

eHomemakers' (eH) in India

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ABSTRACT

The rural sector is facing global challenges that cannot be met without support by information and communication technologies (ICT). ICT is used to share information with trainees, homemakers, farmers and educating staff in agriculture, horticulture, fisheries. "eHomemakers" is an emerging field comprising the enhancement of agriculture and rural development through improved information exchange, communication and learning processes, based on the use of internet and other digital technologies by actors in homemaker locally, regionally and worldwide. eHomemakers explores the opportunities of how ICTs can be used to improve the lives of the rural communities. The paper is focused on the use of information, communication, and associated technologies in homemaker development.

KEY WORDS : eHomemakers', eH, Information and technologies farmers

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INTRODUCTION

The agriculture sector is facing global challenges that cannot be met without support by information and communication technologies (ICT). ICT is used to share information with trainees, farmers and educating staff in agriculture, horticulture, fisheries, and agriculture engineering. "e-Agriculture" is an emerging field comprising the enhancement of agriculture and rural development through improved information exchange, communication and learning processes, based on the use of internet and other digital technologies by actors in agriculture locally, regionally and worldwide. e-Agriculture explores the opportunities of how ICTs can be used to improve the lives of the rural communities. Farmers are now using video conferencing to procure good-quality seeds, fertilizer and other inputs. Timely information on weather, disasters, improved agricultural practices, commodity prices and market information greatly benefit farmers directly to minimize the risks and provide opportunities for enhanced incomes. In case of rural women this will be a great help to enhance their life skills particularly self awareness, decision making and interpersonal relationship etc. which ultimately leads a

scenario of qualitative life in farm families. The paper is focused on the use of information, communication, and associated technologies in agricultural development [1].

A website is helping Indian women to earn an income and balance their work and home lives. eHomemakers promotes the use of information and communication technologies to telework and run small home business.

eHomemakers started life as "Mothers for Mothers," in informal group launched in Malaysia in 1998 by Chong Sheau Ching, founder and Chief Executive Officer of eHomemakers. With International Development Research Centre (IDRC) support, Sheau and colleagues explored how information technologies, from mobile phones to the Internet, could be harnessed to help poor, isolated women working at home. One outcome: a Chinese, English, and Malay language website through which now more than 17,000 members share information, organize activities, advertise products and services, and more [2].

eHomemakers believes that acquiring micro-business skills can increase women's confidence and improve family well-being. This is the goal of its Salaam Wanita (recognizing women) project, for instance, that provides homebound women with technical and business skills [2].

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One of its activities is weaving and marketing colourful bags and baskets from recycled magazines. The eco-baskets are sold internationally through eHomemakers' website and at fairs and earned about RM1,000 [CA \$310] a month [2].

Opportunities for women in India:

Migration from a resource-driven economy to a knowledge-based one demands technological advancements which use new and existing knowledge and know-how to improve productivity, services and overall welfare in an economy. The introduction of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) into the daily lives and activities of women in India represents an unprecedented opportunity to improve the lives of poor women. As social attitudes about women change, more women are able to take advantage of new opportunities for economic and social development, with far-reaching impacts on household, community and market relations.

ICTs have the potential to enable women to become equal stakeholders in the growing knowledge economy. Low income women have successfully used ICTs for their own interests by forming peer networks through employment interest groups such as the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, the umbrella of micro-credit activities like the Grameen's Village Phone Program in Bangladesh, and through business collectives like the Tortas bakers in Peru. Bangladesh can capitalize on these lessons and explore new approaches based on the positive experiences of women working in and with ICT sectors elsewhere [3].

Integrating gender into future ICT programs :

Train women entrepreneurs on ways to use ICT and web portals for gaining information on education, markets and pricing. Conduct training on the use of search engines, business management software, online manuals and other tools for micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME) owners. Establish women-only training sessions and consider the timing and location of training to respond to women's specific needs (e.g. security concerns, need to balance training with domestic responsibilities, etc.). Conduct a training of trainers for women to form a network of women ICT trainers. Build capacity for the establishment of enterprises that service ICTs (computer repair, computer supplies, computer manufacturing, as well as programmers).

Economic and social infrastructure :

Establish ICT terminals in places women congregate (e.g. women-owned stores or market stalls, hair saloons,

health clinics, or women's sections of mosques). Develop community based websites to track community decisions made on resource allocation and preservation.

Education and workforce development:

Introduce nationwide ICT training for teachers (course content and teaching methods) at non-traditional, primary, secondary and tertiary levels, to build a portfolio of ICT trainers in the country. Promote broad awareness of the requirements for and benefits to literacy, knowledge, and an ICT-literate society through the use of traditional media and public service announcements. Improve the image of ICTs, particularly among girls, through school programs, career fairs for girls, and public media images and outreach. Use ICTs (Internet, CDROM, spreadsheets, and other tools) to increase educational management. Use CDROMs and other materials to reduce the costs of textbooks and increase access to new information and materials for learners. Promote alternative learning opportunities such as radio learning.

E-governance and local government :

Facilitate stakeholder dialogue between national government officials, local government leaders, community leaders and community members on ICT needs. Track the use of online forms, disaggregated by sex.

Conclusion:

ICT acts as a backbone in upliftment of society specially for rural women who are still roaming in the darkness of unawareness and illiteracy. It can be concluded that if proper, planned and timely platform is provided for rural women to orient with the new technologies then the time will come when a crystal clear picture of qualitative life in rural families will be portrayed in front of our eyes.

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