

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS: Volume 30, Issue 3: Women, Work and the Digital Economy

Gender & Development (G&D) is a unique journal, offering a forum for the sharing of experiences and analysis between feminist activists, scholars and women leaders across the globe working in research, policy, and practice. The final issue of G&D in 2022 will be published in November, focused on women, work and the digital economy.

The Context

The world has become more digital and automatized. In 2016, the digital economy was valued at USD 11.5 trillion, or 15 per cent of the world's GDP, and is projected to grow rapidly according to a 2017 study by Huawei and Oxford Economics. In spite of this, only a small portion of our world is digitally connected, meaning that a large section of people, particularly the poor and other socially and economically marginalized groups, do not experience the benefits stemming from a rapidly digitising global economy. The UNCTAD Digital Economy Report 2021 raised concerns that only 20 per cent of people in what is referred to as 'least developed countries' (LDCs) use the Internet, or have severely limited access.

Digital inequities are also deeply gendered. Globally, there is a glaring gender digital divide, with the divide being more pronounced in countries of the global south, due to a lack of equitable digital resources/infrastructures, low digital literacy, as well as prevailing socio-cultural norms. Moreover, this digital divide manifests itself intersectionally along gender and race with serious social and economic implications on women coming from the most socially and economically excluded groups. This gender digital divide came into sharp reality during the pandemic, when a majority of informal workers, businesses, banks, schools, health services, and importantly, government relief measures and social protection services had to be accessed digitally. As a result, many women, especially socio-economically marginalised women lost waged or self-employed work and fell out of the social security net due to lack of digital coverage. Recent research in the global south suggests that this digital divide could keep distancing women, girls and other socio-economically marginalised groups from their livelihoods and vital services like education, health, financial inclusion and government schemes.

Although rapid digitisation is characterised by increased inequities, digital labour markets have emerged as significant avenues for income generation for women, people with disabilities, and migrant workers and refugees. However, only few women in the global south are able to benefit from these opportunities, and many have become part of the invisible workforce on online digital platforms.¹ This brings us to the question: What comprises digital labour, which sectors do women participate in on these digital labour markets, and how do they fare?

According to Gregg and Andrijasevic, "Digital labour refers to a range of tasks performed by humans on, in relation to or in the aftermath of software and hardware platforms" (2019, 1)². There is much

¹ ILO (2021). World Employment and Social Outlook: The role of digital labour platforms in transforming the world of work. ILO, Geneva.

² Gregg, Melissa and Rutvica Andrijavesik (2019) 'Virtually absent: The gendered histories and economies of digital labour' Feminist Review 123 (1-7) DOI: 10.1177/0141778919878929

research on the role of underpaid poor migrant women working from the global south in technology and electronics assembly plants who sustain the digital economy. Many women working in the digital economy, such as in digital labour platforms as well as location-based platforms, face inequalities with few benefits, even though their labour is substantial. A study by Anita Gurumurthy, Khawla Zainab, Sadhana Sanjay (2020)³ explains that while digital apps for labour such as cleaning services and beauty work have given some women access to the digital gig economy, this form of labour remains marked by instability, lack of social protection and a lack of access to redressal mechanisms, thereby rendering women, particularly migrant women, more precarious. This is visible when we look at how informal retail workers like street vendors, many of whom are women, get impacted by monopolistic e-commerce platforms. We also see these inequalities manifested in the digitisation and platformisation of the agricultural sector, care work and domestic work as well. There is thus a critical need to expand discussions on the structure of digital labour markets, the exploitation of gendered labour as well as data extractions that power the platform economy and digital capitalism.

Call for contributions:

For this issue of *Gender and Development*, we will explore the impact of the rapid digitisation of work, and identify solutions to make the digital economy more inclusive for marginalised groups, including women, LGBTQI persons, and persons living with disabilities. We invite articles that propose ideas and share best practices on how we can enable equitable digital literacies and resources between the global north and south, as well as within the global south, and reduce digital inequities on the basis of gender, race, caste and ability. How have women and other marginalised groups navigated, questioned and challenged these inequities and discriminations? And, how can we ensure that the benefits of the digital economy reach the most vulnerable groups? Together, these concerns and questions comprise the thrust of this Issue's call for contributions.

Some of the themes that could be pursued in addressing these questions include:

- The gendered implications of a rapidly digitising global economy on formal and informal economies of the global south at regional, national and local levels, particularly in the context of the pandemic.
- Old and new forms of gender-based inequalities and discriminations that are emerging while engaging with these digital labour platforms and other applications.
- The various ways in which women and other marginalised groups cope with these inequalities, discriminations and digital infrastructure deficit.
- Roles of the state and the market in the digitising of the economy and its implications on vulnerable groups.
- How institutional racism and sexism operates to keep the status quo within public policies and market and its implications on black, indigenous and other people of colour.
- How artificial intelligence can perpetuate gender imbalance.
- Concerns and questions regarding data, data for whom and protection of data.
- Innovative feminist methodologies to research gendered digital labour markets and gendered responses to inequities.

³ Anita Gurumurthy, Khawla Zainab, Sadhana Sanjay (2020). Indian Women Workers on AMT in the Post-pandemic Moment The Macro Frames of Microwork. *Economic and Political Weekly* 56(17)

This issue strongly encourages scholars and practitioners to share innovative local measures, programmes and research that could inform digital policies and labour laws, and shape a more gender equitable digital economy, one that could aim to:

- bridge the digital gender gap,
- advance and secure women's labour rights,
- tackle institutional racism and sexism,
- enhance local economies such as women and trans-persons led cooperatives and enterprises,
- enable access and ownership over digital resources and build digital literacies and capacities among women, young people, persons living with disabilities, and LGBTQI groups,
- improve financial inclusion, access to public services, relief measures and social protection.

Submissions

We want to hear from women's rights activists, community and grassroots leaders, civil society organisations and networks, feminist economists and researchers, academics, policy makers, and development and humanitarian practitioners from all generations, identities and backgrounds who are directly involved in challenging existing inequities on the basis of gender, race, caste or other markers of difference in the digital economy. Overall, this issue will publish articles that highlight innovative technological, programmatic and policy solutions to help move towards a more gender equitable digital economy.

Please send your abstract of 100 words or less, in an email attachment to **genderanddevelopment.south@gmail.com** as soon as possible and no later than **10 March 2022**. Please include your name, contact details as well organizational affiliation, if relevant. We will contact you by the end of March if we would like you to develop your abstract into a full article (of around 7,000 words plus references). Guidelines for contributors are on the website and we strongly recommend you read that carefully before composing your abstract.

G&D is a unique journal which acts as a forum for the sharing of analysis and experiences between feminist and women activists involved in research, policy and practice in the areas of development and humanitarian aid. For more information on the journal, visit: www.genderanddevelopment.org.