



# USAID/Microsoft Airband Initiative

## CLOSING THE GENDER DIGITAL DIVIDE



The **USAID/Microsoft Airband Initiative** aims to address the gender digital divide through bringing meaningful connectivity and Internet access to more women in remote areas of the world.

While Internet adoption and mobile phone ownership are on the rise, figures show staggering gaps in access for women in many regions of the world. Addressing this gender digital divide is more critical now than ever before, as multiple sectors—such as agriculture, health, education, and civic engagement—increasingly utilize digital solutions.

Women who previously benefited from traditional development interventions are now often left out of digital ones, perpetuating gender inequality and moving development content out of reach. Since women’s empowerment is key to sustainable community development, Microsoft and USAID partnered to create sustainable and gender-equitable connectivity offerings in Colombia, Ghana, Guatemala, India, and Kenya.

### WHAT IS THE USAID/MICROSOFT AIRBAND INITIATIVE?

Launched in August 2020, the **USAID/Microsoft Airband Initiative** is a collaboration between Microsoft Corporation’s Airband Initiative and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). This public-private partnership seeks to bring Internet access to more women around the world, expanding women’s economic opportunities and enabling digital development services. The partnership will utilize the technical expertise and scale of Microsoft’s staff and operations as well as USAID’s expertise and successes on combating gender inequality in the digital development space.

“I think that the issue that this initiative is designed to address - the issue of prosperity and opportunity for women around the world when it comes to technology - is one of the issues of our time.”

**BRAD SMITH**  
PRESIDENT OF MICROSOFT

Six participating Microsoft Airband partners across the five countries include: New Sun Road (Guatemala), Bluetown (Ghana), AirJaldi (India), AndiTel (Colombia), Mawingu (Kenya) and M-KOPA (Kenya). Mawingu was previously funded by Microsoft and USAID as a rural connectivity initiative. Now, Mawingu and the other in-country partners have committed to programming that focuses on closing the gender digital divide.

## PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION:

The **USAID/Microsoft Airband Initiative** will be executed in three phases:



In the first phase, Microsoft Airband partners will **collaborate with regional gender and technology experts to design a tailored approach to gender-focused connectivity programming**, ensuring each program is designed with local conditions and social norms in mind.



The second phase will focus on **scaling up effective gender-focused connectivity programming** through implementation grants and ongoing technical assistance.



The third phase will include **publicizing the findings, highlighting successes, recruiting new Airband partners**, and encouraging other Airband partners to establish their own gender-focused connectivity programs.

Gender-focused connectivity programming is likely to include interventions such as:

- Working with women’s empowerment non governmental organizations (NGOs) to promote digital development
- Determining acceptable price points and desired information services
- Exploring innovative ways to make mobile phones and the Internet more accessible
- Considering the related barriers to women’s technology access and use, such as electricity
- Supporting low-literacy and local language requirements
- Incorporating risk mitigation strategies to ensure “Do No Harm” principles and counter gender-based violence

By putting women’s needs at the center of meaningful connectivity and working toward a common goal, USAID and Microsoft can close the gender digital divide and develop a more inclusive user base, demonstrating the potential of technology to change lives and create more self-reliant communities.



**Learn More: For more information about the program, contact [digitaldevelopment@usaid.gov](mailto:digitaldevelopment@usaid.gov)**

The USAID/Microsoft Airband Initiative is being implemented by DAI, under the Digital Frontiers cooperative agreement. Digital Frontiers works closely with USAID Missions and Bureaus, the private sector, and international and local development organizations to identify successful and sustainable digital development approaches and scale their impact globally.



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