Event Summary
OVERVIEW

The 2020 Global Digital Development Forum (GDDF), held over 16 hours on **May 6 2020**, was conceived in the wake of mass in-person conference cancellations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the course of seven weeks, from the forum’s first official convening on March 18, to its announcement on March 30 and its implementation on May 6, the GDDF Organizing Committee coordinated a first-of-its-kind, entirely virtual digital development conference comprising **154 sessions** and covering seven Information and Communications Technologies for Development (ICT4D) topic areas.

As this brief report will cover, GDDF is best understood not as one “big” event, but -- much like an in-person conference -- as many small ones as well. A participant may watch a live keynote with 1,000 others at midnight in D.C., share a pre-recorded “lightning talk” on social media (#GDDF20), ask a question during a lively panel discussion, learn a new skill in a 30-person workshop, take a nap, catch the 1 PM GMT USAID Digital Strategy keynote, watch a few recorded sessions, and then pop over to check out the networking breakouts, virtual world, and tech demos.

The goal was to go beyond just putting a keynote online and provide an early attempt at the digital transformation of a global conference.

- **16** Hours
- **6** Keynote Presentations
- **49** Breakout Panel Sessions
- **23** Workshops
- **37** Lightning Talks
- **39** Tech Demo presentations
GDDF BACKGROUND

The Global Digital Development Forum was inspired by the March 5 ICTworks post, Coronavirus Canceled Your Conference – Let’s Organize a Virtual Event, which led to a vibrant discussion on how to develop a virtual ICT4D conference. From that conversation emerged a desire to build on previous USAID Digital Development Forums (pictured), while expanding both the focus and participation beyond specific donors or countries to include a global audience of low and middle income country (LMIC) practitioners. USAID, Chemonics, Save the Children, TechChange, IntraHealth International, CRS and the ICT4D Conference, and the Digital Impact Alliance agreed to co-organize the event around major ICT4D themes.
The Organizing Committee and TechChange designed five session types, which were delivered through a combination of livestreamed presentations (held in Zoom or Vimeo Livestream Studio) and pre-recorded videos: Keynote Presentations, Breakout Panel Sessions, Workshops, Lightning Talks, and Tech Demos. TechChange built and managed the virtual event platform. Presenters were selected and coordinated by members of the Organizing Committee. Session leads also received coaching in advance of their sessions through trainings led by TechChange and reference materials shared via a special edition of TechChange’s TC101: How to Teach Online 101 course.
SESSION TYPES

**Keynotes:** Moderated keynote addresses from ICT4D leaders on transformative digital development topics of global importance. *(Most popular: “USAID Digital Strategy” (1,047 live attendees))*

**Breakout Panel Sessions:** Live panel sessions facilitated in Zoom and streamed to participants on the GDDF platform; live chat available for Q&A. *(Most popular: “The Importance of Understanding Digital Ecosystems” (203 live attendees))*

**Workshops:** Interactive live sessions featuring practical, hands-on exercises and approaches to ICT4D topic areas. Held in Zoom; limited to 30 to 35 participants. *(e.g., Co-creating in Humanitarian Settings: Methodologies for Inclusivity (43 participants))*

**Lightning Talks:** Fast-paced, pre-recorded video presentations. Featured alongside a chat window for live Q&A with the presenter. *(Most popular: Data Privacy in the time of COVID-19 (693 watched live))*

**Tech Demos:** Interactive pages featured a pre-recorded Tech Demo video, discussion thread, and a live chat channel where participants could speak with an expert on the tech solution. *(Most active forum: Dobility Inc.: SurveyCTO Phone Interviewing: 56 comments)*

**Networking:** Live activity sessions facilitated over various platforms, including Zoom and Mozilla Hubs, to encourage virtual networking. Private networking also available through in-platform personal text chat or pop-out video chat.
PARTICIPANTS

>5,000 Applicants

3,667 Accepted

2,634 Participated

127 Countries Represented

1,179 Organizations

72% Attended At Least One Live Event

9 Events Attended by Average User

90 Rated GDDF as “Awesome” or “Great”
GDDF Experience
MEMBERS PAGE

User-Added Locations
After logging into the platform, users could add their city -- and over 2,000 did! These were displayed on a map and clickable to see user profiles, pictures, and bios.

Integrated Social Media
Participants added their LinkedIn, Facebook, or Twitter profiles to user profiles to extend conversations beyond the GDDF platform using the #GDDF20 hashtag.

Filter, Sort, and Search Bios
Users were able to find one another quickly to start a video call, send a message, or share in the forum discussions.
PARTICIPANT DISCUSSIONS

Forums with 266 Discussion Threads and 3,000+ Comments
Users connected asynchronously to discuss panels, ask questions, or share personal stories. They could @mention other users, which prompted notifications and emails.

8,000+ Live Chats
Users online concurrently could hold side discussions individually, or in dozens of channels. This included a #support channel, where real-time technical support was always available.

0 Instances of Community Standards Violations
No violations of community standards were reported. Two moderators were online for the entire event but were thankfully not utilized.

Hi @cnichols - The recordings of all of the sessions will be available for at least the next 3 months, if not longer! We want to make sure everyone has the ability to digest the content at their own pace and to continue to connect with one another. The recordings of the live workshops will be uploaded to each of the workshop’s session details page over the next few days, so you can find that information on the Agenda page in the same way as the other sessions. We will just need to reach out to the Workshop facilitators to get their permission to share the recording!

# akros
# truvi
# connecteddx
# baosystems
# celled
# zenysistech
# help
# geopoll
EVENT AGENDA

154 Separate Events, 304 Presenters, 69 Hours of Total Content
Over a 16-hour event, participants were prompted to RSVP for sessions started automatically on the hour. Peak participation was 1,098 participants at 13:00 GMT, and all events were archived with chat instantly after the session ended.

100% of Events Started within 15 Minutes and Ended on Time
However, challenges for two events emerged with incorrect streaming takedowns (using one’s own video on a stream prompted a copyright flag) and titles that were flagged by algorithms on YouTube.

0 Instances of “Zoom Bombing”
The coordination of volunteers and the RSVP/agenda display prevented any unauthorized access to rooms, events, or discussions.
NETWORKING EVENTS

Tech Demos
Connecting participants with innovative tech companies, tech demos comprised quick, engaging demonstrations and the chance to ask and answer questions via live chat and forums.

Networking Workshops
For intentional community building, small workshops facilitated by TechChange asked participants to engage in one-on-one discussions, icebreakers, and shared whiteboards and murals.

A 3D Virtual World
Hundreds of participants joined to watch the live events together from a virtual world, where speaking into the microphone was only audible to those around them.
Insights
ANALYSIS

Buzz Translated to High Levels of Participation
From over 5,000 interested people, 3,666 applications were accepted, and 2,634 registrants attended at least one GDDF event. This means that 72% of accepted applicants participated (a significantly higher percentage than the industry standard for free events).

Not Just One Big Event, but Many Small Ones
A participant attended 9 "events" at GDDF on average, and the average "event" had 112 attendees. Although some keynotes had over 1,000 active users watching, most experiences were shared with under 150 peers (Dunbar’s Number).

Most Participants Came From the US...
Of the 127 countries represented, active participants by continent were North America (68%), Africa (12%), Europe (10%), and Asia (8%). However, users mostly identified Africa and South Asia as their work focus.

...But The Most Active Participants Weren’t
7 of the top 10 GDDF engagement point earners were not based in the US or Europe, as earned by discussions, attendance, and platform activity. Activity on the platform could be tracked by time zone for peaks by location.

Participants Want to Join the Discussion
79% of active users engaged in an event chat and active users posted, on average, 8.4 comments on discussion threads. And they were largely talking with one another (2,782 comments) and often on topics of a personal or networking nature (Most popular discussion thread: Where will you take your next vacation or travel trip? (181 comments))
TWITTER SELECTIONS

"By attending an online conference #GDDF2020 you are saved from that awkward moment when you enter the wrong session and you have to leave right away ..."

Fernanda Matsinhe @nandamatsinhe

Nils Kaiser @nilskaikai: "#GDDF2020 is an amazing demonstration of what’s possible in terms of an online conference - I love and miss travel but hope we’ll never go back to 20h travels, jet lag and tons of CO2 if it can be done this way..."

Ken Banks @kiwanja: "It’s early days/hours but the first fully-online Global Digital Development Forum has been great. Very nice use of tech to bring everyone together. This has to be the future."

Leah Quin @LeahQuin: "So impressed with today’s #GDDF20 platform, diversity of presenters and audience, and speaking slots geared to regions around the globe. Will we ever go back to face-to-face for ICT4D?"

Adam Hunt @adam_hunt: "First conference where my sons can watch the presentations. Also first for me to eat a peanut butter jelly sandwich at lunch break #GDDF20"

Sam Flanagan @samflan: "Excited to be able to join #GDDF20 virtually today - was a little iffy on the effectiveness of remote conference, but the backend digital infrastructure as a participant is awesome and SO well done / organized. I’m already learning a ton just seeing how it’s all set up."

Vriddhi Blog: "I joined the event somewhat skeptically, to be very pleasantly surprised. It was a long day well spent! In fact, I think a digital event is not just a compensation for a physical one- it actually offers something that may not be always possible in face to face conferences."
FEEDBACK

Aha Moments

"I might not want to attend an in-person conference again. Having the conference set up virtually seemed like a way easier to connect to people."

"There was a moment while I was attending that I just really felt that this was a strong candidate for developing a sustaining community of practice. This type of forum and venue could be leveraged continually for development work that is occurring around the world and could serve as a hub for passionate people to interact with one another and learn together."

"...so amazing to realize there are a lot of other people [out] there wrestling with the same questions and issues as me. Loved the ideas and solidarity in [tackling] difficult problems."

"The fact that the digital development community can come together and make something like this happen gave me goose bumps and provided inspiration for what can be accomplished in the future—especially during these challenging times."

"The idea of a virtual conference always seemed "meh" to me, [...]. "Keep it Going!" completely changed my mind as I saw how it can be done to a schedule but stay lively, informative and not just asking for feedback but engaging in dialogue. That's an impressive skillset; wish it were more widespread!"

Platform feedback

"Honestly I was very impressed with the design and how smooth everything went from the sessions I attended. The schedule was easy to find, the scavenger hunt was a great idea to get you started and feel less overwhelmed as to where to click [...]."

"I like that we can watch session[s] we missed. I'm in the US West and this meant I didn't have to miss out on great content."

"I think the platform was GREAT. I loved the gamification component to incentive participation."

"I liked the experiment with the virtual world."
RECOMMENDATIONS

Explore new event structures to maximize participation and content distribution
Participants were excited about the quantity of sessions available, but expressed challenges prioritizing among concurrent sessions of interest and avoiding screen burnout over 16 hours. Future events should explore additional structures that engage global participants across multiple timezones while minimizing content density.

Integrate technologies to make virtual sessions more inclusive
Closed captioning, live transcription, and/or live signing for sessions should be standard offerings for future events. We would also like to supply the option for live translation, as requested.

Continue to structure diversity into agenda planning and session design
Expand the “French track” to include additional languages, especially to increase participation from in-country partners and government representatives in presentations, rather than just HQ/implementing partners. Future session application criteria should take advantage of the virtual format to require/encourage in-country partners to present, and to be more involved in session moderation.

Boost networking opportunities
Building on the success of the scheduled networking sessions and beta-featured Mozilla Hubs/virtual worlds, we would further develop and advertise networking activities in the event agenda. We would also develop platform features that simplify the process for participants and presenters to contact one another.
Annex
## Organizing Committee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allana Nelson</td>
<td>Digital Impact Alliance</td>
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<td>Andrew Hassan</td>
<td>Chemonics</td>
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<td>Ashley Faler</td>
<td>USAID</td>
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<td>Claudine Lim</td>
<td>Digital Impact Alliance</td>
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<td>Coby Jones</td>
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<td>Edel Tessema</td>
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<td>Hillary Eason</td>
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<td>John O’Bryan</td>
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<td>John Zoltner</td>
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<td>Kate Dimsdale</td>
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<td>Laura Walker McDonald</td>
<td>Digital Impact Alliance</td>
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<td>Lisa Kowalski</td>
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<td>Luke Stannard</td>
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<td>Manisha Aryal</td>
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<td>Mark Summer</td>
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<td>Matt Haikin</td>
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<td>Mingo Roberts</td>
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<td>Nick Martin</td>
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<td>Rachael Keyl</td>
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<td>Sonja Ruetzel</td>
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<td>Steve DiPangrazio</td>
<td>Save the Children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wayan Vota</td>
<td>IntraHealth International</td>
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# Volunteers and Support Team

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<th>Ariel Frankel</th>
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<td>Arianna Montero-Colbert</td>
<td>Natalya Buchwald</td>
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<td>Alison Mead Richardson</td>
<td>Hailey Nicholas</td>
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<td>Dar Maxwell</td>
<td>Sedinam Worlanyo</td>
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<td>Ihara Kariyawasam</td>
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<td>Priscilla Nangobi</td>
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