Digital technology is a key vector for both economic and human development that leads to progress in education, health, innovation, industrialisation and goods exports, among other areas, thus helping reduce poverty. However, for more than half of the world’s population there is still no easy way to access the Internet. Investing in the digital economy would enable developing countries to boost their economic growth and integrate into the global market and thus seize the opportunities it offers.

How does the Commission intend to invest in strengthening the digital economy in developing countries?

The Commission fully recognises the importance of digital technology as a vector for economic and human development, and would refer the Honourable Member to the Staff Working Document ‘Digital4Development: Mainstreaming digital technologies and services in EU development policy’ (1), published on 3 May 2017, which outlines the approach for the more effective use of digital technologies in a range of key areas (notably e-governance, agriculture, education, water management, health and energy).

To unlock the potential of digital economy in developing countries and ensure access to open, affordable and secure broadband connectivity, the Commission considers it essential to continue supporting digital infrastructure projects (such as the ongoing ‘Central Africa Backbone project’ and ‘Multinational Trans-Saharan Backbone Optical Fibre Project’) and actions related to capacity-building in cybersecurity, data protection and privacy.

Furthermore, the Commission considers the transfer of expertise towards institutions developing digital policies at national, regional and continental levels essential, and intends to continue to support a culture of innovation. New impetus is to be given to actions fostering entrepreneurship, improving access to finance for start-ups, supporting innovation ecosystems, promoting women’s economic empowerment, supporting inclusive digital financial services and facilitating the creation of links between start-ups from European and partner countries, and making use of the opportunities offered by the European External Investment Plan. In this respect, emphasis will be given to promoting partnerships involving the public and private sectors, working together with European and international financial institutions.

---