Digital Technologies for a Better World?
Conditions May Apply: Why the digitalization of development may exclude its most important target groups.

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Abstract

The United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are driven by the guiding principle of leaving no-one behind (LNOB). In practice, this means ensuring that the most marginalized and vulnerable populations are benefitting from the progress towards sustainable development. The growing use of digital technologies as tools and platforms for development programming poses a complex challenge for the principle of LNOB: Those who are already the most vulnerable, are often the least likely to have the access, skills, financial means, or social positions to interact with and benefit from technology, making them the most likely to be further left behind as development goes increasingly digital.

To be coherent with the SDGs’ underlying objectives, digital development therefore needs to take into account the principle of LNOB and guarantee the greatest possible inclusivity to those who are digitally excluded. At its core, this PhD sheds light on the complex interplay between development, inequalities, and digital technologies, and analyzes the conflicting relationship between digital development and the principle of LNOB. Concretely, the PhD explores how the next international development goals – whatever form or shape they may take – could correct the digital blind-spot of the SDGs and promote an equitable use of
digital technologies in order to uphold the principle of leaving no-one behind in light of the increasingly digital context in which development finds itself.