




CLOSING THE GENDER DIGITAL DIVIDE


THE PROBLEM



Globally, men are 21 percent more likely to be online than women—a figure that rises to 52 percent in least developed countries.¹ Beyond this gender divide, there is also a rural-urban digital divide. In Colombia, women living in rural areas are 35 percent less likely to use the Internet than women in urban areas. This limited access to technology and Internet services has only exacerbated existing social and economic inequalities in these areas, impeding rural women’s opportunities for the future.

To improve rural connectivity and empower Colombian women within their communities, the USAID/Microsoft Airband Initiative is working with a Colombian telecommunications company, Anditel, to bring high speed Internet and digital skills trainings to women in the historically underserved, agriculturally focused regions of Tumaco and Bajo Cauca.

THE PROJECT



Anditel has developed and implemented 11 digital centers in community and women’s associations buildings that provide high-speed reliable Internet service for towns in Tumaco and Bajo Cauca. Each center is equipped with computers, tablets, a TV, and a facilitator or trainer, known as an ICT Community Dynamizer, responsible for operating the centers and delivering basic digital literacy. These ICT Community Dynamizers are female community members who were recognized as leaders in their communities among their peers. After undergoing initial training themselves to improve their digital knowledge and operations and management skills, these women have successfully managed the digital centers since their inception, coordinating and providing support to the community in digital literacy trainings and community-led events.

Anditel has also developed an online learning management system which offers courses in entrepreneurship, agriculture, digital content creation, and more advanced ICT skills. To date, 98 percent of participants have completed all available courses offered through Anditel’s digital literacy training program. While these digital centers and courses are available to all community members, a partnership with Nuestra Tierra Prospera and the locations of these centers in women-led cocoa and bee-keeping associations allow for a focus on equipping farming cooperatives and producers’ associations with skills and education to make their businesses more productive. For example, farmers might learn how to record their business expenses or operational costs in Microsoft Excel or set up an account on an e-commerce platform to sell their products. Children and young people in the area also use the centers to complete coursework, register for classes, complete university entrance exams, and spend their free time there. As a strategy to prevent recruitment by illegal groups, activities are carried out to help children and young people stay engaged and focused on their studies and away from these troublesome groups. These activities include the strengthening of academic subjects, games, and movie and entertainment evenings.

Vanessa Mejía, the Digital Dynamizer for a center located in Tumaco, organized a recycling company comprised of 20 young adults with the help of their digital center. She noted, “With the arrival of the digital center and the

1. <https://webfoundation.org/research/costs-of-exclusion-report/>

assistance of EAFIT University in Medellin, we had the opportunity to educate ourselves. We received classes where we learned to separate solid residues, plastic, foil, metal, paper, and cardboard. We learned the entire recycling process through the digital center.” She noted that thanks to the training sessions offered, “we launched our business idea where we have the possibility to impact our environment in a positive way through recycling and also to generate income for our young community.”

THE RESULTS

Anditel attributes much of the success of the project to the work of the ICT Community Dynamizers, as they have been a key part of promoting the centers and motivating community members to actively participate in trainings and activities. By the end of 2022, 1,473 individuals, 1,130 of which were women, received basic digital literacy training, and a total of 4,218 individuals, 3,130 of which were women, were directly impacted by the project.

While the primary objectives of the centers were to provide connectivity and access to basic digital literacy training, the centers also allowed communities to provide safe spaces for their children and young people to avoid involvement with gangs and other illegal groups, students to continue higher education learning, women’s associations to strengthen their agricultural productive processes, and different non-profit organizations and municipal administrations to host their own trainings.

Anditel’s work advances the overarching goal of the USAID/Microsoft Airband Initiative to bring meaningful connectivity to more women around the world. To learn more about the USAID/Microsoft Airband Initiative, click [here](#).

DIGITAL
CENTERS
CREATED AND
CONNECTED
TO INTERNET:

11

NUMBER OF
PEOPLE WHO
BENEFITED
FROM
CONNECTIVITY :

150,000

NUMBER OF
WOMEN WHO
COMPLETED
DIGITAL SKILLS
TRAINING:

1,130

NUMBER
OF MEN
COMPLETED
DIGITAL SKILLS
TRAINING:

343



Figures between June 2021 and Dec. 2022