



Women, Work, and the Gig Economy

A collaborative research initiative generating evidence on gender and digital platforms across South and Southeast Asia

The 21st century is witness to major transformations reshaping the way we live and work. Primary among them is the acceleration of technological change. Much attention has been afforded to understanding the future of work within this context, but relatively little of the discourse foregrounds the issue of women's work.

Particular shifts that come with advancements in technology are the creation of new jobs and ways of organizing existing jobs. The rise of online labour platforms – mediating supply and demand for tasks and goods – are contributing to these shifts. These platforms enable workers to work directly from or near their homes, and manage their work on a case by case basis, getting paid by output produced, that is, taking on “gigs” either as contracted workers, or as entrepreneurs/freelancers.

For women, platforms can potentially offer flexibility of hours and location, the opportunity to earn a higher income, and enter into more male-dominated or higher skilled work. Platform work also carries risks such as isolation, high competition, replicating informal work structures and excluding workers from labour regulations and social protection. For women in low-income contexts who already face considerable challenges in the labour market – including unpaid work and care responsibilities, restrictive social norms, and limited training opportunities – these trade-offs may, or may not, be worth the risk.

More evidence is needed to understand how gig work and online labour platforms impact women, particularly low income women

and those working in the informal economy, illuminating the practices and policies, which, at scale, have the power to address existing labour market inequalities and contribute to a more inclusive future of work.

“**Women, Work and the Gig Economy**” is a collaborative research initiative coordinated by the JustJobs Network (JJN), supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) as part of the Future of Work in the Global South (FoWiGS) initiative. This initiative examines how digital platforms can enhance women's economic empowerment and build gender-inclusive labour markets in the Global South. This cohort of researchers will:

- Deepen our understanding of the challenges and opportunities that women face in accessing and benefitting from work opportunities through digital platforms;
- Discover innovations, practices and solutions that platforms may use to create higher-quality, inclusive work;
- Collaborate directly with policymakers, online enterprises and workers to scale proven solutions through better design and regulation of labour practices.

By managing and disseminating research across partner institutions, this consortium aims to create a network of researchers, policymakers, and private sector actors who are working toward a more equitable future of global work through evidence, advocacy, and knowledge-sharing.



Beginning in early 2020 and spanning seven countries across South and Southeast Asia, these six research projects will generate new insights into the role of digital platforms and the gig economy in advancing gender equality and inclusion. The teams are part of a growing community of research and practice that will strengthen the evidence base on the intersection of gender, work, and technology in the Global South.

Digital Platforms and Women's Work in Sri Lanka and India

In consultation with digital platforms, civil society and policymakers, this project will assess the ecosystem within which women engage in platform-based work in India and Sri Lanka; it will further investigate how labour regulations, platform business practices, and state policies can support women's economic empowerment through digital work.

Institutions: Centre for Policy Research, World Resources Institute, Indian Institute for Human Settlements, LIRNEasia

From Bottom-of-the-pyramid to Top of the Platform Value Chain: Action-research on Developing Inclusive Platform Models for Women Workers in the Global South

Digital platforms in India have emerged as mediators of work opportunities for women in the informal economy. This project will incubate and test the impact of digital platforms that are run by social enterprises or cooperatives, creating space for women in the informal economy to participate in digital work and contribute to developing the terms of their work.

Institution: IT for Change

Centering the Agency of Women in Thailand's Platform-based Care Economy

This project explores precarity and gender-based issues in Thailand's platform-based care economy. By centring the voices of women workers, this research seeks to strengthen women's decision-making power in determining employment outcomes and working conditions, contributing to an inclusive future of work.

Institution: Just Economy and Labour Institute

Feminist Approaches to Labour Collectives (Femlab.co): Organizing Digitally in South Asia

How can women workers contribute to the design and governance of the future of work? This project explores the extent to which women workers in the informal sector in India and Bangladesh can use digital platforms to optimize their livelihood, share grievances, and communicate directly to the top of the supply chain to improve their working conditions.

Institutions: University of Hyderabad, Erasmus University Rotterdam

Opportunities, Costs, and Outcomes of Platformized Home-based Work for Women: Case Studies of Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand

By assessing women's opportunities for home-based work on different kinds of digital work platforms in Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar, this project examines the economic and empowerment outcomes of such work, and enables cross-country comparisons across different forms of gig work.

Institutions: JustJobs Network, Centre for Economic and Social Development (Myanmar), Kenan Foundation Asia

Driving Inclusion Through Empowerment and Decent Work: The Case of Filipino Women in Online Work

The Philippines has one of the world's highest rates of people engaging in online work. This case study aims to fill critical knowledge gaps related to women's engagement in the digital platform economy, including their motivations and compensation, the challenges they face, and the assistance they need, to prosper in online work.

Institution: Philippine Institute for Development Studies



**FUTURE OF WORK
IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH**



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To learn more, visit the initiative page at

www.Connected2Work.org