THEORY AND PRACTICE OF E-GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

A GENDER PERSPECTIVE
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India

• India is well known for its vibrant information technology industry
• Massive investments in ICT and big budgetary allocations. Many e-governance initiatives aiming at reaching out to the last digital node
• Expected to have a more inclusive democratic governance
Technology and Gender

• A Plea for the inclusion of gender concerns in ICT policy
• Technology assumed to be gender neutral in its application
• Recent important international policy documents have recognized the gender implications of the new technologies
• technology is not high on the agenda of women movements as the more fundamental survival issues are being addressed first
Gender equity, development and e-governance

• Entails issues of women empowerment, inclusive democratic participation, equal citizenship, and gender mainstreaming of public policies including those of ICT policies and programs.

• Need for integration between gender and development and ICT for Development policy
HDI & GDI

• India is ranked 126 out of 177 countries on the HDI
  &
• 96 out 177 countries on the GDI (UNDP Human Development Report 2006)
Gender disparity

• Gender disparity in many sectors with women in a disadvantaged position in India
• Extreme poverty and poor IT infrastructure in rural areas, where the majority of Indian women reside
• To what extent are women able to access or benefit from e-governance measures?
Gender equality status

• The gender equality ranking of India on the basis of indices of economic participation, economic opportunity, political empowerment, educational attainment and health and well being is low. On a scale of 1-7 the ranking of India is 3.27
Women’s Empowerment Measurement

Out of 115 countries surveyed India has been ranked 98 for global gender gap in 2006. (World Economic Forum)

- Key indicators: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, political empowerment and health
- India’s ranking is low in women’s empowerment measurement.
Women and ICT

• In India women's ability to participate in the country's rapid progress towards e-governance impeded by the low status ascribed to women and girls in Indian society

• access to information technology the third most important issue facing women globally, after poverty and violence against women

• While technology is not a panacea for women's problems in developing countries, in general, IT offers new possibilities for women in developing countries in economic, social, and political empowerment en.
Factors affecting women’s e-access

- social and cultural norms, literacy and education, language, time, cost, geographical location of facilities, and women's low computer skills
- added dimension in the context of rural India where gender based discriminations with strong socio cultural roots are entrenched and pervasive.
- gender based digital divide accentuating the pre-existing gender imbalance
Current efforts

• So far governments’ efforts in fostering the involvement of women in governance processes have been articulated through reservations, creation of separate departments to handle women issues etc.
New possibilities

• With new information and communication technologies including internet and mobile telephony along with convergence technologies, women can broaden the scope of their actions and address issues which were previously not available to them.

• ICT tools can come in handy for operating in the public domain virtually as they open up alternate and easier channels for women to communicate without moving outside their homes or village
Empowerment and information access

- access to information can be seen as a central issue concerning empowerment of women
- Women’s low social status, lack of mobility, low education levels, lack of income are barriers to access to information
- impedes the process of their empowerment and democratic participation
Female literacy

• the literacy rate in the among male is 75.85% and among female is 54.16% with a gender gap of 21.69% in the year 2001

• enrolment in primary education has steadily increased, there is a steady drop in retention of girls in the later stages. While the drop out rates for both boys and girls has steadily decreased over the years, the drop out rate for girls still stands at 58.61%
Urban rural disparity in literacy

• The female urban-rural literacy gap still remains high in 2001 with urban literacy at 73.20% and rural literacy at 46.70%

• Notable rural urban gap in literacy
Rural female literacy gap

- education and literacy are low for both men and women in rural areas in India, but women’s overall literacy rate is only 54.6%, compared to men’s 75.8%
- Women are more disadvantaged
- More Women not able to afford IT Education
Reasons for poor female literacy and high dropout among girls

• Gender based inequality rooted in socio cultural norms and attitudes

• Social discrimination and economic exploitation

• Lower enrolment of girls in schools.
Socio cultural norms

- Compulsion to work at home and engagement in domestic chores
- High cost of education to family
- Fear of sexual harassment
- Early marriage and pregnancy
- Long travel distance for higher stages of education
- Lack of transport facilities
- Son preference
Work Force Participation

• Women in India make up 31% of the official workforce. Women comprised 19% of the information technology work force in India, primarily within the software sector. Women comprise 37% of the employees in IT-enabled service sector

• The proportion of women in the Indian IT services workforce is rising steadily
• Women tend to be concentrated in end-user, lower skilled IT jobs related to word processing or data entry and make up small percentages of managerial, maintenance and design personnel in networks, operating systems or software. The lack of mobility is one of the major constraints to women’s ability to participate in the IT work force in India.
Infrastructure related problems

• Poor infrastructure a problem for both men and women in India
• Inadequacy of communications infrastructure and the higher costs of telephone and Internet connections affects both men and women
• A pronounced rural urban bias in implementation of IT programs
Online male female ratio

- The online male female ratio is estimated to change to 60:40 by 2007-08 from the current 68:32
- Of those Indians who could access the Internet in India in the year 2000, only 23% were women.
- Not representative of women in the country as a whole, but a part of a small, urban educated elite
- Cost, language and content factor
Women more disadvantaged

- obstacles greater for women
- More women than men live in the rural areas of developing countries, where infrastructure is less developed than in urban areas.
- Within poor households, women are the poorest of the poor. They have less access to money in the family than men
- In literacy and education, girls and women lag behind men
- Girls are far less likely to have the scientific and technical education needed to benefit fully from information technology policies.
Disadvantages for women

- Social and cultural norms work against women in accessing the limited facilities that are available.
- Women globally suffer from an overload of demands on their time far more than men.
- Lack of contextual information-use skills also has a gender dimension, since women’s isolation gives them fewer or limited opportunities to access information or to broaden their range of comprehension.
General and particular disadvantages

• In general low levels of literacy, little access and control over economic resources, low decision-making power, cultural attitudes and gender blind approaches to development

• Specific to the ICT enabled knowledge networking processes, women still face huge imbalances in the ownership, control and regulation of these new information technologies, similar to those faced in other areas. (UNIFEM, 2000).
The crucial question

- the question of where and how women can gain access to ICT becomes central to the knowledge networking processes.
- The role of intermediary organizations in facilitating connectivity by providing community based technological interface for the networking process
Gender Integration and mainstreaming

• While national and state governments in India have comprehensive IT and Women policies, the two are often found to be mutually exclusive

• the need of gender mainstreamed frameworks and spaces for the growth of engendered ICT-models. This however may be a matter of time and willingness to adopt.
Need for ICT integration with development programmes

- Only access to and use of ICT however is not a complete solution
- Need for judicious integration with health, education and poverty alleviation programs and services for it to be an effective tool of an inclusive e-governance process in which women are able to participate fully.
• Thank You

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