



Empowerment of Women Entrepreneurs with ICT

Dr. Ritushree Narayan

Assistant Professor, Computer & Information Science,
Usha Martin University, Ranchi, Jharkhand, India

ABSTRACT

By using ICT (information and communication Technology) technical capabilities of women develop their entrepreneurial capabilities & enhance social, economic empowerment. Entrepreneurship has emerged as an invaluable tool for economic empowerment of women. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is always an essential element in business world. The survival of business organizations are largely depending on the efficient use of ICTs in enhancing their survival. ICTs are providing women entrepreneurs many opportunities to empower themselves in multifarious ways. Vital issues demanding further attention is improving the ability of women to utilize ICT effectively and in particular for knowledge attainment and creation, in personal and community development as well as socialization channel.

Keywords: *Women Empowerment, Entrepreneurship, ICT for development*

INTRODUCTION

Information and Communication Technology plays enabling roles in socio-economic development. In this age of information society, access to advanced technologies in the field of information and communication has provided numerous opportunities to make lives better. The disparity or the so called 'digital divide' between developed and developing countries in terms of reaping the fruits of ICTs has been one of the much discussed issue in the global arena, besides the concern for 'digital exclusion' of marginalized groups such as women, low income people living in rural areas with in developing countries are critically raised both in academic and

policy making levels. When it comes to utilizing benefits of ICTs, consideration of women is always crucial for both as women are less likely to get the benefits from ICTs whereas ICTs have largest potentials to benefit women. ICTs are being leveraged and/or could be leveraged to entrepreneurship among women as well as to help women entrepreneurs to improve their socio-economic condition. Based on the discussion and analysis, before conclusion the final section would then present how ICTs can be used more effectively to facilitate empowerment of women entrepreneurs overcoming existing bottlenecks and building on the on-going institutional and government initiatives and lastly resorting to some recommendations. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has become a potent force in transforming social, economic, and political life globally. Without its incorporation into the information age, there is little chance for countries or regions to develop. Most women within developing countries are in the deepest part of the divide further removed from the information age than the men whose poverty they share. However, it is not a choice between one and the other. ICT can be an important tool in meeting women's basic needs and can provide the access to resources to lead women out of poverty. Women work two thirds of the world's total working hours spending mainly on growing food, cooking, raising children, caring for the elderly, maintaining a house, hauling water, etc., which is universally accorded low status and without pay.

Women's Empowerment through ICTs

ICTs have provided a wide range of opportunities for development of women. It is a powerful catalyst for political and social empowerment of women. Women

are directly accessing global markets through e-commerce and are using the Internet to support their activities with market and production information. E-governance programmes have been initiated using ICTs for delivering government services; in some cases with an explicit strategy to ensure these services reach women and others who face barriers to access information. Women are increasingly adopting ICT for various business related tasks like preparing letters and memos, producing report, data storage and retrieval, budgeting, planning and analyzing problems and alternatives. Health educators have used the radio to communicate information related to women's health. Email, online newsletters have enabled women to communicate on a global scale, resulting in increased collaboration to push the agenda of gender equality. New technologies do offer remarkable advantages in terms of ease of communication, interaction, and efficiency in information storage and retrieval; however they are not universally available. New initiatives have been most effective where they go beyond issues of access and infrastructure to consider the larger social context and power relations. The women entrepreneurs in the Middle East and North Africa use information and communication technology (ICT) for their businesses at rates well above the per capita average worldwide. Thus, women are extensively using ICT in making successful business ventures.

Factors Motivating the Usage of ICT

Women entrepreneurs are being induced to incorporate the ICT in their businesses to manage the operations. The extensive uses of ICTs are changing the company's work culture. Modern and advanced ICT tools are very powerful in delivering quality and contributing towards financial growth and progress. The adoption or non adoption of e-commerce, m-commerce or social media is having direct impact on the failure, survival, growth or success of their entrepreneurial venture. Use of ICT has become relevant in every business sector as it brings increased profits through business networking. ICT increases productivity, improve job performance and enhances job effectiveness in any businesses. ICTs allow women entrepreneurs to sell their products in the most profitable markets. ICT in businesses have reduced operation costs and also enhanced market performance. Women entrepreneurs can easily plan their product mix and input purchases in an efficient manner as information on prices are readily available online. This leads to reduced broker's exploitation and

thus, minimizes the information gap between the market and the women entrepreneurs. ICTs open new avenues for education, communication and information sharing and the marketable skills of women entrepreneurs are enhanced through training in emails, word processing and internet.

Barriers Challenging the Usage of ICT

The main barriers in using ICT in businesses are lack of knowledge, lack of access, the high costs of equipments, connections, hardware and software applications. Women are still not conversant enough to use ICT in their businesses. This is due to the social norms and unavailability of adequate knowledge about computer. Availability of network infrastructure is also a major challenge among women entrepreneurs. Network failure and network trafficking are the reasons for the failure of on time communications which hampers the effectiveness of business operations. Women entrepreneurs' attitude, knowledge and experience also play an important role in adopting new technologies. The absence of technological adequate knowledge also poses a challenge for women entrepreneurs. Language barrier is also an important factor. Most of the sites use English as a medium for communications and women's are mostly familiar with the local language.

CONCLUSION

The ICT sector is now a growing sector for employment, and a key factor for both national and international development. Without the adoption of new technology, there is a very limited scope for the nation as well as a region to develop. Women entrepreneurs are still unable to completely tap the potentialities of ICT for the development of their business. Gender gap in the digital world is still much prevalent in the developing countries. ICT can provide wide variety of benefits to different types of firms. Moreover, ICT reduces business operation costs, improves productivity and strengthens the business firm in the market. Simultaneously, women entrepreneurs are being faced with lots of challenges like - ICT training, financing, social norms and linguistic issues. Hence, Government should come up with special policies and schemes on financial support, infrastructural support and training facilities in school to promote and develop the usage of ICT among women entrepreneurs both in rural and urban areas to make them independent.

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