



USAID
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DigitalFrontiers
SCALING DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT

CLOSING THE GENDER DIGITAL DIVIDE

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Through the WomenConnect Challenge, USAID has identified five proven strategies to close the gender digital divide and increase women's economic empowerment. The projects from WomenConnect Round One emphasized the need to incorporate women-centric programming, challenge perceptions, and generate economic opportunities.



Change Social Norms and Cultural Perceptions

In many poor or rural communities, access to technology and the internet by women is often seen as immoral, inappropriate, or unnecessary. It is important to work on perceptions with those frequently in power, such as men, community and religious leaders, and elders. Tackling these existing social and cultural norms will help women gain access to information and opportunities, build confidence, and feel empowered.



Create economic opportunities

When trained on using technology, women can access increased economic opportunities, from serving as community technology leaders to entrepreneurs. Once men are educated about online workforce opportunities for women, they often become supportive of technology access due to the increased family income. In turn, a woman's financial gains allow her to have more liberty and be able to afford additional internet access, educating and empowering her further.



Cultivate women's confidence

In many developing countries, ingrained traditional gender roles lead women and men to believe that women are unable or not smart enough to use technology, enforcing a gender digital divide and lack of confidence. Targeted programs have helped women increase self-efficacy and have demonstrated that women are able to effectively utilize technology, understand risks and opportunities, and position themselves as role models in their communities.



Design Creative Women-Centric Technology

To close the gender digital divide, programs must use technology options tailored to women in developing countries, many of whom are illiterate or have low literacy levels. Innovative video and audio platforms allow women to readily communicate and learn. Offline content on a range of development topics can reach women who do not otherwise have access to the internet. Custom devices and services can meet women's needs much better than a "universal" technology.



Develop Community Support

As poor or rural women gain access to technology, many become advocates for change in their communities. When given a platform to communicate with local leaders, they have championed issues disproportionately affecting women such as gender-based violence and access to finance or government programs, which benefits the whole community and leads to greater acceptance of women's technology use.