ICTs improving self-confidence and expression of women

■POONAM DHAKA, INDRA AHLAWAT AND GAYTRI TIWARI

ABSTRACT

There are generally more male teachers at the secondary level, which may be a contributing factor to female student participation levels. This paper suggested that an information communication technologies (ICTs) training workshop is most effective when it brings together participants who share common objectives.

KEW WORDS : Opinion and suggestion, Home science training programme, Adopted village

INTRODUCTION

Seventy per cent of Indian's population lives in rural areas, often accessible only by unpaved, poorly maintained roads or by river transport. As a result, sending children to school specially for girls, and family members to health clinics, is time consuming, expensive and oftentimes impossible during the rainy season. The information communication technologies (ICT) sector is seen as consisting of segments as diverse as telecommunications, television and radio, computer hardware and software, computer services and electronic media like the Internet, as well as the content of these media.

With access to information via ICT applications, rural women can make informed decisions around education and.rural services which directly affect their livelihood. Agriculture, natural based and resource-based activities can gain from the introduction of ICT applications and use. Most Indians derive some portion of their economic livelihoods from agriculture, fisheries, and livestock. By integrating ICTs into agriculture and natural resource-based activities, the sector can be supported by product differentiation, infrastructure improvements, and enhanced skill sets. ICT applications can also be integrated into the range of processes in agribusiness, planning, and management, and the agro-industry cluster. While ICTs in agro-business are generic to other business needs, there are certain aspects that have immediate and direct implications for the rural poor, including managing, sharing and storing agricultural-related information and data, Access to time-sensitive and public (government) information, links and networks that support participatory information sharing and access to market information across sectors. ICTs have also been used by many as tools for social transformation. For example:

e-commerce:

– E-commerce initiatives that link rural women directly to universities and global markets through the Internet, as well as support their activities with education, market and production information, are being tried today in many places in India by NGOs.

– E-governance programmes have been initiated by some governments using ICTs to make government services more accessible to citizens by providing them electronically, in some cases with an explicit strategy to ensure these services reach women and others who face barriers to access.

– Health educators have used the radio to communicate information related to women's sexual and reproductive health. Possibilities based on the Internet are

Author for correspondence:
GAYTRI TIWARI, All India Coordinated Research Project, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, College of Home Science, Maharana Partap University of Agriculture and Technology, UDAIPUR (RAJASTHAN) INDIA
Email : tiwarigaytri@gmail.com; tiwarigaytri@indiatimes.com

Address for the coopted Authors:
POONAM DHAKA AND INDRA AHLAWAT, College of Home Science, Maharana Partap University of Agriculture and Technology, UDAIPUR (RAJASTHAN) INDIA
Email : poonamdhaka@yahoo.co.in

also being explored.

– Information sharing and dialogues through email and online newsletters between women from the different parts of India and abroad and among women in the other parts of country have also enabled collaboration and a convergence of effort on a global scale to push the agenda of gender equality.

ICT applications in rural contexts:

The Ministry of Agriculture set up Village Information kiosks in eleven villages in the Rangareddy district of Andhra Pradesh. As an agricultural extension initiative, this project seeks to provide quick dissemination of technological information from the agricultural research system to farmers in the field and inputs feedback into the system. The kiosks are managed by local Mutually Aided Cooperative Thrift and Credit Societies dominated by women and provide price information at the farmer's markets. Villagers use the Internet to find information on a range of entitlements, link up with schemes and check their eligibility for housing and crop loans [1].

MSSRF has been experimenting with using ICTs as a way of facilitating development in poor rural communities. MSSRF's e-villages empower people through increased access to computerjerminals, which are loaded with an informational database of government services [2]. In community centers where computers have been installed, women are encouraged to run the center, provide information services to the village and offer training courses for other women. A central hub located in a nearby town provides support and daily information bulletins. The daily information bulletins are sent by email to the networked villages, which includes a summary of the local main news stories, local weather report, and daily prices from local markets. Trained ICT personnel staff in the hub and are on hand to respond to requests from the villages. ICT training courses of up to 25 people can be held at each hub and larger courses, for handicraft production entrepreneurs making incense sticks or small scale paper production from banana leaves, have been developed to facilitate livelihood diversification through small business activities [2].

In Jaipur, the Ajit Foundation created an interactive water-map of a village, which records water amounts available from each source, water quality, maintenance, demand and harvesting systems. This map helps farmers make informed decisions about their local water resources [3].

Women's e-commerce initiatives:

Self Employed Women Association's (SEWA) Trade Facilitation Centre, India has had success in its e-commerce endeavors supported by its websites www.banascraft.org and www.kutchcraft.org. An innovative approach to reach producers and artisans under-served by connectivity involves putting women producers in touch with a cadre of computer operators who perform a variety of supportive functions that enable on-line selling [4].

Cottage Industry Global Market (CIGM), India is a network with horizontal and vertical linkages, comprised of women's weaving cooperatives in rural northern India whose main products are handmade woolen shawls and other woolen attire. CIGM fosters links between the individual cooperatives as well as links with other players, including local NGOs, local government, Georgetown University (U.S.) and the World Bank's Development Marketplace (the funder). Three women are responsible for co-coordinating material supply, marketing and record keeping out of a center that also provides training to the cooperative members. Government policies support cooperatives in the form of loans, training programs and marketing opportunities [5].

ICT training workshop:

An ICT training workshop is most effective when it brings together participants who share common objectives. W^men learners, farmers or small business owners who are likely to work together or to get benefit from sharing information with each other, will have an added incentive to use ICTs to communicate with each other long after the training workshop has ended. By bringing together the widest spectrum of knowledge economy stakeholders, the workshop can provide the physical and intellectual (learning) space for dialogue that will enable enterprising participants to form alliances with Internet Service Providers (ISPs), business support services, financial intermediaries, employment agencies, career counselors and other institutions.

– To be effective, ladies trainers from the university must first conduct a simple needs assessment prior to the workshop that asks women what is important to them. This provides the trainer with a good sense of the knowledge gaps that need to be included in the workshop, and places ICT use within contexts relevant to women's lives.

– The trainer then designs a training program in collaboration with participants, resource persons and local mediator organizations wherever possible. This ensures full and active participation on an ongoing basis between participants and local resource persons, and maximizes the learning process.

– Third, the trainer uses on-line 'laboratory' conditions for participants to experience web navigation and software packages developed by the university. This method of training encourages confidence building, skills in problem solving and self-empowerment. It is a particularly effective mode of training for women, who value the creation of networks and peer groups to build future alliances.

– Lastly, trainers must find a local computer training center that is open to the public to ensure that women will return to a familiar space to try out new skills. If possible, trainings for women should be led by women. In addition to augmenting skills, women-only trainings are also effective in increasing confidence and self-esteem by providing safe spaces, role models and networks to encourage and support learning about ICT, and provide one-on-one support so participants can learn at their own pace (Tondon, 2005).

Conclusion:

The information communication technologies (ICT) sector is seen as consisting of segments as diverse as telecommunications, television and radio, computer hardware and software, computer services and electronic media like the Internet, as well as the content of these media. E-commerce initiatives that link rural women directly to universities and global markets through the Internet, as well as support their activities with education, market and production information. E-governance programmes have been initiated by some governments using ICTs to make government services more accessible to citizens by providing them electronically, in some cases with an explicit strategy to ensure these services reach women and others who face barriers to access. Health educators have used the radio to communicate information related to women's sexual and reproductive health. Possibilities based on the Internet are also being explored. Sequential steps should be taken to attain this goal like information communication technologies (ICTs) training workshop which is most effective as it brings together participants who share common objectives.

LITERATURE CITED

1. The National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE), India http://www.manage.gov.in

2. MS Swaminathan Foundation (MSSRF) e-villages in Tamil Nadu, India http://mssrf.org/

3. Water mapping, India http://www.sarai.net/journal/03pdf/292_296_vvyas.pdf

4. Women's E-Commerce Initiatives, Self Employed Women Association's (SEWA) Trade Facilitation Centre, India, http://www.sewa.org, www.banascraft.org and www.kutchcraft.org

5. Cottage Industry Global Market (CIGM), India http://www.k2crafts.com

6. Tandon, Nidhi Networked Intelligence for Development: www.networkedintelligence.com, September 2005