

Gender and Information & Communication Technology: An Experience of Sahapur Gram Panchayat in Malda District

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ABSTRACT

The concept of Gender has been considered as socio-cultural determinants. It demands the rights of equality, equal opportunities, and responsibilities between men and women in society. It is also referred to the participation of all in the decision making process in all sectors of the civil society equally which is not affected by the gender discrimination. Women are representing almost half of the global population. So empowering women is very necessary for the nation's sustainable development. In 1992, the 73rd amendment act facilitated women to participate in the decision-making process in the rural local self-governance in India. It has been cultivated the women for their social, political and economic development. In this context, ICT has been playing a major role to promote gender equality by empowering women. Through the ICT women have been increased their self-confidence and self-independence. ICT also enable them to participate in the decision making process in their household as well as the process of governance.

In this paper it is found the realities of the role of ICT for women empowerment in rural areas. The objective of this paper is to analyze the theoretical concept of gender equality as well as women empowerment. In this paper, It is explored the role of ICT to promote the gender equality in the rural governance with a case study. The field study has been conducted in Sahapur Gram Panchayat of Old Malda Block in Malda district, West Bengal.

1. Introduction

Gender has been considered as socio-cultural determinants. It refers to socially and culturally constructed attributes of men and women's behavior which has been differentiated from each other. It has been determined by the role and functions of men and women on the basis of masculinity and femininity in the society. History tells us Women have been oppressed and exploited in the socio-economic and cultural fields from. They always have been viewed less than men. Even today in many society women have not self-independence compare to the men. So demand for gender equality has been rising in the whole world. Gender equality demands the rights of equality, equal opportunities, and responsibilities between men and women in society. It is also referred to the participation of all in the decision making process in all sectors of the civil society equally which is not affected by the gender discrimination. Women are representing almost half of the global population. So empowering women is very necessary for the nation's sustainable development. Here rural Local self-governance is necessary for the development of the rural people as well as women.

Participation of the rural people in the governance is very much essential to make democracy successful. Local self-government is the basic unit of people's participation and governance. It fulfills the basic needs of the citizen as well as the society. In India, where two-third population lives in the rural areas, it is very necessary for the participation of the rural people in the governing process for the nation's development. It would not possible until rural people including women control over their destinies through the rural local self-governance.

Women have long been marginalized in Indian society. In 1992, the 73rd amendment act facilitated women to participate in the decision-making process through the rural local self-governance in India. It has been cultivated the rural women for their social, political and economic development. In this context, ICT is the necessary tool to promote gender equality by empowering women. Through the ICT women have been increased their self-confidence and self-independence. ICT also enable them to participate in the decision making process in their household as well as the process of governance. In this paper, I am going to analyze the role of ICT for empowering women through the conceptual framework of women empowerment and gender equality with the experience of Sahapur GP in Malda district, West Bengal, India.

2. Objectives of the study

The main objectives of this paper are-

1. To understand the theoretical concept of gender equality as well as women empowerment.
2. To understand ICT as a tool for sustainable development as well as the women empowerment.
3. To understand digital divide in the Indian context.
4. To find out the realities of the role of ICT for women empowerment in rural areas.
5. To explore the role of ICT to promote the gender equality in the rural governance with a case study.

3. Methodology

I have been used analytical as well as descriptive method in this study. Analytical method helps to analyze the concept of

gender equality and women empowerment. In this study, information collected from several books, journal and internet sources. This paper is mainly based on primary data as well as secondary data.

4. Concept of gender equality and women empowerment

Gender equality has been established for the equal rights, opportunities and also equal distribution of power between men and women in the social, economic and political field in the society. It is the result of the gender biases which has long been viewed women as the most marginalized and less than men. In another word, it is the concept by which socio-economic transformation of women has been being established. According to UNICEF (2011) that Gender equality also refers to the equal rights (economic, social & political), resources, opportunities and protections for the women and men, boys and girls.

Gender equality would not be possible without empowering women. Women empowerment is the process by which women enjoying some provisions guaranteed by the governing authority for improving their socio-economic conditions and strengthening political rights which ensured equality and the development of life in the society. Empowerment has been considered as the development of the skills, resources, opportunities and motivations for the decision making. Empowerment has a process of the development which intensifies the capacity and capability of the autonomy and self-determination. It is based on three important pillars: i. Education, ii. Health, iii. Per-Capita income. In other word women empowerment is the process by which women are empowered to control their own mind and soul. It has also been considered as the multidimensional process which enables women for participating in social, economic, political and cultural fields in the society. The main objectives for empowering women is to increase the participation in the decision making process of the governance as well as the civil society.

5. Importance of ICT in present era

In this era of globalization, the impact of Information and Communication Technology has been very relevant in the modern society. The ICT has been accelerated and operated for the transparency and accountability of administration, the sustainable development, making huge employment opportunities and improved citizen's quality of life. It has also been transforming the society in a new way and boosts the knowledge economy across the world. This massive expansion of the internet connection helps common people to improve their daily livelihood by using so many e-services like internet banking, e-ticket; online shopping etc. ICT has been promoting development in a multidimensional way like it has been reducing the cost of operational activities by improving administrative efficiency and staff productivity. ICT also helps for social development in the field of education, healthcare, and environment preservation etc. application of ICT in the process of governance assures accountability, transparency, and effectiveness in terms of service delivery to the citizen. It also helps citizen to gather information for their daily livelihood at minimal cost, time and efforts. Now for developing countries,

ICTs are taking a major role to participate in the process of the global economy.

UNO's agenda 2030 for the sustainable development emphasizes on ICT as the catalyst for sustainable development. Spread of ICT makes the world interconnect for improvement for the citizen's daily livelihood. There are 17 goals have been recognized for achieving the sustainable development throughout the world. Out of this goal

- Goal 4- education,
- Goal 5- gender equality,
- Goal 9- infrastructure (universal and affordable access to the internet) and
- Goal 17 – Partnerships and means of implementation

These have been considered as the main catalyst for the development of any particular nation. According to the Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, UNO, (2016) ICT has been very important for the empowering individual as well as the society throughout the world in terms of reliable access to the education, healthcare, and such services like mobile banking, e-governance, social media etc. This knowledge platform has discussed on 'ICT as a catalyst for sustainable development' based on three grounds. These are

1. Universal access to the newly invented technologies between and within countries, bridge the digital divide between urban and rural areas as well as the men and women.
2. Sustainable Development Goals also emphasize on the Global e-Sustainable Initiative (GeSI) report on 'System Transformation- How digital solutions will drive progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals'. According to GeSI ICT is the very much important for the today for the development in all aspect of society as well as the nation.
3. Mobile industries take the crucial role for promoting of the sustainable development goals. Mobile connectivity throughout the nation impacts the socio-economic condition on the individual as well as the society.

6. ICT and Women Empowerment

Information and Communication Technology is a platform by which people can interact with each other and share knowledge across the world. With the help of ICT, women can express their opinion and emotions openly and explore the world and also reducing the barriers to access external information at a minimal cost, time and efforts. ICT as a tool that helps women to be more empowered in the society. It helps women to build up their abilities and skills for strengthening their participation in the socio-economic and political process of the society. ICT has also been making employment opportunities for women in the various IT sectors and others which make women financially independent and empowered. Knowledge building through the ICT enables the women a respectful life to the society. Opportunities for jobs by ICT oriented knowledge improve the individual confidence level of women and aware them for their future vision. In this circumstances, women have been playing a vital role in the decision making process in the household as

well as the society because the economy is the main strength to exalted their position in the society.

According to United Nation’s report (2005) on ‘Gender equality and empowerment of women through ICT’ that ICTs are playing crucial role for making capacity building, employment opportunities and also empowerment of women. ICT has been considered as the important means for the political, economic and social development of women which promote the concept of gender equality. World Summit on the Information Society’s (WSIS) ‘Declaration of Principles: Building the Information Society: a Global Challenge in the New Millennium’ affirmed that extensive growth of ICTs secures the huge opportunities for women. The development of women is necessary for the nation’s sustainable development. Women are the integral part of the today’s information society. Information Society builds up the capacity of women and secures their participation in all societal activity on the basis of gender equality (WSIS, 2003).

Today the value of women’s voice and their contribution in the economic field is very important for the sustainable development to the nation. ICTs are necessary as tools for enhancement women’s quality of life which helps to ensure the gender equality.

7. Digital divide in India

Digital divide refers to the knowledge gap between those individuals and societies that have sufficient resources to access information and communication technology tools and those have not. India is ‘the union of states’ which is the seventh-largest country in terms of area and the second in terms of population in the world. It has also been considered the world’s largest democracy. Adoption of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in Indian society has been very significant for the nation’s development. It is also considered as a developmental tool which takes the country to the goal of sustainable development. The main objective for the adoption of ICT in every aspect of the governance in India is to empower people and ensure better service delivery to the citizen in digital form. India has initiated several e-governance plans for the transparency and accountability in the administration.

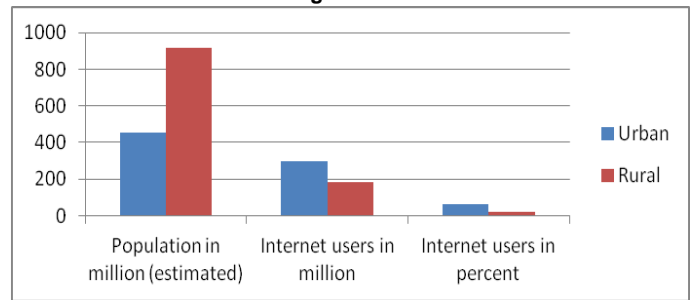
Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and Kantar IMRB has published a report called ‘Internet in India 2017’ on 20th February 2018. The report has been said that the total number of internet users in India is about 481 million (as of December 2017) and 64.84 percent of the total urban population use the internet and 20.26 percent of the total rural population are using the internet in India (table no 1, figure no 1).

Table no 1
Internet penetration in India

Internet penetration in urban and rural areas	Population in million (estimated)	Internet users in million	Internet users in percent
Urban	455	295	64.84
Rural	918	186	20.26

Source: <http://www.iamai.in/>

Figure no 1



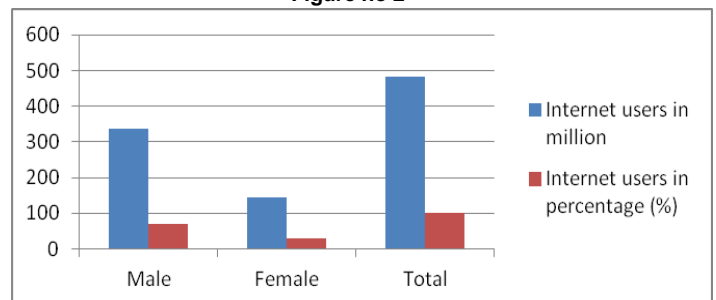
The report also has said that the domination over the internet is still male-dominated because there are estimated 143 million female who are using internet that only representing 29.73% of the total internet users (Table no 2, figure no 2). To the report ‘Digital India’ has been focusing on the rural India, but digital inequality among the rural and urban areas and women and men still persist very much. In terms of internet usage in rural areas, women are very less compare to the men. The ratio of internet users between male to female in rural India is 64:36 (Internet and Mobile Association of India & Kantar IMRB, 2018).

Table no 2
Gender internet penetration in India

Population of male and female	Internet users in million	Internet users in percentage (%)
Male	338	70.27
Female	143	29.73
Total	481	100

Source: <http://www.iamai.in/>

Figure no 2



These data have been clearly showing that people of India are not digitally empowered equally. This digital divide between rural and urban areas as well as male and female are the major drawback for the establishment of ICT in all aspect of the governance in India. From this digital divide, a massive digital inequality has been emerging which also affect the economy of the country in this knowledge-based economic world. It also has been increasing inequality between men and women which is one of the barriers to the social harmony.

8. Case of Sahapur GP

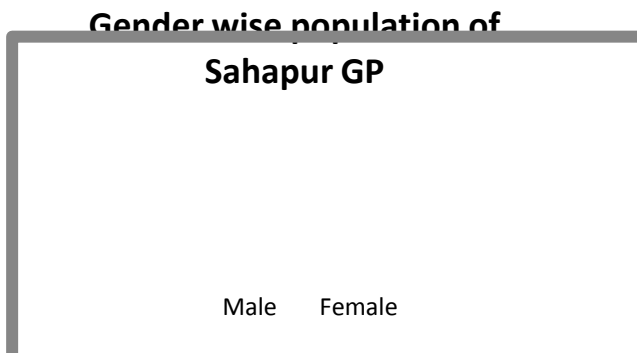
The main focus of the study is Gram Panchayat of Sahapur. Sahapur Gram Panchayat is located in the Malda district, West Bengal, India. It has been located 2km from district headquarter English Bazar, 5 km from old Malda and 347 km far from state capital Kolkata. Malda District has been composed of 2 sub-division, 15 community development blocks, 2 municipalities, 12 state assembly constituency and 146-gram panchayats.

Sahapur GP is under the old Malda community development block which belongs to Malda Sadar sub-division. The total population of this GP is 37744 and a total number of household is 8013(as per census 2011). 18368 are representing women of total population (table no 3, figure no 3).

Table no 3
Total Population of the Sahapur GP

Gender wise population	Population in number	Population in percentage (%)
Male	19376	51.34
Female	18368	48.66
Total	37744	100

Figure no 3



9. Analysis of the Data

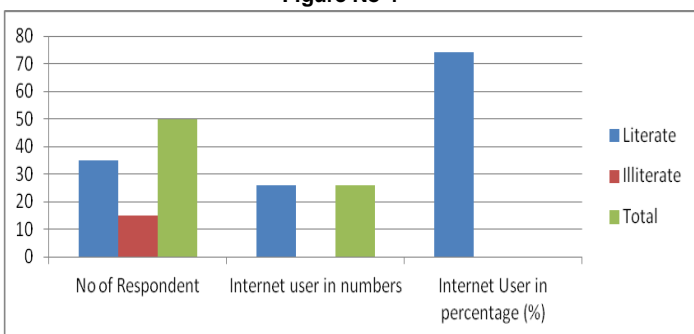
Purpose of the study is to analyze the digital empowerment of women in Sahapur GP. For this purpose, field study has been conducted for fifty women of different families with the help of six parameters which determines the usage of the internet of women. They are mentioned below.

In terms of education, there are 74 percent women using the internet who are literate No women use internet who are illiterate (Table No 4, Figure no 4).

Table no 4
Internet usage in terms of Education

Education	No of Respondent	Internet user in numbers	Internet User in percentage (%)
Literate	35	26	74.29
Illiterate	15	0	0
Total	50	26	

Figure No 4



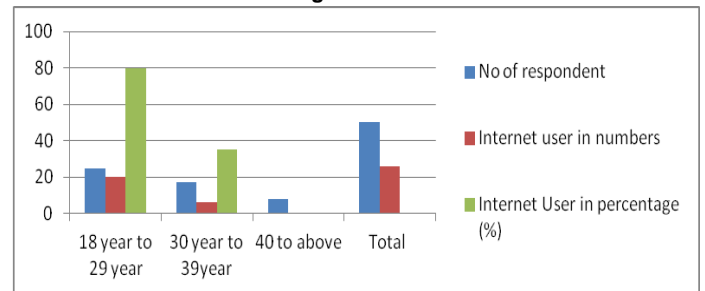
Most of the internet users of women are younger. The percentage of the younger women that means between 18 to 29

years of the age group who use the internet is 80% and between 30 to 39 years of age group use the internet is 35.29%. But above 40 years of age, no women are using the internet (Table no 5, Figure no5).

Table No 5
Internet usage in terms of Age

Age	No of respondent	Internet user in numbers	Internet User in percentage (%)
18 year to 29 year	25	20	80
30 year to 39year	17	06	35.29
40 to above	8	0	0
Total	50	26	

Figure No 5

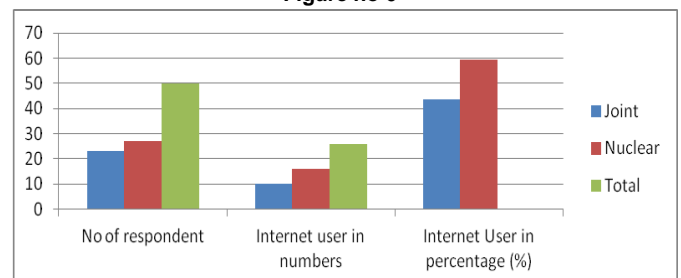


Internet usage of women in Sahapur Gp also determines by the nature of family. From my study, I have found that there are 43.48% women who belong to the joint family have been using the internet and 59.26% women have been using internet belonging to the nuclear family (Table no. 6, Figure no 6).

Table No 6
Internet usage in terms of Family

Family	No of respondent	Internet user in numbers	Internet User in percentage (%)
Joint	23	10	43.48
Nuclear	27	16	59.26
Total	50	26	

Figure no 6



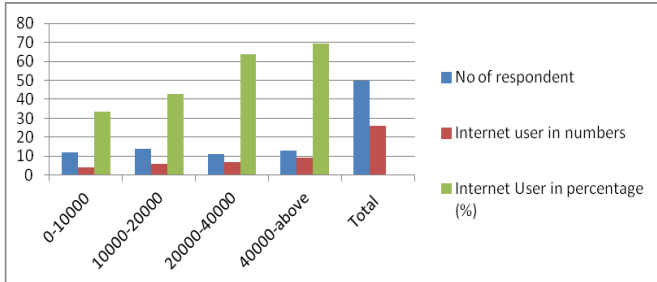
The economy is one of the major determinants of increasing usage of internet. Here I have found that the percentage of the internet user of women increasing when their family income is high. (Table no 7, Figure No 7)

Table No 7
Internet usage in terms of monthly family Income

Income in Rupee	No of respondent	Internet user in numbers	Internet User in percentage (%)
0-10000	12	4	33.33

10000-20000	14	6	42.86
20000-40000	11	7	63.63
40000-above	13	9	69.23
Total	50	26	

Figure No 7



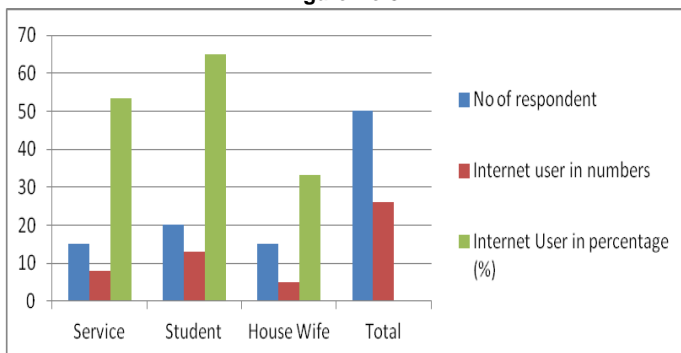
Source: field survey

In terms of occupation, a higher rate of internet usage of women who are students. There are 53.33 per cent students of total respondent use internet where women who involve in service. 65% women using internet who are student. Housewife uses internet representing about 33.33% percent. (Table No 8, Figure no 8).

Table No 8
Internet usage in terms of Occupation

Occupation	No of respondent	Internet user in numbers	Internet User in percentage (%)
Service	15	8	53.33
Student	20	13	65
House Wife	15	5	33.33
Total	50	26	

Figure No 8

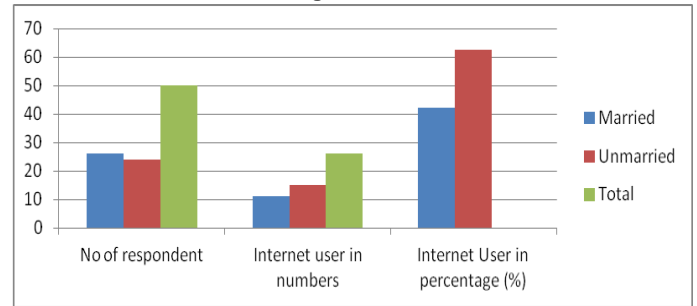


I have pointed out that the internet usage in terms of marital status that the 42.30% women had been using the internet and related facilities, who are married and 62.5% women have used internet who are unmarried out of total respondent of women (Table no 9, Figure no 9).

Table No 9
Internet usage in terms of marital status

Marital status	No of respondent	Internet user in numbers	Internet User in percentage (%)
Married	26	11	42.30
Unmarried	24	15	62.5
Total	50	26	

Figure No 9



10. Conclusion

From the above discussion on ICT and gender equality, it is clear that the role of ICT is very much relevance for promoting gender equality. The main objective of the E-Governance is to develop the accountability and transparency. Application of ICT enables marginalized women more efficient for the participation in the field of the economy of their household as well as the society. But still now in the developing countries like India rural women do not have to access fully ICT for the development. The percentage of the rural women who use the internet is very less. In India, there is huge knowledge gap between men and women to use information and communication technologies (ICT). From the experience in Sahapur GP it has been revealed that the usage of the internet of women is determined by their socio-economic condition. It found that there was no infrastructure for the empowering women through ICT in Sahapur GP. Education and economy are the primary determinants of the digital empowerment of women. In terms of age the younger generation of women basically students have a higher rate of internet usage. In terms of nature of family higher rate of internet use belong to nuclear family.

It is found that women's participation in the use of ICT is restricted due to the different causes. These causes are:

1. Low level infrastructure.
2. Literacy level is low.
3. High level of cost for using the technologies.
4. Insufficient internet facility in specific areas.
5. Inefficient technical experts.
6. Women are dependent on Man.
7. Lack of economic freedom.
8. Absence of implementation of governmental initiatives.
9. Lack of budget for training for both men and women.

On the basis of the study, it is mentioned that have mentioned some suggestions for the digital empowerment of women in rural areas can be developed the under mentioned criteria. These are given bellow-

- Education is the basic priority to empowering women through ICT. The government should be provided free education of computer to women.
- Government should make law for the implementation of ICT in the primary level education.
- Various campuses should be implemented for increasing the encouragement of women to use ICT.

- Free skill development programme through computer centers for women may be implemented to digitally empowerment.
- Free access to internet can be provided in rural areas.
- Future IT-related job opportunities should be created by the government for women.
- ICT can be used for the security of women by installing cameras, emergency apps etc.

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