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Media Accessibility Among the Self Help Groups of Southern Tamilnadu: A Study

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Abstract: ***The newly developed Information and Communication Technology serves as a vital tool to form a bridge between the New Information Society and the previous Enlightenment Society. The strong linkages by flawless information flow enhanced by the effective use of Information and Communication Technology would significantly boost the development of any Nation. Women have access to better information services through creative use of Information Technology leading to empowerment. This paper analysis the level of media accessibility among the Women with special reference to Self Help Groups in Southern Tamilnadu. The respondents of the study were selected by the Stratified Random Sampling Method. The data were collected through structured interview schedule and analyzed through SPSS.***

Keywords: Media, Self Help Groups, Accessibility.

I. INTRODUCTION

Empowerment of women in the context of knowledge societies entails building up the abilities and skills of women to gain insight into the issues affecting them and also building up their capacity to voice their concerns. It entails developing the capacities of women to overcome social and institutional barriers and strengthening their participation in the economic and political processes so as to produce an overall improvement in their quality of life. Knowledge networking catalyses the process of women's empowerment by opening up avenues for women to freely access information and articulate and share their experiences. Sharing information and views gain knowledge which creates the possibility of their further enrichment. By the use of information and communication technologies, women can broaden the scope of their activities.

Access to information and knowledge is the central issue necessary for women's empowerment. Women have traditionally been excluded from the external information sphere because of factors working to their disadvantage such as lack of free social mobility and formal educational opportunities. Information and Communication Technology opens up a direct window for women to the outside world. Information flows to them without any distortion or censoring. This leads to broadening of perspectives, greater understanding of their current situation and the causes of poverty and the initiation of interactive processes for information exchange. According to UNESCO Report on "Gender issues in the Information Society", the capability of women to effectively use information obtained through Information and Communication Technology is clearly dependent on many social and cultural factors, including literacy and education, geographic location and social class and free social mobility.

In developing countries like India, about 90% of rural women are working in informal sector and are engaging in economic activities such as handicrafts and sewing, weaving of baskets and fabrics, working in cities as vendors without any benefits. In the context the women compulsorily need the poverty alleviation programmes and empowerment initiations through technology.

They have to be exposed to Information and Communication Technology especially telecommunication services, mass media and broadcast services to create markets for their products and services. With this background the study attempts to study the level of media accessibility among the Self Help Groups of Southern Tamilnadu.

II. Objectives of the Study

- The study aims to assess the media accessibility among the respondents.

III. Methodology

According to the status report of Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women, the total number of Self-help group members in Tamil Nadu (32 Districts) as on 31.03.2012 are 85,69,676 in 5,56,311 groups. Among the total members, 21, 61,653 members of Self-help groups belonging to the Nine Southern Districts, Kanniyakumari, Thirunelveli, Thoothukudi, Ramanathapuram, Virudunagar, Sivagangai, Madurai, Dindigul and Theni were selected for the study by using Stratified Random Sampling Method. The Sample size was determined by $n=N/Ne^2+1$ where 'n' is sample size, 'N' is the Population, 'e' is the error of acceptance. With the above equation, the sample size is confined to 400.The 400 samples are again classified based on the demographical variables such as Age, Education, Income, Occupation and Nativity (Rural/Urban). The Structured Interview Schedule containing questions on various heads was used in the Survey. The data collected was analysed through SPSS and interpreted.

IV. Review Literature

Nadamoto Satoko (2005)[1] 36 in the study "Gender and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs): A comparative Analysis of Three Cases in India" stated that the level of education, affordable access to the technology, information relevant to the user and a greater amount of support influence the use of information and communication technology among the rural women. The study identified that the lack of level and community related content in local languages continues to be a major barrier in women's use of information and communication technology for economic empowerment.

Jhumpa and Omana (2006)[2] in their study titled "A magic lantern for the Grassroots" revealed that the information and communication technology results in high spirit and engagement in new activity among the rural women. It also increases the learning ability, learning interest and confident to face the local problems.

Balasubramanian et.al., (2010)[3] in their study on "Using Mobile Phones to promote lifelong learning among Rural Women in Southern India" demonstrated that the transition from "powerlessness" to empowerment is possible if non-formal learning settings and low-cost technologies offer means to accelerate the process in the content of social capital.

Rasheed et.al., (2011)[4] conducted the study on "Information and Communication Technologies and Empowerment of Indian Rural Women" concluded that the information and communication technology among the rural women has a significant positive impact on their empowerment particularly, psychological empowerment

Praveen Dalal (2012)[5] in his study "Use of information and communication technology for women empowerment in India" argued that while there is recognition of the potential of information and communication technologies as tool for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, a 'gender divide' has also been identified in the lower numbers of women accessing and using information and communication technology compared with men. The study contended that unless this gender divide is specifically addressed, there is a risk that information and communication technology may exaggerate existing inequalities between women and men and create new forms of inequality.

V. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The issue to be analyzed in this section is level of Media accessibility with regard to the Old Media and New Media. The Old Media or the Traditional media encompasses television, newspaper, radio and magazine. The New media refers the electronic communications that are conceivable due to innovation in computer technology.

Based on the accessibility it is found that the television is the topper in the list with 97% access, followed by the mobile telephone (93%). Various studies show that the reach factor of television is higher than other media. The television being an audio visual medium makes the audience as couch potatoes. About 85% of mobile users do not know the various mobile languages and applications. They use the very basic applications such as organizer, clock, camera etc., they are unaware how to use other complex applications such as Whatsapp, downloads etc. The respondents do not access internet through mobile telephone. The internet creates network irrespective of space and time. All the respondents use mobile telephone only for receiving and sending calls, 50% of respondents use mobile telephone to send messages (SMS) and nearly 17% of them listen to radio and music.

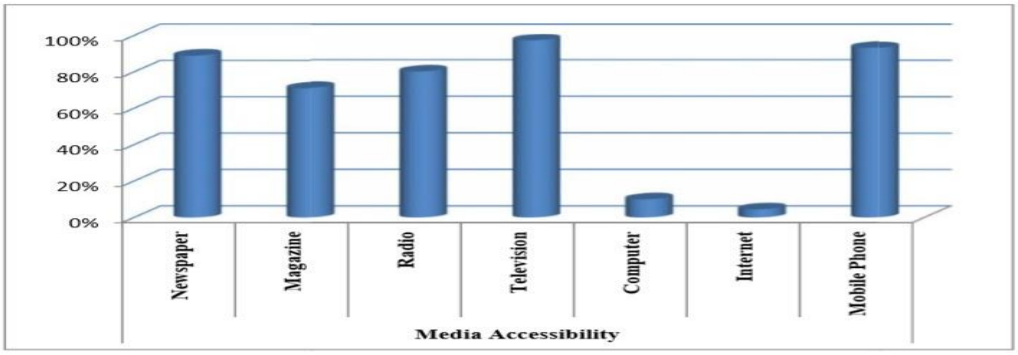
Table 1.1. Media Accessibility among the Respondents

	Newspaper		Magazines		Radio		Television	
Access	Yes (N=400)	No (N=400)	Yes (N=400)	No (N=400)	Yes (N=400)	No (N=400)	Yes (N=400)	No (N=400)
	355 (89%)	45 (11%)	284 (71%)	116 (29%)	320 (80%)	80 (20%)	388 (97%)	12 (3%)

	Computer		Internet		Mobile Phones	
Access	Yes (N=400)	No (N=400)	Yes (N=400)	No (N=400)	Yes (N=400)	No (N=400)
	40 (10%)	360 (90%)	18 (4.5%)	382 (95.5%)	372 (93%)	28 (7%)

Newspapers and magazines are accessed by 89 % and 71% respectively. Both being print medium is less accessed comparatively than television and mobile telephone. As far as newspapers and magazines are concerned only 21% of the respondents read newspapers out of self-interest. The remaining is forced by the co- members of the Self-help groups and by friends and family members. The Self-help group centers educate their members to read newspapers regularly. Thus they developed the habit of newspaper reading after joining Self-help group in order to express and share information while participating in meetings.

Figure1.1.
Media Accessibility of the Respondents



The least accessed media are the computer and internet the rate of accessibility is 10% and 4.5% respectively. It is shocked to notice that about 35% of the respondents have not even seen the computers. The rural respondents count to the majority, among those who do not access the computer. The age factor also determines the accessibility of the computer among the respondents. The respondents in age group 36-45, 46-55 and above 55 do not access computer. Among the 10% of respondents who access computer only a few know computer applications. When the accessibility of computer is low, relatively the accessibility of internet is found to be very low. Only a meager percentage of respondents (below 2%) are aware of e-mail. They use internet to pay e-bill and surf information. So most of the Self-help groups are found as a closed community, not connected even with the other groups at state level or national and international level.

On the one hand only 10% of the respondents of urban group below 25 years with High School education have seen the computer physically. The respondents belonging to the rural areas have not even seen computers. On the other side the governments both central and state are romantically implementing computer and computer aided technologies through various schemes. Very catchy slogans like hi-tech India, information age and digital India are advertised everywhere. The governments have made computer education as a compulsory one from third standard schooling onwards and computer lap tops are provided to the students through free-bee scheme. It is realized that the ground reality is completely different from the showed reality.

VI. Conclusion

Overall, the access of the traditional media is higher than the new media. Though the respondents access to the media their literacy to access the information and knowledge through the medium is not appreciable. There is a need for enhancing the media literacy among the respondents in order to involve themselves in the mainstream development. Initiatives must be taken to provide accessibility and awareness of computer and internet in particular.

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