Executive summary

Evaluation report of the Wehubit 2.0 Belgium's flagship programme boosting Digital Social Innovations in Africa

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Presentation of the evaluation

Belgium has made digital transformation a central component of its development cooperation. In 2016, it adopted its Digital for Development (D4D) Strategy, positioning digitalisation as a cross-cutting enabler of sustainable and inclusive development, with emphasis on human rights, digital inclusion, gender equality, and the ethical use of technology. Within this framework, programmes such as Wehubit contribute to implementing Belgium's D4D commitments by supporting digital social innovations that address local needs.

Wehubit 2.0 aims to increase the use of digital innovation to contribute to the SDGs and address global challenges. Its intervention logic is structured around two Specific Objectives. SO1 supports digital social innovations addressing digital gender gaps and inclusion barriers. SO2 strengthens the capacity of national and regional actors to contribute to digital innovation ecosystems. The programme combines financial support, capacity building, knowledge exchange, and internal advisory services. It is implemented from 1 October 2023 to 31 December 2026 with a total budget of €5m funded by the Belgian State and operates primarily in 14 partner countries of Belgian development cooperation in Africa. Wehubit 2.0 is fully embedded within the Enabel Innovation Hub, which brings together five flagship programmes, namely Wehubit 2.0, DGA, DGI, RTIA, and DeSIRA+, under a common methodological foundation referred to as the "Wehubit blueprint".

The overall purpose of this end-term evaluation (ETE) was to generate evidence and learning on the performance and added value of Wehubit 2.0 while ensuring accountability towards key stakeholders. The evaluation therefore combined formative and summative dimensions.

More specifically, the evaluation aimed to:

- assess the overall performance and effectiveness of the intervention by analysing outputs, partnerships, and progress towards results, while identifying initial observable effects;
- examine the contribution and added value of the innovation dimension in progressing towards the programme's objectives and its alignment with Enabel Strategy 2030;
- identify strengths, limitations, and areas requiring adaptation in programme approaches and draw lessons for future programming;
- assess the relevance and coherence of the strategic choices underpinning the Innovation Hub strategy.

The end-term evaluation was conducted between January and April 2026 while the project was still under implementation. It included a theory of change reconstruction, a desk review covering 168 documents, including annual reports, monitoring data, calls for proposals, grantee reports, and scaling tools, and primary data collection during the Innovation Days event in Dakar. The mission also included direct observation of the Knowledge Exchange Network (KEN), in-person exchanges with grantees and Enabel teams, 27 stakeholder interviews involving the PMU, Innovation Hub programmes, Enabel HQ experts, and representatives of the four supported projects, four in-depth case studies, namely ALeDIA, OpenTeleRehab, Longa, and DonDeSang, and a benchmarking exercise covering 10 comparable programmes to position Wehubit 2.0 within the innovation support value chain.

Findings and conclusions

The final evaluation of Wehubit 2.0 identified several findings relevant to digital social innovation support programmes. The six conclusions and summary DAC scores presented below highlight the main results of the evaluation.

Wehubit 2.0 addresses a strategically relevant niche but operated in practice as a pre-scaling programme. The programme targeted an underserved segment of the digital social innovation ecosystem in Africa, situated between post-proof-of-concept support and scaling-stage financing. In practice, however, several structural factors shifted implementation towards earlier-stage support. Grant duration (around two years), grant size (generally around €250,000), and the profile of selected organisations created a gap between the programme's stated ambition and the outcomes that could realistically be achieved. This conceptual misalignment nevertheless represents an opportunity and could be integrated into a broader innovation support chain involving downstream scaling partners.

Strong internal coherence but incomplete external synergies. The Innovation Hub generated substantial internal coherence through the mutualisation of human, methodological, and logistical resources across Wehubit 2.0, DGA, DGI, RTIA, and DeSIRA+. These arrangements produced tangible efficiency gains and strengthened Enabel's credibility as an institutional actor in digital innovation support. By contrast, the translation of this positioning into structured and external synergies remained incomplete, as the programme did not establish sufficient partnerships to position itself within a broader innovation support value chain.

A high-value multimodal support model. Wehubit's three-component approach, combining grant funding and monitoring, tailored scaling support, and a structured Knowledge Exchange Network, constitutes a distinctive and valued support modality. The most durable effects identified through the evaluation were primarily strategic rather than operational. Grantees consistently reported that the programme changed how they conceptualised scaling: they entered the programme focused mainly on project delivery and exited with a broader strategic perspective on long-term development.

A sub-granting mechanism structurally biased towards large international NGOs. Administrative and compliance requirements associated with the grant mechanism proved disproportionate relative to the average grant size and structurally favoured large international NGOs with established grant management systems. This occurred at the expense of local actors and public institutions that the programme also aimed to support and represents a significant limitation in terms of sustainability, efficiency, and relevance.

Sustainability embedded in programme design but still conditional for most grantees. Sustainability considerations were integrated into Wehubit's intervention logic through selection criteria emphasising institutional anchorage, economic viability, and collaboration with public actors. For most supported innovations, however, sustainability remained conditional. While the programme helped organisations better understand scaling requirements, facilitating transition towards the next stage of support remains the main gap to address in future programming.

Positive unintended effects. The programme generated several positive unintended effects. Wehubit functioned as a strategic diagnostic instrument by providing grantees with a clearer understanding of their scaling trajectory and future development needs. Another unintended effect was the Innovation Hub's progressive specialisation in supporting the scaling of NGO-led social innovation, which could become a niche on which to capitalise within the development finance ecosystem.

Cross-cutting dimensions such as human rights, gender equality, inclusion, and environment are formally embedded in the Wehubit 2.0 design and reflect good alignment with Enabel policy frameworks. Given that the programme primarily supports NGO-led social innovation initiatives targeting vulnerable populations, many interventions are by nature inherently inclusive and contribute to transformative effects at service delivery level.

Relevance	B	Wehubit 2.0 addresses a clearly identified and highly relevant gap in the African innovation ecosystem by supporting the transition from proof-of-concept to scaling. The programme's demand-driven approach, the combination of financial and non-financial support, and its integration within the broader Innovation Hub ecosystem constitute coherent and relevant design choices. The programme also demonstrates institutional learning through the integration of lessons from Phase 1 into its revised approach. Several factors nevertheless limited overall relevance. Initial assessments of partner capacities relied mainly on application documents, communication on programme modalities could have been more detailed, and the sub-granting mechanism tended to favour large international NGOs. This partly reflects structural constraints linked to Belgian State audit and due diligence requirements. In practice, Wehubit 2.0 operated more as a pre-scaling acceleration mechanism than as a full scaling instrument.
Coherence	B	Internal coherence is strong at strategic and institutional levels. The pooling of human resources, tools, and events across five programmes generates tangible efficiency gains. Enabel's 2024 Innovation Policy formalises this logic, and Wehubit acts as the methodological engine of the broader Innovation Hub. Coherence is, however, weaker at operational and country levels, particularly because of uneven mobilisation of national focal points. External coherence is also more limited. While the programme occupies a complementary position within the innovation financing landscape, structured and measurable synergies with other international actors remain underdeveloped. The planned partnership with BIO, for example, did not materialise.
Effectiveness/Impact	B	Overall effectiveness is moderate to strong, although performance varies across levels of analysis. The programme performed well in establishing impact pathways and creating conditions for future change. Tangible impact, however, remains partly emergent because of the relatively short implementation period and uneven levels of innovation maturity at entry. Several initiatives were not yet ready for scaling, meaning that achievements should be understood as foundations for future impact rather than completed systemic transformations. The programme's main contribution lies in strengthening existing initiatives and improving their scaling potential.
Efficiency	B	Efficiency operates at two levels. The Innovation Hub model generates tangible efficiency gains through pooling functions across five programmes, creating economies of scale in knowledge management, communication, event coordination, and scaling support. Shared tools, joint procurement, and transversal frameworks add clear value, while the BRINK coaching mechanism strengthens methodological coherence. The model also enables

		flexible allocation of core team capacity across programmes, improving resource optimisation beyond Wehubit 2.0 alone. At the same time, several structural constraints partly limit value for money. The team relies on short-term contracts and external consultants, increasing knowledge loss risks. Sub-granting procedures are rigorous but grants remain limited and requirements can burden smaller organisations.
Sustainability	B	Sustainability is embedded in the programme design from the outset through selection criteria focused on institutional anchorage, viable business models, and alignment with national strategies. The capacity-building component represents the programme's most consistent contribution to sustainability. Supported organisations leave with a clearer understanding of their scaling trajectory, strategic roadmaps, and reusable tools. The main limitation is that strategic readiness does not automatically translate into operational sustainability. The programme clarified what scaling requires without consistently facilitating access to the resources needed to achieve it.
Unintended Effects	A	The programme generated several positive unintended effects. It functioned as a strategic diagnostic instrument for grantees and produced cross-programme learning spillovers through the Innovation Hub structure. Another unintended effect is the Hub's emerging specialisation in supporting the scaling of NGO-led social innovation, an area where demand remains strong despite limited tailored support mechanisms. In several cases, these unintended effects represent some of the programme's most durable contributions.
Cross-Cutting thematics	B	Across the cross-cutting themes examined, the programme demonstrates a generally solid level of integration. Human rights, inclusion, gender equality, digital access, and environmental sustainability are closely embedded within the programme's intervention logic and specific objectives. A substantial share of the observed contribution nevertheless stems from the profile of supported organisations themselves, many of which already specialise in gender, inclusion, or related social impact areas.

Recommendations

N°	Recommandation	Related conclu sion(s)	Targeted actors	Lev el	Priority	Type
1	Reposition Wehubit explicitly as a pre-scaling preparation programme positioned within a broader innovation support chain. Identify downstream scaling partners and financing instruments to which Wehubit-supported initiatives can be referred and reflect this positioning within the programme's theory of change.	C1	Innovation Hub / PMU / Enabel Management Committee	3	Long-term	Strategic
2	Establish more systematic downstream partnerships, require commitment letters	C3 ; C5	Innovation Hub / PMU /	3, 1	Medium-term	Strategic

	from national counterparts, and, where possible, involve them in project steering committees to strengthen pathways towards sustainable scaling.		Enabel HQ / Implementing partners			
3	Clarify the positioning of "Wehubit as a Service" within Enabel's innovation architecture to ensure complementarity with other departments, improve internal visibility, and strengthen institutional uptake.	C2 ; C3	Innovation Hub / Enabel HQ / PMU	3	Medium-term	Operational / Strategic
4	Develop a scaling financing mechanism at country representation level through a two-tier model in which headquarters provides pre-scaling accompaniment based on the Wehubit approach, while country representations take over scaling support by leveraging their local anchoring, operational flexibility, and proximity to national systems.	C1 ; C2	Innovation Hub / Enabel Country Representations / Enabel Management Committee	2 and 3	Long-term	Strategic
5	Commission a legal and regulatory assessment examining the feasibility of establishing a distinct legal status for the Innovation Hub within Enabel. This could enable more diversified financing sources, lighter procedures, and broader eligibility for private sector actors, public institutions, and civil society organisations.	C2 ; C3	Enabel HQ	3 and 4	Long-term	Strategic
6	Introduce thematic clusters within the existing Knowledge Exchange Network (KEN), for example in digital health, agriculture, or education, to strengthen the relevance of peer exchange and facilitate interactions between projects facing similar operational challenges.	C3	Innovation Hub / PMU	1	Medium-term	Operational
7	Introduce a systematic scaling readiness assessment at selection stage to distinguish between pilot-stage, pre-scaling and scaling-ready initiatives, and to better assess organizational maturity, absorptive capacity, sustainability prospects, and the capacity of applicants to operationalise gender-transformative and human-rights-based approaches within their scaling strategies and implementation models.	C1 ; C5	Innovation Hub / PMU / Enabel HQ	1	Short-term	Operational / Strategic
8	Develop and implement a formalised knowledge retention strategy for the Innovation Hub, including a mandatory capitalisation deliverable at the end of each programme.	C2 ; C4 ; C6	Enabel HQ / Innovation Hub	3	Medium-term	Operational / Strategic

Lessons learned

Analysing the capacity of local implementation partners at application stage helps reduce operational fragility during implementation. Selection processes tend to focus primarily on lead organisations, while local partners are assessed less systematically. In projects that rely heavily on these actors, their operational capacity directly affects implementation quality. A more systematic assessment at full proposal stage reduces operational risks**.**

Calibrating administrative requirements and selection procedures to the size of the grant and the organisational maturity of the implementing entity reduces friction and allows organisations to focus more effectively on implementation. Administrative requirements should reflect the size and risk profile of sub-grants. When procedures are excessively demanding, they create a disproportionate burden for smaller grants and can disadvantage organisations with more limited administrative capacity. This lesson is particularly relevant for programmes managing grants of different sizes within the same portfolio.

Integrating a scaling maturity framework into monitoring and evaluation tools allows a more structured assessment of whether the conditions for scaling are in place before additional resources are allocated. Scaling requires sequential progress across operational, institutional, and financial dimensions. Without such assessment frameworks, programmes risk supporting scaling processes before the necessary foundations have been established. Embedding a maturity framework within monitoring and evaluation systems therefore provides a more systematic and replicable approach.

Developing funding partnerships helps bridge the gap between institutional maturity and financial consolidation for scaling. A support programme lasting 24 months may establish favourable institutional conditions for scaling, but it rarely covers the transition towards the next financing phase. The central challenge is therefore not whether supported organisations are capable of scaling, but how programmes connect them with follow-on funders and downstream financing mechanisms.

Presenting support instruments clearly at application stage increases their uptake and overall effectiveness. The use of strategic support mechanisms depends not only on their quality but also on how and when they are introduced. When information remains limited during the application phase, these instruments tend to be underused. Earlier and clearer communication can therefore improve uptake without requiring substantial modifications to the instruments themselves.