



EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH E-GOVERNANCE: A STUDY OF GENDER-INCLUSIVE INITIATIVES IN INDIA

Nidhi Katoch*

Assistant Professor (Guest Faculty), Dept. of Public Administration Punjabi University, Patiala. *Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

Women constitute almost half of the Indian population thus their participation in development is crucial to the progress of India. E-Governance is the use of Information and communication technology (ICT) to provide services to the citizen efficiently and effectively. This research paper studies the role of E-governance in empowering the women of India. This study analyses the various gender-specific programmes and initiatives implemented by Govt of India to promote socioeconomic development, bridge the gender gap and enhance the participation of women in decision-making. The study investigates the problems of fostering gender inclusion in e-governance and provides solutions to improve the efficacy of these activities. The study also looks at how technology may be used to build an enabling environment for women's empowerment and emphasises the significance of a gender-sensitive approach in e-governance projects.

KEYWORDS : E-Governance, Women Empowerment, Gender Inclusivity, Digital Divide

INTRODUCTION

Background

E-Governance: The use of information and communication technology (ICT) to deliver government services, exchange information communication transactions, and integrate various stand-alone systems and services between government-to-citizens (G2C), government-to-business (G2B), government-to-government (G2G), and back-office processes and interactions within the overall government framework (UN E-Governance Knowledge Based, n.d.).

E-governance enhances the smooth functioning of administration and tries to make sure that government services reach all sections of society. Women play an important role in the development of the country and their empowerment is a necessity. E-governance increases women's ability through a process of raising knowledge of their rights to public services and the right to participate in public places, as well as through the acquisition of skills and technology to access information and services and to interact with the government through its e-services. There are various initiatives have been taken by the government of India for the empowerment of women through E-governance.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The paper aims to examine how E-governance is improving the socio-economic conditions of women in India. It also studies the various programmes implemented by the government of India. The study analyses the impact made by these programs and initiatives and what are the main problems and challenges faced in the way of empowering women through E-governance.

Research Methodology

This research is based on an analysis of data gathered from secondary sources. The study's data is collected from reputable academic journals, newspaper articles, government papers, policy documents, and research articles. The qualitative approach has been applied to synthesise and present the findings, allowing for meaningful conclusions to be drawn.

E-governance Initiatives for Women Empowerment Education

Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA):

It is part of the Digital India programme and intends to bridge the digital divide by covering 6 crore rural homes, with a focus on the rural population, including marginalised groups, women, and girls. As of 08.12.2022, the percentage of women who have benefited from PMGDISHA is more than 53% of the total enrolled, 54% of the total trained, and 56% of the total certified.

Ministry of Education's Department of Higher Education administers the 'National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology' (NMEICT) Scheme, SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds), SWAYAM PRABHA, National Digital Library (NDL), Virtual Lab, e-Yantra, NEAT (National Education Alliance for Technology), and other programmes to ensure that students across the country receive quality education through e-learning (PIB, 2022).

Saksham Portal

The UGC has created SAKSHAM, a dynamic webpage that strives to empower women on campuses by raising knowledge about (a) Opportunities and initiatives in Higher Education Institutions (HEI) for women (b) Support and redressal mechanisms for HEI students and employees (c) Web resources for women in the form of government and UN policy documents (UGC, n.d.).

Health

Poshan Tracker

Anganwadi Workers have been technologically empowered through the distribution of smartphones for efficient service delivery and monitoring under POSHAN Abhiyaan. A transparent and supportive atmosphere that supports health, wellness, and immunity is being built to improve the nutritional status of women and children. Poshan Tracker is an application built on cutting-edge technology that ensures real-time monitoring of supplementary nutrition and provides information for timely supervision and management of services (PIB India, 2022).

PMSMA (Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan) Portal:

The service, which began in November 2016, seeks to provide assured, comprehensive, and high-quality antenatal care to all pregnant women free of charge. Also, obstetricians/radiologists/physicians can register themselves as a volunteer through this portal.

Economic

Mission Shakti

Ministry of Women and Child Development has launched an umbrella scheme 'Mission Shakti,' an Integrated Women Empowerment Programme, for execution during the 15th Finance Commission period. It intends to increase mission-mode interventions for women's safety, security, and empowerment through institutional and convergent mechanisms for greater efficiency, effectiveness, and budgetary prudence (PIB, 2022).

Direct Bank Transfer

Payments deposited into a woman's account not only boost her financial inclusion but can also affect her labour-force participation. For example, MNREGA Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme provides for direct payment to their bank account instead of handing them which ensures that women will have access to their money (Bull, Grown, Guermazi, Psme, & Rutkowski, 2021).

Through DBT, the amount of Pradhan Mantriv Vandana Yojna is deposited directly to the pregnant and lactating women's accounts.

Mahila E-Haart

This is a direct internet marketing platform that leverages technology to help women entrepreneurs/SHGs/NGOs showcase the products/services that they make or manufacture. It is a project aimed at satisfying the goals and requirements of women. This was done with the understanding that technology is a crucial component of business productivity and that it should be available to the majority of Indian women entrepreneurs, SHGs, and NGOs (MoWCD, 2017).

Women Entrepreneurship Platform

It is a unified access platform that brings together women from throughout India to create a nurturing ecosystem that allows them to realise their business aspirations. WEP accomplishes this by providing necessary access to information and services through crucial collaborations.

E-shakti By NABARD

e-Shakti is a National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) pilot initiative for digitising Self Help Groups (SHGs). It was started to solve certain issues, such as enhancing the quality of SHG bookkeeping and allowing banks to make educated credit choices regarding the group using a Management Information System (MIS)(PIB, 2017).

Safety She-Box

The Sexual Harassment Electronic Box (SHe-Box) is an initiative of the Government of India to establish a single point of contact for any woman, regardless of her employment level, whether in the organised or unorganised, private or public sectors, to expedite the filing of sexual harassment complaints. Any woman who has experienced sexual harassment at work can use this link to file a complaint. When a complaint is made to the 'SHe-Box,' it is forwarded straight to the appropriate authorities with jurisdiction to investigate the situation (MoWCD, n.d.).

Video Conferencing Facility under One Stop Centre

One Stop Centres (OSC) are designed to assist women who have experienced abuse in both private and public settings, including the home, community, and workplace. The OSC will provide video conferencing (through Skype, Google Conferencing, etc.) to facilitate quick and painless police and judicial processes. If the offended woman desires, she can record her statement for police/courts from the OSC itself using audio-video technology means (MoWCD, n.d.).

Online Registration of Complaints in National Women Commission. Women can register their complaints online and can track their status from time to time.

Miscellaneous

NARI: National Repository of Information for Women portal is an initiative of the Ministry of Women and Child Development to provide women citizens with easy access to information on government schemes and initiatives for women.

Kavalan: The Tamil Nadu Police created Kavalan (meaning Police in Tamil) as part of the Tamil Nadu State Police Master Control Room initiative. People in Tamil Nadu, particularly women and the elderly, can download the Kavalan - SOS app whenever they feel vulnerable or endangered. Help from the police can be reached as soon as possible with this mobile app, regardless of where they are. During natural disasters, people can also use this app to rapidly contact the police (Kavalan-SOS Mobile App, n.d.).

Impact of E-governance

E-governance, also known as the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in government service delivery and citizen participation can significantly influence women's empowerment in a number of ways. Some significant ways that e-governance can promote women's empowerment are listed below:

a) Access to Information: Platforms for e-governance make it simple to find out about the many government initiatives, policies, and programmes that aim to empower women. With more knowledge available to them, women are better able to make decisions and actively participate in political and civic life since they are more aware of their rights and privileges.

b) Participation in Decision: Making: Women can actively engage in decision-making processes by providing input, expressing ideas, and participating in online consultations using e-governance platforms. This inclusion may result in more gender-sensitive laws and initiatives that specifically address the demands and difficulties faced by women.

c) Financial Inclusion: Through online banking services and digital payment systems, e-governance can assist women become financially empowered. These platforms give women the ability to access financial resources, autonomously manage their accounts, and engage in economic activity, which eventually results in economic

empowerment.

d) Access to Services: E-governance can improve the efficiency and accessibility of public services, facilitating access to vital services like healthcare, education, and social welfare for women, particularly those living in rural and distant locations. The better access they now have may have a good effect on their general health and way of life.

e) Education and Skill Development: Women can acquire knowledge and skills through online education and skill development programmes backed by e-governance, creating new chances for their personal and professional development.

Challenges of E-Governance:

E-governance has the ability to increase women's access to information, services, and opportunities, which will empower them. It does, however, also offer certain difficulties that can prevent women from being fully empowered. Here are a few of the main difficulties:

a) Digital Divide: The digital divide, or the difference between those who have access to digital technology and the internet and those who do not, is one of the main issues. Due to challenges including low literacy rates, a lack of infrastructure, prohibitive costs, and cultural obstacles, women in many areas have limited access to technology. This disparity may make it difficult for women to gain from e-governance projects.

b) Digital Literacy: Despite having access to technology, many women do not have the digital literacy skills needed to use e-governance platforms and services successfully. The influence of e-governance on women's empowerment may be limited as a result of underutilizing the tools and services that are accessible due to this lack of awareness.

c) Gender Stereotypes: Women's engagement in and access to e-governance projects can be impacted by social conventions and gender stereotypes. When using digital platforms for governance-related goals, women may encounter pushback from their families or communities. The development and execution of e-governance efforts may be hampered by gender prejudices, which may lead to the exclusion of the unique requirements and viewpoints of women.

d) Online Harassment and Safety Concerns: Women frequently experience harassment and abuse online, which might make them reluctant to take part in e-governance conversations or openly voice their ideas. To encourage women's active participation in digital governance platforms, it is imperative to ensure a secure and inclusive online environment.

e) Data Privacy and Security: Women's personal information might be misused or compromised, raising privacy and security issues. Building confidence and promoting women's involvement with e-governance platforms requires ensuring adequate data protection procedures.

CONCLUSION:

The study's important finding is that e-governance has tremendous potential for empowering women in India. But it also emphasises how crucial it is to solve the problems with the digital gap, gender stereotypes, and safety issues. A coordinated effort is required to advance digital literacy, gender-sensitive content, and significant female representation in decision-making processes in order to fully realise the revolutionary potential of e-governance for women's empowerment. India can create a more equal society where women may take an active role in governance and contribute to overall socio-economic development by promoting an inclusive and safe digital environment.

REFERENCES

1. Bull, G. L., Grown, C., Guermazi, B., Psme, J., & Rutkowski, a. M. (2021, March 05). Empowering women: Send social assistance payments directly to her. Retrieved from World Bank Blogs: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/empowering-women-send-social-assistance-payments-directly-her>
2. Kavalan-SOS Mobile App. (n.d.). Retrieved from vikaspedia.in: <https://vikaspedia.in/e-governance/women-and-e-governance/kavalansos-mobile-app>
3. MoWCD. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://wcd.nic.in/schemes/one-stop-centre-scheme-1>
4. MoWCD. (2017). Mahila E-Haat. Ministry of Women and child development.
5. MoWCD. (n.d.). About She-Box. Retrieved from https://shebox.nic.in/user/about_shebox
6. PIB. (2017, aug 08). e-Shakti initiative of NABARD. Retrieved from pib.gov.in: newsite/printrelease.aspx?reliid=169737

7. PIB. (2022, Dec 09). SCHEME FOR DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN. Retrieved from pib.gov.in: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1882218>
8. PIB India. (2022, Dec 21). Year End Review-2022: Ministry of Women and Child Development. Retrieved from pib.gov.in: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=1885352>
9. UGC. (n.d.). Saksham. Retrieved from <https://saksham.ugc.ac.in/>
10. UN E-Governance Knowledge Based. (n.d.). <https://publicadministration.un.org/>. Retrieved from <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/Resources/Glossary#:~:text=E%2DGovernment%3A%20E%2Dgovernment,communication%20channels%20for%20engagement%20and>