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## MODERN ICT AND GENDER EQUALITY: BRIDGING GENDER GAPS THROUGH ICT

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### Abstract

The modern world cannot deny the role that technology plays in its global realm. Technology has left an indelible mark in this modern world. It has brought a remarkable change globally and has led to a new revolution. The basics of how we think, we live, and the way we work have been completely transformed today by technology. One cannot examine the extent to which technology has led to these changes not only in the technological arena but also in social, political, and economic areas and aims to improve things holistically and bring development globally. ICT serves as a major tool in achieving gender equality and across the globe various countries have distinguished it as an effective tool in accelerating gender equality and development. ICT thus serves to bring equality by focusing not only on education but also on society's cultural and institutional frameworks. These cultural frameworks decide the role of genders that they play. Thus, it aims to bring a revolution by demystifying these cultural and institutional notions which shape individuals and

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Anu Books, India

Gender Roles and Green Concepts: Pathways to Environmental Sustainability

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31995/Book.AB302-F24.Chapter1>

promote equality and parity in education by shattering the notions that do not let women come out of their closets. Girls belonging to families where the tendency of their parents does not allow them to finish their school education and where they are not expected to work outside their home consequently hinder their growth and the benefits of education do not reach their doors. The perception that women's value is less impedes their ability to work and fully participate in the economy. Hence, the use of ICT creates an atmosphere of equality in every field. Irrespective of gender and any physical environment, ICT serves to bring equal access and opportunity to every individual globally.

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**Keywords**

Gender, equality, e-governance, culture, revolution, education, development.

**Introduction**

Achieving gender equality is a major challenge that the world has been facing for decades. The problem has been in existence for ages and has been continuing since then. The modern society that we consider as information society is a result of industrialization and revolution which has been brought up by what we call today as ICT and is the most debated phenomena in recent times. The modern world is an era of the internet which is evolving in this new age and leading to various changes and serves to bring a revolution in every by bringing equality and parity in every sphere of our life.

Gender equality is a major phenomenon that has been in existence since time immemorial. It is the most discussed topic in the modern world. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights defines gender equality as "Gender equality refers to the view that men and women should receive equal treatment and should not be discriminated against based on gender unless there is a sound biological reason for different treatment."

We may refer to the term gender equality as sexual equality, it refers to the idea that there should be no biasedness in terms of gender amongst individuals and one should not be barred of certain things based on his or her identity. Equal access in terms of social, economic, political and cultural aspects is what it serves to achieve. It serves to promote the idea of easiness in access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making regardless of one's gender. Promoting gender equality is a major step that needs to be addressed on a global realm and is an essential component to achieve an effective economic, social and human development. The World Bank 2003 describes it as "There is now a shared understanding within the development community that development policies fail to address disparities between males and females will have limited effectiveness and serious cost implications."

The fifth sustainable goal of the United Nations describes gender equality and targets equal opportunity for females globally. The UNFPA says, "Research also demonstrated how working with men and boys as well as women and girls to promote gender equality contribute to achieving Health and development outcomes." For better health, education, jobs and opportunities ICT can be leveraged by women. SDG 5 aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. It calls for an enhanced use of technology- ICT in particular- to promote and enhance the empowerment of women worldwide. To put these ideas into action the International Chamber of Commerce has teamed up with UN Women - the global champion for gender equality- to host a side event during the HLPF. The event, Accelerating Women's Economic Empowerment to Achieve the 2030 Agenda will showcase the global efforts stakeholders have embarked on to bring women's economic empowerment to the forefront of all the SDG targets.

ICT serves to be an effective tool for economic development by virtue of its characteristics which makes it an effective means through which gender equality can be improved and promoted. An ICT-enabled environment calls for an awareness about gender equality amongst the masses. Its various concepts like e-marketing, e-governance by using internet have envisaged the idea of gender equality

into practice. By putting into action its important concepts it improves the lives of women and their families and promotes the idea of gender equality globally. The role of ICT is indelible in this modern world since it allows an increased flow of information and knowledge and provides exposure to the customs, norms, and practices of other cultures and societies. This awareness leads to an increase in awareness about gender inequality and concepts related to it. It turns out to be a valuable tool in positively changing people's attitudes regarding gender equality and its various programs

ICTs are playing a very crucial role in promoting gender equality across the globe. The role of new information and communication technologies (ICT) and e-commerce in driving the global economy is widely recognized, as ICTs and the internet reach out to many people and have global coverage. It is efficient in terms of cost and time and therefore provides more opportunities and convenience. In developing countries, the use of ICT and e-governance, e-commerce, seems to be particularly attractive to women who are now able to unveil their veil and come out and speak for themselves.

### **Gender Inequality and Its Forms**

The unequal treatment of boys and girls or discrimination based on gender is what we call gender inequality. To describe in simple terms gender inequality is the social phenomenon in which people face unequal treatment on the grounds of their gender and sex. It is caused due to gender discrimination and sexism that goes on in society amongst individuals. This discrimination can occur based on various grounds like biological, cultural, economic or social. It is not confined to certain people but also affects the non-binary as well. On a large scale, we find that women are affected by this distinction the most. It weakens women in a plethora of ways and affects their life in many ways including education and health.

Gender inequality is a multifaceted issue that concerns men and women alike. It considers men and women as different and not the same thus not providing equal opportunities and access in life. Women are disadvantaged in many areas where they can excel and are left

behind men making them inferior in certain ways. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 aims to enhance the use of technology to promote the empowerment of women. Modern ICT provides opportunities to tackle gender inequality and allows women to embrace digital technology, e-governance more than men on a large scale. It thus provides the impoverished an equal amount of access and opportunities in education, employment, health, participation, and safety services.

### **Gender Inequality in Education**

Gender bias in education is one of the prevailing problems that are being discussed in a global realm. This biasedness in education leaves a long-term consequence on students' lives. Gender stereotypes affect the lives of children deeply on a very large scale. By the mark of this biasness, their self-esteem is affected at large. It is considered that education is a tool that enables an individual to come up with knowledge and experience and succeed in life. But this does not always remain the same because of the gender gaps that exist in our society and which debarred individuals from achieving the knowledge that they need to be successful in life. Education allows individuals to gain knowledge so that they go ahead in every field. Despite progress in every field in recent years, gender equality remains a pervasive issue around the world. The male-centric attitude continues and makes it a challenge for women to achieve knowledge and compete with others. In the present context, the use of ICT has enabled women to come out and achieve education as their formal right. But this isn't sufficient until we equate it with other aspects of education where we see male-centric environment being dominant largely. Since the curriculum and the language are always male-centric it does not let women have equal rights and let them act passively. True equality in education requires the development of specific and effective guarantees to ensure that female students are provided with access to the same curricula and other educational and scholarship opportunities as male students.

Providing equal access to education and resources and a proper curriculum which is not male-centric is what gender equality aims at.

The textbooks and the curriculum in the schools and colleges which are gender biased are another reason for inequality in education since they propagate the same ideas that they adhere. The textbooks and the teaching materials which are designed from a male-centric attitude also display a sense of inequality since it does not take into consideration both sexes equally. To achieve equity and parity in education we need to dismantle gender inequality at its grassroots level and provide equal access to education facilities, and curricula to both males and females. The curriculum, teaching materials and textbooks and management, which are directly male-centered become a hurdle in achieving equality. Educational reforms aim to outcast these notions which propagate these stereotypical ideas of inequality thus making education an individual's fundamental right. The Right to Education Act 2009 in India makes education a basic right of an individual. To tackle this problem, it has made primary education free and compulsory for all children between 6 to 14 years regardless of their gender.

### **Gender Bias in Labor Work and Wages**

Certain practices like biased recruiting strategies in the workplace and discrimination in wages based on gender continue to limit the development of an economy. These biased practices limit women's success and lead to their less participation in the economic development of a society. Women no doubt earn lower wages comparatively to men. Since this earning defines their role in the economy therefore their role is underrated or underrepresented in high positions in the market. This situation is not limited to women but to the third gender also at large. Since they do not identify themselves as either so their role in the economy becomes far less comparatively to men and women. A society which does not consider them normal does not let them come out and speak for themselves and participate in the economy's development.

Throughout the workplace, there are traces of gender bias even in the language of the job description the language used is gendered. Our society places the role of caregivers to women and the caregiving responsibilities of children and adults are placed on women's shoulders

as a result they are less involved in tough decision makings and let their work be limited to household chores. The value of work that women take is considered less comparatively. The AAUW reports that occupational segregation accounts for up to 51% of the disparity between men's and women's earnings. Around the world, we see that ICT has brought a massive revolution and its usage in the workplace provides women with knowledge and information that helps them achieve their rights. With the use of ICT information has reached even resource-poor and non-literate women who were once debarred of knowledge. ICT has made it easy for them to fight for their rights not only in society but also in their workplaces.

### **Gender Bias in Health Care and Survival Needs**

Biasness in healthcare is a fatal issue. This is a widespread problem that depicts the biased attitude of the researchers, doctors, patients, nurses and other medical staff and administrators of the healthcare department. Worldwide we see that gender bias exists in every field including medicines as well and this is more common with women who face this at large. The United Nation 2020 report found that close to 90% of all people have some form of gender bias against women. Inequality in medical research also reinforces gender bias and a lack of awareness about disparity and inequality fuels gender bias. Gender bias can cause knowledge gaps amongst individuals as a result of which we find less inclusivity in medical care. These gaps lead to less knowledge about other sex than males because of the gendered practiced environment which favors males over females and other sex. This ultimately leads to a lack in the diagnosis and medical care provided to females and other sex. According to WHO, "the health of women and girls is of particular concern because, in almost all societies, they are disadvantaged by discrimination rooted in sociocultural factors, such as unequal power relationships between men and women, experience of physical, sexual and emotional violence, and an exclusive focus on women's reproductive role." Technology and Information society has been considered a boon in healthcare and medical practices. It has served as a tool that has given us access to healthcare and has

reduced the gender gaps in the medical sector to a certain extent that there seems a close in the gender gaps in the upcoming years. Digital technology has the potential to increase people's ability to have access to healthcare and medical facilities while also reducing its cost and making it cost-effective. E-health is a major step that has been taken into practice to reduce gender bias in the healthcare sector.

### **Causes of Gender Inequality**

The roots of gender inequality lie in gender bias and social norms that restrict women's rights and opportunities. Around the world, we see that gender inequality still exists and it gives birth to various problems that down the line cause decay to humanity. The Human Rights Careers describes that around the world women still have less access to education than men. 1/4 of young women between 15 -24 will not finish primary school. That group makes up 58% of the people not completing basic education. Of all the illiterate people in the world, 2/3 are women. When girls are not educated on the same level as boys, it has a huge effect on their future and the kinds of opportunities they are about to get in their lives. The causes of gender inequality are many and they vary according to cultural factors. The major causes worth mentioning are listed below:

- Uneven access to education
- Patriarchal society
- Discrimination
- Lack of awareness
- Poverty
- Racism
- Societal mindsets
- Lack of advanced facilities

### **Gender and ICT**

The role that ICTs play in running the world's economy is widely evident. It has covered all the four corners of this world and has led to massive change globally. Its time and cost-effective quality



have made it a significant tool in bringing a revolution by facilitating access to markets, information, technology, knowledge, and health. Women in the initial days if we consider did not have access to resources that could bring an upliftment in their lives. The ICT world has brought an immense change in the lives of women by facilitating access to resources and lives they expect to live. ICT provides a substantial amount of access to everyone irrespective of their gender. It offers new opportunities to all genders specifically women who were lacking behind since their potential was hidden by the so-called social standards. Female entrepreneurs are now able to come out with their ideas to improve their lives and standards globally. It thus promotes gender equality and encourages women's participation in the economy and its development.

### **ICT and Women Empowerment**

ICTs serve as a major tool for the empowerment of women globally. It serves to fill the existing gender gaps in the society. ICT has immense potential to create new employment opportunities and facilities for women across the world. It plays a significant role in the empowerment of women. "Gender dimensions of ICT- in terms of access and use, capacity-building opportunities, employment: are explicitly identified and addressed; ICT can be a powerful catalyst for the political and social empowerment of women, and the promotion of gender equality."

Access to ICT has provided women an equal chance to come forward and work equally with men for the development of a nation. One of the major aims of ICT is to encourage the participation of men and women equally in the decision-making process. Without access to ICT one cannot imagine the equal access that women get as a result of this revolution. In countries where female literacy is a barrier additional investment is needed to uplift women by educating them and training them with an access to ICT. Empowerment is a multidimensional aspect of society. It is a degree of autonomy and self-determination that enables people to represent their interests systematically and become more confident in preserving and claiming one's rights. ICT has empowered

women in a plethora of ways by providing inclusion in social, economic, political, technological, and agricultural areas. The United Nations Population Information Network (UNPOPIN) defines women empowerment as having five major components:

- Women's sense of self-worth
- Their right to have and to determine choices
- Their right to have access to opportunities and resources
- Their right to have the power to control their own life
- Their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social, economic order, nationally and internationally.

### **Improving Gender Equality with the Use of ICT**

ICT has immense potential to create new employment and a great scope for people to develop in every major area they fall behind due to any factor. It creates an atmosphere where one can look forward and present his or her views unhesitatingly. With the advent of modernization and the use of ICT, a new atmosphere has been developed where public opinions are influenced positively. Women are benefitted the most since ICT promotes equality in every field and encourages women to pursue their education. Education provides them an equal chance to grow and develop in their respective fields. E-learning is an important aspect that has been prevalent in this modern world. It has laid a new foundation in the field of education which has offered a chance to learn.

### **Conclusion**

ICT has laid a huge mark in this modern world. Its traces can be seen in the basic aspects of our life. It has dominated our lives by becoming a part and parcel of our lives. By providing us with everything in hand and making things friendlier and more compatible for us it has leveraged man with extra potential to do things effectively. When it comes to its uses its applications are on a large level since it dominates every area we are associated with. The COVID-19 pandemic which took place in the year 2020 made ICT a boon for the

world. Since the entire world was caught up by this pandemic which took place globally ICT served the masses in every possible way. The entire economy went down with an increase in the death ratios and many lost their jobs. ICT made it possible for the masses to work online and fulfill their needs. It promoted the idea of equality in basic life routines. By giving women a sense of empowerment ICT has made their status in life equally important. Empowering women has made them self-reliant and has put into action the aim of gender equality to be fulfilled. Gender equality aims to enhance the role and status of women in life and their participation in the digital economy by which we can achieve greater social, political, and economic independence and development globally.

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