A Study of Women Empowerment & Role of Information and Communication Technologies

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Abstract:

"Women empowerment" and "women equality with men" is a universal issue. Women empowerment is a term that is used to encourage, inspire and celebrate women. It is also used to celebrate the strides that women and girls have taken in terms of gender equality, financial independence and high confidence. Women empowerment is all about giving women the power and control of their lives to become anything they want and to do what they want in situations where they were not allowed once upon a time. It refers to the creation of an environment for women where they can make decisions of their own for their personal benefits as well as for the society. This chapter looks at the prospects generated by ICT supported networking processes for women's empowerment. It discusses the foremost challenges and a hindrance confronted by women and recommends strategies to address those challenges and means to revamp the situations giving rise to women's empowerment.

Keywords: *Women Empowerment, ICT, Electronic Media.*

Introduction:

Information and Communication Technologies are diverse set of technical tools and resources to create, disseminate, store, brings value addition and manages information. The ICT sector consists of segments as diverse as telecommunications, television and radio broadcasting, computer hardware, software and services and electronic media, for example, the internet and electronic mail. While the potential of ICT for encouraging economic growth, socioeconomic development and effective governance is well recognized, the paybacks of ICT have been unevenly disseminated within and between countries. Poverty, illiteracy, lack of computer literacy and language barriers are among the factors impeding access to ICT infrastructure, especially in developing countries. Another hindrance pertains to ICT is lack of its access to women. It may also be realised that converged applications have a lot of bearing on e-governance, which, people perceive as means to 'good governance'. Initiatives of the government and the private sector to adopt standards develop interconnection and accounting systems and to deploy infrastructures, due to liberalization policies, have seen the growth of satellite systems and regional WANs (Wide Area Networks) in India. Emergence of ICT on the national agenda and announcement of ICT policies by several state governments has strengthened India's position in the software-driven ICT sector in the world. For example states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Pondicherry etc. announced several ICT policies in their respective states.

"Women empowerment" and "women equality with men" is a universal issue. Women empowerment is a term that is used to encourage, inspire and celebrate women. It is also used to celebrate the strides that women and girls have taken in terms of gender equality, financial independence and high confidence. Women empowerment is all about giving women the power and control of their lives to become anything they want and to do what they want in situations where they were not allowed once upon a time. It refers to the creation of an environment for women where they can make decisions of their own for their personal benefits as well as for the society. Nature of our society is male dominating from starting so work done by women were never recognized and appreciated. Nobody has ever mentioned about their contribution in music. The famous musician Jane Pirone has created www.drummergirl.com as a reaction to negative experiences faced by her. Her motto was to encourage future female drummers like her. Her efforts also bring to notice the importance of ICT as without paying anything all the people can get information about female drummers on web. She has mentioned that WWW gave her a platform to bring social change. Alternatively, it is the process for women to redefine gender roles that allows for them to acquire the ability to choose between known alternatives whom have otherwise been restricted from such an ability. There are several principles defining women's empowerment such as, for one to be empowered, they must come from a position of disempowerment. Furthermore, one must acquire empowerment themselves rather than have it given to them by an external party. Other studies have found that empowerment definitions entail people having the capability to make important decisions in their lives while also being able to act on them. Lastly, empowerment and disempowerment are relative to other at a previous time; therefore, empowerment is a process, not a product.

[1] To develop women friendly work environment leading companies are now offering benefits like crèches, and option to relocate to city of their choice in case of transfer of the husband. According to a survey done by Internet and Mobile Association of India in 2009 reveals that there are 6.5 million claimed internet users, 4.18 million active internet users.

[2] Empower is a multidimensional word including social, physical, spiritual, mental, political and psychological dimensions. Empower means personal growth in decision making, analyzing critical situations, coping with all circumstances and facing challenges. Internet gives them a platform where people can interact with each other with hesitation as they are unaware of each other's identity. Especially women can show their emotions, views, feelings and opinion more openly. In text communication there is no inferior feeling of how you look, how you talk or how somebody is looking at you. Psychological impact of writing also gives them strength.

[3] Women Empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal-right to women, and to make them confident enough to claim their rights, such as:

- freely live their life with a sense of self-worth, respect and dignity,

- have complete control of their life, both within and outside of their home and workplace,

- to make their own choices and decisions (right to choose: to say yes or no),

- have equal rights to participate in social, religious and public activities,

- have equal social status in the society,

- have equal rights for social and economic justice,

- determine financial and economic choices,

- get equal opportunity for education and employment opportunity without any gender bias,

- get safe and comfortable working environment.

Importance of Women Empowerment

Empowering women is important because women aren't getting what they deserve.

- **Underemployed and unemployed:** Women population constitutes around 50% of the world population. A large number of women around the world are unemployed. The world economy suffers a lot because of the unequal opportunity for women at workplaces.

- **Inspiration for others:** There are a lot of women in India who have done exceptionally well in various fields of life. Women like PT Usha, Hima Das, PV Sindhu, Sania Mirza, Saina Nehwal, etc. have won various trophies and medals in their respective fields and showed the girl power to Indian people. After looking at them, a lot of girls came out of their houses and showed what actual talent they carry inside them.

- **Talented:** Women are as talented as men. Previously, women were not allowed higher education like men and hence their talents were wasted. But nowadays, they are also allowed to go for higher studies and it encourages women to show their talents which will not only benefit her individually but to the whole world at large. Today, Many women are occupying the top position of multinational companies

- **Overall development of society:** The main advantage of Women Empowerment is that there will be an overall development of the society. The money that women earn does not only help them and or their family, but it also help develop the society.

- **Economic Benefits:** Women Empowerment also leads to more economic benefits not to the individuals but to the society as well. Women empowerment leads to more financial independence of women and girls**.** They are taught on how they can use their skills to get income that they can use to support their families. Women empowerment helps women to stand on their own legs, become independent and also to earn for their family which grows country's economy.

- **Reduction in domestic violence:** Empowering girls also leads to reduced levels of domestic violence. Educated women and girls are able to stand for themselves and escape from incidences of domestic violence.

- **Reduction in corruption:** Women Empowerment is also advantageous in case of corruption. Women empowerment helps women to get educated and know their rights and duties and hence can stop corruption.

- **Reduce Poverty:** Women Empowerment also reduces poverty. This also contributes significantly to the family welfare. This is because their children are more likely to acquire good education and they are also able to save and invest for the benefit of their families.

- **National Development:** Women are increasingly participating in the national development process. They are making the nation proud by their outstanding performances almost every spheres including medical science, social service, engineering, etc. This leads to more developed economies. This is because the women are able to work and acquire income which translates to higher levels of a country's GDP. By empowering women, we enable the nation.

- **Availability of Quality workforce:** Large organizations need a large pool of high quality workforce. Empowerment of women would help in increasing the total workforce of quality people.

- **Self-esteem:** Women should be treated equally with men in all spheres of life. This would help her develop a good emotional health.

- **Improved health:** Another importance of empowering women is that it leads to healthier societies. This is because women by nature are the care takers of their homes and when empowered, they are better able to take care of their homes and families.

- **Human rights:** Every Woman deserves to be treated with respect and dignity. Not allowing them to get educated or not providing them with a safe working environment is against basic.

- **Cleanliness and hygiene:** Empowering women also include providing them education related to cleanliness and hygiene. When they understand the benefits of maintaining a clean and hygiene environment, they would obviously make effort towards it.

- **Educated society:** Women empowerment leads to increased levels of literacy in the world. This is the case when these girls gain education that can help them better their lives. Many people do want their daughters to study and thus a lot of women remain illiterate. But, girls should be allowed to study till the time she feels it is good for her. This is not only good for her but also from the country's perspective as well.

- **Gender equality:** Empowerment of women is also important in accomplishing the world goal of gender equality. By empowering girls, this goal is achieved as they are better able to compete with their male counterparts in places such as government, learning institutions and even leadership positions.

- **Political representation:** Girl empowerment also contributes to equality in political representation. This is because the girls have more confidence to compete for leadership and political seats.

- **Women empowerment helps realize the potential and the dreams** that are manifested in the female population hence giving them momentum to propagate themselves.

Types of women empowerment:

• **Political empowerment**: It is concerned with augmenting the power of voice and collective action by women. Besides, it confirms equitable representation of women in decision-making structures, both formal and informal, and strengthens their voice in the formulation of policies affecting their societies.

• **Social empowerment:** This is a process of attaining information, knowledge and skills; and auxiliary participation of women in social organizations without any gender biasness in day-to-day activities. It is also concerned with inculcating a feeling of equivalence instead of subservience among women.

• **Economic empowerment**: Women are economically endowed when they are supported to engage in a productive activity that permits them some degree of independence. This type of empowerment is also concerned with the quality of their economic involvement, beyond their presence as poorly paid employees.

Status of Women in ICT:

Any technology that is not proper for women is not justly appropriate technology. In the last 30 years, communication technologies have been put into action in a number of educational and developmental applications. It is a commonly held view that women are less engaged with Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) than men. Information and Communication Technologies are for everyone and women have to be an equal beneficiary to the advantages offered by the technology, and the products and processes, which emerge from their use. The paybacks accrued from the synergy of knowledge and ICT need not be restricted to the upper strata of the society but have to freely flow to all parts of the female population. The

scope of areas in which ICT can put a greater switch in the hands of women is wide and uninterruptedly expanding, from man - aging water dissemination at the village-level to standing for local elections and having access to lifelong learning prospects. ICT in convergence with other forms of communication have the potential to reach those women who hitherto have not been reached by any other media, thereby empowering them to partake in economic and social progress, and make informed decision on concerns that affect them. As it is demarcated in ICT Industry, women are understated in all sectors, accounting for around 30% of employees. o Women are underrepresented on higher education courses relevant to the ICT sector. o Evidence from US recommends women entrepreneurs are more likely to adopt internet and new technologies for business growth than men. A need of women in the new globalize environment are as diverse as the socio- economic scenario. Considering women, as a monolithic group will over simplify their information needs. Within women's group itself, globalisation has generated the haves and the have not i.e those who are in a valuable position due to globalisation and those relegated further into disadvantaged position under the new economic policy. The information needs will also vary accordingly. A nation that wants to progress cannot afford to disregard capacity building and empowerment of women. Gender sensitivity is the precondition that must prevail and be strengthened at all levels. Women's development is now inextricably associated with technology. Thus, technological intervention undertakes a greater and more vital role, especially when viewed globally. It's potential to sweep across political, geographical, economic and social barricades are just the leverage that women need to build for themselves a new distinctiveness and a more honourable place in society. As has been experienced the world over, women have restricted access to technologies in India. However, there are now enough experiences to show that when women are trained, they show noteworthy understanding and control in using technologies commendably. In India, women comprise a large portion of the rural population and play a significant role in the rural sector. Their involvement in a number of productive actions is commonly overlooked. The experience of women in the field of animal husbandry—principally dairying—is a case in point. Women have stated their helplessness in looking after cows, diagnosing several diseases and providing instantaneous care. The reasons cited were their unawareness of current veterinarian care, on the one hand, and the lapse of outmoded methods of care on the other. A study of the situation in different parts of the country resulted in the proliferation of a complete range of manuals for animal husbandry workers. But technical information was offered in such difficult terms that it mystified even technical workers. It is from the United Nations Fund for Women's Development (UNIFEM), an expert team of veterinarians worked on simplifying the manuals and drawing up pictorial charts. The manuals and charts listed the do's and don'ts for practitioners in the field. Large groups of women in the dairy industry greeted this information as it empowered them with appropriate knowledge, bypassing the otherwise precondition need for schooling and literacy.

A large group of workingwomen of India is in the rural and unorganized sectors. Socially the majorities of Indian women are still tradition bound and are in a disadvantageous position. Inequality in women's access to and participation in all five communications systems, especially the media, and their insufficient mobilization is to promote women's contribution to society. Since globalisation is opening up the Indian economy suddenly at a very high speed, during the past decades, advances in information technology have facilitated a global communications network that transcends national boundaries and has an impact on public policy, private attitudes and behaviour, especially of children and young adults. Everywhere the potential exists for the media to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women. More women are involved in careers in the communications sector, but few have attained positions at the decision-making level or serve on governing boards and bodies that influence media policy. The lack of gender sensitivity in the media is evidenced by the failure to eliminate the gender-based stereotyping that can be found in public and private local, national and international media organizations. The continued projection of negative and degrading images of women in media communications - electronic, print, visual and audio - must be changed. Print and electronic media in most countries do not provide a balanced picture of women's diverse lives and contributions to society in a changing world.

Knowledge networking and Empowerment:

Empowerment of women in the context of knowledge societies entails building up the abilities and skills of women to gain insight into the issues affecting them and also building up their capacity to voice their concerns. In developing countries women are abused in various sectors. Submissiveness and servility is in their nature because of the inequality they are facing. Despite the great growth of education in many countries women are still not considered as equal gender everywhere. The status of women is considered to be inferior even after her great contribution to society. It is the right time for women to stand for her. Women empowerment is a burning issue these days. Various NGOs are working for the betterment of women and give them training for self-independence. Government is also taking this issue seriously and has announced various policies in favor of women. In this scenario Information and Communication Technology is also playing an important role. Through ICT women are getting security, awareness, knowledge, employments, confidence, popularity etc. This paper brings into notice the role of Information and Communication Technology in women empowerment. Here various cases have been discussed to give a light on the changes ICT has brought to the society. It also suggests the steps to be taken for women empowerment through ICT. The concept of gender equality is a common concern all over the World. The same has now acquired new dimensions with the advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The ICT has a potential to bring development for a nation. It can reduce trade distortions, eliminate poverty, empower weaker segments including women, etc. The same is, however, possible only if a nation follows sound ICT strategies and policies. We have to set our priorities to those areas where we are lagging far behind. One such area is the unequal access of ICT to women. Information and Communication technology (ICT) has become a potent force in transforming social, economic and political life globally. Their uses and importance are increasing daily correspondingly. Women are often unsung heroine in the advancement of information technology especially in the developing nations like Nigeria where women are dramatically underrepresented in the ICT field. This paper examined the present trend of women and ICT usage in Nigeria. It is noted that lower numbers of women are accessing and using ICT compared with men. Women are also more strongly represented in lower level ICT occupations than in higher status and higher paid arenas. The benefits of ICT to women themselves, their works, the society at large and even as parents were examined. ICT has potential to bring development to a nation by reducing trade distortions, eliminate poverty, provide employment opportunities, improve health- care delivery and other services relating to women. Empowerment strategies to promote and improve the present situation such as creating an enabling environment which supports and encourages women more access to benefit from ICT projects, creating a regulation and policy which supports women's use of ICT and promoting increased employment in the IT sector for women and the use of ICT for women's Small Scale Enterprise (SME) were recommended among others.

Urban women and ICT

a. Urban educated women need information on:

- Educational & research opportunities

- Career advancement facilities

- Employment prospects in India and abroad

- Fashion and market values

- Health and child care facilities

- Art and entertainment

- Social support system for working women

- Legal rights and provisions

b. Urban lower middle class women need information on:

- Educational facilities and opportunities

- Career advancement and job opportunities

- Inexpensive health and childcare

- Inexpensive social support systems

- Legal rights and provisions against social injustice, domestic violence,

c. Poor urban women may need information on:

- Free health services and child care facilities

- Job opportunities in the low paid informal sector including domestic services

- Housing availability specially in slums

- Free educational facilities, information regarding government programmes for poor

Conclusion:

The majority of women in the developing world do not have access to ICTs due to variety of barriers as such the infrastructural, social, cultural and linguistic. Information needs of women as well as their ICT use differ widely. However, there is no ideal ICT that fits all situations. Though women are engaged in numerous roles in agriculture, they are keen to have information on other parts, such as child health, nutrition, prevention and cure of common diseases, employment opportunities etc. Those trying to install ICTs for women empowerment should build their strategies grounded on ICT use pattern and varied information needs of rural women. Emerging a dynamic and relevant content for rural women continues to remain as a major challenge. Adequate resources need to be allocated for this activity, if profits from resources invested in connectivity and hardware have to be copiously realized. Women were denied a lot of opportunities and they missed out on a lot of things that would have changed their lives. However, they deserve equal opportunities for education, in their careers, in the society, and so much more. The empowerment of women is a very important task that every one of us should undertake. This is because empowering women is equal to empowering the whole community and generations to come. There are many ways in which we can empower girls and women and the task does not solely lay with the government but with everyone in the society.

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