



The gender technology gap has to end

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(Mains GS 1 : Role of women and women's organization, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues)

Context:

- Access to technology has become crucial in Covid-19 pandemic, to ensure public health and safety.
- Around the world, information and access to health care have largely moved online, and those left behind face grave disadvantages.

Limited or no access:

- According to Global System for Mobile Communications (GSMA) estimates, over 390 million women in low- and middle-income countries do not have Internet access.
- South Asia has more than half of these women with only 65% owning a mobile phone.
- In India, only 14.9% of women were reported to be using the Internet.

Digital challenge for vaccination:

- This divide is deepened by earlier mandates to register online to get a vaccination appointment.
- Recent local data revealed that nearly 17% more men than women have been vaccinated.
- While improving awareness of how to access vaccination and help are crucial to protecting women, the mindset around digital technology and device ownership must also change.
- For example, when families share a digital device, it is more likely that the father or sons will be allowed to use it exclusively.

Cultural belief:

- Due to deeply held cultural beliefs, it is often believed that women's access to technology will motivate them to challenge patriarchal societies.

- There is also a belief that women need to be protected, and that online content can be dangerous for women/expose them to risks.
- As a consequence, girls and women who ask for phones face suspicion and opposition.
- For example, in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, fewer women than men received the necessary information to survive COVID-19.

Feminism: a way of life:

- The concept of feminism goes beyond the rights of women as it is about a way of life.
- Feminism means being inclusive, democratic, transparent, egalitarian, and offering opportunities for all i.e. equality through innovation.
- Feminist technology (sometimes called “femtech”) is an approach to technology and innovation that is inclusive, informed and responsive to the entire community with all its diversity.

Steps to an equitable future

- At UN Women, companies are encouraged to sign up and agree to principles that will lead to a more equitable future for all.
- Generation Equality Forum tried to double the number of women and girls working in technology and innovation.
- By 2026, the aim of the forum is to reduce the gender digital divide and ensure universal digital literacy, while investing in feminist technology and innovation to support women’s leadership as innovators.
- Digital empowerment programmes and partnerships such as EQUALS and International Girls in ICT Day will encourage girls to choose STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) as their academic focus.
- These programmes also help girls to enter digital technology careers, and aspire to be the next leaders in digital technology.

Hardly a neutral world:

- Most technologies that are available to the layperson today are created by men, for men, and do not necessarily meet everyone’s requirements.
- The supposedly neutral world of technology is full of examples of this: from video games to virtual assistants to the increasingly large dimensions of “handheld” smartphones, technology is not always made with everyone in mind.

Economic benefit of technology:

- Companies should not look at gender-equal technology solely from an altruistic perspective, but from a pragmatic one.

- According to GSMA, closing the gender gap in mobile Internet usage in low- and middle-income countries would increase GDP by U.S.\$700 billion over the next five years.
- Women and girls are the largest consumer groups left out of technology and could be major profit drivers.

Apps should be inclusive:

- In the App Store, there are about two million apps, most of which cater to young men.
- Apps must be designed to be geared specifically towards mothers or apps for women to access telemedicine consultation.
- Apps should also develop for digital networks to connect women to informal job opportunities so they can still earn while balancing caring for their families
- Other than apps, built-in features on mobile phones such as an emergency button connecting women to law enforcement if they face unwanted street harassment should also be considered.

Conclusion:

- World now has the opportunity to shape the future in a way that is more equal, diverse, and sustainable in the world of technology in the aftermath of the medical and socioeconomic devastation in the past year.
- The right thing to do is also the smart thing to do, thus, Bringing an end to the gender technology gap will save lives and make livelihoods more secure.
- As a result, the next pandemic, once it arrives, may not be nearly as destructive and it can only lead to a better community and a better world.