



Pathways for Prosperity Commission: 2018 - 2020 Delivering Impact

When the Pathways Commission was established at the end of 2017, the narrative around technological change was focused on richer countries and was extremely negative: it was all about job losses caused by automation. In just two years, the Pathways Commission has led the transformation of this narrative to a more optimistic and pragmatic conversation. We have highlighted the concrete steps developing countries can proactively take to maximise the benefits and minimise the liabilities of digital technologies – so that everyone can capture the upside in this new era.

In this time, we have consulted and engaged with academics, governments, policymakers, civil society activists and private sector leaders, taking us around the world to Nairobi, Washington, D.C., Delhi, Dar es Salaam, Jakarta, Kigali, London, Ulan Bataar, Johannesburg, Addis Ababa, New York and Beijing – and of course to Oxford where the secretariat has been based. This engagement and analysis has resulted in four major reports and a global Digital Manifesto. In addition to the Commission's final report – the [Digital Roadmap](#), which distilled this two year's of enquiry into specific recommendations on how to implement an inclusive digital economy, the Commission has produced:

- [Charting Pathways for Inclusive Growth: From Paralysis to Preparation](#), which examined the impact of technological innovation on growth, jobs and livelihoods in developing economies and outlined pathways that developing countries could adopt for inclusive growth.
- [Digital Lives: Meaningful Connections for the Next 3 Billion](#) detailed how people in developing countries are using digital services and devices, and discussed some of the barriers – both hard and soft – that face traditionally marginalised groups as they try to benefit from new technologies.
- [Positive Disruption: Health and Education in a Digital Age](#) offered guidance on how digital technologies can be used to improve the lives of people in developing countries, while keeping a careful eye on the limitations of solutions that rely solely on hardware.

We also published a paper on the governance of digital technologies, [Digital Diplomacy](#), which is based on a survey of more than 100 policymakers, entrepreneurs, academics and NGOs from across the world with a focus on developing countries.

In combination, these reports have been downloaded almost 12,500 times, and have been covered by leading international outlets including the Financial Times, BBC, Le Monde, CNN International, CNBC Africa and Bloomberg, as well as a host of other newspapers,

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Pathways for Prosperity Commission on Technology and Inclusive Development

broadcasters and websites across Africa and Asia. We have also published 36 [background papers](#) written by leading thinkers and academics. These papers have supported our research, covering a range of issues including: a paper by Dani Rodrik on [Global Value Chains and New Technologies](#), a case study on [Electronic Health Records in Kenya](#) from Naomi Muinga and Chris Paton, and a paper on how [the Mobile Phone Revolution is Impacting Digital Inequality](#) by Philip Roessler.

Our significant engagement and output over this period have enabled us to have real impact in a variety of areas:

First, the international arena: as a direct result of the Commission's work, there are now strategies, plans, commitments and investment programmes in place that will deliver on the opportunities of the digital age that would not have been in place without the Commission's contribution. The World Bank is using our work to shape its thinking (e.g., the next World Development Report), and its investments (e.g., its multi-million dollar digital moonshot programme). Trade Ministers of the Commonwealth Secretariat are shaping their plans around our research. The African Union's draft Digital Transformation strategy leans heavily on our language and concepts, as does the ITU Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development – and even the Canadian national statistical office. All of these organisations have made use of the Pathways Commission's language, framing and ideas to shape their own digital strategies and implementation.

The UK Department for International Development (DFID) has reframed its whole digital strategy around our Charting Pathways report. DFID's digital lead highlighted that: "Basically, the Commission is doing what we at DFID would want to do, if only we had the time." Mastercard Foundation, one of the largest philanthropic organisations in the world, is using our research to shape its investment decisions for youth employment – calling our reports 'their bible'. The Centre for Global Development (CGD) in Washington, D.C. has set up a new work programme on data governance, explicitly taking up the baton from the Commission – and Benno Ndulu is co-leading this work with them. In addition, the World Economic Forum is establishing a new Platform on Sustainable Development in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, partially based around our analysis, and was launched in Davos in January 2020.

While these are all excellent developments, the impact we have had in developing countries is even more important. The Dutch Embassy in Benin told us that Charting Pathways was exactly what was needed in the country. An official in the government said that this report provides an answer to the question of how an agricultural economy will be able to thrive in the digital era. The Commission's legacy initiative at Oxford University's Blavatnik School of Government is now working with officials in Benin to upgrade their digital plans. The Commission has also been advising the Colombian government on its digital transformation and AI strategies. After meeting Benno Ndulu, the government official who leads innovation in the Tanzanian government plans to implement our thinking there, and is working with policymakers across the government to deliver this.

We can demonstrate still more concrete impact of the Pathways Commission via the [Digital Economy Kit](#). Through this work, the Commission has actively partnered with countries to

unpack and find solutions to the practical challenges of planning for digital transformation and new pathways for growth. This policy kit has been refined through pilot phases in Ethiopia, Mongolia, and South Africa, where the Commission has supported dialogues with key stakeholders, local partners and governments, to help them agree on priorities for a national digital strategy.

These country level pilots have already demonstrated extraordinary results: in South Africa, the draft digital strategy work has been tied into President Ramaphosa's Public-Private Growth Initiative, and there is now a clear, realisable strategy for the creation of half a million jobs in globally traded services. This plan, which was agreed by the Department of Trade and Industry, the industry association for business outsourcing (BPESA), and Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator, includes a provision that one in five of the jobs created will go to excluded young people. BPESA has said that the dialogue process has entirely transformed the way it operates, meaning they now – for the first time – work hand-in-glove with the industry association on digital business. The previous jobs strategy 'was based on yesterday's reality', according to BPESA's CEO, Andy Searle, and the dialogue process had made the organisation much more ambitious. The process of implementing the Digital Economy Kit in South Africa demonstrated a strong focus on the opportunities of digital as its starting point, which was an important learning for the Commission.

In Mongolia, a digital strategy was produced in partnership with the Cabinet Secretariat, which plans to use it to draft new laws and propose new investment projects. The Chief Cabinet Secretary said that it was his positive impression of the level of engagement and co-creation during the dialogues that he is setting up a Digital Council, which is a public-private initiative aimed at building a cohesive and coordinated approach to digital transformation in the country – in other words, to continue the work that the Pathways Digital Economy Kit has started. Elements of the strategy primer are now included as manifesto commitments ahead of the next election.

The emphasis on a whole-economy approach to policymaking in the Digital Economy Kit has resonated in Ethiopia, too. Ethiopian policymakers have begun to insist on a more coordinated approach to digital transformation, and the Ministry of Innovation and Technology (MINT) will be submitting the strategy to the Ethiopian Cabinet to take forward. The Commission's input marks a distinct change in approach: prior to our work in the country, the Ethiopian digital strategy was siloed within MINT. Now the government wants to use digital economy to signal to the world that the country will be more open in regulatory terms.

In addition to our three pilot countries, Benin and Malawi are also starting to adapt and use the Digital Economy Kit to develop their own digital strategies. A range of other countries – Ghana, Botswana, Rwanda, Eswatini, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, and Sierra Leone – are in discussions to do the same. The Commission has signed a memorandum of understanding with the UN Technology Bank to roll out digital assessments in their partner countries. The Commission also has an emerging partnership with United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA): working together to find the best way to integrate the Digital Economy Kit into its digital identity and digital economy programmes.

We are delighted that the Commission's work will now be taken up by a five-year research and policy engagement initiative to be based at Oxford's Blavatnik School of Government, partnering with a South African university (WITS) and an Indian think tank (IDFC), among others, with a key focus on the governance of technology and a continued emphasis on inclusion.

The Pathways Secretariat