


Chapter 15


Women Empowerment in India: Are We on the Right Track?

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ABSTRACT

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have attracted the continued attention of national governments, international bodies, private organizations, civil societies, and NGOs. ICT has the potential to act as an influential method for promoting gender equality and social-economic and political empowerment of women. The chapter describes a number of ICT-backed initiatives in different countries targeted towards various concerns of women such as health, education, violence, governance, income, etc. It demonstrates the ability of ICT for empowering women especially those belonging to the marginalized group. This chapter examines the key challenges including technical, social, and economic to the usage of ICT for women's development as well as suggests initiatives for national governments, policy makers, and organizations focusing on the issue of women empowerment.

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INTRODUCTION

Women present a distinctive resource for nations and play a dual role in the socio-economic development of the country. While being involved in various economic activities they are the primary care givers at domestic level. As per Indian Labor Organization (ILO) estimates, women perform two-thirds of world's work, get one-tenth of its income and possess one hundredths of worlds property. Women are burdened with greater amount of work than men (Ferrant et al., 2014). The greater responsibility of work as compared to men along with their involvement for a larger share of non-SNA (System of National Accounts) work of economy¹, makes them overburdened even before they enter into the labor market. *The Forgotten Women*, by Tsjeng (2018) portrays the hardships faced by women right through history, being restricted from universities and academic associations, compelled to resign post marriage, or crediting their accomplishments to male associate (pp. 14–16). This makes it evident that gender equality principles are not followed in practice though development can be seen in terms of prospects and alternatives enjoyed by individuals in the society (Panigrahy, 2006).

The disparity as described above is not due to the fact that women are mediocre wage earners, farmers or entrepreneurs; it is largely because of the business size they own, human capital (education, health) and the sectors in which they function (Furst-nichols & Buvinic, 2014). The contribution of women in building nations was acknowledged with the declaration of International women's decade in 1975. Consequently, from the perspective of gender equality, the subject of women empowerment has caught the attention of governments, national and international organizations, and scholars around the world. United Nations (UN) Secretary General Kofi Annan once said, "There is no tool for development more effective than the empowering women and girls"².

Empowerment as defined by the World Bank (2008) "...is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes"³. Women empowerment would thus mean a process that would enable women have control and power over physical and psychological resources. Longwe's (1994) five level model describes control as the last level of women empowerment. These levels include; welfare, access, conscientization, participation and control. In the welfare stage, women are passive beneficiaries of welfare acts initiated to address gender discrimination; the access stage makes some progress and involves women empowerment by their access to education, credit and land. In the conscientization stage, women develop awareness that the unequal access to resources is embedded in institutional, structural and social discrimination. In the participation stage, women begin to take part in decision-making procedures

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