US Contribution
Open Consultation CWG-I

Introduction

Access and usage of digital tools empowers women and girls by providing essential information and services for health, safety, education, and economic growth opportunities—all of which are crucial for societies to realize their full economic potential. While the reach of digital technologies continues to rapidly expand, the gap between men and women accessing the Internet has widened over the last three years. A woman is 14 percent less likely than a man to own a phone in low and middle-income countries. Globally, this equates to a mobile phone gender gap of roughly 200 million women. Moreover, high costs of devices and Internet service, lack of digital literacy, and prohibitive social norms disproportionately impact women. The lack of access to the Internet and lack of basic digital skills limits women's ability to participate in the digital economy, obtain good education, access healthcare services and participate in the civil discourse.

The United States believes that without major changes in policies concomitant with a significant increase in investment many of the benefits of technological changes will be out of the reach of women, thus potentially exacerbating current gender inequalities. The following includes a sample of programs, which reflect the United States' commitment to promoting ICT use by women and girls all over the world.

Enabling Device Ownership and Promoting Digital Literacy

Connected Women Program (Worldwide)
The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) partners with AusAID (Australia's government aid agency), GSM Association (GSMA), and Visa — known as the GSMA Connected Women Program — enabled 15 million underserved women to own and effectively use mobile phones in order to increase their access to vital information, networks, and services to improve their family's quality of life.

Women and the Web Alliance (Kenya and Nigeria)
Women and the Web, a three-year training program in Kenya and Nigeria, was a partnership between USAID, NetHope, World Vision, and Intel. The program trained over 100,000 women in digital literacy, computer, and Internet skills. After receiving training, many of the trainees began microenterprises and began receiving microloans. Other trainees have started one-woman internet cafés.

WomenConnect Challenge
Launched by USAID Administrator Mark Green at the 2017 Global Entrepreneurship Summit, the WomenConnect Challenge is focused on holistic approaches to closing the digital gender divide that address affordability, digital skills, and prohibitive social norms. An open call for proposals will be announced in early 2018.

Developing Research and Tools

Gender and ICT Survey Toolkit
USAID's Gender and ICT Survey Toolkit addresses the challenge of poor gender disaggregated data at the sub-national level. The Toolkit was developed to facilitate the collection of gender-disaggregated information by providing draft survey questions and research design around women's access and use of ICTs. In a parallel effort launched in October 2017, USAID's Gender and ICT Training Course focuses on integrating gender and ICT programming for USAID staff and implementing partners.

USAID Support for the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP)
USAID has provided policy guidance to financial regulators to address specific constraints women face (i.e. limited access to national IDs, restrictions on movement, asset ownership, etc.). Data and research projects, such as the recent smallholder national surveys, embed analysis to draw out special considerations for women's segment. Experiments with financial services providers that test different features (i.e., user interfaces, real-time communication, and delivery channels), which take into consideration the design requirements for female users. The program also creates a community of practice to coordinate donor advancement for women's financial inclusion.

Supporting Policy Advocacy for the Right of Women to Participate in the Digital Economy

mSTAR (Bangladesh)
USAID's Mobile Solutions Technical Assistance and Research Project (mSTAR) in Bangladesh, supports the transition away from traditional cash payment methods to mobile financial services (MFS). The mSTAR program focused on increasing digital transactions and providing access to mobile financial services to women, with three quarters of the program's total transactions going to women.

Better Than Cash Alliance (Afghanistan)
The Government of Afghanistan joined the Better Than Cash Alliance (BTCA) in 2013. The BTCA is supporting policy guidance, advocacy, and research that integrate gender equality and women's economic empowerment into global and national government policies impacting the inclusion of women by way of government to person (G2P) and business to person (B2P) payments systems.

APEC Policy Partnership on Women in the Economy (ASIA)
USAID, in partnership with the U.S. Department of State, has actively promoted women's entrepreneurship in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), an organization of 21 economies working together to promote reform. Through the APEC Technical Assistance to Advance Regional Integration (ATAARI) project, USAID has supported the development of an APEC web-based platform for women's business networking and support. The website includes a women's business directory, resources, an information forum, and information on financing opportunities for women entrepreneurs.

Domestic Support for STEM Education

The United States is committed to STEM education as a key to engaging more women in technology fields. In February 2017, President Trump signed two bills into law:

- INSPIRE Women Act – which stands for Inspiring the Next Space Pioneers, Innovators, Researchers, and Explorers -- NASA will support women's involvement in the fields of aerospace and space exploration, encouraging women and girls to pursue STEM studies and careers in aerospace and space.
- Promoting Women in Entrepreneurship Act – expanding National Science Foundation efforts on behalf of women in science and engineering to encourage its entrepreneurial programs to recruit and support women to extend their focus beyond the laboratory and into the commercial world.