Logical Creations Education Research Institute
LC INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF STEM
E-ISSN: 2708-7123
Web: www.lcjstem.com | Email: editor@lcjstem.com
Volume-03 | Issue-02 | June-2022

ICT: An Innovative Move to Promote Gender Equality and Sustainable Future for Women in India

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.6849974

ABSTRACT

Indian civilisation is male-dominated, and women's efforts were disregarded. ICT has brought a glimpse of hope and a wealth of viable answers to this imbalance, which is why women's empowerment has been prioritised. ICT can boost gender equality. Digital technology can help eliminate gender gaps by boosting access to welfare, ID, financial services, and information. Technology can remove many of the obstacles women encounter, opening up new economic options and allowing them to join the workforce, improving their future. Digital technology has impacted how we organize, the strategies we use, breaking down boundaries, eroding state power, producing information, and developing unfathomable solidarity networks. Digital revolution changes how people live, work, and interact. Globally, gender equality is important. ICTs have added additional dimensions. ICTs improve service delivery, government, and poor populations' opportunities. Gender-neutral ICT policy can boost women's employment. SDG 5 aspires to increase the use of ICTs to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. ICTs are continuing to change the way we live and work. For women, girls, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, using technology to advance gender equality and women's empowerment is critical. This article examines ICT-enabled networking for gender equality. It also discusses policy framework for gender equality through ICT and goes on to suggest ways to improve the conditions leading to Gender equality.

Keywords: ICT, Gender, Empowerment, Exploitation.

Cite as: Showkat Ahmad Dar, Aadil Ahmad Shairgojri. (2022). ICT: An Innovative Move to Promote Gender Equality and Sustainable Future for Women in India. *LC International Journal of STEM (ISSN: 2708-7123)*, 3(2), 179–185. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6849974

INTRODUCTION

We are in the throes of another fundamental upheaval in human civilisation, the digital revolution, which has birthed **(**Mishra, 2015) the "information society." "Information society" is a popular topic. New ICTs, especially the Internet, bring in a new era. The information age's benefits haven't reached everyone, and not all of its effects are beneficial (Gurumurthy, 2004). Promoting gender equality is crucial to economic and human growth. "The development community understands that policies and activities that fail to address gender inequality will be ineffective and costly (Dilli 2003).

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Gender equality means men and women should be treated equally unless there is a biological justification for different treatment (Universal Declaration of Human Rights). Human rights include gender equality. Women should live in dignity, without want or fear. Empowering women advances progress (Adam, 2018**)** and reduces poverty. Empowered women boost the health and productivity of families, communities, and the next generation. Gender equality is one of the eight MDGs. Gender equality is crucial to the other seven goals. Information and communication technology are a proven tool for supporting economic growth and (Kabeer, 2005) sustainable development (UNPF, 2015). With encouragement and support from family, government, society, male colleagues, etc., women can enter the national economy and contribute to economic growth (Mishra et al., 2014). The same qualities that make ICTs an excellent tool for economic growth also make them an effective way to promote gender equality.

ICT infrastructure or access can raise gender equality awareness. E-commerce involves trading goods and services online. Electronic commerce uses mobile commerce, EFT, supply chain management, Internet marketing, online transaction processing, EDI, and inventory management (Mishra, 2015) systems. Modern electronic commerce employs the Web, but may also use e-mail (Wikipedia, 2014). ICT and e-commerce benefit disadvantaged women and families. Increasing women's participation in the digital economy can boost national capability, economic independence, and advancement.

ICTs improve information and knowledge flow and exposure to different cultures' customs, norms, and behaviors. This increases gender disparity awareness. By broadcasting educational programmes on gender equity, ICTs can help change people's attitudes, including women's, towards women. A more informed and sensitive constituency can also pressure lawmakers to consider gender in their social and economic policies (Chen, 2004). ICTs promote gender equality globally. New information and communication technologies (ICT) and e-commerce drive the global economy because they reach many people, have a wide geographical reach, and are time- and cost-efficient. ICTs increase market, commercial, processing, and knowledge access. ICT and e-commerce are attractive to small businesswomen in developing countries. These female entrepreneurs can use ICT to find new business prospects or contact clients (Teltscher, 2002).

In today's ever-changing workplace, ICTs are essential. How do we ensure that women and girls have the ICT and STEM skills they need to compete in the twenty-first century economy, have more options, and have access to better-educated, better-paying jobs? 90% of future occupations will require ICT skills, and 2 million new positions in computer science, mathematics, architecture, and engineering will be created. ICTs can help close the skills gap by extending education and literacy to those who are otherwise disadvantaged due to a lack of infrastructure or political unrest. Women account for half of the population. Participating in SDG implementation at all levels and driving the ICT industry could result in user-friendly, responsive technology. We can all do our part to close the gender gap, dispel preconceptions, and encourage women and girls to seek jobs in computer science. This empowers women and girls while also helping men and boys pursue the 2030 Agenda. (ITU, 2018)

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METHODOLOGY

Ex post facto and analytical research are both applicable to the current investigation. As a result, the research is conducted using analytical and descriptive approach. As a result, the research relies on both primary and secondary sources. A qualitative approach has been used to analyse the secondary data that has been gathered from reputable sources such as books and websites on the internet and newspaper articles, as well as various international journals and magazines. In addition, the research is based on personal observations.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze the Role of ICT for Gender Equality and Sustainable Future for Women in India.

Why ICT matters for Gender Equality?

Gender equality is a human right for a peaceful, affluent, and sustainable planet. Last decade grew. A UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is tracking 17 SDGs agreed two years ago. ICT may help women with personal safety, education and employment access, financial inclusion, and healthcare information. These benefits depend on women's access to ICT, which depends (Gurumurthy, 2006)on pricing, content, skills, and security. SDG 5 aims to promote gender equality and empower all women and girls by increasing the use of ICTs.

The International Chamber of Commerce and UN Women hosted an HLPF side event. The event will highlight worldwide initiatives to make women's economic empowerment an SDG priority. Innovation, investment, and product and service creation by the private sector improve women's lives. 75% of the world's poor are women. According to statistics, women reinvest 85% of every (Vegga, 2018) dollar into her family, so empowering women economically is key to ending poverty and boosting prosperity. People argue globally about ICT and gender equality.

The Internet assists female entrepreneurs in reaching worldwide markets. ICT enables all businesses to compete in global marketplaces, regardless of their size, location, or industry. Partnerships can assist realise ICT's potential through upgrading skill sets, offering digital devices to women, and training women (Vyas, 2022) to teach their communities how to use them. Multistakeholder collaboration and ICT business innovations to improve women's workforce involvement and financial inclusion will be highlighted during today's side event. (Opportunity)

Healthcare and education are provided to women using ICT. These demands can be met through private sector **(Vyas, 2022)** training, infrastructure, and ICT services. ICT, Policy and Sustainable Economic Development, defined from the article International Chamber of Commerce (ICC). Governments must develop a stable investment climate in order to use enabling technologies to achieve their objectives. (Capacity)

Men are more likely than women to own and utilize digital devices when they are younger and older. ICT enhances planning, teamwork, and the quality of data. In order to empower women through the use of**(Vyas, 2022)** information and communications technology, policymakers must have a thorough understanding of the ecosystem, as well as the obstacles that women face in gaining access to these tools. A primary goal of the ICC is to better understand the interrelationships between the many components of the information and communications technology (ICT) ecosystem.

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Understanding these issues can aid policymakers in deciding on the best course of action. (Understanding)

Improving Gender Equality with ICT

ICT's unique traits and economic benefits can promote gender equality. ICTs can alter public opinion on gender equality. This method can get politicians in India to consider gender in social and economic plans. ICT can promote gender equality by encouraging women to pursue technological occupations and (Chen, 2004) introducing them to entrepreneurship. This improves women's social, economic, and educational position. The World Bank predicts Internet users to grow by 52% each year, reaching 6.8% of the population (Garima, 2015)by 2011. IDC predicts that IT and ITES would grow by 21% over the next five years, reaching Rs 9.58 lakh crores in 2016. India's IT industry is growing quickly. Expanding ICTs affects women, though. Indians have a digital divide. Cisco Learning Institute for Women found in 2019 that 27% of Indian women have Internet connection. (World Bank, 2011)

Low technology access characterizes India's gender digital divide. Poverty, computer incompetence, and language barriers impede universal access to ICT infrastructure Mishra, (2017) As a result; most Indian women are in a bad predicament. Unequal access to ICT and engagement in all communication systems, notably the media, and a lack of effort to foster women's contributions to society. Lack of gender sensitivity in public and private local, national, and international media reveals lack (Kiran, 2015)of gender sensitivity. Electronic, print, visual, and auditory media continue to convey negative and humiliating images of women. Print and electronic media fail to accurately reflect women's lives and contributions to society in most nations. Several (VAPS, GOI)

In the 1990s and 2000s, India's IT industry was the largest private employer of women. Telework, flexible hours, telecommuting, and the internet have tempted many women to apply for technical and administrative professions. Increased public participation liberated women from male domination (Bhattacharyya et al. 2013). Using ICTs, rural women can obtain economic independence and new job alternatives. ICTs can empower rural women, but the organization using them must have a clear vision and goal (Sulaiman et al. 2011). ICT gender dimensions include access and use, capacity building, employment, and women's empowerment. ICT can empower women politically and socially and promote gender equality (Ramilo et.al. 2005).

Policy Framework for Gender Equality through ICT

First, women have poor access to information for cultural, social, economic, and geographic reasons. Illiteracy hinders women's access to information. Second, civic society and government aren't using ICT to empower women fully. They don't create structures and venues for ICT infrastructure growth. ICTs are expensive. This hinders the communal and individual adoption of ICT. Women in India have a meagre income and no household decision-making capacity to invest in these technologies. ICT penetration depends on energy, phone lines, internet gateways, etc. Given the situation of rural infrastructure, facilities appear more skewed towards urban areas, marginalising women. Fifth, linguistic hurdles impede the poorest

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and ignorant from accessing internet knowledge. Vernacular content is scarce. Sixth, hinterlands lack trained personnel to manage technological and networking difficulties. *To* promote gender equality and overcome women's ICT barriers, consider these strategies:

The government should improve ICT infrastructure and assure its widespread use, especially in schools. ICTs overcome Gender Digital Divide. National, state, and district policy frameworks should be built to address gender equality and gender mainstreaming, coupled with research on ICT and female empowerment. ICTs can provide new solutions for women to obtain and refresh their skills so they can participate fully and equally in the economy. Female education is especially crucial in countries that limit women to household tasks. Lack of education perpetuates gender inequities. (Gurumurthy, (2008)

In India, there are major differences in access, use, and regulation of ICTs between societies and regions. Ensure that an ICT-based project addresses these gaps with a different gender viewpoint, not as a single approach (Ramilo, 2002) for men and women. Many girls and women confront hurdles to attend school. In such cases, remote learning programmes are helpful, and the curriculum should include women's gender issues. Ensure adequate and sustainable technology transfer since know-how transfer must accompany technology transfer.

For a sustainable working model, both men and women must actively generate demand. Print and electronic media in India should promote female education, gender equality, and (Sandy's, 2005) gender empowerment. A better-educated society would support female education and gender equality. To design ICTs for women in poor countries, consider their social and cultural surroundings. It's crucial to understand women's ICT experiences, what they desire, and how they want to utilize it.

Likewise, Gender-sensitive ICT policy and regulation, National policies must be created to overcome impediments to (Sandy's, 2005) women's access and usage of ICTs and to ensure ICTs benefit women equally as men. Regional, national, and worldwide research on ICT and gender equality and documentation of good practises help practitioners and policymakers understand how these technologies affect gender equality and women's empowerment.

ICT-enabled education can increase educational opportunities for women in formal and non-formal settings. It can offer flexible (Haffkin, 2002**)** access and study times and foster peer-teacher engagement. It can increase outreach to rural and workplace women and promote lifetime learning. (ECOSOC) (2010)

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CONCLUSION

For gender-positive ICT outcomes, India must priorities gender. He emphasised the necessity for gender analysis, according to Louise Chamberlain, to understand how integrating men and women influences policy making and project implementation. This poll result identifies significant gender issues and public opinion in India that should concern Indian officials. Gender equality and ICT should be promoted by all parties in India. Through coordination, collaboration, and corporation in ICT, all players in India may build an inclusive, democratic, gender-based information society. Infrastructure, relevance, accessibility, affordability, software, and hardware related to ICT and gender must all be addressed by policymakers. We support an ICT policy that promotes women's engagement.

ICT has transformed the world scenario, opening up many untapped areas. Gender equality has benefited from the use of ICTs, especially its flexibility. It's crucial to consider these implementations' strategies and methods for sustainability. Some initiatives have met infrastructural, cultural, and social needs, especially in India. Increasing women's voices and publicizing their stories can open more doors and have a global impact through the use of ICT.

While ICT alone cannot alleviate all of society's problems with gender inequality, it can provide new sources of information and ways of communicating for those living in areas where there is one. Technology has the potential to help close the gender wage gap and advance gender parity in a number of fields. Women and their families in developing nations can benefit from the use of information and communication technologies. Increasing women's participation in the digital economy is a way to increase national capability, economic independence, and advancement.ICT access shouldn't be limited to the wealthy, but also to the poor.

ICT can reach women who haven't been reached by conventional media, empowering them to grow socially and economically. Few women hold decision-making roles in the communication industry due to a lack of gender awareness and stereotype. The government should ban unfavorable and degrading pictures of women in media. Unfavorable and insulting portrayals of women must change in media. Regulate gender-based programming. The government should set up MCACs in panchayats and blocks to provide tele-education, telemedicine, and internet access.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We want to thank everyone who helped us finish this paper. Our Guide Dr. P.Sakthivel thoughtfulness and encouragement helped us organise our article in a period-appropriate fashion. We should also thank all the researchers and writers who had successfully written papers on a similar topic. Their references and citations helped us complete our work effectively.

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