BUILDING CAPABILITIES OF WOMEN THROUGH E-GOVERNANCE AT THE GRASSROOTS: A CASE STUDY OF GHAZIABAD DISTRICT, U.P

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CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND POLICY SUGGESTIONS

The study " Building Capabilities of Women through Electronic Governance at the Grassroots: A Case Study of Ghaziabad District, U.P" attempts to address significant issues related to the impact of electronic governance in enhancing the capabilities of women. For centuries, women in India have been subordinated to men and socially oppressed. The various religious practises in India, as well as personal laws based on them, consigned women to a status inferior to that of men. Before independence, women did not have an important existence of her own; she existed for men and always played the second fiddle to them. Till present day, the social and economic status of Indian women has been changed to a considerable extent but their condition is not yet satisfactory. Too often, women are not treated as ends in their right, persons with a dignity that deserves respect from laws and institutions. Instead, they are treated as mere instruments of the ends of others – reproducers, caregivers, sexual outlets, agents of a family's general prosperity. In this respect, unequal social and political circumstances give women unequal human capabilities. There is a need to ensure women empowerment and to enhance their capabilities through the medium of electronic governance

Conceptual Framework of the Study:

Earlier studies conducted on electronic governance in general and its impact on women in particular have identified several issues such as the design of electronic - governance policies and strategies, delivery of basic e-services, e-participation of citizens and more specifically of marginalized groups, women and youth access to ICTs. Few studies have investigated the impact of the women's attitude towards the acceptance of new technology. The majority of the studies were carried out in developed and developing countries. Nancy J. Hafki and Sophia Huyer stated that ICTs has provided opportunities to women so that they can improve their incomes and become aware of their rights. There were many illustrative studies from Africa, Asia, and Latin America that emphasize on the possibilities for women's empowerment

through ICTs [236]. Farida Umrani and Rehana Ghadially were of the opinion that ICT permits access to information and resources that encourage women to acquire education, and skills to transcend social restrictions, gain control and thus get empowered. However they also highlighted that there is an uneven distribution of these technologies within societies as well as across the world which have given rise to a new form of poverty that created two groups one that has abundant information (Technocrats or rich class) and other which lack the access to information (poor and common masses). They stated that divide occur across race, ethnic group, class, age religion and gender. Lacks of access to ICT become a significant factor that have marginalised women to participate in economic, social and political sphere[237]. Marilyn Carr argues that ICT are an important tool for women empowerment, in particular. According to him, critics of ICT points out to the pressings needs of women in developing countries for safe, water, food, improved health, and better education rather than access to ICT. Some emerging studies support these arguments and indicate that ICTs could be a tool for women's active participation in improving their economic and social situations[238].

Nath presented a formal model of the role of ICT in building capabilities of women leading to their empowerment. The author explains that, ICT in the context of knowledge societies is understood as building the ability and skills of women to gain insight of actions and issues in the external environment which influence them and to build their capacity to get involved and voice their concerns in these external processes, and make informed decisions. He points out that this entails building the capacities of women to overcome social and institutional barriers, and strengthening their participation in the economic and political processes to improve their quality of lives. Nath's model implies that women's access to strategic information leads to their empowerment. Though the model takes cognizance of the various conceptualization processes that information goes through in the women's system, it does not take into consideration various inhibiting factors and obstacles that could affect women's

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[236] Nancy Hafkin & Sophia Huyer, Cinderella or Cyberella? Empowering Women in the Knowledge Society, UK: Kumarian Press, 2006.

[237] Farida Umrani & Rehana Ghadially, " Empowering Women through ICT Education: Facilitating Computer Adoption", Gender Technology and Development", Vol. 7, No.3, 2003, pp. 359-377.

[238] Marilyn Carr & Sophia Huyer, "Information and Communication Technologies: A Priority for Women" Gender, Technology and Development, Vol.6, No.1 , 2002, pp 85-100.

empowerment. The implicit assumption that access to strategic information automatically empowers a rural household is critical factors that focus on hierarchical cultural structure within which rural women function. Furthermore, there is no indication of how the needed information is to be acquired and who is to pay for it. The essence of empowerment is the ability to use information in making choices that supposedly would influence future participation in policy to alleviate poverty[239].

Despite these observations about the model, it must be pointed out that Nath is one of the few authors rigorously to define the theoretical underpinnings of ICT and rural adult education. Rao raises the issues of the role of women in the development process. Women according to him need to be empowered through the government sponsored schemes and programmes. The writer discusses economic reforms and its impact on the women. He was of the opinion that the policy responses are required to incorporate gender concerns into the design of economic reforms. He suggested that it can be achieved both through gender aware economic planning and by increasing the accountability of policy making to women[240].

The study on "Building Capabilities of Women at the Grassroots through Electronic Governance: A Case Study of Ghaziabad District" attempts to bridge the gap by understanding the importance of capability in women's life and its relationship with empowerment. In rural areas, women have been burdened with traditional expectation of a particular role in the family and society. She lacks freedom of taking independent decisions due to the low levels of education and patriarchal structure of society. Hence, the access toICT becomes a central issue that is necessary for women's empowerment. Extreme poverty and poor IT infrastructure in rural areas, where the majority of Indian women reside, further restrict women's access to education and information technology. Such an iniquitous position of women has contributed enormously to the slow pace of development in India. The issue of gender equity is not a supplement to development and e-governance. In the adoption and usage pattern of a system, the topic of e-governance is a new and emerging one,

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[239]   V. Nath , " Empowerment and governance through information and communication technologies: Women's perspective" Retrieved on November 2, 2013 from http://www.cddc.vt.edu/knownet/articles/womenandICT.htm.

[240]   M.K Rao, Empowerment of Women in India, New Delhi: Discovery Publication, 2005.

especially if one examines this pattern within the context of rural areas. The study has given greater attention to the supply side of e-government related to the issues of strategies and policy evaluation to derive the qualitative analysis.

The survey of the literature on the electronic governance and women revealed that only a few attempts have been made to study the importance of capability building of women and methods through which situation of women is improved. Some of the surveys give a very bleak picture of the participation of women in the electronic governance programs. There have been numerous theoretical studies but not a particular case study to brief out the capability building in women for the actual empowerment of women to study through the lens of electronic governance. Hence, this very particular aspect differentiates the study with the other scholars who have done work on this particular subject. Hence, Ghaziabad district was undertaken to study the particular dimension. The objective of the study was to understand the relevance and impact of electronic governance in the lives of rural women. The rural women have to face some of the problems related to poverty, illiteracy, sexual abuse, child marriage and domestic violence. It becomes imperative to understand their social and economic background to analyze, the role of technology and its benefits to women. The role of electronic governance has been significant in providing information to women related to education, health, employment and hence empowering them to develop their political and economic capabilities. The research has focused on the gender responsive governance that demands participation of women at all levels of governance. The active involvement of women and ensuring greater transparency and accountability to them in the governance process has been significant.

The Purpose of the Study:

The present study was undertaken to examine the factors associated with the use of information technology and identifies its impact on the lives of women at the grassroots. One of the objectives of the study was to identify the awareness level of women about the knowledge of internet on computers/ mobile to access government services. Majority of the women respondents were not aware of the benefits of Information and Communication Technology. They stated that they are engaged in the agriculture and household activities; that negates them to learn computers.

Further another objective was to identify the common problems faced by women in using the e-governance services. Field survey revealed that rural women face many problems of poverty, illiteracy, and economic backwardness, patriarchal values and norms that restrict women to use technology. Many other factors that hamper women access to computers are lack of training programme, non-availability of kiosks in the village and lack of transport and communication facilities to reach Lokvani Kendras. Women find it difficult to benefit from them due to the existing limitations of a male dominated society. It is assumed by the government that electronic governance projects will benefit women and men equally, but the ground reality is that there is an unequal access to electronic governance schemes for men and women.

Further the study revealed that the majority of the rural women have a negative perception about the use of Information and Communication Technology and its impact on women. They stated   that they are   constantly reminded by the male members of what they should or should not be interested in, and where their strengths lie. The decision to access internet on mobile or computers is also regulated by the male member of the family. Majority of rural women respondents stated that they had access Lokvani Kendras for availing government services.

The study also revealed that many of the young rural women respondents have accessed the internet for receiving information related to their education or employment. Majority of them stated that proper training for using computers have been a part of the curriculum in their schools and colleges. They were of the opinion that internet has been their part of the life. They were also using social networking sites from that they were able to get updates regarding government policies and schemes. They were positive about this technological innovation and believed that it is an essential medium for social change. They also stated that the government should provide basic infrastructure in rural areas so that more women use it and in return leads to their capability building. According to the focus group discussions, many rural women have seen this as a good opportunity to establish connections with government authorities to access services online.

Further, an attempt was made to understand the circumstances under which women operates internet to access the government services. Firstly, the question was whether there has been the impact of electronic governance on rural women in the areas of

education, employment and participation in decision-making. Secondly, whether the usage of electronic governance brought any change in women's life and to what extent male have been supportive of the use of technology by women. The foremost challenge faced by the women in Indian society is related to its social and economic exploitation. The patriarchal society has subordinated and oppressed women and has prevented them to take independent decisions. In rural areas, the condition of women is worse due to their economic backwardness and persisting levels of poverty and inequality. Given the low literacy rates of these disadvantaged groups of women they are denied information that is legitimately due to them. In such a scenario, even the creation of the structure of participation (reservation) does not itself ensure that such structures will function effectively. Information and awareness ensure that exploitation can be fought and reduced and in that sense, awareness is empowerment. Women must not merely recognise that they are disadvantaged, but must also be aware of what they can do legally, peacefully and constructively to overcome their oppression. The role of technology in accelerating the process of socio-economic development accepted as key mover by policy makers, social workers and practitioners of technology. Though women, adds to the family income by carrying out economic activities in organised and unorganised sectors, as well as household activities, most of her activities are not given importance, and she is oppressed in the social system. Therefore, it is pertinent to develop appropriate technology for women. Any strategy aimed at rural development will be incomplete without involving the womenfolk or without having a programme content aimed at raising their socio-economic status. It was in the light of this that the role of electronic governance as a medium of interaction between citizen and government is significant. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the implication of electronic governance for the women living in rural areas.

Hypothesis:

The following hypothesis were formulated and tested during the course of the study:

a) **Electronic-governance is an essential medium through which the capabilities of women could be enhanced resulting in their empowerment.**

The objective of electronic governance was to empower women at all levels. Majority of the young women respondents stated that they have access to internet through mobiles/computers. They were of the opinion that ICT has made their life easy by providing them an opportunity to become an active participant in the governance process. They have used the government website for the application of birth and death certificate, information about land records, health facilities, income, and caste certificate. Further, they stated that ICT is one of the medium through which government information is obtained, and complaints can be registered about any administrative failure. They believed that electronic governance has enhanced the decision-making capacity of women and increased their legal awareness. Rural women respondents stated that they had become knowledgeable and informed of government initiatives through the use of ICT. Further, they have accessed government websites to know more about issues such as the names of the local officials and their roles and responsibilities, working hours of government application forms available for download, latest rules and regulations. They were positive about the provision of this basic information to them that enhanced their greater awareness about governance issues leading to their increased participation in the political process. It can be observed from the above analysis that building capabilities of women is important to overcome social and institutional barriers. Hence, it leads to their participation in economic and political processes for an overall improvement in the quality of their lives. The above arguments justify the hypothesis that electronic governance is an essential medium through which the capabilities of women could be enhanced resulting in their empowerment

b) **Electronic governance makes a positive impact on the life of the women.**

Majority of the women respondents stated that electronic governance have benefited women in many areas and have made their life easier than before. They

were of the opinion that ICT has promoted their participation in political and democratic process through information about electoral processes. They find it convenient to get information about the candidates and election procedure. They stated that ICT-enabled education has benefitted them for accruing educational opportunities at both formal and informal levels. Most of the women respondents have accessed online education courses on many subjects that have enhanced their lifelong learning. The availability of computers in schools and colleges has offered many opportunities for the women so that they can develop the skills required for computer literacy programmes. Women members have accessed internet for employment opportunities and by making direct contact with the employers. Many women members have received training for the operation of the internet at formal and informal level that has made them self-independent. The women respondents stated that they had accessed government websites in the areas of health, nutrition, mobilization and the policy recommendation. They reported that through the use of ICT they have tried to overcome social and institutional barriers and have enhanced their participation in bureaucratic, economic and political processes. They further stated that that electronic governance initiative ensures transparency and accountability in the administrative system. Hence, hypothesis that is electronic governance had a positive impact on the lives of women is considered valid.

a) **Through electronic governance women can become economically independent**.

It was observed that, in the urban areas the availability of economic opportunities is much greater in number in comparison to rural areas. In rural areas, the major part is done by   women i.e. domestic works, reproduction and childbearing that is not recognised as an economic productive work. Though National E-governance Plan (NEGP) seeks to lay the foundation for many electronic governance projects in rural areas to provide economic opportunities to women but it has not been able to work successfully at the ground level. Women's economic opportunities are linked directly to women's access to land, labour, financial and product markets. Majority of rural women respondents claim that, they did not receive any benefit from the electronic governance schemes to enhance their economic opportunities. Many of the women that were surveyed did not appreciate the

potential of technology to facilitate the work from their houses . The major reason of their economic dependence on male members is that women have no control over the finances of the home, or they do not have sufficient personal income. Only few women respondents who have received training in computer literacy have access the website for finding alternative ways for economic opportunities. Majority of the women respondents stated that they had no experience of online access to paid jobs that can enhance their economic status. Further women respondents indicated that they were more concerned about their traditional gender role of taking care of their domestic responsibilities. Majority of the male respondents disfavour the strategy of women's economic independence through electronic governance. Male respondents stated that women should only perform their traditional roles that are only limited to the family matters. Hence, hypothesis that through electronic governance, women can become economically independent stands invalid.

b) **Electronic governance enables women to operate within the conservative patriarchal structure in an efficient manner.**

Drawing on the experiences of the women respondents it was felt that the patriarchal structure restricted women's access to new technology. Many of the incidents have showed that patriarchy culture have been reinforced on rural electronic governance. Women were not allowed to go alone to the Lokvani centres; male used to accompany her to these centres. It was observed that the male member of the family had knowledge about the use of computers and mobile to access online information. But in the case of women, they were not encouraged to learn and receive trainings regarding short term computer literacy programmes. It was observed that the work of women sarpancha was performed by the male members of the family. During the survey, there was an indication of negligible role of women sarpancha in rural governance. Majority of the women respondents stated that major decisions related to the access of technology are taken by the male member of the family. Although the survey shows that women's have capacity to learn, but it was found that due to women less role in decision making in the family, they are not able to take an independence stance. Majority of the

male members did not favour or encourage their women to use computers or mobiles. Women are still subordinated in the families and decisions are enforced on them. This shows that the patriarchy is still a common norm in rural areas. Hence the hypothesis electronic governance enables women to operate within the conservative patriarchal structure in an efficient manner is considered to be invalid.

Methodology and Data Collection:

In order to test the hypothesis and to realise the objectives of the study, an empirical study was undertaken in the district of Ghaziabad. The reason behind the selection of the district was that, it has become the first electronically governed district of Uttar Pradesh. The objective of the initiative was to create computer awareness amongst the people. The stress on computerising of the government department for better administration was given priority. Lokvani Kendra was established so that even rural population can receive benefits of Information and Communication Technology. Male and women respondents were interviewed in Ghaziabad district of urban and rural area. Under the rural setup, agricultural labourers, housewives, artisans, small business, servicewomen were covered. In the urban area working women, housewives, business running women were interviewed. Of the total households in the entire sample, 233 female respondents and 232 male respondents were interviewed. Particulars of family members, workers, education level, nature of the female headedness, labour force participation, internet users, income and household expenditure have been analysed. In the rural areas, Two-stage sampling design was adopted and in the urban areas, multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted to obtain desired results. Data was collected both through primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources comprised of published, unpublished reports, books, articles, journals, newspapers. Data from the primary sources was collected through interview schedule, focused group discussions, and case studies. The interview schedule that was prepared was semi-structured in nature having closed-ended questions. Three sets of interview schedules were prepared having close-ended questions, one for the officials, pradhan and male/women respondents. The purpose of collecting data was to see how far the people in the district were aware of ICT and to what extent it has

helped the women in social and economic development. In order to understand the basic arguments of the study. The study has been divided into six chapters.

Chapterisation

The first chapter namely "Theoretical Framework of the Study " is introductory in nature that highlights the problems faced by women in the patriarchal structure that have oppressed and subordinated women. It is argued that electronic governance is one of the medium through which the citizens can access to government services. In rural areas, Panchayati Raj is a form of political institutions through which government schemes and projects are implemented at the grassroots level.The issues of the capability approach, women empowerment, electronic governance and Panchayati Raj have been discussed in detailed.

The second chapter "Research Design" outlines the research methodology that is adopted for the study. Hypothesis, objectives of the study, data collection, sample and locale of the study: Ghaziabad District. Socio-economic antecedent and intervening factors are briefed.

The third chapter "Gender Perspectives on Capability Approach: Contributions of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum" explain in detail the notion of capability that has been associated with the concept of functioning, agency, freedom and well – being of an individual. The chapter discusses the comparative analysis of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum capability approach.

The fourth chapter "Empowerment of Women through Electronic Governance: A Case Study of Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh " highlights the fundamental concern of electronic governance as a tool for empowering women. Empowering women means that they should be provided social, economic, and political opportunities so that they can become self-independent. A study of Ghaziabad has been discussed in detailed.

The fifth chapter "Empirical Analysis and Critical Evaluation" reviews the study of empirical data collected during the field study. The statistical tabulation has been used extensively for the explanation of the antecedent and intervening factors of the study. SPSS have been used extensively to derive the result and outcome of the study.

Findings of the Study

It was observed that in the district of Ghaziabad only a few women had access to the government delivery services through Lokvani Kendras (Jan Suvidha Kendra) which is a single window system that provides services related to birth, ,income caste and death certificates, information regarding health , land records and pension schemes to the people. The participation of women in making personal use of computers or mobiles in households for availing services of electronic governance was amply visible. The women living in rural areas were more engage in agriculture activities. The significant findings of the study are as follows. The case study, however, provides a mixed picture of success and failure in the implementation of E-governance in Ghaziabad district. The findings of the study are as follows:

Majority of women residing in rural area women are engaged in agriculture, either as cultivators or labourers as compared to other male workers. One of the major attributes of women engaged in agriculture is their low level of educational attainment. The overall picture that emerges from the survey is that one of the greater disadvantages is for women in general and those belonging to rural as well as SCs/STs, in particular. The other factors that are limited access to resources and low level of education and skills. It is revealed from the study that these are the important reasons for the presence of women workers in the agriculture sectors. Most of the women respondents were illiterate and suffers from many handicaps such as burden of household responsibilities, inadequate health and education services, domestic violence and control of finances by a male member of the family

In Ghaziabad district, only twenty percent of people possess computers and laptops at home. The remaining seventy-nine percent do not possess the same, even though the district is proud of having average literacy rate as high as seventy-eight percent. These figures indicate that although Ghaziabad is a hub of educational institutions, majority of the people do not have laptops or computers at their home. From the field survey, it was noted that in urban areas , there was no gender distinctions as women were an active participant in using internet services for maintaining records or for accessing any government information. In rural areas, as most of the women are illiterate and engage in agriculture activities, the usage of computers for public services was less. Only young women have been equipped with the knowledge and

use of computers due to the facilities provided by the schools where students were provided basic information about skill development through the use of internet It is observed that only a few percent of people use computers and laptops in their day to day work. This indicates that rural women are still lagging behind in the use of computers and laptops. In rural areas, there are very few kiosks through which people can access computers. Women respondents stated that they had to go to Lokvani Centre for accessing the electronic governance services with regard to obtaining caste, birth, and death certificates. Due to the long distance of villages from these centres it creates difficulty for women to commute and regularly use these services.

During the field survey, it was observed that Pradhans/Sarpanch of selected villages in the four blocks in Ghaziabad district did not favour the empowerment of women through ICT. They believed that the role of women in household is significant because they have the major domestic responsibilities. However, they agree that Lokvani plays a significant role because it is through these centres women avail the benefit of public delivery services. The district officials who were interviewed agreed that the computers provided by the government have benefitted them as they regularly use internet, update their websites and provide government information online. They gave a positive feedback regarding empowerment of women through ICT. They stated that many women are working in government offices and are trained in using computers. They also reported that they have started implementing many e-governance programme namely Mahiti Manthana for promoting computer literacy for girls in the district to enhance their capabilities.

The field survey has revealed that in rural areas only a few women respondents have used internet on mobile, and they feel that it is an easy way of communication. They have used internet on mobiles/computers for registering complaints, applying for the jobs and booking railways tickets online. However the rural areas did not receive support from government for the promotion of ICT education among the students and youth unlike in the urban areas majority of women, respondents have been benefitted due to the advent of new economic application.

During field survey, in rural areas two hundred sixty-two men were approached for their opinion on the use of internet by women. Only a few of the male respondents

strongly advocated that more and more women should learn and use internet both at home and their workplaces.

The findings also indicated that although there have been many programmes that were implemented by the government at all levels for the benefit of women however women were not able to get any benefits of this programme due to their inferior position in the society. This indicated that government programmes are only visible on the papers, but their actual benefit of the programme to women has been negligible. The study shows that there has been meagre transformation in the lives of women with regard to their self- independence. The female respondents reported that due to the factors, such as gender, traditional beliefs, customs and norms, level of education, socioeconomic status, and physical factors like distance and lack of transportation, etc had a negative impact on their desire to learn computers or mobiles.

The field survey revealed that the majority of the women members could not afford to buy computer or mobile due to the poor economic condition of the family. More than one-third of the women reported that they had to access Lokvani Kendras for availing government services. It was observed that developed community having OBCs population get advantage of computer services, not the areas that were undeveloped having SC population. The differential access by caste groups suggests that the government has failed to provide funds and infrastructure to rural areas to develop the kiosks.

It is clear from the above findings of the case study that progress of ICT application in the district of Ghaziabad inconsistent. Besides, women in the rural areas were lagging behind in most of the benefits of e-governance. The factors that are responsible for sluggish growth of ICT application in the district especially in the rural areas are ignorance, attachment to traditional system, non-availability of hardware, lack of training facilities, lack of coordination etc. Some of the suggestions that are relevant for bringing change in women's life through electronic governance are:

Suggestions and Policy Recommendations

The study attempted to understand the role of electronic governance by enabling online access of government services for rural women. In the light of the above findings the following suggestions and policy recommendations that are relevant

Provide special focus on the role of women in e-governance.

Awareness camps and workshops should be organised for women so that they become aware of their rights. Computer literacy among women is a tool for empowering them politically as well as economically. Self Help Groups also play a meaningful role in spreading awareness about government services in the rural areas.

Regular Awareness programme should be organised.

Training programmes should be initiated to make people aware of the benefits of information technology. Regular awareness campaigns need be organised to generate demand for a change. There should be coordination among all stakeholders, government, public and private sector, citizens, civil society and NGOs that is crucial to the smooth functionings of electronic governance projects and programmes.

Web sites should be made available in local language

It is suggested that websites should be developed in local languages that will be convenient for the people who are not comfortable with english language. A desire to promote change in administrative processes through electronic governance among the government officials is highly recommended. Government should take necessary steps to encourage electronic governance practices to bring transparency and accountability in the administration. Government agencies need to make this task of implementing electronic governance both at the national as well as state level so that people have direct communication with the government.

Financial Assistance by the Government

Financial assistance from the government is needed to ensure smooth working of IT projects. Funds are required for procuring computer infrastructure and internet connectivity. Central government should make funds available for proper implementation of the programs.

Role of Media/ Community Radio Service

The role of media as a medium of spreading awareness among the masses is significant. The social media can be used as a platform to bring about positive changes in women's life and spread awareness about the government services in the rural areas. The changes in the market economy and information on cost of agricultural produce should be provided online which will benefit the agrarian community.