

Gender based digital divide in the labour market in Sri Lanka

Mano Weligodapola¹

There continues to be evidence of a “digital divide” between those who have and those who have no access to Information & Communication Technologies (ICTs) or the knowledge and training needed to use them.

The digital divide in many cases is gender based. Women are certainly not using ICT optimally. Therefore they seem to have been left behind or aside and remain, especially the rural-based, on the underprivileged side of this divide. In a patriarchal society where men are the dominant players in decision making, women normally have not been at the forefront of development, and consequently they face more challenges in embracing new methodologies, which in this case would be the new Information & Communication Technologies. Society has always promoted and favoured men in education and training and formal employment. While free education and progressive social practices have resulted in equity with regard to literacy and education in Sri Lanka it should be noted that even in Sri Lanka, women shoulder most productive, reproductive and community management responsibilities, many of which are not acknowledged, remunerated or reflected in national statistics. Surveys and secondary data will be used in this analysis. A better understanding of all aspects and manifestations of the gender digital divide is essential in order to prevent the adverse impacts of the current trends of access and use on women in Sri Lanka. Attention to the digital divide is also important in achieving the Millennium Development Goals involving youth employment and spread of IT utilization by 2015. So this study about the gender based digital divide in the labour market is very crucial in the Sri Lankan context and is targeted at providing guidance to policy makers.

Key words: Gender, Digital divide, Labour market, Women, Sri Lanka

¹Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology, Malabe, Sri Lanka