

The empowerment of rural women through Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)Sharareh Khodamoradi¹ and Mohammad Abedi²¹ Department of Agricultural Extension Education, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran² Department of Agricultural Management, Islamic Azad University, Qaemshahr Branch, Iran*Corresponding author: abedi114@yahoo.com

Abstract: Rural women are among those major groups at society who previously were considered less by planners, due to specific reasons in the past. And this problem is more observable at developing countries. While, by looking at women's history of economic and social life, we can find that this great group, continuously have played basic role in forming economic condition of country. This great group consistent with men have had active role at areas of social-economic activities and always have had major part on economic production of society. ICT is now recognized as a technological tool which can serve as a catalytic intervention in respect of transforming the lives and livelihoods of rural families. The economic and income divides between urban and rural areas can be overcome only by the technological upgradation of rural professions.

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Introduction:

Information and Communication Technologies or ICTs as they are collectively called have made enormous strides. In a relatively short period of time of our planet's history, its impact has been felt across the globe and through various strata of society. It would not be bold to say that no one has been left untouched in some way or the other. However, the benefits have not been spread evenly. In fact, this has given rise to a new form of divide often called the "digital divide". Due to the lack of resources and particularly the economic might, the poor never attract the attention and thus never get to draw the full benefit from these emerging developments.

As this book will show, what is ironic is that these very same developments hold the key to massive transformative potential in their lives. There is a window of opportunity for the rural masses and the poor to make a game-change switch. So who would play that catalytic role?

According to some predictions, we are moving into an 'information society' by which few aspects of our lives will remain untouched. It is claimed we will have access to unlimited quantities of information; we will be able to watch any number of TV channels from all over the world; we will do our shopping and banking from home. Still deeper changes will take place in society. For example, we are told patterns of employment will change - we will be able to work from home, choosing how and when we work. We are told that the cause of these unprecedented transformations in society is the 'communications revolution'. Are these scenarios credible, even feasible, or are they merely examples of authors' imaginations running wild? This course gives an

insight into the developments in communications technology which give rise to these predictions. It includes an overview of the technology and examines some of the social implications which are claimed for the new developments. Broadcast media are covered including delivery systems such as cable and satellite transmission.

Technologies such as videoconferencing and the Internet, the so-called 'convergent technologies', are also included; digital coding techniques now enable computers

to store, process and deliver motion video as well as audio and text; modems can connect these same computers to others anywhere around the world. Thus it is no longer meaningful to discuss the broadcast media without consideration of computer technologies. This is not a technical course; there are no scientific theories or mathematical equations at all.

The global economy requires the kind of necessity and purpose of educational institutions. Since the current trend towards reducing incomplete information and access to accurate information is growing, other schools can not control time to transfer a set of prescribed information from teacher to student during a fixed time point are, but schools must to promote Culture of "Teaching for Learning For example, acquisition of knowledge and continuous learning skills which make possible during the individual's life. According to Alvin Toffler, illiterate in 21st century, who was not read and write but those who do not know which fail to learn or remember are illiterate. (Jauhari, 2004).

Concerns about educational quality and educational opportunities with the necessity of developing those

most vulnerable are the accumulation of globalization is symbiotic. Generally, "the changes of globalization in developing countries, on low-income groups, especially women and girls and" low skill workers, as well as all groups applying for and obtaining new skills to press. (Bellamy and Taylor, 1998).

In the rural context, development involves use of physical, financial and human resources for economic growth and social development of the rural economies (Burkey, 2000). The term rural development also represents improvement in quality of life of rural people in villages. As per Chambers (1983) "Rural Development is a strategy to enable a specific group of people, poor rural women and men, to gain for themselves and their children more of what they want and need." Singh (1999) defines Rural Development as "A process leading to sustainable improvement in the quality of life of rural people, especially the poor". The fact of the matter is that three quarters of the world's poor, about 900 million people are in rural areas, and the Millennium poverty target set by Millennium Development Goals (MDG), cannot be met unless the world addresses rural poverty. "Sustainable Rural Development can make a powerful contribution to four critical goals of: Poverty Reduction, Wider shared growth, Household, national, and global food security and Sustainable natural resource management" (World Bank, 1997). Hence worldwide there is a growing emphasis on development of rural economy of the countries. Any improvement, in the social or economic status of rural areas would not just directly benefit rural poor but would also bring down the migration-pressures on cities and contribute by positive ripple effect in global stride towards development.

The process of development in a country is to be aided by its governance. The goal of governance "should be to develop capacities that are needed to realize development that gives priority to the poor, and creates needed opportunities for employment and other livelihoods" (The World Bank, 1992, UNDP, 1994). Increased number of poor, hungry or marginalized people in a country represents decrease in its quality of governance. To promote development, various studies have proposed governance in the contextual realities of each country, including veritable participation of citizens in the governmental decision-making process (Grindle, 2004; Evans and David, 2006).

Communications and Information Technologies continue to undergo rapid change and will continue to impact all aspects of the university. Some of these impacts are obvious to both the technical and the casual user but many take place in the background. They include: new approaches to old activities, new activities that were previously not possible, more

personalization of communication and applications, and increasing efficiency and effectiveness in everyone's work environment.

Women form great part of total workforce that needed for agriculture part at universe, as one of the intangible factors at agriculture economy. So, statistics that was represented in relation to extent of women's activity is very lower than real extent. Because in this statistics, mostly, seasonal jobs, part time job, no wage job and their housekeeping activities, aren't considered. rural women, have different roles and duties such as husband, mother, crops producer, participate at ranching activities, planting, maintaining, harvesting, processing, marketing and preparing food. Rural women maybe venturing to culture cash products, while cultivating subsistence products and if they have no farm land, they have to work for others instead receiving wage. We can consider such women as agriculture propagator, production expert and even in some case as policy maker. Other than activity at agriculture field, women's participation at rural development is critical and is considered in order to supply adequate and needed food (Lahsaeizadeh, 2000). According to women's role at family, they can be considered as base of development and progress and unfortunately according to universal tangible realities, they possess unfavorable position at international level (Changizi Ashtiani, 2003).

For example, difference at levels of policy making, investing and receiving salary for equal activity, are universal phenomena. extent of women's participation at economic activities, extent of women's activity at economic activities, is confirmation on lack of adequate attention to women's affair and their added value, because rural women work alongside men, at all levels of producing agriculture crops and livestock products and generally all affairs, and also spend their little leisure time for handicrafts such as rugs and carpets and etc. so it is necessary to establish self acknowledgement fields, directing women's economic and social ability and programming to attract their participation at different activities. At rural area, women have more significant role on family economy and inside activities and cause economic prosperity of society. yet, women couldn't gain their real position as active citizens who have talent for participation at economic, politic, social and cultural arena at most countries, especially developing country, and still their activities in economic calculations aren't considered, and they be considered as intangible workforce. Disappointing estimation about number of active rural women and underestimate about extent of their participation at economic activities is confirmation on lack of

adequate attention to women's affairs and their added value. they are major force to create revolution and potential sources to progress rural economy and increasing extent of growth rate of producing food productions, although traditionally, farming and ranching, has been male profession, but women's role was never restricted to house and family, so they are active outside (farming, ranching, forestry and ...) other than inside activity (Balali, 2005).

Empowering rural women:

Empowerment is capacity that woman can obtain in cultural and social environment, for economic independency and self reliance, by controlling over emotional decision making and far from violation. Empowering means, evolution and developing activities through non governmental organizations (NGOS) that lead empowerment to improve economic dimensions. (Amiri, 2000)

Enabling is process that, during it, people of society do activities to overcome barriers of advancement that finally cause their domination to determine their own density. The term "enabling" means overcoming fundamental inequalities. So it is different from self-reliance. (UNICEF, 1997)

Enabling, enables individual to overcome any problematic condition and consider barriers and problems as part of life and positive campaign. Finally, enabling provides energy to overcome most intellectual barriers and external problems at private life.

Thus, among all what have been said, it is possible to present suitable definition of enabling women, as follows:

"Process of explaining women about themselves (and also men about them) for instances that they must or want to do, and growth of their willingness and courage until they reach to needed competency "(management of rural and tribal women).

it should be noted here , that major factor which should be considered about women's ability , is eliminating individual and social barriers , and finally preparing field of economic and social participation for women at all fields . purpose of women's participation , is because of their dominance on all affairs of village including decision making process , organizations , forums , enterprising posts and ... that involve , participation at all social and economic dimensions .

Criteria of empowering women:

Enabling as a theory of policy making for women, in it present five criteria:

Welfare, access, Concientisation, participation and control.

1- **welfare criteria** : In this criteria, men and women as human resources of development should

enjoy of desirable welfare conditions and equality (Paknazar, 2000).

Most of timing developmental programs, have worked on base of women's welfare. They have considered and provided some services for women who were passive recipient of these services. But these services were limited to physical needs and mostly were considered to revive their role of productivity, again. sometimes , it has been said that this approach has begun at colonial era and has considered women from poor country and intended services for them that dose not exceed from that poverty level . Agricultural and industrial projects were designed for men and social programs for women and children. Most of welfare programs were inadequate or its success was limited. Considerable point in this criteria is that men and women as human resources of development should enjoy equality and desirable welfare conditions. At this stage, women's material welfare and their enjoyment of welfare programs, compared to men (nutrition, death rate and ...) were considered. And women's role as producer to supply their own needs isn't very important.

access criteria : Lack of access or limited access for women to sources including (fields, job, capital and training) cause that their functions at production is less than men (Paknazar 2000). Access to facilities, sources, designed program and projects for women and access to schools and ... are in this part. Just whenever most of other legal, cultural and social issues being solved, men and women would equally access to sources and facilities. Concept of enabling at this stage is that women have equal right to access to sources at family and greater society.

3- Concientisation criteria: Women should know that their problems aren't due to their individual inefficiency and shortage but it has emerged by social system in which discriminations has become formal and acceptable issue. (Araghzadeh, 2002). This stage is more critical and important than other stages. Because women can participate at development activities not just be passive users. Women have real equality at development, just when be aware. Concientisation will help to increase women's ability to equality at participation at society. At this stage, women face with critical analysis with society and will find that what has been considered natural and unchangeable reality, is changeable. (Bakhshoodeh, 2005).

4- Participation criteria: One the most important items that this criteria has considered , is men and women's equal participation at decision making process of affairs of family at society (Paknazar 2000) . Men and women both should participate at process of assessment needs, designing, performing and evaluation of projects and development programs

(UNICEF, 1998). In summary, this criterion means women's participation at all stages of surveying needs, detecting problems, planning, management, performing and valuation.

5- Control criteria: This criterion emphasize on this point that in addition to equal access of men and women to development sources, they must have adequate control on these sources that this issue is balance criterion, between men and women so that no one exceed other one (Paknazar 2000). Women should have opportunities for decision making at workplace and home. If woman is producer, should be shared with part of her interest and wage. Women like men, should be able to choose her individual and social field and able to make decision and also development activities should be facilitator of these processes.

FAO (food and agricultural organization) addresses these three purposes as strategic goals while enabling women:

- 1- equality between men and women to access production sources
- 2- women's participation at policy and decision making
- 3- decreasing rural women's workload and increasing job opportunity and income for them (Paknazar 2000)

within theoretical framework of enabling women, having control on sources is presented as highest stage at women's participation process on development, but existing data at most developing countries, indicates that not only rural women haven't any control on financial resources of family but even they were deprived to access to sources and credits, specially through formal credits system (Shaditalab, 2002).

The question that arises here is that what relation is there between enabling women and micro-credits programs? Nowadays, micro-credits are considered as effective mechanism to eradicate poverty for women. Interests of micro-credits further increasing women's income, include:

- improving women's role in family
- Increasing women's confidence, not only through obtain financial success through business activity, but through increasing women's access to social services and communication with other women.
- Changing at social level (social class) at perspective of women's role.

Conclusion:

Regardless of the wide differences in ICT access between rich and poor countries and between different groups in the country, there are concerns that challenge the application of ICT in education with the existing differences among the lines of

economic, social, cultural, geographic and gender will be broader. Everyone equal opportunities in terms of suitability for participation are necessary, but access to various factors, either as users or as producers through their sources is difficult and heavy. Therefore, the primary differences enhance and even grow. Consequently, programmers' international education is faced with a difficult challenge and how to help solve the problem and its development.

Rural women at agriculture activities have key role as producer. Rural women are most efficient among society women and are such individuals that work in productive occupations, thus it is obvious that attention to rural women as powerful force at rural development can have very positive impacts at this regard.

One of the issues that government should pay attention to is rural development issue especially at undeveloped countries. In this countries due to lack of proper policy making to improve quality of people life level of these areas, villagers migration to cities has increased considerably and led to urbanization growth and emergence of problems and also psychological, social, cultural and economical abnormalities especially at agriculture and ranching part. Also method for growth and rural development growth, require research at this field which can help government in order to economic, social and cultural programming and policy making. Creating local organizations and regional institutions with affective women's attendance and villager participation to solve problems are among important and affective substances that should be considered in regional programming. At developing and changing process of developed economy system of agriculture, value of women's activity changed as form of money which previously was as no wage workforce at family, and was given to her. Other than agriculture part (i.e. industry and public services) which are main field of women's work, rural women's participation is very important. The most important issues about women's social and political participation are participating at programming, decision making, performing decisions and valuing results.

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