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From Seattle to Senegal -- Increasing the Number of Women IT Professionals

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October 11 marked the **International Day of the Girl**. The energy around the inaugural UN-sponsored event provided an opportunity for organizations across the globe to highlight the challenges and opportunities facing girls and young women in both the Global North and the Global South. Arguably many of the issues are more acute for girls and young women living in countries with significant gender

inequity. However, the dearth of women in Information Technology (IT) is a problem that spans geographic and cultural divides. This problem is also a huge opportunity.

On a global scale, women represent more than half of college graduates, yet only a small fraction of the technology sector workforce. This is particularly true in emerging economies where men overwhelmingly dominate the field. A 2011 **report** by the U.S. Department of Commerce indicates only one in seven engineers are female. And although women have earned about **57 percent of all bachelor's degrees**, men earn the majority of degrees in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM)-related fields. In fact in the last 10 years the proportion of science and engineering degrees awarded to women in the U.S. has actually declined. In developing countries where, on average, only **one in five girls completes primary school** the disparity is even greater.

To help address this disparity, **NetHope** launched **Women's TechConnect (WTC)** earlier this month in partnership with **Accenture** and the **Anita Borg Institute**, an organization with a long history of championing women in technology. Announced at the **Grace Hopper Celebration**, Women's TechConnect is an online global community and professional mentoring program for women in technology, to help grow the next generation of women leaders in Information Communications Technology (ICT) roles across the globe. The program brings together women ICT professionals in humanitarian and corporate sectors to learn, grow and empower one another -- from entry-level to leadership. It also encourages the recruitment, retention and success of women in ICT in emerging markets by connecting professional women in technology from the Western world with the next generation

of women in technology in the developing world. This creates a sustainable continuum of success for women and girls in-country, by establishing role models, mentors and community leaders at all levels.

The early response to Women's TechConnect has been strong. From a PhD candidate in Pakistan, to a single-mom who just graduated from the NetHope Academy in Rwanda, to an entry-level IT officer in Haiti, young women with IT skills are pioneering their way into the industry in emerging markets, eagerly waiting for mentors and role models. Women's TechConnect helps them make the transition from school to work and jump-start their career.

But it also helps women IT professionals progress as leaders. Many corporations are interested in the program, as it helps them boost their gender-based leadership programs, supporting the recruitment, retention and job satisfaction of women in technical roles. It also helps them better understand emerging markets, and bridge the span between public and private sectors.

Here's how you can get involved:

- If you work for a corporation interested in supporting women and girls in the developing world, instituting a mentoring program, growing your own leadership bench of women and/or building a stronger presence in emerging markets, [contact us](#) to talk about becoming a corporate partner.
- If you are a woman in an IT role and would like to boost your own leadership skills as you help another woman in the humanitarian sector or developing world enter and thrive in the IT space, [sign up to be a mentor](#).
- And if you are a young woman in ICT space reading this from Latin America, Africa, Asia or any other part of the world [sign up to be a mentee](#).

Fostering the next generation of ICT professionals is foundational to NetHope's mission. And we're excited about the opportunity to deliver programming tailored to the needs of women in the field. Not only will this expand the pool of talented women IT professionals around the world, it will create job opportunities that will positively impact the social and economic future of these women, their families and entire communities.

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