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Gender Equality and Women Empowerment through ICT

(*Manisha Sharma and Kalyani Konch)

Ph.D. Research Scholars, Department of Extension Education and Communication Management, College of Community Science, SKRAU, Bikaner, Rajasthan

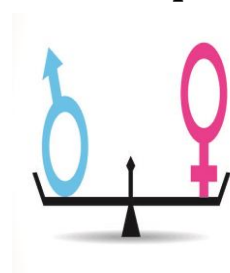
*Corresponding Author's email: manni14.sharma@gmail.com

Gender equality is an essential component for sustainable economic development and empowering the rural women economically and socially including access to land water education training market and financial services. Equality is achieved when women and men enjoy the same rights and opportunities. Women empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities of women.



Information and Communication Technologies comprise a complex and heterogeneous set of goods, applications and services used to produce, process, distribute and transform information. It can reduce trade distortions, eliminate poverty, empower weaker segments including women, etc. ICT also have the potential to improve interaction between Governments and citizens, fostering transparency and accountability in governance. Advancement in technologies helpful in breaking the barrier of poverty, illiteracy, language barrier, socio-economic barriers etc among the rural women in India. ICT can be a powerful catalyst for political and social empowerment of women, and the promotion of gender equality.

Gender Equality



Gender Equality Refers to when women and man enjoy the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of society including economic participation and decision making and when the different behaviors, aspirations and needs of women and man are equally valued and favored.



Women Empowerment

Women empowerment and women equality with men is a universal issue. Women empowerment refers to the creation of an environment for women where they can make their own decisions for personal benefits as well as for the society. It refers to increasing and improving the social economic, political and legal strength of women to ensure equal rights with men.

ICT (Information and Communication Technology)

Refers to Technologies that provide access to information through Telecommunications this includes the internet, wireless networks, cell phones other communication medias.

ICT have provided societies with a vast array of new communication capabilities for example- men or women can communicate getting information in real time with others by using these Technologies.



Gender equality and ICT: ICT consider as a powerful tool for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, a “gender divide” has also been identified, reflected in the lower numbers of women accessing and using ICT compared with men. Women need ICT for the same reasons as men-

- To access information of importance to their productive, reproductive and community roles and to obtain additional resources.
- Access to ICT can enable women and men to gain a stronger voice in their communities, their Government and at the global level.
- ICT also offers women flexibility in time and space and can be of particular value to women who face social isolation, including many women in developing countries

The gender dimensions of ICT—in terms of access and use, capacity-building opportunities, employment and potential for empowerment—are explicitly identified and addressed, ICT can be a powerful catalyst for political and social empowerment of women, and the promotion of gender equality. In general, women make up a small percentage of internet and computer users.

ICT offer the opportunities for direct, interactive communication even by those who lack skills, who are illiterate, lack mobility and have little self-confidence. Here are some aspects of life which have a direct influence of ICT especially on women:

- (i) Women’s increased access to job Market and improve entrepreneurship using ICT
- (ii) Increase of average household income in villages
- (iii) Shrinking Information Asymmetry through ICT.
- (iv) Improved Governance
- (v) Indigenous Knowledge
- (vi) Easy-Family communication
- (vii) Increase Social awareness



When women are able to use them productively, they can substantially improve their lives and increase their income. They have proved useful in: health care delivery; distance education; enhancing rural productivity through access to market information and access to finance; promoting empowerment and participation in national and international policy processes; improving service delivery by governments; improving environmental monitoring and response systems; and facilitating environmental activism.

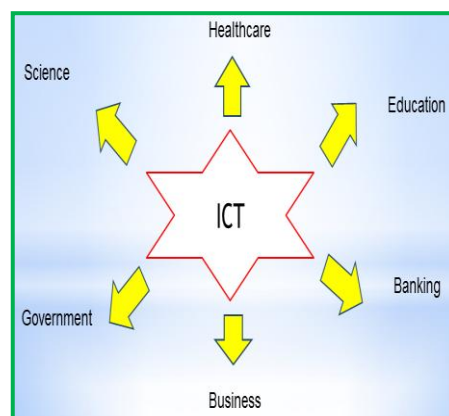
Components of ICT: Information and Communication Technologies comprise a complex and heterogeneous set of goods, applications and services used to produce, process, distribute and transform information. ICT project planning and implementation for social development and gender equality must take place in a context which consists of five main components:

- (a) Creating an enabling environment which supports and encourages strategies to promote women’s equal access to and opportunity to benefit from ICT projects, as well as creating a regulation and policy environment which supports women’s use of ICTs;
- (b) Developing content according to women’s concerns and reflects their local knowledge, and which is of value for their daily lives, business enterprises, and family responsibilities;

- (c) Supporting increased representation of women and girls in scientific and technical education, and using ICTs to promote their increased participation in education at all levels;
- (d) Promoting increased employment in the IT sector for women and the use of ICTs for women's SMEs (Small & medium size enterprise).
- (e) Implementing e-governance strategies which are accessible to women; and promoting women's lobbying and advocacy activities.

Women empowerment through ICT

Women finding employment in the new, often ICT-related industries are rarely those who lost their jobs in the traditional sectors. It is necessary to take into consideration, while addressing gender issues, the priorities and needs of rural women and girls as active users of information and to ensure their participation in developing and implementing global information and communication technology strategies. Effective access to and use of ICT can improve rural women's leadership and participation in community and economic development activities.



ICT services in various fields

Social-economic empowerment: ICT provides opportunities for women socio-economic empowerment in many areas, including in health and education.

Education: The use of computers and the internet radio and television, in informal learning distance education and in establishing e-learning centers to support education and training of women and girls. Continuing gender gaps in education, due to domestic responsibilities, lack of mobility and socio-cultural practices that downplay the importance of education of girls' constitute enormous challenges for women and girls.

Health: There is a vast potential for ICT to facilitate global, regional and national health initiatives for women. Health net is a global communication network, which links health care workers around the world via e-mail and allows doctors, nurses, researches medical students and other health care providers who had been working in isolation to communicate, share experience and access information critical to their work.

Economic Empowerment: ICT interventions that are directed at economically empowering women capitalize on the potential of these technologies as knowledge and networking tools for women as producers and distributors of goods and services. The tools are used to connect women to new and wider markets, broaden their social networks and provide them with information that opens up important economic empower ICT can provide new opportunities for women's economic empowerment by:

- Creating business and employment opportunities for women as owners and managers of ICT-accessed projects, as well as employees of new business ventures;
- Creating an environment, including through training, where women feel comfortable participating in community development activities and advocating for their needs and priorities;
- Developing ICT-based tools that address women's specific needs and are run by women (for example, literacy programmes, business planning courses, ICT training, access to market and trading information services and e-commerce initiatives);
- Offering economic opportunities in salaried employment and entrepreneurship, as well as in the ICT sector itself and in jobs enabled by ICT.

Psychological empowerment: ICT education provide psychological empowerment because-

- An increase in self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Feeling more valued, respected.
- Greater motivation, inspiration, enthusiasm and interest to develop new skills and knowledge.
- Feeling much less isolated from others (particularly other supportive women) and, as a result, experiencing greater wellbeing, happiness and enjoyment of life.

Technological empowerment -

ICT education provide technological empowerment because-

- New knowledge, awareness and understanding about new ICTs and their potential benefits and impacts.
- The development of new skills, experience and greater confidence and competence in using new communication technologies.
- Advice and support in using email and the Internet, provided in ways that often met the participants' needs very well.

Educational empowerment

ICT provide educational empowerment because-

- ICT delivers information about whole world in a language they understand and a medium that they would be comfortable with.
- Wide knowledge of each area, understanding of new concepts.
- ICT helps in non formal and adult women education.

Political Empowerment

- Information technology can contribute to increasing women's networking for social and political advocacy, strengthening women's participation in the political process, supporting the work of elected women officials, and increasing women's access to government and its services.
- ICT is a forceful tool to improve governance and strengthen democracy and citizen empowerment.
- It can help foster more transparent governance by enhancing interaction between government and citizens, revitalizing civic institutions and public debate, promoting equity and equality. It can be particularly powerful in providing a voice to women who have been isolated and invisible.
- ICT considers a powerful tool in delivering Government services and promoting transparency and accountability.
- E-governance focuses on new information technologies to strengthen the public voice to revitalize democratic processes and Government to better serve the public interest.
- E-governance is significant for the exercise of citizenship and direct public participation in Government activities, both of which are key elements in women's empowerment and achievement of gender equality.
- Gender-responsive governance involves the active and meaningful participation of women in all levels of decision-making and ensuring greater transparency and accountability in government.

Conclusion

The majority of women in our developing country like India do not have access to ICTs due to variety of barriers as such the infrastructural, social, cultural and linguistic. To make women independent, powerful and strong in all fields with the help of ICT necessary actions are to be taken at regional, national and international level. ICT provide resources, information and opportunities for development.

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