Chapter 1

Information and Communication Technologies - An Emerging Tool for Women Empowerment

Anjana Rai[1*]

[1]*Department of Extension Education and Communication Management, College of Community Science, Acharya Narendra Deva University of Agriculture and Technology, Kumarganj, Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh.*

Abstract

Women make up 48.41% of India's population (World Bank, 2022). Technology can strengthen women power. Out of the five thrust areas earmarked for India's Vision 2020, the information and communication technologies (ICT), like the other four, have also given us vital tools to achieve our development strategies. These tools and technologies coupled with the power of knowledge can enable women in developing countries to join the battle for economic, social and political empowerment. Already a "digital divide" implying uneven distribution of the technologies within the societies and across the world has set in, upsetting the balance of gender equality. Ready access and use of ICT is expected to bridge this "gap" or "divide" to a large extent, provided social and economic benefits are directly linked to these emerging technologies. Information and communication technologies have created new types of work that favor women because the technology enables work to be brought to homes and allow for better accommodation of work and family schedules.

Keywords: Women, Empowerment, ICT and Tool.

Introduction

The first Prime Minister of India Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once said, "To awaken the people, it is women who must be awaken; once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves". In developing countries women are abused or misused in various sectors. Submissiveness or compliance 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 minor or 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. Various NGOs are working for the betterment of women and give them training for independence. Goal 5 of sustainable development goals is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. There has been progress over the last decades, but the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030 [1].

Government is also taking this issue seriously and has announced various policies in favour 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. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Women Empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal right to women. Women empowerment helps women to control and benefit from resources, assets, income and their own time, as well as the ability to manage risk and improve their economic status and wellbeing. When women get empowered, the whole family gets benefits [2].

There has been progress over the last decades: More girls are going to school, fewer girls are forced into early marriage, more women are serving in parliament and positions of leadership, and laws are being reformed to advance gender equality. Still, many women in India and different parts of the world are missing opportunities in various employment sectors, and many segregate them because they are women [3].

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 which will help

to improve health and wealth of nation. With respect to the impact of the pandemic on education, an estimated 27 crore children in India have been affected as a result of school closure. This is worrisome since, in addition to learning, government schools provide mid-day meals to children, which is an essential factor for vulnerable children and girls to attend school. Likewise, with the shift in classes to the digital mode, it will particularly be more difficult for girls to access education mainly because of increased expectations to contribute to household chores. Access to education is also impacted because of poor access to technology, wherein only an estimated 28% women have access in rural India, while in the urban areas, access is estimated to be 33%. Out of the total allocation towards education in 2020-'21, a mere 0.4% was allocated to women as per the Gender Budget Statement, which is less than sufficient to meet the growing challenges of access to education in light of the pandemic [4].

There are basically five dimensions of women empowerment namely cognitive dimension, psychological, economic, political and physical [5].

ICTs are also used to refer to the convergence of media technology such as audio-visual and telephone networks with computer networks, by means of a unified system of cabling (including signal distribution and management) or link system. However, there is no universally accepted definition of ICTs considering that the concepts, methods and tools involved in ICTs are steadily evolving on an almost daily basis. ICT is playing an important role in changing the attitude and perspective of society towards women. It is creating a psychological comfort level of women at their work place by providing them additional knowledge and skills.

Role of ICT in Women Empowerment

Hussain et al [6] reveled that there was positive relationship between use of mobile and internet with women's empowerment. As use of mobile and internet increase the women's empowerment also increase so the Government should increase the availability of mobile network and internet facilities to enhance the women's empowerment.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is a broader term for Information Technology (IT),which refers to all communication technologies, including the sinternet,wireless networks, cell phones, computers, software, middleware, videoconferencing, social networking, and other media applications and services enabling users to access, retrieve, store, transmit, and manipulate information in a digital form .

Following are some aspects of life which have a direct influence of ICT especially on women:

(i) Women's increased access to job market and improvement in entrepreneurship skills using ICT tools:

- In most countries, women comprise a significant percentage of the labour force and, in some, account for more than the world average of 51 %.
- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has found that the use of information and communications technology (ICT) has led not only to better business performance for women, but also better living conditions. It can also be particularly effective in loosening constraints on women entrepreneurs.

(ii) Increase of average household income in villages Rural women's access to paid work is crucial to achieving self-reliance and the well being of dependent family members using ICT.

(iii) **Women empowerment:** Women empowerment can be defined as advancing women's self-appreciation worth, their capacity to decide their own decisions, and their entitlement to impact social change for themselves and others.

- **Personal empowerment:** Obtaining the knowledge and information they wanted. Feeling comfortable participating in certain group activities or able to talk about certain social or personal topics.
- **Educational empowerment:** Education for women empowerment is not just about literacy. Rather, it is about teaching women the skills and knowledge required to shape their own futures. Women's education's importance extends beyond individual growth.

ICT deliver 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 help in non formal and adult women education.

(iv) **Economic Empowerment:**

Economic empowerment of women refers to the process of enabling women to gain access to the resources, opportunities, and decisionmaking power necessary to achieve financial independence and contribute to their communities. Women's economic empowerment refers to the process by which women gain the ability to make strategic choices and decisions regarding their economic resources and opportunities. This encompasses a broad spectrum of activities, including access to education, employment, financial services, and property rights. At its core, economic empowerment is about enabling women to participate fully in the economy, thereby enhancing their autonomy and agency.

It is not merely about increasing women's income but also about transforming the structures that limit their economic potential. The concept of women's economic empowerment is deeply intertwined with gender equality. When women are empowered economically, they can contribute to their families and communities in meaningful ways, leading to improved living standards and overall societal progress.

This empowerment is often measured through various indicators such as labour force participation rates, wage equality, and access to leadership positions in business and government. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing effective policies and initiatives aimed at fostering an environment where women can thrive economically. ICT helps them to increase their monthly income. ICT provide jobs and opportunities to merge with large industries. ICT education makes women economically sound that is source of other all types of women empowerment.

- **Social empowerment:** Social empowerment of women is about equipping women with the tools, confidence, and opportunities to actively participate in society. It goes beyond just achieving equality; it aims to create an environment where women can thrive, lead, and inspire others to do the same.

Gaining access to new and useful knowledge, information and awareness about a range of issues, topics and activities of interest to women. This new information and knowledge often provided mental stimulation and broadened participants' thinking. Participating in

various activities with other women and people in positions of influence where you can openly discuss issues, share concerns and experiences, and reflect on issues affecting you

- **Psychological empowerment:** At its core, psychological empowerment of women refers to the process of helping women recognize their own worth, abilities, and potential. It's about shifting perspectives from self-doubt to self-belief and creating a mindset that supports resilience and confidence. This empowerment isn't handed out - it's cultivated within. It includes developing self-awareness, setting boundaries, and feeling capable of tackling challenges. Psychological empowerment creates a foundation for women to pursue their dreams, overcome obstacles, and live authentically.

It often focuses on four key areas:

1. **Self-determination:** Feeling in control of your own life and decisions.
2. **Meaning:** Recognizing what's truly important to you and aligning your actions accordingly.
3. **Competence:** Trusting in your skills and abilities to achieve your goals.
4. **Impact:** Knowing that your actions make a difference in your own life and the lives of others. 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 [7]. It can be at organizational level, personal level or social level. Through Internet, television, radio and mobile phones women are getting information about all the real incidents happing in world and learning skills to tackle situations; it is helping to bring leadership qualities in them.

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.

- **Technological empowerment:** In today's rapidly evolving world, technology plays a pivotal role in shaping societies and driving change. An area where its impact is particularly significant is women's empowerment. Leveraging technology can empower women by providing them with tools, opportunities, and platforms to overcome traditional barriers and achieve socio-economic equality. This brief note explores the multifaceted ways in which technology contributes to women's empowerment.

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.

- **Political empowerment:** The term political participation encompasses a broad range of activities through which individuals engage with political processes. These include the right to vote, contest elections, join political parties, engage in political activism, influence public policy, and cultivate political consciousness. Having a voice for their rights and increased ability to make decisions. Networking or meeting with people in government and industry and other women to discuss issues affecting.

- **Shrinking Information Asymmetry through ICT:** Information asymmetry is a problem that prevents communication processes to be effective in the digital economy. Information and communication technology (ICT) has been recently documented to increase information sharing between market participants in various sectors of developing countries [8].

(v) **Improved Governance:** The essence of e-government is to link government activities with the advanced technology that the world is having today. This technology has already shown a remarkable job in bringing efficiency in private sector through e-business, e-banking, e-procurement etc. E-government is engaged not only in providing citizen services but in improving public sector efficiency, transparency and accountability in government functions and decreasing the costs of public administration [9].

(vi) **Indigenous Knowledge:** Indigenous knowledge is the basis for many remote, rural, and marginalized communities in society and as such, is an important component in the educational development of members within these communities. In parallel with the increasing recognition of the value and relevance of Indigenous knowledge to today's world and the need to preserve it, is recognition of the role that information technologies (IT) can play in its capture, management and dissemination [10].

(vii) **Easy-Family communication:** There is no doubt about it-the way we communicate with our family members today has changed dramatically in recent years. Just a decade ago, text messaging, blogging, and emails were not methods of family communication. Today, they are widely used by families around the world. For example, parents use text messages to remind children of their curfews. Children send emails to their parents to give them their Christmas lists. College students use Web cameras to say good night to their family member who live hundreds of miles away. These are just a few of the ways in which technology has changed the way families communicate with one another in today's modern world [1].

(viii) **Increase Social awareness:** In this digital Era, social networking has already become a social norm for many of the new generation teenagers. Updating Facebook status, tweeting and posting photographs on Instagram have become everyday activities. Their life is reflected in social networking where there lies a lot of memories by posting images of their happy moments and recording some other emotionally important happenings and events [11].

Conclusion

In the recent years, through the implementation of various ICT related projects, the Women Empowerment is been improved. There are also many projects for the greater involvement of women. The main object is to make the women both economically and socially strong. The study clearly found that the women were immensely benefited from the use of ICT. ICT has made a tremendous impact in imparting knowledge on modern technology and its uses. This study concluded that the ICT (information and communication technology) empower a woman in various areas like social, educational, psychological, political, technological and economical and well as few degree of dis empowerment due to some internal and external reasons. 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. Still, majority of women in the developing world do not have access to ICTs due to variety of barriers as such the poverty, computer literacy, infrastructural, social, cultural and linguistic etc. So we should focus on how to cross such barriers which help women empowerment more better.

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