

# NARROWING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN: A KEY TO BUILD DEMOCRACY IN MEXICO IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC

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**ABSTRACT:** The digital gap between men and women and its impacts is part of the historical context of disadvantage that women experience. Therefore, this study adds to how access and use of Information and Communication Technologies contributes to women's ability to acquire knowledge to empower themselves in different sectors, allows an active participation in public affairs, demand or contribute to the solution of problems that affect them as well as all citizens and influence the government's decisions, particularly in our global health pandemic. The inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as women, strengthens democracies, forces governments to improve their capacities so that they can achieve the pillars of electronic and open government, such as transparency and accountability.

**Keywords:** *digital divide, gender, democracy, ICT, citizen participation*

## INTRODUCTION

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have revolutionized the world, bringing changes in the population; however, access and use of these technologies has been differentiated, where some groups are more privileged than others. Women are an example of these disadvantages.

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Historically, women's opportunities have been restricted due to the context and roles assigned and as a result of gender stereotypes, established under a patriarchal system that limits or deprives their participation in the public sector.

According to the National Institute of Women (Inmujeres, in Spanish) of Mexico, patriarchy refers to “the anthropological term used to define the sociological condition where male members of a society tend to predominate in positions of power; the more powerful this position is, the more likely it is that a male member will retain it” (2007, p. 103).

The patriarchal system has predestined women in the private sphere, where their main activities are domestic work, as well as taking care of the family, represented by children or dependent members. Additionally, these tasks are not remunerated economically. One might think that this situation is a thing of the past, but the truth is that the COVID-19 pandemic showed how this scenario presently continues.

Sexual stereotypes “reflect popular beliefs about the activities, roles, features, characteristics or attributes that characterize and distinguish women from men” (Inmujeres 2007, p. 62), erroneous traditionalist ideas that end up affecting the scope of women's development. For example, assuming that engineering or politics is a field only for men.

The National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (Coneval, in Spanish) in Mexico reinforces the above. In 2018 it stated that:

Most men work in occupations classified as masculinized, i.e., those with low female participation. On the other hand, women are concentrated either in mixed activities, where the number of women and men is balanced, or in feminized occupations or occupations with low male participation. In this regard, it has been documented that feminized occupations tend to have relatively lower salaries. (Coneval, 2020b)

In many cases women maintain a limited intellectual profile due to lack of or restricted education, professional development, work, development in the public sphere; among other factors that prevent them from using their full potential to actively participate in the solution of problems that affect them, and thus be agents of change and aspire to a better quality of life.

ICTs represent an opportunity to empower women, to promote their scope of performance beyond home, not only framed by the labor market, but also to document them, bring them closer to information and allow them to actively participate in the public sphere, to influence public decisions, and contribute to better democracies.

The National Institute for Federalism and Municipal Development, points out that “in an ideal democracy, citizen participation is the factor that materializes changes, so it is necessary that between rulers and citizens establish a dialogue to achieve common goals” (2018, para. 3).

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF WOMEN’S DISADVANTAGE**

According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI, 2020a) Mexico has a population of 126,014,024 people; 48.8% men and 51.2% women. Being women the majority in Mexico they represent an important sector. The United Nations states that: “It is not possible to realize the full human potential and achieve sustainable development if half of humanity continues to be denied the full enjoyment of their human rights and opportunities” (2015, p. 7).

In Mexico, as of 2018, the total poor population represented 41.9% and 7.4% were in extreme poverty (Coneval, 2020a); that is, the total number of people living in poverty amounts to 49.3%, almost 50%. Under this context it can be inferred how women being the majority, are also poorer than men.

There are several factors that contribute to women’s poverty and keep them in an unequal world, one of them is their low participation in the economy; according to a 2018 study by Coneval (2020b), found that:

Only one third of current household monetary income is contributed by women, this is due to various reasons, such as low participation in economic life (52% compared to men as of 2018), they are economically dependent on indirect sources such as government programs or other households (family help).

In Mexico, “labor force participation during 2017 was 77.6% for men and 43% for women; where the former dedicated 49.7 hours per week to paid work and the latter 38.9 hours” (Galperin y Arcidiacono, 2021, p. 5). This inequality in women’s participation in the economy limits their continuous development, training and professional experience, as well as their opportunities to access services of all kinds, such as the Internet.

Furthermore, the wage gap between men and women is a factor that remains, which is conclusive to understand the poverty environment experienced by women. In this regard, Coneval (2020b) indicates that within the non-poverty population, women receive 90 pesos for their work for every 100 pesos received

by men. However, in poverty contexts, the gap widens, women obtain 73 pesos for every 100 pesos.

Additionally, the unequal situation of women, due to a low participation in economic activity and the wage gap, becomes complex if they are young. As Moreno and Merino (2021) state: “the vulnerability of employment among young people is greater if they have other components such as gender, race, geographic location or identity” (p. 87).

Also within education, a persistent gap is observed, especially in adult women, which places them in an overlooked group. In comparison with younger population, where the educational gap decreases. According to Coneval (2020b), educational backwardness is greater in poverty contexts, reaching 40 percent in men and 50 percent in women.<sup>1</sup> This underscores not only that people are poor, but they also receive less education.

With respect to health, the disadvantaged situation of women is similar. Coneval's data (2020b) for 2018 in poverty contexts, shows that the majority of women and men affiliated had health access through Seguro Popular, 82% and 77%. In non-poverty population, most women and men were affiliated to IMSS, 59% and 64%.

A further obstacle is the fact that women have little independence to enroll in the health service on their own, either because they are working or because they can afford to pay for the service:

5 percent of women in poverty have access as affiliation holders, while 30 percent of affiliated women without poverty are access holders. Entitlement grows among men, to 16 percent of men in poverty, and to 52 percent of men without poverty (Coneval, 2020b).

As we can see factors such as wage gap, unpaid work, and the high dependence of women because they cannot be economically active without limitations (caregivers) do not occur in isolation; on the contrary, there is a relationship between these factors, which places them at a disadvantage.

Human reproduction also plays an important factor, due to the natural process required. It forces women to move away from work for a time; however, opportunities to re-incorporate are not easy. On the contrary, they are sometimes discriminated for this very fact. Coneval mentions:

In 2018, the economic participation of women aged 25 to 44 without children stood at 79 percent, while for mothers it was 61 percent.

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<sup>1</sup> Both refer to female household heads.

For every 100 men employed without pay, there were 131 women in the same condition in 2008, a figure that rose to 141 women in 2018. This situation represents a barrier to women's economic autonomy. (Coneval, 2020b)

Likewise, domestic work makes it difficult for women to join or keep a position in the labor market, and those who manage to do so generally acquire a type of employment that allows to combine work and household activities, resulting in a "double workday"<sup>2</sup>:

With respect to men, women spend 2.5 times more time on household chores and twice as much on caregiving, regardless of their poverty status. In 2018, women spent an average of 22 hours a week on household chores and 28 hours on caring for others, while men spent 8 and 15 hours respectively. (Coneval, 2020b)

In summary, the difference between the type of activities performed by men and women has enabled or limited women's access to the world of ICTs, as pointed out by Galperin and Arcidiacono (2021): "labor force participation and the types of jobs performed by men and women often correlate with different opportunities to access the Internet and develop ICT skills" (p. 1).

The disadvantages between men and women unveiled up to this point, we can also add the digital divide, which is the focus of this paper since it carries more detriments for women, due to lack of knowledge, limited access or basic use of ICTs.

The limited skills that women possess or have been able to develop in this area restrict or make it impossible for them to participate in public affairs or processes. We establish that increasing women's ICT skills will provide them with abilities to investigate and acquire information, and allow them to participate in the public and political sphere, thus building better democracies.

### ***Digital divide between men and women***

The digital divide between men and women reveals different focus for research. For this paper we identify the digital divide from Stoiciu's (2020) position who indicates that:

The concept of the digital divide has evolved over the years and is generally defined as a social issue linked to the different amount of information available

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<sup>2</sup> Paid and unpaid activities (domestic work), some even mention of a "triple workday load", see Rivero (2020).

to people depending on whether or not they have access to the information society and information and communication technologies (ICTs). It also refers to countries, regions, cities and businesses that are at a differentiated socioeconomic and cultural level with respect to ICT accessibility. It includes imbalances in Internet infrastructure, information and knowledge, and equality of opportunity based on income, race, ethnicity, gender, or other similar criteria. (para. 2)

This definition recognizes not only factors linked to access or equipment, which could be thought of in a first approach, but also emphasizes the knowledge necessary to make good use of ICTs, which depend on other socioeconomic and cultural elements, such as gender, a relevant topic for the analysis of this work. As indicated by Sánchez (2010) “men, young people, urban dwellers and wealthier and more educated people are more likely to use the Internet” (p. 121).

The digital divide between men and women represents another inequality factor between both groups, which can be linked to the existing gap in education, as Inmujeres points out:

Schooling is closely linked to ICT use; as people’s educational level increases, ICT’s use increases, and the gaps between women and men are reduced. The lowest percentage of use and the largest gaps by gender are observed among those with the lowest educational levels. (2016, p. 1)

The digital divide is a problem that affects women in Mexico and brings a series of intertwined problems, such as the lack or limited access to information, use of information to expand their opportunities, make better decisions and prevent the violation of their rights. This is relevant if we seek to avoid environments of violence or file complaints. At least 6 out of 10 Mexican women had an incident of violence; 41.3% of women have been victims of sexual violence and 9 women are murdered per day (UN Women Mexico, 2018).

On the subject of the digital divide, the term digital illiteracy does not only consider the lack of access to a computer or mobile device (tablet or cell phone). It goes beyond that. It includes the ability to navigate, the type of information or consultation sources, as well as the use given to such information.

As van Dijk points out in Gómez *et al.* (2018) access should be recognized as:

A process of technology appropriation consisting of the following stages: 1) motivational access related to the interest and attraction for the new technology, which can be explained by social, cultural, mental and psychological factors; 2) physical or material access linked to the availability of hardware, software, applications, networks and the use of ICT and its applications; 3) access to digital literacy linked to education to acquire digital skills; and 4) use referring to meaningful opportunities of use. (p. 51)

Therefore, it is necessary to review whether statistical reports, especially governmental ones, contemplate these elements that define access. Usually these reports relate to interest or physical space, downplaying the importance of ICT regarding education and information use; which can really empower the population, as is the case for women.

According to the International Telecommunication Union (UIT, 2019) “the proportion of women using the Internet globally is 48%, compared to 55% for men. In relative terms, this means that the global Internet user gap is 12.5%” (para. 6).

Data from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) show that in 2018 the heterogeneity access gap in Latin America and the Caribbean persisted as a disadvantage for women. In the case of Mexico women are positioned at 38% in internet access compared to 49% for men (Agüero, Bustelo and Viollaz, 2020).

According to data from the 2019 National Survey on Availability and Use of Information Technologies in Households (INEGI, 2020b) 70.1% of the population aged six years or older in Mexico is an Internet user and 20.1 million households (56.4% of the national total) have Internet connection. With this information, we infer that progress is being made in terms of interest and connection, since more than half of homes have the service.

However, in contrast to the above, it is possible to find that 96.4% of the population with university studies connects to the network, while 59.1% of people with basic education studies are connected (INEGI, 2020b). We conclude that the higher the education, the greater the need and interest in connecting or the better possibilities of doing so, due to the opportunities of a higher income.

The above is relevant, for our analysis, and provides evidence of how women have less access to education, so they may also have less need, interest and opportunities to connect. This becomes more complex if we consider the connections by geographic zones. According to INEGI (2020b) 76.6% have access in urban areas while only 47.7% in rural ones. If we analyze this

situation, we can affirm that the disadvantage increases in addition to being a woman, one is poor, with a low educational level and belongs to a rural area.

Even when a high number of mobile devices is perceived, not all people live today in the ICT world. Inmujeres (2016) states that in Mexico computer, internet and cell phone use is lower among women than men, about one fifth of the population aged 6 years and older does not use any of the three devices corresponding 12.5 for women and 9.2 million for men.

Regarding the ICT use while being connected, 90.7% do so to obtain information and 90.6% to communicate (INEGI, 2020b). We can think people are informed; but it is essential to question in which sites, if they are reliable and the specific topics of interest. According to INEGI (2020b) electronic transactions, purchases or payments made through the network, are still an uncommon activity among Internet users, reporting in 2019, only 27.2%.

The above may suggest that the reason to connect may be entertainment and communication through popular platforms, if we also consider that the cell phone represents the technology with the highest national dissemination with 86.5 million users in the country (INEGI, 2020b) and not precisely to get information or participate in issues of public relevance, whether at the municipal, state, national, regional or international level.

The main reason why people have not used computers and the internet is because they do not know how to use them, which excludes and limits them in terms of their education, the use of services and their labor insertion and even their participation in society. The proportion of women who say they do not know how to use these devices is higher than men. (Inmujeres, 2016)

For this reason, it is necessary to develop policies, programs and projects aimed to train users in order to achieve greater benefits, as indicated by ITU:

When women and girls have access to the Internet and the skills to be able to use ICTs, they have the opportunity to create new businesses, sell products to new markets, find better-paying jobs, and access education, as well as financial and health services. (2019, para. 2)

Hence, the need to focus not only on the use of ICTs as a means of entertainment or communication, and not only to provide access to communities so that they feel included. Objectives should be oriented to achieve skills in the population, which will allow them to access information, make good use of it, make better decisions, participate in public and governmental processes that



define their quality of life, especially vulnerable groups, which are lagging behind and disadvantaged, such as women.

In relation to democracy, this issue is relevant, since building democratic societies requires the active participation of all; where their contribution is not limited only to the action of voting. Otherwise it is only a mirage, as Meixueiro acknowledges:

It is true that democracy does not only concern electoral issues; the democratic regime must seek, among other things, a better society and an adequate coexistence among citizens; combating inequality, reducing economic gaps and seeking well-being, respect for human rights and legality must be priorities of public policies emanating from a democratic regime. (2016, para. 3)

## **A BETTER DEMOCRACY IN MEXICO BY REDUCING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN**

One of the main foundations of democracy is the power that people have to decide collectively who represents them; however, if we consider the unequal situation experienced by women in Mexico, it is possible to assure that their participation is restricted. Therefore, it cannot be said that this form of government is fulfilling its objective. Luna indicates that:

The life of our country will be fully democratic when we citizens, in a co-responsible manner with the institutions of the State, promote the application of our laws and the creation of conditions of equality and justice for the entire population, fairly employing the mechanisms established in the laws to influence the acts and decisions of the government. (2016, p. 53)

If measures are not taken, it is not surprising that democracy in Mexico will continue to be perceived as lacking results, due to the absence of response to social needs, which contributes to the weakening of governments. Aguilar (2020) states: “the number of those who perceive that democracy has lost its capacity for social leadership is growing, it does not know what to do in the face of numerous problems or does little in the face of them” (p. 14).

On the other hand, it is necessary to highlight that democracies are complex and require the involvement of all social actors in order to create alternative solutions to imminent social problems, as indicated by Sánchez (2017):

Given the difficulty and complexity of governing a democratic and politically plural society with a globalized economy immersed in a vertiginous connectivity, government without the involvement and commitment of society in the solution of public problems is clearly insufficient. (p. 11)

In order to achieve the above, it is necessary to generate conditions of equality so that all people, especially vulnerable groups such as women, have access to the knowledge and skills necessary to actively participate in democracies, making their rights effective in an informed and conscious manner. Undoubtedly one of the alternatives to achieve this is through ICT capabilities.

Gender equality is an unaddressed issue that requires special attention, the Global Agenda emphasizes its claim to realize the human rights of all people and achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls (United Nations, 2015).

It also states that Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) seek “...a world in which all women and girls enjoy full gender equality and where all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed” (United Nations, 2015, p. 4).

Specifically, SDG number five, Gender Equality, in its target 5.5 indicates that it is necessary to “ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all decision-making levels in political, economic and public life (United Nations, 2020, para. 18)”. Furthermore, target 5.6 with respect to ICTs, states that it is necessary to “Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women” (United Nations, 2020, para. 21).

Mexico, upon subscribing to the Global Agenda requires pertinent interventions that contribute to the achievement of its goals and objectives; but for this, more actions and less simulations are indispensable, as James Madison quoted in (Colet, 2008), states: “...a democratic government without the people having information or the means to achieve that democracy, is the preamble to a farce or a tragedy, or both at the same time” (p. 213).

Therefore, to strengthen democracies through the inclusion of groups that are behind makes it possible to rebuild peaceful societies, with less coercive populations, and encourages governments to reinvent themselves, modify and improve processes in order to respond effectively to social needs, not only allowing citizen participation, but also encouraging it and providing them with the necessary tools to achieve it.

Then, the construction of solid democracies requires the inclusion of women, who must have a more active role in it. Thus they need to acquire knowledge and skills to participate in the political life, otherwise they forgo the opportunity to decide upon public matters or being underrepresented. Melchor (2021) reported: “Women in the world are underrepresented in political positions, they occupy on average 24.9% of parliaments, 6.6% of heads of state and 6.2% of government heads” (para. 1).

Therefore, governments need to place as a priority issue the digital divide between men and women in the political agenda, focused to train citizens in ICTs, especially women, with whom there is a historical debt.

Likewise, it is essential to remember the guiding principles of citizen participation, such as: recognition and respect for others; focused on results; inclusive, non-exclusive; voluntary, equitable, limited in time and implement it (Sanhueza, 2004).

With these principles, we can take a closer look at the recognition of the other; since conceiving the other requires openness towards change and in the gender agenda. Even though one can observe how this appears continuously in the discourse, in practice, it is only simulation with no –or minimal– orientation towards a true paradigm shift (different to androcentric).<sup>3</sup>

The principle of being inclusive is a determining factor, as (Sanhueza, 2004) points out: “the exclusion of any group deprives the process of knowing all points of view, considering all interests...” (p. 4). That is why leaving out women or limiting their participation in democracies does not contribute to the wellness of a government’s system. Moreno and Bracamontes (2021) highlight:

Women’s political participation is an indispensable element that characterizes stable, consolidated democracies, which include all citizens in decision-making in order to effectively address social problems. (p. 80)

Lastly, the equitable aspect is fundamental, since, as women are a vulnerable group, it is essential to ensure their participation. Sanhueza determines:

The commitment of the parties can be seriously affected if any of the groups is perceived as having privileges or advantageous conditions in relation to the others. In this sense it is important to ensure, with special support if necessary, equitable use of resources, access to information and capacity to influence. (2004, p. 4)

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<sup>3</sup> “Systematic invisibilization of women and everything related to the feminine” (López, 2021, p. 265).

Regarding citizen participation, four levels can be distinguished:

1. Informative: the objective is to provide information on the subject in question. At this level the flow of information is unidirectional and there is no possibility of feedback or direct negotiation on what is reported.
2. Consultative: the objective is to invite individuals and groups to actively participate through their opinions and suggestions.
3. Resolutive: the objective is to convene individuals and groups with real possibilities of influencing a specific issue. The actors are considered as executors and/or managers of social programs and/or projects to respond to local problems. In this way, the stakeholders participate in a negotiation process, as a result of which binding agreements are reached and therefore have an impact on the decision adopted.
4. Congestion: the objective is to convene key actors to be part of a decision-making process that involves more than one specific issue. Co-management is carried out as a function of a broad management process (Sanhueza, 2004, p. 3).

These elements help analyze to what extent women participate. Do they play a decisive role or are they simply spectators? According to our analysis, there is evidence that establishes how many women have managed to become involved in public issues; however, a larger segment of women are located at the information level, due to the lack of interest of governments to involve them.

An example, is the 1% participation of women in the public hearing regarding the project “Tren Maya” (Sánchez, 2020). An important hearing, due to the controversies it brings, such as land use, impacts on flora, fauna, climate change, public budget, among others. This case reveals, on the one hand, the precarious participation of women and, on the other, the government’s lack of interest in an inclusive process that represents all groups.

It is also appropriate to question whether the role of the State in solving problems, especially those demanded by women, is effective. Since such problems are still present and in many cases have worsened. We agree with (Aguilar, 2012) when he affirms that the government of the 21st century has achieved recognition of its political legitimacy; however, what is still pending is the capacity and effectiveness of governing.

If one considers the dimensions of state capabilities analyzed by Bonifacio (2018):

- Institutional: related to the possibility for the State to set and guarantee the rules to be complied with in the set of relationships existing in society.
- Policies: the ability that exists in the State to process the demands coming from society, i.e., governmental direction.
- Techniques: these are related to the state apparatus and refer to the capacity to analyze and manage the policies of the areas of state intervention, i.e., to know the issues, their nature, identify the causes of the problems and intervene effectively in their solution.
- Administrative: implements and provides public services.

It is possible to note that the Mexican government has not placed much emphasis on the policy, techniques and administrative dimensions, as it has not been able or had the political will to recognize, process the disadvantages faced by women, and provide opportunities for them to participate and intervene effectively.

While it is true that an intervening State was required, as stipulated by Aguilar (2012):

The great interventionist State was required, but this changes when society has informative, cognitive, technological, organizational and productive capacities; in addition to developing political capacities for information, deliberation, understanding and self-regulation and co-responsibility through trust, partnership and cooperation.

It is also true that the population of the 21st century has a more active role in decision making, participates from its own sphere with the implementation of solutions to social problems; however, it cannot be taken for granted that all people do so to the same extent. There are restrictive situations for certain sectors, such as lack of knowledge, skills, tools, among others.

On the other hand, it is not new that the government is shifting. An example of this is the electronic government, which according to the Latin American Center of Administration for Development (CLAD, 2007) is:

The use of ICTs in administrative bodies to improve the information and services offered to citizens, to guide the effectiveness and efficiency of public management, and to substantially increase public sector transparency and citizen participation. All this, without prejudice to the denominations established in national legislation. (p. 239)

Technological advances are evident and substantial changes such as open government remain constant. Therefore, it is urgent to provide the population with the necessary skills to make use of these innovations, especially the most disadvantaged and “digitally illiterate” groups, such as women in many cases. Otherwise, the pillars of this model, consisting of transparency, participation, collaborative work and accountability, will not be useful.

In this framework, as Bonifacio (2020) points out, the bureaucratic tradition associated with opaque processes, citizens’ ignorance regarding the criteria that guide decisions and lack of access to public information is a thing of the past and the desired democratic consolidation has no place without citizen participation. Therefore, ICTs, as well as representing progress in public administrations, must take an interest and implement policies, programs and projects that guarantee this objective.

Furthermore, Colet (2008) suggests:

Citizen access to public service is difficult and costly. Internet and cell phones are easy and less expensive access mechanisms for citizens. However, this type of services is useless if the platforms are only built for computers and not for cell phones, in addition to the lack of training for different groups to make use of these services. (p. 204)

The above is possible with greater political will, since technology has gradually become part of people’s lives, if we consider that:

88.1% have at least one cell phone of the so-called smart phones or Smartphone. Among the population with this type of cell phone, 94.7% use the functionality of network connection, 44.3% have a computer, while households with Internet availability register 56.4%, which corresponds to an increase of 3.5% compared to 2018. (INEGI, 2020b)

However, technological advances are fast evolving and if there is no focus on people who do not have the resources and digital training, in a short time they may be left out of this dynamic, lagging behind, and instead of narrowing gaps these widen more. As Bonifacio (2020) indicates “the existence of a fourth industrial research, the exponential era and the change is very fast, as an example is the Big data, artificial intelligence, cryptocurrency, robotics and 3D printing”.

It is possible to devise strategies to be developed by the government, such as using Big Data to create an algorithm and identify user preferences; thus

understanding how connections are being used. Likewise, from data governance, the State can make a balance in the population by areas to know which are the least connected, why they do not approach the electronic government, the various public services through technology. Identify whether this is due to connection problems, or regarding equipment, knowledge, or skills, and thus plan actions that contribute to the reduction of the digital divide.

In this way, data governance allows improving their intervention capacities and developing public policies that really solve problems (Bonifacio, 2020a). This can help to improve the quality of life of women and the overall population, offering or bringing social services to vulnerable groups such as women.

As Colet mentions: “an administration intensive in information and communication technologies is equivalent to an administration endowed with a huge and very strict techno-structure and few administrative personnel” (2008, p. 218), it can be inferred that personnel in public administrations for bureaucratic procedures should be decreasing.

We can anticipate that if the government reduces the payroll, which is often the subject of scandal due to corruption, this resource could be invested in more technology; training of personnel to use it, as well as generating new types of positions to train the population to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills. As indicated by Gil-Garcia and Pardo cited in Criado and Gil-Garcia (2013), organizational, human and symbolic resources are also necessary to carry out this type of administrative innovation projects.

However, the balance cannot be tipped to one side. As the evidence shows that as long as comprehensive processes are not implemented, the results will continue to be the same. Criado and Gil-García point out:

It should not be forgotten that certain projects have focused on increasing the capacity of citizens to carry out online procedures without considering, at the same time, their participation in the design and improvement of these administrative processes, despite this being one of the objectives to be pursued within the dynamics of governance that have been promoted recently. (2013, p. 11).

Undoubtedly, current democracy in Mexico requires substantial changes, such as integrating an active citizen participation, which can intervene in public decisions and not only in certain spaces of opinion granted by the government. People must demand the power they have in this type of government.

## CONCLUSIONS

The digital divide between women and men is the result of a series of inequalities that have historically existed between the two groups, which has deprived and will continue to limit their development unless it is delegitimized at the regulatory and institutional level.

Therefore, there is an unquestionable need to create affirmative actions, laws, mechanisms, instruments, technical and human capacities that ensure the reduction of the various disparities that exist between genders, such as the digital gap. If the technological world continues its course and women maintain these disadvantages they run the risk of not advancing towards a better quality of life and losing the rights achieved so far.

The above is evident, especially in a time of global health emergency, which once again placed women at a disadvantage, as they were the ones who lost their jobs and even their lives, due to the type of paid and unpaid activities they had to face. This is an example of how public policies with a gender perspective continue to be a debt in Mexico.

A clear example is the number of jobs that women lost because they “had to return” to take care of the home, children, the elderly and those affected by COVID-19. Due to the cultural, social and labor scenarios (areas, types of jobs, schedules) that continue to operate on the basis of gender and continue to violate women’s rights.

Likewise, the pandemic makes it clear how the digital divide further detonates inequalities between men and women. First, because many of the types of work occupied by women could not be migrated to “home office”. Second, where it was possible, women with little or no ICT skills had fewer opportunities to do so; and finally, those who did manage to do so, faced the “triple workday”, consisting of paid work, domestic work and children’s education.

In this sense, the need to provide women with ICT skills can be corroborated, since both the information and knowledge society are constantly advancing, both in the public and private spheres. If women do not manage to advance at the same pace in these two areas, they will remain in a context of inequality and this situation may even increase, since teleworking is a growing trend.

It is impossible to deny that an informed, trained and inclusive citizenry can be synonymous with responsibility, commitment to public and political life; which is interested, informed, analyzes, makes decisions, demands transparency in public processes and accountability in the use of resources. This leads to establish true democracies, not just mockups.



In this context, ICTs represent an opportunity to achieve greater citizen participation, where governments build real channels to approach their constituents. A scenario in which power truly resides with the people.

Thus, it is possible to assert that in order to build a better democracy in Mexico, it is essential to include women. They represent more than half of the population; but it is also necessary to ensure their full participation through the development of skills and leadership to influence public decisions. To this end, they must be trained in the access and effective use of ICTs, since the global health pandemic caused by COVID-19 has demonstrated how these capabilities are indispensable in an era where information and communication technologies have become the predominant element that brings people together, allows them to stay informed and continue to participate in public affairs.

The reduction of the digital divide can help women find better opportunities, especially for those who have been excluded from public life due to different situations and conditions of their gender, such as race, socioeconomic status, geographic location, among other inequalities that keep them in a disadvantaged situation.

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