

Women Empowerment through ICT

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Abstract: Empowerment refers to the ability of people to control their own destinies in relation to other people in society. 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. Women play a pivotal role in the development of any country. Women's status is the best indicator of progress of any nation. Status and development of women influence the development of country, as they not only constitute half of its population, but also influence growth of the remaining half of its population. . The women in society are appointed majority of the duties that sustains life - cooking, caring and uplifting of children, caring for the elderly, maintaining a house and many other which are done by women and no pay.no doubt, only few percentage of women in society are getting their respect in families but major part of the society are not giving their rights. In majority of the families, women are taken very casually by their family members. No one ask for their suggestions while making any decision. Nature of our society is male dominating from starting so work done by women were never recognized and appreciated. Nobody ever mention about their contribution in life. The status of women is considered to be very inferior even after her great contribution to society. 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 in nation growth. So growth of country depends upon ICT and women. Hence it is very important for women to be aware about ICT. 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.

Keywords: Education, Women Empowerment, ICT

I. INTRODUCTION

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 without 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 looks, how you talks or how somebody is looking at you. Psychological impact of writing also gives them strength. There is no universal definition of women's' empowerment as factors such as socio-cultural, geographical, environmental, political and economic, as well as many other aspects of countries and regions, influence it. Kabeer (1994) offers a definition of empowerment as: the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them. A Position of Woman in India In Indian society there occurs a great disparity in the matter of economic resourcefulness between a man and a woman. Our society is male subjugated both economically and socially and women are always dispensed with dependant role. A nation that does not esteem its women cannot be designated as a civilised nation at all. Such a nation cannot grow and develop. Thus, the national consensus should focus on betterment of women by befittingly empowering them. Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that aids people gain control over their lives. Women empowerment commonly refers to the process by which women augments their power to take control over decisions that shape their lives, including in relation to access to resources, partaking in decision making and control over distribution of benefits. Women's empowerment has five components: women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to decide choices; their right to have access to chances and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their aptitude to influence the direction of social conversion to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and universally. Though empowerment is a central approach taken up by a number of international and national agencies, few of them share shared definitions and most of them have diverse explanations of empowerment. More women are convoluted in careers in the communications sector, but few have achieved positions at the decision-making level or serve on governing boards and bodies that sway media policy. The lack of gender sensitivity in the media is shown by the failure to eradicate the gender-based stereotyping that can be found in public and private local, national and international media organizations. The unremitting projection of

negative and degrading images of women in media communications - electronic, print, visual and audio - must be altered.

Need for Women's Empowerment

There is Need for Women's Empowerment. Women are suffering from various types of problems due to lack of education and information. Thus, women's empowerment is necessary. Women's empowerment is one of the key factors in determining success of development of country. Right information given at the right time can empower the rural women and protect them from various problems. Various ICTs, such as radio, television, mobile phone and internet are used for empowering the women via awareness, education and information. This is an ICT era, but, until today, half of the women are suffering from various types of problems due to the gap between ICT and its use. Women and girls are exposed to great discrimination in economic, education, health and social services access worldwide. On the other hand the range of women's economic activities in emerging countries is very broad. It embraces formal sector and informal sector employment, as well as self-employment in farming, trading and crafts production etc. There are plentiful possibilities for ICTs to improve women's economic activities in the field of trade, governance, education, health, crafts, employment in formal as well as informal sector. ICT brings lot of openings to women in the work situations and small business. Teleporting, flexi time and work from home arrangements are some of the gender magnitudes of ICT's usages. Largely speaking, there are three sorts 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. B. Communication Technology and Education for Women —Any technology that is not proper for women is not justly appropriate technology.

According to The World Bank (2008): empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. So, one definition of women's empowerment could be a process that gives them control of power and resources, and changes women's lives over time through their active participation in that process. The UN millennium development project (United-Nations, 2005) focused on globalization as well as gender equality and empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty in a sustainable way. Womens' full and equal access to ICT-based economic and educational activities support women's contribution in business and home-based activities and help women to become more empowered. By accessing information, women can enrich and enhance their quality of life. The United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (UNDAW) focuses on "ICTs and their impact on and use as a tool for the advancement of women" (Marcelle, 2002). Successful case studies from many countries describe the use of ICT as a tool for the economic empowerment of women (Prasad & Sreedevi, 2007), participation in public life (Lennie, 2002), and enhancing women's skills and capabilities in society (Mitchell & Gillis, 2007). When used effectively, ICT can create better opportunities for women to exchange information, gain access to on-line education and to engage in e-commerce activities (Marcelle, 2002).

World Wide Web is an immense source of information. It has been broadly used for obtaining any information at any time independent of the location. However now it is also being used to create awareness in society. Small groups working on various social issues can easily use the WWW to reach public, like discrimination against women or inequalities between men and women, domestic issues. WWW is becoming more popular among women to get recognition. www.cybergirl.com and www.bust.com are examples of such sites which has played a major role in women empowerment. ICT is playing an important role in changing the attitude and perspective of society towards women. Through Internet, television, radio and mobile phones women are getting information about all the real incidents happening in world and learning skills to tackle situations; it is helping to bring leadership qualities in them. It is creating a psychological comfort level of women at their work place by providing them additional knowledge and skills. Psychological empowerment can be at organizational level, personal level or social level. ICT has provided new term E- governance. All the developing countries are working on this. It can get greater access to services, greater accountability, transparency and citizen empowerment, strategic reward such as improved decision making through information, improved knowledge sharing and organizational learning, improved interactions with citizens, other government organizations and businesses and industry, improve market relationships between government and private sectors and greater ability for organizational change management.

Women are responsible for the self as well as family healthcare. Lack of knowledge of nutrition leads to high maternal mortality and infant mortality rates. It was found that people have a low level of nutritional education. Low nutrition education explains the poor intake of vitamin-rich food, especially green vegetables among women, even though they are available in plenty in the surrounding. This is also not possible for women to always visit health and Aanganwadi centres for nutrition education. Their contribution is hindered by lack of communication and other infrastructural facilities. Women want detail information about the various health problems and prevention so that they can learn about first-aids also. Women are interested in knowing the importance of breast feeding during lactation period. In addition, lack of medical amenities for childbirth was the other factor affecting the health of women. There was not any lady doctor in the village for the women. Women have no knowledge about the government hospitals. Even with the help of You –Tube, women can solve various health problems.

II. FACTORS IN WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT

Generally, two key factors in the process of empowerment are identified: control over resources (the conditions for empowerment); and agency (the ability to formulate choices). From the conceptual framework discussed by some scholar with the help of Figure, it can be understood that empowerment is a dynamic process that may be separated into components, such as enabling resources, agency and outcomes.

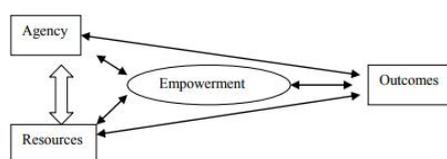


Figure1

This conceptual framework showing relationship between resources, agency and outcomes correlating empowerment. Alternatively, the consolidated framework developed by Chen (1997) details four broad pathways through which individuals’ experiences change:

1. Material pathway, through which changes in access to or control over material resources, such as in the level of income, in the satisfaction of basic needs or in earning capacity, are experienced.
2. Cognitive pathway, through which changes in level of knowledge, skills or awareness of wider environment are experienced.
3. Perceptual pathway, through which changes in individual confidence level and self-esteem and vision of the future as well as changes in recognition and respect by others are experienced.
4. Relational pathway, through which changes in decision-making roles, bargaining power, participation in non-family groups, dependence on others and mobility are experienced.

As illustrated in Figure2, the independent variables, such as personal characteristics (education and age) and motivation (type of information, purpose of involvement, and access level), are different for each woman. These variables affect dependent variables like material, relational, cognitive, perceptual and technological change. For example, an educated woman can learn ICT skills more easily and acquire more knowledge and skills than a woman without education and can therefore perceive changes. Similarly, all other factors like age, purpose of involvement, access to ICT, and information type may affect women’s knowledge and skill gained through ICT and affect the changes leading to empowerment as well.

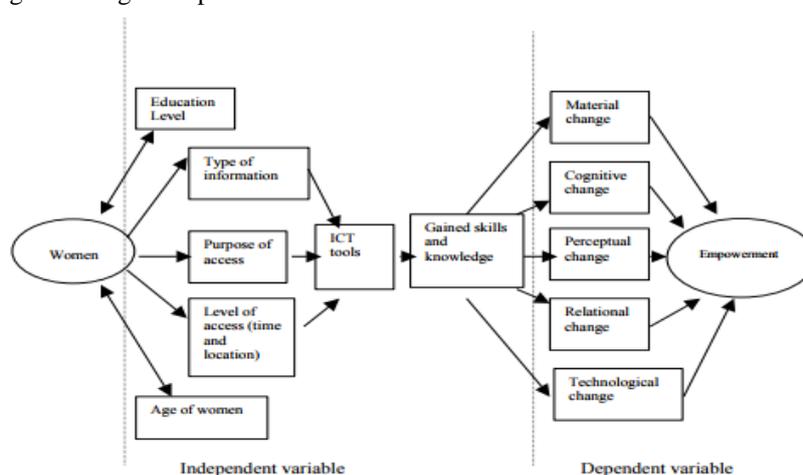


Figure2: Proposed model for measuring empowerment for ICT intervention (based on Lennie, 2002, Ahmed et al. 2006 and Chen, 1997)

Women are able to speak about their problems without any fear through ICT. Women get awareness about women's problems and rights in the society. They get inspiration for any work. Now women are free to do any work without any pressure from their husbands or other family member. They are able to do anything on your own without the help of other.

Supporting Agencies

There are various firms working in this direction which includes government agencies, NGO's, educational institutes, radio stations, industries etc.

- Smile (Savitri Marketing Institution for Ladies Empowerment) - It organizes various IT seminars for women in collaboration with IT companies like NIIT organizes a seminar named Swift Jyoti. It was 18 hour program designed for women from 6 to 60 years. The motive was to literate women about computer and its benefits.
- Ujjas Innovation – In this various views about different issues related to women are released in a newsletter called “Ujjas”. The newsletter went on air on All India Radio Bhuj Station in Gujarat. By this effort the channel wants to bring light on the condition of women in various areas.
- The Dhan Foundation and Swayam Krishi Sangam –they are working for poor women to educate them about ICT so that they can get the respect, honor, strength, independence that they deserve.

Industries Various companies like IBM, HCL, GOOGLE, MICROSOFT, TCS etc are providing a variety of services to attract women employees like maternity leaves, child care leaves, flexible working hours, work from home facility, pick and drop facility etc. According to article of economictimes.india.com this scheme is working so currently, Infosys is having the largest percentage of women at 33.4%, followed by TCS 30% and Wipro 29%.

- Karnataka State Women's Development Corporation (KSWDC) has launched e-mahile project for women over 11 districts. And each woman is given free laptop, printer, camera and projector for their use. The project also includes yoga classes and personality development classes for women as added advantage.
- Gyandoot: Gyandoot is an e-government project started by the state government of MP (India) for rural people.

Women Empowerment through APPS

ICT can play a foremost role in women empowerment. But this cannot occur till the e-governance and ICT strategies and policies become transparent and accountable. To orient ICT projects, ICT project planning and implementation for social development and gender equality must take place in a context which comprises of five main components: (a) Creating an environment which supports and inspires strategies to indorse women's equal access to and opportunity to benefit from ICT projects, as well as creating a regulation and policy environment which backings women's use of ICTs; (b) Developing content which speaks to women's concerns and replicates their local knowledge, and which is of value for their daily lives, business enterprises, and family responsibilities; (c) Backing augmented representation of women and girls in scientific and technical education, and using ICTs to promote their amplified participation in education at all levels; (d) Promoting amplified employment in the IT sector for women. (e) Executing e-governance strategies which are accessible to women. Smartphones have become an inseparable part of our lives and what makes them all the more important is the kind of apps we can download on our devices. From beauty and fitness apps to period tracking apps and those that make us look good on social media; there's a whole bunch of such applications that make our day-to-day lives easier. UrbanClap is your one stop destination for all urban lifestyle services. This app help in hiring local professionals to get things done that matter in day to day life. It provide the services like Professional Services and Home Services - Professional Services are yoga instructor, photographer, make up professional, birthday planner, interior designer, tutor, tax consultant etc . Home Services are electrician, plumber, carpenter, home cleaning, AC repair services, pest control services etc. Women safety has become the utmost priority of the Indian government considering the increasing cases of crime against women. There are various safety apps present on the play store designed for the protection and security of women. These safety apps for women, which will ensure that they are not alone anywhere they go. The basics of most apps are similar — a user-decided list of emergency contacts to alert, and transmission of GPS-determined location — but the newer ones are easier to use, almost intuitive. Safetipin is one of the good options when it comes to safety apps for women. The app is designed keeping in mind the concept of personal safety. It incorporates all the essential features such as GPS tracking, emergency contact numbers, directions to safe locations etc. The Himaat app is a free safety app recommend for women by the Delhi Police. In order to use the app, the user has to register at the Delhi Police website. Once the registration is complete the user will receive an OTP, which has to be entered at the time of completing the app configuration. In a problematic situation if the user raises the SOS alert from the app, the location information and audio video will be directly transmitted to the Delhi Police control room following which the police will reach the location. The next on our list is the Women Safety app that will inform and update your dear ones if you are stuck in an unsafe place. It will send all the details related to your location with just a tap of a button. The app will send an SMS to a preconfigured number along with your location and a link

of Google Maps. The app will also click two pictures with the front and rear camera, which are directly uploaded to the server. Stipator means 'bodyguard' in latin, the application is designed to help working women feel secure and safe while they commute. This mobile app acts as a bodyguard for women and lets them be tracked while on the road, posting their whereabouts at regular intervals on popular social networks. Umang app provides all pan India e-Gov services ranging from central to local government bodies and other citizen-centric services like Aadhaar and Digilocker on one single platform or mobile app. Whether you need to pay your utility bills, file income tax, book a gas cylinder, know about your Provident fund account or have Aadhaar related query, Umang provide you with all services on one mobile application. The Raksha app is designed to ensure that women stay safe always. The app comes equipped with a button, which will send alerts to your loved ones with your location in a situation of distress. You can select the contacts, which will be able to see your location. Moreover, if the app is switched off and is not working then also you will be able to send alerts by simply pressing the volume key for three seconds.

III. CONCLUSION

Women are engaged in numerous roles in various fields. They are keen to have information on other parts, such as child health, nutrition, prevention and cure of common diseases, employment opportunities etc. Those organizations who are trying to install ICTs for women empowerment should build their strategies grounded on ICT use pattern. The advent of ICT has altered the global scenario and many unexplored areas are now open for encashment. The best part about ICT is that it is capable of several adjustments as per the necessities of the segment using the same. The same can also be adjusted as per the needs and requirement of women in India. This means that even the traditional families can allow the women to participate and use of ICT from their respective homes. However, the awareness and facilities are missing radically. The national policies and strategies have not yet taken into consideration this unexplored potential pool of intellectual inputs. With training and awareness programmes we can make a big transformation. 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. 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. Some of the recommendations are listed below:

- All educational institutes by law should offer free basic knowledge of computer to women of all ages.
- ICT awareness camps should be organized on regular basis in rural areas.
- Internet facilities should be available at all locations including the remote ones.
- Free computer centers should be opened at rural area for providing basic knowledge of computer.

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