



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

GUINEA

SUCCESS STORY

Cyber Skills Bring Business Success

Computer training and support boost women's businesses



Photo: USAID

Women entrepreneurs gather in cybercafés to learn basic computer and Internet skills.

Access to the Internet encourages women to improve their English and develop other language skills useful for business.

Telling Our Story

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Where can African businesswomen go to market their wares, promote new product lines, find competitive suppliers, or strike up new ventures? Hadja Mariama Bah, owner of a women's clothing enterprise in Guinea, is going online. Hadja has always conducted business in person or through the mail, frequently relying on word of mouth to establish, maintain and expand her network of clients and partners. Now, through USAID-supported program, Hadja is learning to use the Internet as a business tool with the potential not only for operational savings but also for access to a wider market and, therefore, increased revenues.

USAID's African Businesswomen's Information Service (ABIS) offers women in eight West African countries — Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Sierra Leone and Togo — the opportunity to learn computer basics for business. Participants include women from a wide range of age groups and educational levels, and 70 percent own a small business in the informal sector. USAID provides free training sessions on using email to communicate, using the Web to find commercial opportunities and accessing special events targeted to African business owners. Access to the Internet also encourages the women to improve their English and develop other language skills useful for business. The training is supplemented with around 40 hours of support over six weeks to give women time to practice and build on the skills they acquired during the initial workshop.

The sessions take place in local cybercafés, where female trainers create an atmosphere of camaraderie and mutual support, encouraging participants to freely experiment and ask questions. In this environment, the women's confidence grows. They are also invited to bring a colleague or friend to follow-up sessions, promoting the goal of informal knowledge sharing. To help the women incorporate their new skills into everyday business activities, USAID provides information on local Internet service providers and instructions on how to set up an account.

Women in the program automatically become members of the ABIS Forum, which provides them with a continuing source for trade leads and a forum to discuss topics of interest and significance on business development in West Africa.