

Rural Women Empowerment through ICT in India

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Abstract

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is a wonderful tool which benefits all spectrums of people in the world and reach millions of people every day. It is the communally and economically marginalized, predominantly women in those countries, who do not bring in the benefit of it. Recent developments in the fields of information and communication technology are undeniably revolutionary in nature. Information has become the principal determinant of the progress of nations, communities and individual. There is a potential for ICTs to purge gender discrimination and to empower women in society. But with science, technological innovations and socio-economic changes, women, even rural women, are progressively starting to utilize various kinds of technological instruments. ICTs perform as an agent to empower women, allowing them into the main torrent of society. Amongst the various kinds of ICTs the cell/ mobile phone and television have reached a significant place. These two technologies are providing knowledge, economic independence, social security, social networks and self confidence to rural women, mainly young girls seeking employment opportunities and working in small and medium level towns. An attempt has been made in this paper to explore women's empowerment through ICTs in rural areas by IT sector and blockade to the usage of ICTs.

Keywords: -

ICT, Rural Women, Rural Areas, IT Sector, Employment Opportunities.

Introduction

Empowerment of women that will have lasting impacts must involve consciousness raising before the social construction of gender, which subordinates' women in the family, class, caste, religion, or society, can be changed. The economic empowerment approach has relied on improving women's control over economic resources and strengthening women's economic security. The results also suggest that policies to rise women's age at marriage, enhance their educations and open

greater employment opportunities will also help to empower them, at least in some respects. Our goal is to cause policy, institutional and individual change that will improve the lives of women and girls everywhere. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women. Women's empowerment is an important agenda in the development efforts. There has been significant shift in approach of the district administration towards the development of women, especially the poor & the illiterate. When you train a woman, you help the entire family, the village and the nation. The current paper focuses on women's empowerment in the domestic sphere — that is, their freedom from control by other family members and ability to effect desired outcomes within the house hold.

Objectives of Study

This study has the following objectives:

1. To investigate women's empowerment through ICTs in rural areas.
2. To analyze the socio and economic inclusion of rural women by ICTs.
3. To identify the barriers of usage of ICTs by women.
4. To examine the role of the Government and the NGOs in promoting the IT sector for women's development.
5. To suggest strategies to overcome barriers and offer some practical suggest.

Research Methodology

Followed Data used in this study is collected from various sources such as journals, periodicals, articles, books, reports, websites etc.

Empowerment of Women

Empowerment is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept. Women's empowerment is a process in which women gain greater share of control over resources - material, human and intellectual like knowledge, information, ideas and financial resources like money - and access to money and control over

decision-making in the home, community, society and nation, and to gain 'power'.

According to the Country Report of Government of India, "Empowerment means moving from a position of enforced powerlessness to one of power". The process by which people, organisations or groups who are powerless a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context, b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives and c) exercise this control without infringing on the rights of others and d) support the empowerment of others in the community

Education of Women

Education to women is the most powerful instrument of changing their position the society. Education also brings about reduction in inequalities and also acts as a means to improve their status within the family. In order to encourage education of women at all levels and to dilute gender bias in the provision and acquaintance of education, schools, colleges and even universities were established exclusively for women in the State. To bring more girl children, especially from marginalized BPL families, into the main stream of education, Government has been providing a package of concessions in the form of free supply of books, uniform, boarding and lodging, clothing for hostilities, mid-day meals, scholarships, free by-cycles and so on. As a result women's literacy rate has grown over the three decades and the growth of female literacy has in fact been higher than that of male literacy rate.

Health and Well-Being

Health and well-being is a concept related to the substantial differences between women and men in their access to sufficient nutrition, healthcare and reproductive facilities, and to issues of fundamental safety and integrity of person. According to the World Health Organization, 585,000 women die every year, over 1,600 every day, from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. The complexity of the social and cultural issues, combined with the stigma and fear of disclosure lead to a situation where only a small proportion of the crimes of sexual assault, child abuse, wife battering and gun related violence are ever reported, making accurate data extremely difficult to obtain.

Rural Women and Digital Carve up

In India, rural people, especially lower castes, women and socially marginalized communities, are facing problems of trouble-free communication and accessing information technologies. They are

not able to communicate freely and use the technologies, because of the social control and economic factors. The digital divide between rich and poor, rural and urban, men and women, lower caste and upper caste has created a huge gap in the accessibility of the technology. The digital divide is often characterized by poverty, illiteracy, lack of computer literacy and language barriers. To overcome these constraints, some initiatives have been taken by world forums. The United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (UNCSTD) (1995) identified significant gender differences in levels of accessibility of ICTs. The information revolution appears to be by-passing women. Fewer women are accessing and using ICT compared with men, even though ICTs are powerful catalysts for political and socio-economic empowerment. Technology-based social empowerment especially for rural women is a new emerging concern in the present information world. The Millennium Declaration adopted in 2000, underscored the urgency of ensuring that the benefits of new technologies, especially ICT, are available to all. In the year 2000, the Economic and Social Council of India adopted a ministerial declaration on the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based economy.

Access to Information

ICT can deliver potentially useful information, such as market prices for women in small and micro-enterprises. For example, use of cellular telephones illustrates how technology can be used to benefit women's lives, by saving travelling time between the market and suppliers, by allowing women to call for product prices and by facilitating the constant juggling of paid and unpaid family activities. Now a day many useful mobile apps are developed so as to provide different sets of information without going to the concerned places or authorities. So these type of apps can help the rural women in many ways according to their livelihood.

Employment

Considering, then, how important the IT industry may be for the employment of young female professionals and if it is not now it will be soon, the responsibility to create nondiscriminatory and comfortable workplace environments should fall heavily on the largest and most economically significant companies in the software sector. However, ICT has played an important role in changing the concept of work and workplace. New areas of employment such as teleworking, i.e. working from a distance, are becoming feasible

with new technology. As a result, a high proportion of jobs outsourced by big firms are going to women, therefore, work from outside the office, often from their own homes and at any time, thereby raising their incomes to become more financially independent and empowered.

Barriers to Usage of ICT's for Women

- Lack of clear National Policy for promoting ICT for women's development.
- Poor ICT infrastructure, inefficient telephone services, lack of electricity in many remote, far-flung areas, and frequent power cuts.
- Lack of computer skills on various areas including hardware and software installation and maintenance, internet and non- internet based skills such as telnet, FTP, mailing etc.
- Limited online information in languages other than English.
- Women's time is at a premium. The barrier to ICT use includes the issues of information overload and the time consumed in searching for useful and practical information

Role of IT Sector

Keeping in view the plight of rural women, who are more unaware of new technologies than their urban counterparts, government is providing special packages for them, who are involved in home based or small-scale activities related to handloom, handicraft, sericulture, etc.. Government of India is in the process of establishing Community Information Centres (CIC) at all block levels, which are designed as the prime movers of ICT in the most economically backward and geographically difficult terrains. CICs are supposed to provide multipurpose information on health, education, social welfare and small-scale industry, etc. SITA (Studies in

Information Technology Applications) is a women empowering project that aim to educate low-income women in Information Technology, and trying to change the deeply rooted discriminating attitudes towards women.

Conclusion

It is true that technology is one of the developmental tools. At the same time the new technological inventions have to be properly implemented and people trained to utilize its advancement for their development. The accessibility of cell phones is creating decision-making capacity and economic liberalization to women in the study area. Working girls can contact family at any time and from anywhere. Both parents and girls then feel safe and secure. On the other hand, we need to notice the negative impact of cell phone accessibility. It is a very new technological tool and care must be taken not to de-motivate rural women.

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