

DIGITAL LITERACY AND ICT TO ENGAGE, EDUCATE, AND EMPOWER WOMEN IN INDIA

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ICT has the capacity to bring the change and develop women to be a strong pillar of the world economy. For example, women who do not have access to formal education but are proficient in informal skills such as crafts, sewing, basket weaving, etc. can use ICT as a platform to promote their talents in Facebook-based business. However, due to socio-economic and institutional constraints, India faces a large gender digital divide which is represented in women's low level of access and usage of ICT.

REASON FOR FEWER WOMEN IN ICT

According to the National Family Health Survey 2019-2020 conducted in India (source: <https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1680702>), more than 60% of women have never used the internet. Many women, in comparison to males, lack access to technology due to a variety of factors such as gender discrimination and socio-economic constraints. Following are three main factors for women's lack of access to ICT:



60% of women of around 22 states of India have not used internet.

(source: <https://www.developmentnews.in/digitally-empowering-women-rural-india/>)

Language Barrier: One of the barriers for rural women is the absence of resources available in their own language. With around 122 major languages in India (source: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/262843168_The_Status_of_Indian_Languages), it is difficult to create material in a local language. Content development in local language necessitates both time and expertise.

Work-Life Balance: According to Kaspersky's 'Women in Tech' report (cited in: <https://www.kaspersky.co.in/blog/women-in-tech-2021/22425/>), the work-from-home during the COVID-19 pandemic is hampering women's progress, as social gender roles impose females to contribute more time to household labour, home schooling of children, and other responsibilities in comparison to men. The work-life balance is still an unachievable myth. This imbalance leads to physical and emotional exhaustion for women, as well as to female employee attrition at workplace.

Invisible bias at workplace: In India, 34% of the IT workforce is now women (source: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/jobs/more-women-in-it-cos-now-work-on-their-growth/articleshow/81195724.cms>). Regardless of this, due to social interdependence and restrictions, the society and technical community discourage women to pursue a career in science and technology. Delayed or neglected recognition in the workplace, gender harassment, and unequal treatment are few of the many hidden prejudices that contribute to the decline in the number of women working in ICT.

ACTION TO IMPROVE WOMEN'S ACCESS TO ICT

To bridge the digital divide, it is necessary for women of all socioeconomic classes to comprehend and acquire the skills that they require in order to fully benefit from ongoing technology advancements. Listed below are a few examples of action that could help achieve this goal:

Early Mentoring: Early mentoring is important for encouraging young women and girls as it could provide improved quality of learning opportunities for utilizing ICT. Such mentoring may include promoting awareness of ICT careers, possibilities, and growth in the STEM field and ICT.

Training programs: ICT training programs must be made available to girls from impoverished rural regions. The programs are also to provide another chance of learning for women who could not complete their formal education. These programs would help women progress in non-traditional sectors.

Education to Empowerment: Unbiased education is the key to success for female students in higher education and to become motivated to seek careers in technical fields. The ICT-oriented education would ensure the equal access to job opportunities for women.

Policy development and implementation: Policies must be prepared in order to provide learning opportunities for women. The existing organizations and educational institutions must have a section in place to conduct reach-out programs for women in the rural areas.

The traditional gender discriminations and social restrictions are stumbling blocks to women's advancement in ICT in India. If access and usage of ICT is linked to socio-economic growth, it is critical that women understand and use these technologies. ICT can support gender empowerment and better education and can create opportunities for women.