teachers, parents and children to ensure that the digital solutions address their needs (Int_2). The underlying strategy involves providing financial and technical support to partners, aiming to enhance the quality of digital education and ensure access to digital education services at the local level.

To guarantee on-the-ground relevance, the project further employs various **quality assurance and safeguarding mechanisms**, ensuring that funding applications target specific developmental issues within the population. First, a crucial **safeguarding measure** to ensure the accuracy of the alignment with the needs and capacities of beneficiaries is the inclusion of local actors, such as the **local education groups (LEG),** EU-Delegations or international actors like Oxfam, GPE in the quality check process of modes. These groups convene diverse stakeholders, including state institutions, donors, and civil society actors, to ensure coordination and relevance of the modes in the specific local context (Int_7, 8, 9, 11). Second, the targeted support of CSOs further promotes alignment with the needs of indirect target groups, given the rooted presence of CSOs in the local context (Int_8). In the case of Madagascar, the national LEG equivalent PNPSE advised the CSO CONAMEPT during their project planning and recommended the implementation of digital solutions in education should not replace on-site learning but rather be understood as a meaningful supplement to increase flexibility and ensure continuity of education services, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (Int_3).

When it comes to the alignment with the needs of the stakeholders, the evaluation of the project also highlighted certain **limitations when it comes to the size of the funds and the digital prerequisites in the countries.** First, the interview partners have criticized the relatively small size of the funds (ranging from EUR 55,000 to 290,000 each, with the majority around EUR 100,000) and **short duration** when compared to the financing and project durations of bilateral projects (Int_1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7). Given that the modes represent a small-scale, one-off approach, it is unlikely that they can comprehensively tackle the scale of developmental challenges and fully cater to the substantial needs of the recipients, especially the need for digital infrastructure, or establish enduring structures. However, it is essential to note that the project was specifically designed as a rapid COVID-19 response, planned within a short timeframe to provide quick and targeted support to partners to face the pandemic. Therefore, the projects anticipated developmental impact and sustainability were expected to be limited (European Commission, 2020; EU, 2020).

Second, respondents stressed that the **digital prerequisite** in the partner countries are difficult to achieve and the **need for digital infrastructure**, frequently mentioned by partners and stakeholders, could not be sufficiently addressed by the project due to its scope (Int_2, 5, 7). While SO1 incentivized cooperations with the private sector already during the application forms, there was no direct contribution from SO1 in terms of private sector partnerships or the furnishment of digital infrastructure (Int_5, 8). Interview partners have also stressed, that in a country like Madagascar, it was even difficult to provide "analogue" education (e.g., physical equipment and teaching material to children) and electricity, suggesting that digital education is an ambitious goal (Int_4).

Relevance – Dimension 3: Appropriateness of the design

The third dimension assesses the appropriateness of the project's objective and results model, with its outputs, activities, instruments, and result hypotheses, as well as the implementation strategy. The results model and underlying hypotheses as described in chapter 2.2 serve as a central basis for the evaluation in this regard.

In its entirety, the evaluation team deemed the project's **design as very appropriate and relevant**. The holistic design is primarily marked by the established BACKUP three-fold approach, e.g. combination of fund management alongside advisory services and knowledge-sharing. The project's **demand-based and funding-oriented design** is deemed suitable for achieving the project's objectives.

Given the short-term and urgent need of any COVID-response, the project's approach **was a well-chosen approach** for the EU response to deliver timely, demand-based and flexible support to partner countries (European Commission**,** 2020**;** EU, 2020). The design of the GIZ project therefore was very suitable to contribute to the EU Impact Objective to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in partner countries.

The project's theory of change logically mirrors this approach. The results model of the project implies, and the gathered evidence affirms, that the anticipated **outcome aligns with the project's scope** (see chapter 2.2). The distinction between the five outputs mirrors the project's dual approach, encompassing financial support and technical guidance on one side and fostering networking support on the other. The various outputs complement each other (e.g., focus on quality, access etc.) which is mirrored in the interconnected nature of the results model. The alignment of the project design with partners' needs is apparent, as evidenced by the satisfaction expressed by African partners (Int_1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7).

Relevance – Dimension 4: Adaptability – response to change

Relevance in this dimension is achieved if the project's results model and other steering instruments have been adapted to changing contextual factors over the course of the project.

The BACKUP Initiative generally employs a **high degree of adaptability and response to change**. On the one hand, this goes back to the project design and the nature of the **highly flexible and adaptable** demand-based fund. One of the success factors that guarantees adaptability to change is the logic of BACKUP as a fund that can be adapted to regional contexts, sectors and thematic foci without much effort. In this regard the current focus of the SO1 can already be seen as a functional upscaling of the BACKUP Education intervention that existed already for over 10 years before RESICODI was commissioned and to which SO1 attached. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the new thematic focus of digital solutions in the education sector was added to the funding scheme.

On the other hand, also the current BACKUP Initiative project and project team has been able to **adapt well to the challenges and different phases of the pandemic (from acute to back to normal)**. The project design, which provides partners with extensive flexibility and employs a streamlined administrative concept, has also empowered partners to adapt their supported projects to the local pandemic contexts in digital education (Int_1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11) e.g., moving from completely remote operation to hybrid or semi-remote operations. The project team was able to provide technical advice activities as well as networking activities completely remotely in the peak of lockdown measures.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges to state institutions, impacting their capacities and introducing concurrent issues during the project's implementation. However, in contrast, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) proved to be more quickly, directly handing in concept proposals and initiating planning processes for applications. Despite the circumstances of the pandemic, these attributes allowed SO1's activities to proceed effectively (Int_11).

4.2 Coherence

This section analyses and assesses the coherence of the project. It is structured according to the assessment dimensions in the project **evaluation matrix** (see Annex).

The coherence criterion analyses the extent to which a development intervention is compatible with other donors' activities as well as other interventions in the education sector. Since this is a joint intervention a closer look to intra-agency coordination will be paid, e.g., to what extent SO1, implemented by GIZ, complements, and supports SO2+3, implemented by Enabel, efforts and vice versa.

Coherence – Dimension 1: Internal Coherence (German DC)

Dimension 1 focuses on internal coherence, and examines synergies, trade-offs, and connections within German Development Cooperation (DC) projects, as well as the alignment of project implementation with GIZ's governing principles and standards. The evaluation, utilizing interviews with the project team and pertinent GIZ projects, scrutinized the internal coherence of the project. It leveraged the internal stakeholder map to identify potential synergies that could enhance project alignment. (GIZ, 2023).

The project was committed to maintaining internal coherence and synergy with **bilateral projects**, **particularly in the basic education sector**. However, due to the withdrawal of German bilateral DC in basic education and shift to multilateral support, there are less bilateral projects for SO1 to connect and harmonize with. A crucial step in this commitment involved consulting ongoing bilateral projects, such as "Improving basic education in Malawi", which closed in October 2023. This consultation process was integral, especially when partners from these countries were seeking SO1 funding for projects. The purpose was to safeguard the complementarity of activities within the national education sector and to prevent any potential adverse interactions between the initiatives carried out by SO1 and existing bilateral projects (Int_11).

The project also aligns thematically with "**Generation Digital! – Supporting Digital Skills for the Next Generation" project**, a regional project initiated in 2022 (GIZ, 2022a). In some respects, SO1 as part of RESICODI can be understood as a pioneering and pilot project for the GD! project, commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), which has the same approach and similar thematic focus of aiming to promote digital skills among children and youth. However, GD! operates more long-term and without EU co-financing (GIZ, 2022a). Through testing the ground, establishing highly useful contacts and gaining first experience in the support of digital solutions, SO1 generated useful lessons learnt and therefore created synergies with the GD! Project (Int_11).

Coherence – Dimension 2: Intra-Agency Coordination

This section on intra-agency collaboration, delves into the synergies and trade-offs inherent in the joint intervention, assessing the extent to which the collaboration between GIZ (SO1) and Enabel (SO2+3) complements and supports each other's efforts. This entails an evaluation of the SO1's coordination with SO2+3 scrutinizing how well both agencies collaborate, and determining the added value generated by this partnership.

The coherence of the **intra-agency coordination between GIZ and Enabel** is marked by the structuring of separate spheres of interventions and complementarity of actions. The Contribution Agreement of the EU emphasized the **importance of delineated responsibilities and accountability** (EU, 2020). This approach allows each organization to leverage its respective strengths effectively according to the respective focus of the intervention. Given the short time to set up the project, both organizations were able to build on existing structures that fostered the effectiveness of actions: Enabel built on ongoing interventions in the area of TVET and health and GIZ built on the established BACKUP Initiative in the area of basic education (EU, 2020). Together, both projects were employing a holistic support of education and health mitigation through digital solutions in the context of the pandemic.

However, although both agencies are involved in one project, the **separation of interventions also limited the potential for synergies** during the implementation. While both agencies were targeting education, the distinction between basic education and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) was coupled with divergent ministries and contacts in the respective countries. Additionally, Enabel focused on three countries (DRC, Rwanda and Burundi) and GIZ intervened in 8 countries in East and South Africa (including these three partner countries), leaving limited cooperation possibilities (EU, 2020, Int_11, 12, 13).

Lastly, **challenges were identified in achieving closer cooperation and coordination** between both organizations. While the Team Europe approach and the concept of inter-agency collaboration was indeed combining forces of two agencies, it should not be overlooked that the organizations operate with notable differences not only in their intervention scope but also in their operation (e.g., Enabel with local staff in Rwanda while GIZ from HQ in Germany) (Int_11, 13). Enabel was mandated with a coordinating role for the Action by the EU. Yet, the evaluation suggest that the coordination role was characterized by occasional difficulties attributed to factors such as staff turnover and an insufficiently fulfilled role of coordination throughout implementation and reporting (Int_11). While there have been no signs of duplication of efforts, or any negative unintended interactions, there is still room for improvement in enhancing collaborative efforts, effective coordination and steering the intra-agency collaboration.

Coherence – Dimension 3: External Coherence

Dimension 3, focusing on external coherence, pertains to the alignment of the project with interventions by other donors in partner countries and its consistency with the agendas of various bilateral and multilateral donors. This involves evaluating the project's efforts in harmonization and coordination with relevant actors, assessing its added value, and ensuring avoidance of duplicative efforts.

SO1 has effectively complemented **other interventions of international donors.** The project's foray into the novel field of digital education involved successful network creation, showcasing commendable efforts. In that it was found to fill a crucial gap between the digital sector and the education sector, where organizations like Oxfam have limited experience and focus so far on Africa (Int_8).

Despite its small-scale nature, there exists **promising potential for increased synergies at the local level**, fostering connections with other interventions. The project's opportunity to further enhance its positive influence by facilitating knowledge exchange with other donors and interventions to improve quality and identify synergies, could have been maximized further, as for example suggested by Oxfam and an EU delegation. For example, it was mentioned that the international partners appreciated being involved in the quality check process but would have wished to be more included in the implementation of pilots, also to leverage synergies with other projects in the area (Int_4, 8).

4.3 Effectiveness

This section analyses and assesses the effectiveness of the project.

Effectiveness- Dimension 1: Goal Achievement

Effectiveness dimension 1 aims to assess whether the project has **achieved** the objective on time and in accordance with objective indicators agreed upon in the contract. Table 11 contains the assessment of the project's objective indicators. To assess indicator achievement, the evaluation used the project's **current monitoring data** (received in February 2024) as well as primary qualitative and quantitative data collected during the evaluation.

Overall, the project **successfully attained its anticipated outcome, even surpassing almost all indicators**. Consequently, the implementation of the project can be deemed very effective. The project's overall contribution to the attainment of its objectives appears plausible, with the various hypotheses linking the project's outputs and activities to its module objective evaluated as largely realistic and reasonable. Generally high goal achievement does not necessarily imply that higher and more ambitious goals should have been set. This also goes back to the short-term preparation of the offer including target values, the not necessarily foreseeable dynamic development of the pandemic and the nature of a demand-based approach, e.g., unpredictable how and when grant applications would be rolling in for the project team (EU, 2020). In that regard, it can be evaluated as a success, that so many applications were attracted with the given and fixed budget of the project team.

Indicator	Goal Achievement
Specific Objective 1: Digital solutions to improve continuity and quality of education services are implemented.	
Indicator 1. Number of digital solutions that have been tackled by country (target: 12 in total)	49 digital solutions that have been tackled by country (target value: 12) - 2 x Botswana, 4 x Burundi, 2 x DRC, 9 x Madagascar, 10 x Malawi, 5 x Namibia, 4 x regional, 8 x Rwanda, 5 x Zambia) **Achievement: 408%**
Output 1.1: Learners and education professionals have access to digital education services.	
Indicator 1.1.1. Number of reached learners and education professionals by age, sex and country (target: 1.000.000).	3.591.433 "reached learners and education professionals by age, sex and country" (target value: 1.000.000) - 95.019 education professionals in Botswana, Burundi, DRC, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, Rwanda und Zambia - 3.496.414 learners/students in Botswana, Burundi, DRC, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, Rwanda und Zambia **Achievement: 300%**
Output 1.2: Ministries and civil society organizations are supported to plan and implement digital solutions in education.	
Indicator 1.2.1. Number of supported ministries and civil society organizations (target: 4 ministries, 5 civil society organizations).	- 5 supported MoE (2 x Namibia, Rwanda, 2 x Zambia) - 14 supported CSO (5 national CSO: 2 x Botswana, 1 x Madagascar, 2 x Namibia / 8 CSO national coalition: Burundi,

	DRC, Madagascar, 2 x Malawi, 2 x Rwanda, 1x Zambia / 1 regional CSO: GCE) **Achievement: 211%**
Indicator 1.2.2. Percentage of the supported ministries and civil society organizations indicate that the technical assistance has improved the planning and implementation (target: 80%)	83 % of supported indicate that the technical assistance has improved the planning and implementation (target: 80%) - After the implementation of each measure, each applicant is asked to indicate to what extent the technical assistance, offered by SO1, has improved the planning and implementation of the measure. **Achievement: 104%**
Output 1.3: Learners and education professionals have taken part in measures to improve digital skills.	
Indicator 1.3.1. Number of learners and education professionals who have taken part in measures to improve digital skills by age and sex and country (target: 500.000)	533.710 „learners and education professionals who have taken part in measures to improve digital skills by age and sex and country" (target value: 500.000) - 11.271 education professionals in Botswana, Burundi, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, Rwanda und Zambia - 522.439 learners in Botswana, Burundi, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, Rwanda und Zambia **Achievement: 107%**
Output 1.4. Cooperation agreements between the public sector, or civil society organizations and the private sector to foster digital solutions for education services are established.	
Indicator 1.4.1. Number of cooperation agreements (target: 2 cooperation agreements)	2 cooperation agreements between the public sector or civil society and the private sector regarding digital solutions for the promotion of continuous, high-quality education are in place (target value: 2) - One agreement was closed between the e-government division Zambia and Airtel. - One agreement was closed between the national education coalition CONAMEPT and Telma. **Achievement: 100%**
Output 1.5. Learning and network building among the partner countries and internationally in the area of digital solutions for education and COVID-19 resilience (in general) are supported.	

Indicator 1.5.1. Percentage of the participants in exchange formats indicate that the knowledge exchange of the respective exchange format on digital solutions in education is relevant for their work (target: 75%).	88% of the participants who completed the anonymised online survey following the eight exchange formats indicate that the knowledge exchange of the respective exchange format on digital solutions in education is relevant for their work (target value: 75%) - 87 participants took part in the eight exchange formats on 30 June 2021, 01 July 2021, 24 & 25 November 2021, 23 & 24 August 2023 and 27 & 28 September 2023.. Among the participants completing the anonymized evaluation online survey, 88% of them indicated that the knowledge exchange of the respective exchange format on digital solutions in education is relevant for their work. **Achievement: 117%**

Source: latest M&E data drawn from the project's Wiki (M&E tool, 15.02.2024) (GIZ, 2024).

Cross-cutting aspects

As an additional aspect in terms of goal achievement, it was analysed to what extent the implementation addressed **gender-mainstreaming** as a cross-cutting topic. The conducted desk research suggests that gender was included as a cross-cutting topic in almost all of the applicants' proposals (Syspons, 2024). Examples are the training of female teachers of the digital skills training (Int_3, 5) and reaching female learners (GIZ, 2024). At the same time, also **intersectional** approaches to gender equality have been employed by some exemplary modes. For example, a campaign in Zambia targeted children with disabilities in rural areas (Int_2, 3). Further, SO1 fostered a **rights-based** approach as a cross-cutting topic through its focus on CSOs that aim at strengthening the capacity of duty bearers (e.g., public education) and empowering the rights holders (e.g., learners) (Int_11).

However, while gender is a cross-cutting theme, the evaluation also suggests that the **ambition** of the BACKUP Initiative here **is not specifically high** among the supported modes as e.g., it is mostly understood as supporting 50/50 girls and boys (Int_8). The SO1 did **not have a strong focus or specific support/activities to foster gender equality,** e.g., specific modes, leaving room for improvement in terms of gender-responsive or gender-transformative approaches. Especially, given the general backlash for gender equality during the COVID-19-pandemic and girls in the education sector, more emphasis on gender could have been employed to reach girls (Int_7, 8).

Effectiveness – Dimension 2: contribution to achievement of objectives (outcome hypotheses)

In the effectiveness dimension 2, the evaluation analyses how activities and outputs of the project contributed to the attainment of the module objective. For this purpose, **two hypotheses** were selected to assess the plausibility of the output's contribution to the overall module objective. The output-outcome level hypotheses for closer examination were selected together with the GIZ project team. They concern the link between Output 1.2 and the Outcome (H1) as well as Output 1.5 and the Outcome (H2). These two hypotheses were seen as the most relevant and comprehensive to assess the project's contribution to its objective at outcome level. Each of the hypotheses will be illustrated by examples of performance stories of modes that were able to be triangulated by the evaluators through documents and interviews.

Outcome Hypothesis 1 (plan and implement digital solutions, output 1.2): If ministries and CSOs are supported with advice and funds, then ministries and civil society organizations are supported to plan and implement digital solutions in education, which will result in digital solutions to improve continuity and quality of education services being implemented.

Hypothesis 1 on Output 1.2 is **confirmed** by the evaluation. In short, it postulates that the BACKUP Initiative's support of ministries and CSOs with advice and funds would improve their planning and implementation of digital skills in education, resulting in digital solutions that improve continuity and quality of education services.

From the very beginning of the action, the **interest and demand for BACKUP funds under SO1** to be supported in improving digital solutions in education in the eight partner countries Botswana, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, Rwanda, and Zambia was high (GIZ, EU & Enabel, 2023). African partners confirmed that the project's flexible support in times of crisis and budget constraints, as well as the combination of high-quality financial and technical assistance provided MoE and CSOs with adequate and targeted capacity building to fill existing gaps with regard to 49 implemented digital solutions (Int_1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, Indicator 1.2.2 GIZ, 2024). In that, the diverse needs of applicants in terms of capacity building for education planning and management were taken into account - from researching and needs assessment for effective planning to MoE directly training teachers in basic digital skills so that lessons could be continued online (GIZ, EU & Enabel, 2023). With SO1's support, e.g., the Zambia National Education Coalition (ZANEC) first conducted a study on the status of digital skills among teachers, parents and learners, which helped to identify the needs and strategies to improve planning and implementation of digital solutions in education. In this study, challenges that educational professionals and learners faced during the COVID-19 pandemic were identified for the digital skills training for teachers, thereby contributing to targeted improvements in terms of the quality of the digital education. Moreover, as capacity needs were identified by the partners themselves through the demand-based logic, the project clearly filled existing gaps to maintain continuity and quality of education services.

Finally, through the project's support, **African partners were enabled themselves** to improve the continuity and quality of education services and therefore deal with challenges in the education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic (Int__1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7). As a result, BACKUP Initiative's support enabled the MoE and CSOs to reach **more than 3.5 million learners and education professionals** in Botswana, Burundi, DRC, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, Rwanda und Zambia (GIZ, 2024).

Outcome Hypothesis 2 (networking, output 1.5): If regional and national regular knowledge sharing events are organized and experiences shared, then learning and network building among the partner countries and internationally in the area of digital solutions for education and COVID-19 resilience are supported, which will result in digital solutions to improve continuity and quality of education services being implemented.

Hypothesis 2 on Output 1.5 is also **confirmed** by the collected data. It describes that through organizing regional and national regular knowledge sharing events, learning and network building among partner countries and internationally in the area of digital solutions for education and COVID-19 resilience will be improved. This should then result in digital solutions to improve continuity and quality of education services being implemented.

Interviewed African partners **acknowledged that peer-to-peer exchange with actors** who work at a comparable level was beneficial in a time of an unprecedented COVID-19-pandemic and lockdowns. It was found that SO1's support for regional and national knowledge exchange enabled partner countries to learn and build on other countries' good practices to improve their own planning and management of digital solutions (Int_1, 2, 3, 5, 7). This is also reflected in the goal achievement of indicator 1.5.1. "88% of participants in exchange formats indicate that the knowledge exchange of the respective exchange format on digital solutions in education is relevant for their work" (GIZ, 2024). In the case of **Zambia**, the positive effects of the networking on the implementation of digital solutions are clearly recognizable. The Zambian CSO ZANEC confirmed, that the exchange with other African

partners revealed that all countries face similar problems and therefore synergies could be created, and good practices were shared (Int_2).

Moreover, the evaluation also **identified evidence for effective and institutionalized national and regional exchange that would also continue beyond the project duration**. An illustrative instance that demonstrates the effectiveness of the organized networking events by SO1 is the case of **Madagascar**. The initial national exchange between the two CSOs, ACCESSMAD and the national coalition CONAMEPT, involved sharing their experiences during a virtual session on computer recycling. This, however, motivated the CSOs to take it up to the regional forum where a collaboration on computer recycling with another CSO started. Finally, further exchange formats are planned beyond the duration of the project's support, e.g., for finding common solutions, measuring impact, discussing evaluations as well as the intersection of gender and technology (Int_1, 3).

Effectiveness – Dimension 3: Quality of implementation

Several factors added to the SO1 realizing the aforementioned contributions to the project's objectives. These factors include effective communication, relationship management, and target-oriented steering.

SO1 demonstrates **strong communication and relationships, coupled with an effective steering structure**. Feedback from interviewees, including African partners, the EU, Enabel, and GPE, affirmed that the project's communication was appropriated in terms of frequency, timeliness, accuracy, and its problem-solving orientation (Int_1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13). Those engaged in various project modes also acknowledged the project's responsiveness, timely communication, and problem-solving approach, emphasizing its adaptability and openness in addressing challenges (Int_1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7). This can be attributed to the inherent motivation and strong service-oriented nature embedded in the project design. The BACKUP approach inherently fosters trust and strives to empower partners to take action. Also, it was mentioned several times that the clear and simple application forms developed by the SO1 were facilitating the application (Int_1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7). However, interviewees pointed out that SO1 could have promoted more exchange to enhance collaboration among partners and other donors or stakeholders in the education sector of the respective countries to facilitate **knowledge and information sharing** (Int_1, 2, 3, 5). Also, different stakeholders said that while being involved in the application phase, they would have appreciated updates on the implementation of the partners' projects supported by SO1 in the given country (Int_4, 8, 9).

Despite operating from Germany and maintaining a remote connection with African partners, the project team benefitted from personal contacts from BACKUP Education and was widely visible and seen as closely attuned to the concerns of the partners (Int_1, 2, 3, 5, 6). Interviews indicate that the project's communicative and relational interaction approach allowed it to carry out diverse activities with partners and stakeholders, fostering trust and mutual appreciation. The project team was consistently perceived as highly committed to the project, its objectives, and the needs of the partners.

Ensuring **high-quality implementation**, SO1 effectively managed its various activities. The use of detailed annual operational plans and the Wiki, a robust monitoring system previously endorsed during the implementation of BACKUP Education, showcases the project's adept control and oversight of funded activities without resorting to excessive micromanagement. Besides its interpersonal communication, **effective management** is a vital factor in ensuring the implementation of high-quality initiatives. This approach facilitated a targeted and impact-focused management strategy, enabling the project to shift its focus based on the fulfillment of various indicators. The BACKUP Wiki, functioning as a tool for monitoring and evaluation, not only provided insights into overall goal attainment but also allowed for the specific monitoring of mode characteristics, such as those related to civil society, regional formats, or cross-cutting topics (Int_11).

4.4 Impact

The impact criterion is organized into three evaluation dimensions, taking into account the expected accomplishment of overarching development outcomes, the project's role in contributing to these outcomes, and the initiation of positive or negative unintended impacts. In this evaluation, obtaining robust evidence for all the steps between the outcome and impact levels outlined in the hypotheses proved challenging due to the extended causal chain. As a result, the evaluation of impact hypotheses relies on a plausibility analysis, grounded in assumptions regarding the project's effectiveness.

Impact – Dimension 1: EU General Objective / higher-level development changes/results

The initial dimension of the evaluation scrutinizes the realization or anticipation of overarching development results. The overarching impact objective of the **EU Action RESICODI** was set out "To mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Eastern and Southern Africa" (General Objective). This impact is gauged by tracking the time series of coronavirus incidence (GIZ, EU & Enabel, 2023; EU, 2020). However, it is crucial to note that since the BACKUP Initiative supports African partners in the field of education, the direct impact contribution to the EU Objective mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic and its indicator, the incidence rates in respective regions, is only indirect and challenging to validate precisely (Int_11). Therefore, the evaluation predominantly examines the **lower-level impacts delineated in the results model**. The evaluation has therefore focused on and assessed the plausibility between outcome and impact level through outcome-impact hypotheses (see impact dimension 2).

In terms of education objectives, the project plausibly contributes to **national education objectives as well as to achieving "Quality Education" as set out in SDG 4 of the Agenda 2023** on a global scale (UN, 2015a). Through the BACKUP Initiative's financial and technical support, the respective African partner countries are supported to improve the continuity and quality of education services and push digital transformation in education as set out in their national education objectives. The project, through its extensive support modes and the diffusion of holistic, participatory, and multi-stakeholder approaches to education sector planning, actively works towards empowering national governments and various civil society stakeholders (Int_1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9). So far, the project's support enabled the MoE and CSOs to reach **more than 3.5 million learners and education professionals** in Botswana, Burundi, DRC, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, Rwanda und Zambia (GIZ, 2024). While the pandemic caused drawback to meet commitments of SDG 4, digital solutions and technologies have worked to counter these setbacks globally (GIZ 2022). Contributions to SDG 4 therefore seem generally plausible through three channels: achieving high quality education (e.g., through skills training), digital transformation (e.g., to increase access to education) and fostering equal access (e.g., through gender and conflict sensitivity as a cross cutting topic) (Int_9, 11).

While promising impacts have been identified and corroborated with stakeholders, it is crucial to recognize that the broader impact of the comparatively small-scale funds provided by SO1 alone is constrained and the **causal chain long** (Int_11).

Impact – Dimension 2: contribution to achievement of objectives (impact hypotheses)

The soundness of the outcome-impact hypotheses hinges on the validation of the output-outcome hypotheses evaluated in the effectiveness section (refer to chapter 3.5).

Given that these hypotheses were **affirmed**, **the project is deemed to have attained its objectives through the intended impact pathway**. Likewise, this section scrutinizes the extent of SO1's contribution to the aforementioned impacts, in the form of two specific impact hypotheses, that lie closer to the sphere of influence of the project. Considering the constraints delineated earlier, the evaluation will primarily rest on a plausibility analysis.

Impact Hypothesis 1 - Covid-19 Mitigation:
If digital solutions to improve continuity and quality of education services are implemented, this will increase the resilience of partner countries' education systems and contribute to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in partner countries.

Based on the collected evidence, **impact hypothesis 1** can be **confirmed**. It postulates that the SO1's support contributed to continuity and quality of education services, thereby increasing the resilience of partner countries' education systems and contributing to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in partner countries.

In this regard, partners were able to link their results achieved in their modes in terms of quality and continuity to their **ability to strengthen the resilience of their organization and education systems** (Int_1, 2, 3, 5, 6). CSOs and MoE have played a crucial role in enhancing the resilience of their education systems, particularly in the face of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Amidst the diverse and complex contexts in which these partners operate, BACKUP's financial and technical assistance has not only fortified their capacities but has also enabled them to navigate the unprecedented disruptions caused by the pandemic. The demand-oriented approach of BACKUP has been instrumental in tailoring solutions to the immediate needs arising from the pandemic, ensuring that the partners can effectively address the unique challenges presented by COVID-19. This adaptability and responsiveness have further contributed to the resilience of CSOs and MoE, enabling them to sustain their critical roles in advancing digital education and mitigating the impacts of the global health crisis on the education sector. The collaborative and participatory nature of the initiative has fostered a spirit of unity and shared responsibility, reinforcing the partners' ability to withstand and overcome the adversities brought about by the pandemic, ultimately contributing to the long-term resilience of the education systems in the region. It is thus plausible that through increasing the resilience, SO1 contributed to **mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis** in partner countries in the area of education services. Many state institutions were under stress and confronted with various pressing challenges on their agenda (Int_11). While in many countries, immediate health response was prioritized, the support by SO1 for keeping the education system running was effective, even though on small scale.

Although the intervention was conceptualised in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and resilience in this regard, the evaluation also suggested that **resilience may be defined in a broader sense**. Such as resilience for disruptions related to natural disasters (e.g., cyclones in Madagascar) or disruptions due to ongoing conflict (such as in Burundi or DRC) (Int_4, 6). The teacher training on digital skills enhances the resilience of education systems by enabling rapid adaptation to changing circumstances, facilitating swift transitions to online or blended learning during crises. Additionally, the international certification and efficient contracting processes contribute to teachers' professional standing and enable prompt service delivery, crucial for addressing challenges, especially in times of crises like the COVID-19 pandemic (Int_6). It is plausible to assume that due to contributions, such as teacher training on digital skills, partner countries will be better equipped and the beneficiaries better off than before if they face disruptions or crises of any kind.

Impact Hypothesis 2 – Digital Transformation:
If digital solutions to improve continuity and quality of education services are implemented, this contributes to the digital transformation of the education sectors in partner countries.

Impact hypothesis 2 can be **confirmed**. It suggests that the project contributed to the implementation of digital solutions to improve continuity and quality of education services, contributing to the digital transformation of the education sector in partner countries.

The initiative has plausibly contributed to **heightened awareness for the importance of digital education and skills** among education professionals and government officials, fostering a positive shift towards digitalization (Int_1, 5). Many learners and education professionals could be reached via supported modes in the 8 partner countries (see chapter 3.5). Additionally, evaluation interviews showed that the influence of two CSOs in the political arena was especially noteworthy, as they successfully raised awareness among political actors for digital solutions

in education: The Namibia National Teachers Union (NANTU) was involved in the development of the new national education strategy and successfully campaigned for the relevance of digital education. ZANEC in Zambia mentioned during the interview, that they raised awareness, especially as a national coalition including 93 non-state actors, among political actors for digital solutions in education through research and advocacy (Syspons, 2024; Int_2, 5). Recognizing the crucial role of political willingness for sustainable change and funding, these CSOs have demonstrated the potential of civil society as a forerunner in exerting political pressure for transformation.

However, one limitation to the hypothesis becomes apparent as it must be noted that the project's duration and its pilot character cannot **achieve systematic digital transformation**. While heightened digital skills training and awareness alone are a good progress, the current lack of digital infrastructure and devices in partner countries to advance digitization in schools on a broad scale does not enable a transformation yet. Nevertheless, the evaluation has also revealed some good practices in this regard that yield potential for broader impacts, such as in Madagascar, where a partnership was reached to hand out recycled computers to schools and is showcasing the way for change (Int_4, 6). SO1's approach to support MoE and CSOs thus provides an initial move for digital transformation to materialize in the future.

4.5 Sustainability

This section analyses and assesses the sustainability of the project. It is structured according to the assessment dimensions in the GIZ project evaluation matrix (see Annex).

The sustainability criterion assesses the **likelihood of positive project outcomes** persisting after its conclusion. Due to the timing of this evaluation (final evaluation; in comparison to an ex-post evaluation), long-term results at population level are neither likely to be observable at this point; nor a focus of this evaluation. Additionally, due to the nature of a project operating at the meta-level, long-term results at the level of indirect target groups (i.e., children and adolescents of school age in African countries) are not observable at this point. Hence, the assessment of sustainability focuses on the extent to which **results at the output and outcome levels are anchored** in both Civil Society Organisations and Ministries of Education.

Sustainability – Dimension 1: Capacities of the beneficiaries and stakeholders

This aspect assesses the utilization of capacities relevant to the project objective by direct and indirect target groups or intermediaries. Given that long-term results will not be robustly evidenced at this point, the continuation of grant recipient's engagement in efforts to support the digital transformation in the education sector is taken as a first indication of their sustainability. Hereby, it is also considered to what extent the direct target group has built upon established capacities.

At the level of direct target groups, positive assessments were made in terms of developed capacities of ministries and CSOs in line with SO1's objectives. Through the project's targeted advice and financial assistance, the project was able to contribute to capacity building at various levels: for example, the individual (e.g., professionalization of representatives), organizational (e.g., needs analysis) and national level (e.g., advocacy and more effective planning of digital solutions) (Int_1-7). As seen in Chapters 3.5 and 3.6, several performance stories from the eight partner countries have demonstrated the project's support to CSOs and MoE to maintain continuity and quality of education services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, with its dual approach to fund MoE and CSO, the project also plays a pivotal role in consolidating and **sustaining the activities of civil society** in the national and regional discourse. This is highly relevant for CSOs as they are often underfinanced and dependent on external funding. The interview partners have confirmed the relevance of this support that has also resulted in professionalisation of organisations with the potential to make CSOs also more attractive to donors in this field and potential follow-up funding (Int_4).

However, **questions of resilience and sustaining capacities for partners are closely associated with sufficient and sustainable financing** and capacities. Further financial support is crucial for maintaining partners' capacities expressed in all interviews with partners and stakeholders (Int_1-9). This is even more relevant for CSOs as they are dependent on external funding as well. While there are some positive notes of cases like the MoE in Botswana that increased the budget 2021 and 2022 by 5.7 % compared to its previous budget, tense budgets in the partner countries outnumber this (GIZ, EU & Enabel, 2023, Syspons, 2024). However, it is important to note that maintaining digital solutions and capacities requires substantial means in partner countries, including increased government involvement, higher budget allocations, and plausibly multilateral and international funding (Int_1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8). While it is acknowledged that advocacy for digital education and digital skills have to be set up in parallel to advancing digital infrastructure, the current lack of digital infrastructure, connectivity, access and devices in partner countries to advance digitization in schools on a broad scale limits the sustainability of obtained capacities (Int_1, 2, 3, 5, 6).

At the level of indirect target groups, the evaluation showed positive developments for teacher skill trainings and their ability as multipliers to reach final beneficiaries. Digital skills and teacher training was a dominant theme in applications and common way to reach final beneficiaries (Int_11). In Namibia, the interviewees highlighted, that their strategy of nationwide training, i.e. in every region and in almost every school in the country, makes it possible for teachers with digital skills to teach sustainably throughout the country and to incorporate these skills into their lessons. Through the project, teachers were empowered to apply and transmit their acquired knowledge, serving as multipliers to reach final beneficiaries (Int_5).

Sustainability – Dimension 2: Contributions to supporting sustainable capacities

This aspect evaluates how well the project facilitated the integration of results into (partner) structures. For this purpose, the dimension examines whether the project adopted suitable approaches, methods, and policies/strategies to continue the grant recipients' engagement in efforts to support the digital transformation in the education sector.

SO1 activities aimed to **encourage sustainability at various levels** and therefore provided several safeguards, such as demand-orientation, participatory approach and networking approaches:

- First, the **demand-orientation** of SO1 significantly contributes to the sustainability and anchoring of results within the structures of BACKUP grant recipients. Owing to the fact that the partners' measures were implemented by the African partners themselves and not by international donors, individual and organizational capacities and learning were created. This approach reinforces relevance and ownership among MoE and CSOs, and further acts as a safeguard to enhance sustainability.
- Second, through a **participatory and holistic approach** through involving both civil society and public sector actors, the project promoted a systemic approach to digital transformation and especially the social participation of civil society and its inclusion in the sector dialogue, which has a sustainable effect on processes in the education sector (Int_3, 4).
- Third, SO1's technical support and advisory services play a crucial role in **incentivising partners to consider sustainability strategies at an early stage** when submitting applications. The incentives to ensure sustainability, are especially crucial given the short duration of the project (Int_11).
- Fourth, a contribution of the project to support sustainable capacities can be also seen through **establishing long-term networks between African partners**. The exchange of good practices and lessons learned, also beyond the project duration, can contribute to sustaining capacities and solutions. However, it might still be too early to determine at the time of the evaluation, especially as also partners have indicated that networking and relationship building needs time (Int_1).

Sustainability – Dimension 3: Durability of results over time

This aspect of sustainability **pertains to predicting durability**. Therefore, the evaluation team assess the extent to which the project results exhibit permanence, stability, and long-term resilience.

Overall, the evaluation data shows that the **conditions to ensure the permanence, stability and use of the project's results after its ending in the short and medium term depend on the context**. In this regard, the evaluation team found examples of sustainable anchoring of project results and training outcomes, but also identified hurdles to the sustainability of results.

On the one hand, there are **opportunities for the continued implementation of the piloted** modes. Some partners have identified and explored approaches for continuing and replicating successful initiatives (Int_1, 5). As discussed in dimension 1, the project actively supported the organizational capacities of ministries and CSOs, with the participatory approach and ownership ensuring the continued implementation of project modes. An illustrative example of this continuation is observed in Namibia, where the Teachers' Union has established an academy for continuous professional skill development of teachers, providing skill training on various levels (Int_5). In the case of a mode in Madagascar, activities will be further continued with the support of donors such as AFD (Int_1).

However, on the other side, the **evaluation also brought to light certain limitations and challenges in sustaining and/or scaling the activities on the ground**. Although the project contributed to increased capacity among its direct target group, their anchorage in partner structures remains dependent on the context, given the insufficient (financial) capacities of national structures. First, it should be noted that the regional project operates in a highly diverse regional context **leading to varying degrees of sustainability** for the achieved and potential results of the modes. E.g., especially when considering fragile contexts coupled with weak state budgets such as DRC or Burundi, sustaining efforts might be more at risk compared to country contexts like Rwanda where digitalization is much more institutionalized already in the economy and public budgets. Second, as discussed in dimension 1, the most significant hindrance is the limited **financial resources of partners** to continue and expand these activities. The examination of reports following SO1 support indicates that follow-up funding will be essential for all activities (Syspons, 2024). For example, in the case of Namibia, it was highlighted that "the focus of the ministry is on digital infrastructure, and investing in skills is not very high on the agenda" (Int_6). Overall, the collected evidence suggests that the success of the modes is heavily **contingent on national policy processes and the available funding perspectives**.

5 Conclusion

The project BACKUP Initiative was **overall evaluated as successful,** evident in its alignment with the five OECD-DAC criteria relevance, coherence, effectiveness, impact and sustainability.

Not only was the SO1 **highly relevant** to international, European, and national development agendas, but it also effectively addressed the needs of target groups and beneficiaries through MoE and CSOs. The project's success in relevance was due to the project's approach and successfully combining a fund to finance projects with the provision of technical and financial advice, and its adaptability. Next, the project displayed **strong coherence**. SO1 demonstrated commendable efforts in achieving **internal coherence**, particularly with (where available) bilateral GIZ projects. The intra-agency coordination between GIZ and Enabel was characterized by the structure of separate spheres of interventions and complementarity of actions. While signs of duplication were absent, there remains a clear opportunity for further improvement in fostering collaboration and coordination efforts between stakeholders, while added responsibility lies with the role of the Coordinating Agency. In addition to its internal coherence, the SO1 proved successful in complementing **other interventions by international donors**, particularly through its innovative foray into the realm of digital education. However, the potential for increased synergies at the local level suggests room for continued growth and enhanced connections with other ongoing interventions.

Its strong strategic alignment and coherence also helped SO1 to be **highly successful in its goal achievement** as set out by surpassing almost all indicators. The project's activities were instrumental to this achievement, benefiting from an established funding approach. The project demonstrated that high-quality implementation, effective and target-oriented management and a good steering structure helped to achieve the above contributions. In terms of cross-cutting topics, gender was mainstreamed, but was not a focus of the project. Therefore, the project's **impact is considered successful**. The project plausibly contributed to a set of overarching impacts, subject to a long impact chain. These enabled African partner countries to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in partner countries in the area of education and to contribute to the digital transformation of the education sector. SO1's activities aimed to **encourage sustainability** at various levels and provided several safeguards to ensure sustainability. Nevertheless, the ambition level that can be expected from small-scale funds needs to be considered. Finally, the sustainable institutionalization of acquired capacities in partner structures is subject to limited (financial) capacities in the national structures and digital infrastructure.

In **sum**, the evaluation highlights that SO1 was a highly relevant, targeted and rapid response to needs in the context of the COVID-19-pandemic. It enabled successful pilots, bridging financial gaps and building necessary capacities for digital education in times of crisis. The evaluation thus demonstrated both the plausible benefits of a small-scale and demand-based fund as well as limitations for future programming.

6 Lessons learned

This evaluation identified important lessons learned that are either relating to factors of success, e.g., approaches to keep and scale, or to factors of failure, e.g., room for improvement.

Factors of success

Targeted and flexible support in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

Building on the **established and experienced** BACKUP approach proved to be a well-chosen approach by the EU and BMZ to quickly deliver targeted and flexible support in partner countries in the course of the pandemic. Due to established contacts in the partner countries from previous project phases, as well as established project and fund management, technical and financial support to African partners working on digital solutions for education services was quickly delivered.

- **Recommendation:** The established BACKUP approach could be scaled and adapted for other intervention areas, especially when untapping new fields of action such as digital education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Demand-orientation

The **demand orientation** of the project was the **project's key success factor for implementation**. The demand orientation allowed a very diverse range of needs to be met by partners. It also served as an important safeguard to ensure relevance on the ground given the pressing needs in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Strong demand-based support for civil society is also in line with the German Feminist Development Policy.

- **Recommendation:** The demand-orientation of the fund should be kept or scaled for other interventions. The project is well advised to maintain its broad offer of support which account for a range of the partners' needs.

Targeted capacity building

The **combination of high-quality technical and financial advice and the funding mechanism** supported multidimensional and **targeted capacity building** for African partners due to the systemic and holistic approach. SO1 effectively supported national and civil society stakeholders within the education sector that reached the final beneficiaries and lead to capacity building and impact on several levels, including individual, organizational, national, and regional capacities.

- **Recommendation:** The modality of combination of high-quality technical and financial advice should be scaled for effective and holistic capacity building of CSOs and MoEs.

High quality implementation

Through the project's **flexibility, good steering, adaptive management, and responsiveness to change and established personal networks**, the project responded in a timely, appropriate way to changing contexts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Recommendation:** The project team should invest in and continue the elements of its high-quality implementation.

Complementarity of the Team Europe Approach

Complimentary action between Enabel (TVET) and GIZ (digital education) resulted in **holistic support of education sectors and professionals** in the context of the pandemic. It is noted that the Action's distribution of responsibilities by Specific Outcomes by agency seemed to allow for using the Agencies' experiences for implementation, while ensuring clear responsibilities.

- **Recommendation**: The EU should continue Team Europe approaches to build on European agencies' strengths, diverse experiences and ensure complementarity between actions.

Opportunities & Recommendations

Experiences from implementing Specific Objective 1 as part of the EU Action RESICODI have created many lessons learned for (future) projects in the digital education sector:

A) Lessons learned for the current project:

Leveraging Synergies

The evaluation has revealed that there was still **potential for the modes to realize synergies in partner countries** with other interventions. Even though SO1 supported the partners in this, some interviews suggested that the small-scale SO1 modes were not always sufficiently coordinated and known to other interventions in the education sector.

- **Recommendation**: The involved entities (GIZ, EU, BMZ & Enabel) could support the modes in **leveraging their combined networks in the partner countries**, e.g., connecting the grant recipients more with existing interventions in the intersection of digital and education in the respective country (bridge building). This might also include encouraging the grant recipients to follow-up on synergies even after contact has been established by GIZ.

Gender Equality

Gender equality faced a general backlash during the COVID-19 pandemic - especially girls have been left behind in the education sector. Therefore, **more emphasis on gender** equality in digital education is needed, e.g., through supporting specific modes aimed at gender equality.

- **Recommendation:** The German Feminist Development Policy launched in 2023 and initiated by Minister Schulze offers momentum to systematically anchor gender-responsive and gender-transformative approaches, coupled with an intersectional and rights-based approach.

Limitations of the Team Europe Approach

The evaluation identified room for potential in terms of cooperation and coordination as well as connection of the fields of action between GIZ and Enabel due to an unsatisfactory coordination role.

- **Recommendation**: For **effective intra-agency cooperation** clear and enough (time and monetary) resources need to be allocated by the EU and member states and enforced for the coordination role in these complex Team Europe projects. Defining responsibilities among cooperating agencies, awarding the coordination role with enough resources as well as implementing trust and team building activities between agencies could further strengthen Team Europe outcomes.

B) Lessons learned for conceptualising future projects in digital education:

Digital infrastructure as a challenge

Insufficient digital infrastructure is a challenge for any project engaged in the digital transformation in many African countries. It is acknowledged that advocacy for digital education and digital skills have to be set up in parallel to advancing digital infrastructure to not lose time. However, the private sector plays a crucial role in providing connectivity and digital devices, e.g., in terms of connectivity, infrastructure and devices for a digital transformation.

- **Recommendation:** Therefore, similar projects in digital education could place emphasis **on cooperation agreements with private sector actors,** e.g., where applicable systematically. As sometimes it is difficult for (small) NGOs to connect and attract private sectors themselves, the donors could leverage their weight.

Limitations of smaller-scale and short-term project commissions

The project underscored the challenges inherent in having a **concise project duration** and a **limited funding period**, emphasizing the notion that building meaningful networks requires a considerable amount of time and effort. SO1 entered a new field with its focus on digital skills in education in African countries. Therefore, the network

with relevant actors around the BACKUP Initiative had to be enlarged and could not live up to some partners' expectations.

- Recommendation: The evaluation has shown that the short intervention timeframe as part of the short-term COVID-response were not necessarily designed for long-term solutions, but still challenges the sustainability of project capacities and outcomes for partners. Therefore, any short-term project should incentivize and support partners with **sustainability and exit strategies** for projects and network activities at an early stage. Also, commissioning parties should consider this in their strategic planning.
- Recommendation: For a digital transformation in the African partner countries further large-scale funding is essential. Therefore, any short-term project should emphasize on supporting the partner to **attract follow-up funding**. For projects at the intersection of digitalization and education, there is often only funding for very specific topics/areas, depending on the donor. Here, the evaluators see some potential in connecting grant recipients more with multilateral donors and international organizations already present in the local education sector as well as the digital sphere for leveraging further funding at the intersection of digital and education.

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Annex

assessment dimension		evaluation question	indicator/descriptator	data source
relevance	design	To what extent are the causal hypotheses in the results model plausible?	1. Qualitative assessment of the plausibility of causal hypotheses in the results models 2. Qualitative assessment of the plausibility of risks, assumptions and external factors 3. Qualitative assessment of the implementation strategies 4. Qualitative assessment of the system boundaries according to different stakeholders a) Project staff b) Partners	project documents interviews with project staff, grant recipients, strategic partners and other stakeholders
	responsiveness to needs, policies & priorities	To what extent does the intervention meet the national education strategy of partner countries?	1. Description of partner countries national education strategies 2. Comparison of partner countries national education strategy with the project's conception and implementation	national strategic documents project documents interviews with project staff, grant recipients and other stakeholders
		To what extent is the intervention in line with the EU priorities?	1. Description of EU priorities relevant for the project 2. Comparison of relevant priorities with the project's conception and implementation	EU strategic documents project documents interviews with project staff and donor
		To what extent does the intervention meet the needs of beneficiaries and stakeholders?	1. Description of beneficiaries and stakeholders assumed needs and capacities 2. Comparison of beneficiaries and stakeholders assumed needs and capacities with the intervention's objectives and project development	project documents interviews with project staff, grant recipients and other stakeholders

	adaptability	To what extent has the intervention responded to changes in the environment over time (risks and potentials)?	1. Degree to which the intervention can provide an overview of changes in the implementation that resulted from changing framework conditions 2. Qualitative assessment of the project's reaction to the changes aforementioned	project reports interviews with project staff, grant recipients, strategic partners, and other stakeholders
coherence	**inter-agency collaboration**	To what extent does the intervention complement and support Enabels efforts?	1. Description of Enabel's objectives 2. Qualitative assessment of degree to which project operations are subsidiary to objectives	project documents interviews with project staff and Enabel representatives
	EU	To what extent does the intervention complement and support other donors' activities?	1. Description of related projects within the EU development cooperation 2. Qualitative assessment of synergies between the project and EU activities in this field	desk research interviews with project staff and EU representatives
	other interventions	To what extent does the intervention complement and support other interventions in this field?	1. Description of related project within international development cooperation 2. Qualitative assessment of synergies between the project and related interventions	desk research interviews with project staff, grant recipients, strategic partners, and other stakeholders
effectiveness	**indicator achievement**	To what extent were the project's objective achieved?	1. Analysis of monitoring data	monitoring data
	hypotheses	To what extent has the intervention supported ministries and civil society organizations to plan and implement digital solutions?	1. Description of intervention activities related to support ministries and civil society organizations 2. Qualitative assessment of the intervention activities and their effects at the level of intended beneficiaries	project documents Monitoring data Interviews with project staff, grant recipients, strategic partners, other stakeholders
		To what extent has the intervention supported learning and network building among the partner countries and internationally in the area of digital solutions for education and COVID-19 resilience?	1. Description of intervention activities related to support learning and network building 2. Qualitative assessment of the intervention activities and their effects at the level of intended beneficiaries	project documents Monitoring data Interviews with project staff, grant recipients, strategic partners, other stakeholders

	cross-cutting topic	To what extent has gender-mainstreaming been applied to the intervention?	1. Description of intervention activities related to gender-mainstreaming 2. Qualitative assessment of the intervention activities related to gender-mainstreaming and their effects	project documents Monitoring data Interviews with project staff, grant recipients, strategic partners, other stakeholders
	quality of implementation	What assessment can be made of the quality of steering and implementation of the intervention in terms of the achievement of objectives?	1. Success factors of the intervention cited by interview partners and project staff 2. Success factors cited in the intervention's documentation 3. Hindering factors of the intervention cited by interview partners and project staff 4. Hindering factors cited in the intervention's documentation 5. Qualitative assessment of the quality of steering and implementation of the intervention.	project documents Monitoring data Interviews with project staff, grant recipients, strategic partners, other stakeholders
	unintended effects	To what extent can unintended positive/negative effects be observed?	1. Analysis of unintended effects	project documents Monitoring data Interviews with project staff, grant recipients, strategic partners, other stakeholders
Impact	**hypotheses**	To what extent has the intervention contributed to increase resilience of partner countries' education system and to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in partner countries?	1. Description of intervention outputs and outcomes 2. Qualitative assessment of the intervention outputs and outcomes and their effects at the level of intended beneficiaries	project documents Monitoring data Interviews with project staff, grant recipients, strategic partners, other stakeholders
		To what extent has the intervention contributed to the digital transformation of the education sectors in partner countries?	1. Description of intervention outputs and outcomes 2. Qualitative assessment of the intervention outputs and outcomes and their effects at the level of intended beneficiaries	project documents Monitoring data Interviews with project staff, grant recipients, strategic partners, other stakeholders

Sustainability	**capacities of the beneficiaries and stakeholders**	To what extent do the beneficiaries and stakeholders have the institutional, human and financial resources as well as the willingness required to sustain the positive results of the intervention over time?	1. Analysis of the degree to which partners / grant recipients share the vision & objectives of the project 2. Analysis of the degree to which partners / grant recipients are committed to advancing objectives of the project	project documents Interviews with project staff, grant recipients, strategic partners, other stakeholders
	contribution to supporting sustainable capacities	To what extent has the intervention contributed to the beneficiaries and stakeholders having the institutional, human and financial resources as well as the willingness required to sustain the intervention's positive results over time and to limit the impact of any negative results?	1. Assessment of the extent to which results have been anchored in the structures of the grant recipients 2. Qualitative assessment of project contribution to resilience of grant recipient institutions	project documents Interviews with project staff, grant recipients, strategic partners, other stakeholders
	durability of results over time	to what extent can the positive results of the intervention be deemed durable?	1. Assessment of risks and potentials for sustainability of results in national contexts (case studies)	project documents Interviews with project staff, grant recipients, strategic partners, other stakeholders
lessons		What are the identified lessons learned?	1. Analysis of lessons learned	project documents Monitoring data Interviews with project staff, grant recipients, strategic partners, other stakeholders

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