



Photo Credit: GAPI

GAPI-SI and Bluetown

In Mozambique, only 10 percent of the population has access to the internet, one of the lowest internet penetration rates in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is primarily due to the high cost of internet access and smartphones, poor connectivity, and limited digital skills. Contributing to gender disparity in digital connectivity, rural women often lack access to education and employment opportunities and are therefore unable to afford internet-enabled phones. Unreliable access to energy, lack of information, and the belief that tech opportunities are exclusively for men also discourage women from becoming digitally connected. These limitations keep women from participating in the digital economy and improving their well-being, further perpetuating a cycle of poverty and entrenching the prevailing wisdom that technology opportunities are for men only.

Through the WomenConnect Challenge, USAID’s global call to close the digital gender divide, GAPI, a Mozambican development finance institution, and Bluetown, an internet service provider, joined efforts to address these pressing issues and help women in Ribáuè, Mozambique.

The team launched an entrepreneurship program to help women explore small business opportunities and access the digital marketplace. The participants also learned how to use technology and the internet smartly and safely.

In addition, Bluetown set-up a low-cost, dependable internet network for the community and established a lease-to-own smartphone program to ensure women had access to phones with online and offline content.

Bluetown’s technology provided a no-cost offline “cloud,” allowing women to browse entrepreneurial and agribusiness videos and content. Thousands of women watched the videos and gained knowledge on how to start a business and join the digital economy. The women, now positioned in their communities as technology experts, connected community members to the network and trained people to utilize the internet in order to enhance their livelihoods.

Through the program, women successfully learned to access information, use the internet and technology, pursue economic opportunities, and increase their incomes.

The program:

-  improved internet connectivity;
-  lowered the cost of internet-enabled phones;
-  taught women about digital literacy and safety;
-  provided entrepreneurial content;
-  supported women in starting small agricultural businesses; and
-  positioned females as technology experts in their communities.