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AFCHIX

In poor, rural communities around the world, women disproportionately face adversity or difficulties in using technology. As societies join the digital revolution, females are often left behind, unable to access online services, information, and income-generating opportunities.

To help end the gender digital divide, AFCHIX not only set out to provide community access to the internet but also to generate business and empowerment opportunities for women.

The project worked with women collectives in underserved communities to create internet networks implemented and operated by women. The women determined the internet access rate, the location of the networks, and the community training opportunities.

Through a grant from the WomenConnect Challenge (WCC), USAID's global call to close the digital gender divide, AFCHIX worked in rural and peri-urban communities in Morocco, Kenya, Senegal, and Namibia to:

- Position women as technology leaders
- Provide reliable, affordable connectivity to communities
- Train women on technology and the internet
- Teach women about online business opportunities and entrepreneurship

Previously, women in these communities were not seen as technology experts, but through this initiative, female leaders taught men and women how to use the internet and served as gatekeepers to the network. The women subsequently gained respect due to their new roles, knowledge, and control of a community good.

The women decided to place the community networks in local schools and civic centers to ensure young girls and boys were part of the digital era, able to learn about technology and access to educational content online.

In addition, the program trained hundreds of women on digital literacy, cultivated business skills such as marketing and accounting, and connected women to entrepreneurship opportunities, mainly in agriculture, retail, and handicrafts. Online businesses were a new source of income for many women who previously had limited options. These financial benefits helped their families and led to approval and support from many men in the communities.

The successful, low-cost, replicable program was able to engage and empower women while strengthening communities through access to the internet.

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Afchix Women in Computing