



ICT AS A TOOL FOR EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN OF INDIA

Prerana Ratnaparkhi

Home Economics Department
C. P. & Berar College, Nagpur

ABSTRACT:

Women are a great human resource and the role of women in society is absolutely vital for its progress. According to UN (2005), ICTs can be a powerful catalyst for the political and social women empowerment and the promotion of gender equality. In the new era of globalization have widened the gap between education and technology opportunities for men and women. It has great significance for a country like India where majority of the population, around 65% of the people, live in rural areas. Literacy is an important factor on the basis of which ICT can be bought in rural areas. In this paper the study based on secondary data which is retrieved from United Nation Development Programme (UNDP 2010) studies on the terminal evaluation of Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICTD) project in India since 2004 for the progress of rural women in ICT. In Asia, some of the ICT initiatives have been playing a vital role for deprived and empowering rural women. A different perspective of women depicted that most of these ventures have remained as “projects” of someone else than becoming their own ‘initiatives’ Though in these initiative women had greater access to the ICT tools than men. These tools hardly cater to the developmental need of the illiterate rural women who have a long way to move forward in the process of development. In this context, the present study has attempted to study some of the outstanding technological initiatives that have significantly contributed for the women empowerment in rural India. An attempt has been made in this paper to explore women’s empowerment through ICTs in rural areas by IT sector.

Keywords : ICT, Rural Women, IT Sector

INTRODUCTION

Women are a great human resource and the role of women in society is absolutely vital for its progress. Arguably, to empower women is to increase their control over the decisions that affect their lives both within and outside the

household. In the new era of globalization have widened the gap between education and technology opportunities for men and women. Worldwide the capacity of women to engage in the knowledge society is grossly underutilized. In the knowledge society, they need



access not only to new technologies but also to education, entrepreneurship and employment opportunities as well as the ability to participate fully in knowledge based activities. The involvement and engagement of women in the Information Society on an equal footing with men would directly contribute to improving the livelihood of people, making it more sustainable and thereby promoting the social and economic advancement of societies'. Of late, rural development has assumed global attention especially among the developing nations. It has great significance for a country like India where majority of the population, around 65% of the people, live in rural areas. Literacy is an important factor on the basis of which ICT can be brought in rural areas. People in rural areas must understand that without education there is no progress; 4A"s, i.e. Attitude, Aptitude, Approach and Appearance can be implemented to develop the rural part of the country. On the basis of this factor, we can introduce "ICT"

which is the central point of this paper. There are many aspects of ICT on which rural areas can be effectively developed. This will assure that India can 100% stand as developed country if the progress of rural areas is taken as priority by the government of India and our government is working on this issue. "Information Communication Technology" concentrates on these three words: Information, Communication and Technology; to promote information via communication with the help of technology. Communication should be a process that contains the forces of backlash and promotes the forces of transformation and survival. few decades ago, the post, newspapers and radio were the major communication sources in rural areas and rural people depended on these for their information needs. In the present decade, through the invention and penetration of ICTs, the situation has changed considerably. India particularly has reached a better



position in ICT usage especially in rural areas.

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN: In the simplest of words it is basically the creation of an environment where women can make independent decision on their personal development as well as shine as equal as society. Women wanted to be treated as equals so much so that if a women rise to the top of her field it should be a commonplace occurrence that draws nothing more than a raised eyebrow at the gender. This can happen only, if there is a channelized route for the empowerment of women. Thus it is not real surprised that the women empowerment in India is a hotly discussed topic with no real solution looming in the horizon except to doubly redouble our efforts and continues to target the sources of all the violence and ill-will towards women. In women empowerment women gain greater share of control over resources—material, human and intellectual such as knowledge, information, ideas – and financial resources

involving access to money and control over decision making in the home, community, society and nation. The great leader and the Father of the Indian Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, who firmly believed in non-violence as the soul means to achieve peace in the world, also had a deep appreciation of the value of educating women. He had said that: “when a man is educated, an individual is educated; when a woman is educated, a family and a country are educated.” . There are also opportunities to train some of these rural women for self employment in the IT sector (3). We just need to motivate them. Technology-based social empowerment especially for rural women is a new emerging concern in the present information world . The difficulty she faces right from her childhood is unsafe feeling and lack of motivation. Good quality education is also the ultimate intervention in terms of promoting empowerment: it endows individuals with capabilities and a sense of their rights. “Mahila



Bachatgat” is a very good example for women empowerment. They have much power that they can contribute to the Indian economy and can be self-dependent. The handicraft art is also preserved by the Indian women, especially the Indian rural women.

Empowerment is then the process of obtaining these basic opportunities for marginalized people, either directly by those people, or through the help of non-marginalized others who share their own access to these opportunities. It is also includes encouraging and developing the skill for self sufficiency with a focus on eliminating the future need for charity or welfare in the individuals of the group. This process can be difficult to start and to implement effectively. Women can be empowered by social empowerment, empowering women by education and empowering women in business.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY OF RURAL WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

This study has the following objectives: To investigate women’s

empowerment through ICTs in rural

1. To analyze the socio and economic inclusion of rural women.
2. To examine the role of the Government and the NGOs.
3. To elicit the constraints faced by rural women in the process of technological deployment.
4. Practical suggestions for policy makers to improve women’s access to ICT.

METHODOLOGY

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

WOMEN , RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND ICT

India still breathes in villages and this becomes obvious when the fact is taken into consideration that more than 700 million of its population reside in about 636 thousand villages of this country; but even after sixty years of independence, rural India is characterized by severe poverty, illiteracy, lack of health services,



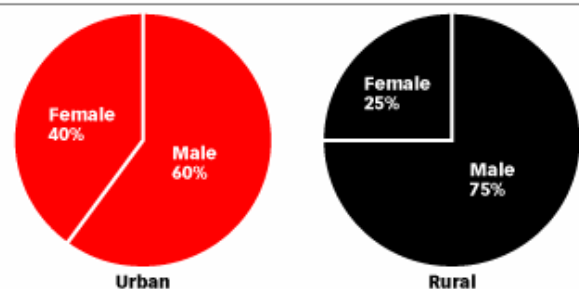
lack of employment opportunities and over all backwardness. The rural Indian population constitutes 68.84% of the overall population as per 2011 census. They are deprived of basic amenities extensively. The total female population in India is 496.5 million and 360.95 million Indian women live in rural area. As per 2011 census, 41.25% of women are illiterates. Those with lower literacy are engaged in menial occupations. They spend longer hours in household chores, in farm or agriculture allied activities. According to Gender Inequality Index (Gil, 2010) maternal mortality ratio (MMR) is 450 for every 1000 newborn, adolescent fertility rate is 68.1, seats in parliament is 9.2%, population with at least secondary education above the age of 25 years and older is 26.6% (male 50.4%), labour force participation rate is 35.7% (male 84.5%), contraceptive prevalence rate for 15-45 years is 56.3%, antenatal coverage of at least one visit is 74% and births attended by skilled health

personnel is 47%. This lower status of rural women has rendered clarion call to the state and central Governments, Non-Government Organizations and the corporate sector to plan and pursue numerous efforts to empower them.

ICTs have been identified as one of the most effective tools to bring about gender and economic development almost simultaneously. Drucker (2001) has famously called ITs 'the great equalizer' and Kelkar and Nathan (2002) optimistically argue that 'the spread of IT-enabled services has been immensely beneficial to both women and men, especially those who have limited skills or lack of resources to invest in higher education' (p. 433; see also Friedman 2005, Goyal 2005; Mitter

Internet User Share in Urban vs. Rural India, by Gender, 2016

% of total



Note: among daily users

Source: Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and Kantar IMRB, "Internet in India -2016," March 1, 2017

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2005). The UNDP Arab Human Development Report affirms that 'new computer technologies offer a whole new field for women to participate in the workforce and play their part in developing the new, technologically based Arab economies on which future development depends' (Arab HDR Press Kit 2002: 1). Usha Sharma shows how: 'ICT ... opens up a direct window for women to the outside world. Information flows to them without distortion or any form of censoring, and they have access to the same information as their counterparts. This leads to broadening of perspectives, building up of greater understanding of their current situation and causes of poverty, and initiation of interactive processes for information exchange. Furthermore, such forms of networking open up alternate forms of communication...' (Sharma 2003: 1).

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 knowledgebase economy.

A) ICT School for Women Empowerment: SEWA was one of the first organization globally to realized the potential of using ICTs for the productive growth of the informal sector. It has established Community Learning Center which is known as 'Sanskar Kendras' (SSK) at various locations to promote skill training, health education, social awareness and disaster preparedness. There was a felt need to introduce Information and Communication security and self-Sustainability. The SEWA

Trade Facilitation Center (STFC) showcase member's product online facilitates, business to consumer sales, build business-to-business links and empowers members to ride the ICT wave.

- B) ICT for Women Conciliation Center: ICT for Women Conciliation Center is one of the initiatives of VIDIYAL, a Non Governmental Organization (NGO) is working since 1986 with Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Tamilnadu. VIDIYAL with the support of Commonwealth of Learning has already initiated lifelong learning in microenterprises development. Still there was a need to strengthen the role of women in terms of their right and enhance their negotiation power in legal, constitutional and human at various level-household, village and enterprise, thus was the genesis of ICT for women conciliation Center.
- C) Mobile Information Technology for Rural Advancement (MITRA)



: Mobile Information Technology for Rural Advancement (MITRA) is one of the technological initiatives of people's Education and development Organization (PEDO), which was established in Rajasthan. Its mission is, 'to strengthen value based people's institution to utilize existing resources for poverty alleviation and environment up-gradation'. The project uses mobile and web technology to automate the tasks of recording and consolidation of data pertaining to all SHG transaction.

- D) Mahiti Manthana –ICT enabled Resource Centers: Mahiti Manthan –ICT enable Resource Centers is a responses to a felt need of na established grassroot program- It for change which was registered in 2004 with mahila Samakhya Karnataka to empower socially and economically disadvantaged rural women through self-help group activity.
- E) ICT for Poverty Eradication of Rural Women: Kudumbasree is a poverty eradication project of

the Government of Kerala, being implemented in the state through the local bodies since 1998.

Kudumbasree encouraged and trained the poor educated women from the neighborhood groups to form enterprise groups to set up micro-enterprises based on ICT applications. Under the rural e-Seva centers, initiated by the Government of Andhra Pradesh , web-enabled rural kiosks were established to provide a large number of citizen services. Initially the project started in all 46 mandal headquarters in the district, with the first women's e-Seva center opening in June 2012. Women from SHGs took loan to set up this initiative and all these centers are running profitably.

- F) 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 Centers (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, 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.

IMPLEMENTING ICT FOR RURAL WOMEN

Followings are most successful factors while implementing ICT for rural women ----

1. Savings and Economic Venture : They stepped forward in economic women empowerment through

microfinance and microenterprises. They have gained the confidence through SHGs meeting's to support their entrepreneurial venture.

2. Need Assessment: While organizing women in group they conducting various meetings, programmes and workshops. So they need to do a assessment through Participatory rural Appraisal, Focus Group discussion, Questionnaire Etc.

3. Integrated Approach: Various needs of women are being ttended by the implementing agencies including agriculture, marketing ,health, human right, etc. They also teach them to use of technology and try to provide the tools for a reasonable cost to the individuals and groups on the need basis.

4. Role of Stakeholder : The role of different stakeholders have significantly contributed in the success of the technological initiative. It includes the ordinary women, voluntary



organization, government officials and international corporate sectors. The multiple stakeholders highlighted the importance of team working and coordinated efforts. The implementing agencies were able to play a liaison role with broader thinking and planning. To get the technical assistance in the rural areas is often a strenuous process; however the consistent labours of the implementing agencies have the initiatives successful.

Now a days 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.



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.

CONSTRAINTS OF TECHNOLOGICAL DEPLOYMENT

a. Multiple Roles of Rural Women:

Due to rigid patriarchal system women faced heavy workload which is one of the major constraints. It becomes very difficult for rural women to reach out to a community centre of village knowledge centre to learn new skills.

b. Financial Restrictions: The initial investment for pioneering a technological initiative or a computer hub demands mega-investments. Even though the cost of mobile is low, but some



of the women are not able to own it due to lack of money or stringent attitude of male members in the family.

- c. Functional Issues: As a large number of women in the rural area are illiterate or have just primary education, they wish to have the use of technological tools in their vernacular languages which are seldom available. Most of the training modules are not in local languages.
- d. Technical Concern: In most of the rural areas, there is a grave concern for regular electricity and internet connections. In the case of the repaired of maintenance, to get the professional help is a herculean task because due to poor roads and transport facilities, they find it too difficult to reach the villages.
- e. Social Problem : The various social problem faced by women in Indian Society have to be addressed. Unless the violence against women, dowry, eve teasing and feminization of

poverty is reduced, it may offer a conducive atmosphere for women to have further new learning.

- f. Policy support: the government is yet to extend ICT policies which are pro-rural poor women. It is a dire need of the hour that the state and central government come out of policies and programmes which can promote digital literacy and ownership of ICT tools.

SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE THE USES OF ICT

1. There is need to use a rights-based approach to ICT policy.
2. Development, where everyone has the right to affordable access to ICTs. Only then, can we work towards securing universal access to ICTs.
3. ICT becomes important, where intermediary organizations can help bridge the gap by email accounts, mailing lists, and other useful functions serve as communication, networking and collaboration channels among women's groups, and between women and the external sphere. Promote the



enrollment of girls in ICT programs by providing such information.

4. On the use of ICT as a part of both formal and informal education system and to initiate distance learning and vocational courses.
5. Policy of funds should not be a hindrance to establishing ICT access points or even implementing telecenter-type programs.

CONCLUSION

Technological initiatives are one of the tool for rural women empowerment which requires preparatory phase before undertaking any such initiatives. Women entrepreneurs must be trained to adopt various information and communication technologies to support and boost their business plans. ICTs were triggering entrepreneurial ventures, especially among the poor women altering their life's path and increase their social status. . 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.

Another important ICT penetration in the rural set-up is the internet. It has been mainly introduced in rural areas through the concept of ICT for development. It was given a great hype in the implementation stage, but accessibility to the internet by rural people did not reach the expected level. This was because service providers and policy makers did not understand rural realities or the information needs of rural people. Rural people's needs are very specific; they need more local information rather than



global information. Nevertheless, if the information centers disseminate information on agriculture, domestic developments, local marketing news, government schemes and health care in local languages, this will be very useful for rural people. ICT have the potential to reach those women who have been not reached by any other media, thereby empowering them to participate in economic progress and make informed decision on issues that affect them. In this connection, the role of government, private and corporate sectors and the civil society is vital.

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