



LABOUR AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

# THE DEAL WE ALWAYS WANTED

**A FEMINIST ACTION FRAMEWORK FOR  
THE DIGITAL ECONOMY**

ISSUED BY FES WORKING GROUP ON FEMINIST  
VISIONS OF THE FUTURE OF WORK

Anita Gurumurthy and Nandini Chami



Digital capitalism has given rise to extreme inequality, concentrating economic power in the hands of a few. Women are disproportionately affected by this and likely to experience greater marginalisation and even loss of livelihood.



The business model of transnational platform companies produces and reproduces racialised and gendered hierarchies in the labour market.



A feminist action framework on the digital economy proposes powerful new visions for creating and sustaining gender-just societies.

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## 1

## OVERVIEW

The techno-social paradigm of the 21st century based on the digital and data revolution raises grave concerns for gender justice. It is built on and reinforces the intersecting axes of social power that have contributed to an unsustainable and unequal world economic order. To resist its onslaught, we need a deep understanding of its workings.

The edifice of digital capitalism is rooted in extreme inequality. Digitalisation is co-linear with the concentration of economic power in the hands of a few,<sup>1</sup> a falling share of returns for labour as compared to capital,<sup>2</sup> and limited progress in reducing income inequality within and among countries.<sup>3</sup> Women are disproportionately affected by this rise in inequality and are more likely to experience extreme poverty.<sup>4</sup>

Even as the COVID-19 pandemic destroyed the world's economies, the personal wealth of Silicon valley czar, Jeff Bezos, increased by \$40 billion.<sup>5</sup> Ceaseless data accumulation under digital capitalism has led to extreme alienation and precarity,<sup>6</sup> and a commodification of social reproduction.<sup>7</sup> This is tragic, considering that the internet's original promise concerned emancipatory forms of being and doing through new forms of connection, collaboration and wealth creation.<sup>8</sup>

We need to recover the digital paradigm and create the normative and institutional frameworks to harness the power of data and the internet for a radically different socio-economic order. Today, as the fallout from COVID-19 hastens the onward march of a paradigm-gone-wrong, we urgently need a feminist action framework on the digital economy that can unleash new visions and create sustainable pathways. Such a framework must mount a challenge to the status quo, recognising the injustices of digital capitalism as a global paradigm that is sustained through a neo-colonial ideology. Our task is to identify and address the extractivism, exploitation and exclusion inherent in this epoch, as reflected in the intersections of gender, class, race, caste and other such markers of power and dominance.

We often speak of the platform economy to describe the emerging economic paradigm. The platform economy comprises a huge ecosystem of transactions scaffolded through a network-data architecture, in other words, the internet and the data that flows on it. The framing logic of the platform

economy, also referred to as the digital economy, is founded on ›digital intelligence‹.

In the past two decades, large digital corporations like Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Alibaba (often called GAFAA) have amassed huge volumes of data. Based on this ever-expanding data pool, over which they have exclusive ownership and control, these corporations have built an ›intelligence advantage‹, giving them the edge when it comes to re-engineering global value chains using data-based insights and predictions. Thanks to such advantage, not only have these companies been able to catapult themselves forward as winner-takes-all monopolies<sup>9</sup> in a particular sector, but have also steadily gained entry into many more sectors of the economy. Digital capitalism thus signifies a shift in capitalist accumulation, with a data-enabled reordering of all aspects of the economy.<sup>10</sup>

The wholesale reorganisation of production, distribution and consumption that we are witness to does not augur well for an equal, sustainable and just economic order. From a feminist perspective, there are some crucial concerns, discussed below.

## 2

## WHY MUST FEMINISTS BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE DIGITAL ECONOMY?

### 2.1 THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION HAS FURTHERED THE NEO-LIBERAL DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM, DEEPENING GENDER-BASED INEQUALITIES

Very early in its course, the digital revolution became the handmaiden of neo-liberal globalisation. The dividends of technology are concentrated in a limited number of superstar firms.<sup>11</sup> Big Tech's business model, based on data accumulation, has fostered the concentration of economic power and the creation of market monopolies.<sup>12</sup> Between 1980-2016, the years that witnessed the emergence of the digital epoch, global inequality increased, with top earners gaining more than the rest (see Box 1).<sup>13</sup> An economic paradigm that women from the Global South have rejected, characterised by increased inequality and corporate capture of social life-worlds, has taken on a new lease of life in the digital economy.

#### Box 1. The Big Tech Ecosystem

In the digital economy, a handful of corporations have managed to build a networked web of connections using their big data power. These dense connections span different verticals or sectors in the economy as well as the various segments of any single vertical. In addition, thanks to big data power, Big Tech is able to manipulate the market. Take the case of Amazon:

- it is not merely an online marketplace, but has stakes in a wide range of economic activities, from the automotive industry to health care, life sciences, autonomous drone delivery, cybersecurity and smart homes.<sup>14</sup>
- Within retail commerce, Amazon provides the essential infrastructure for everything from delivery and logistics support to credit lending and data analytics services to sellers. Amazon Cloud Services (AWS), which is a suite of web-based backbone services for retail commerce, has historically contributed more to Amazon's operating income than its retail arm.<sup>15</sup>
- The company has been found to use data about third-party sellers on its platform to develop competing private-label offerings for the most profitable products, a practice at odds with the company's stated policies.<sup>16</sup>
- Amazon has over 3,000 product lines of its own, including in grocery, book publishing, television and film

production, fashion design, and pharma, and even hardware-as-a-service (Alexa-based gadgets).

Alibaba, the Chinese behemoth, started off as an e-commerce platform, but has now developed a cloud intelligence platform servicing a wide range of sectors – urban planning, agriculture, health, aviation and finance. Alibaba's prowess extends across the data value chain; through its e-commerce vertical, it retains unsurpassed power as a data collector and aggregator, while, as a provider of cloud-based intelligence services, it deepens its unparalleled storage and processing capacity for cross-sectoral business analytics.<sup>17</sup>

The Big Tech ecosystem thrives on aggressive venture finance that has encouraged market manipulation and capture,<sup>18</sup> enabling leading tech companies to scoop up or eliminate competitors. Just seven companies from two countries – the United States and China – account for two-thirds of the total market value of the world's top 70 digital platforms,<sup>19</sup> cornering 75 per cent of all patents related to blockchain technologies, 50 per cent of global spending on the Internet of Things, and more than 75 per cent of the world market for public cloud computing.<sup>20</sup> The developing world trails far behind in digital technological developments.

In a digital social paradigm that is deeply unequal, poverty continues to remain gendered, disproportionately impacting women in their peak productive age range of 25-34 years.<sup>21</sup> In the poorest countries, which have the lowest levels of gender equality attainments (including in education and skills),<sup>22</sup> poverty and associated marginality, especially of young women, means that the data and artificial intelligence (AI) revolution will simply bypass them. Regressive gender norms define women's interface with technology in emerging job markets, relegating them to lower-paid and low-skill opportunities. Furthermore, the COVID-19 context has had a negative impact on women's workforce participation,<sup>23</sup> while confining women to private spaces in which they face the risk of increased violence.<sup>24</sup>

It is time for our conversation to move beyond the access divide to the multiple divides in the distribution of digital dividends globally, nationally and sub-nationally, across gendered locations.

## 2.2 THE DIGITAL ECONOMY PERPETUATES GENDERED LABOUR HIERARCHIES AND UNDERMINES WOMEN'S LIVELIHOOD FUTURES

Evidence suggests that for the majority of the world's women currently concentrated in low-quality, insecure forms of work, the future of work may be no different from the present of work. Highly paid, advanced jobs in computer science and AI programming that hold the promise of upward mobility in the digital economy remain out of reach for most women, as gender gaps in higher education, especially in advanced science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) sectors, still remain unbridged<sup>25</sup> and workplace sexism in technology companies continues to be the prevailing norm.<sup>26</sup> Globally, women represent only one in three crowdworkers. In developing countries, this proportion falls to one in five,<sup>27</sup> as gender divides in technological access and fluency further skew women's participation in the digital labour market.<sup>28</sup>

Women have been hit hardest by the economic shocks of the global pandemic, concentrated as they are in low-paid, unprotected jobs and disproportionately affected by the withdrawal of public investments in social care infrastructure.<sup>29</sup> This situation is only going to worsen, as the acceleration of AI-induced automation in traditional manufacturing and administration jobs dominated by women leads to more job losses in the formal sector and a reversal of hard-won gains in pay and status.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, women in agriculture and informal-sector employment will also be adversely affected by platformisation. End-to-end restructuring of global value chains by platform companies impinges directly on women's traditional livelihoods in agriculture and micro-retail in the Global South. Online food delivery platforms undercut women's home-based catering enterprises, while platformised supply chains in agriculture uproot women-led agro-ecosystems, with potential implications for household food security.<sup>31</sup> The gendered impact of the digital economy on agrarian and informal-sector livelihoods is still unfolding, but empirical experiences belie any optimism.<sup>32</sup>

Platform companies for on-demand services reproduce racialised and gendered labour market hierarchies, designating women to low-end tasks.<sup>33</sup> Platforms also use worker profiling practices that prioritise the preferences of consumers, reproducing entrenched racial and gender hierarchies in the labour market (see Box 2).<sup>34</sup>

### Box 2. Gender Hierarchies in On-demand Care Work

A couple of years ago, a leading on-demand work platform in India, Book My Bai (Book My Domestic Help), ran an ad campaign »Diamonds are useless! Gift your wife a maid«,<sup>35</sup> reflecting the deep-seated patriarchal norms surrounding women's work in general and the normalised devaluation of the work that poor, low-caste women do, in particular. Platforms such as Care.com (described as the Amazon for care services) position themselves as an online marketplace for independent care professionals and clients to identify one another, purporting to be a level playing field where work performance determines earnings potential and better pros-

pects. The reality, however, is that transparency is a one-way street on these platforms. Detailed background information about workers is compiled and presented to clients but client information (location, negative feedback from co-workers etc.) is not accessible to workers.<sup>36</sup> A study of Care.com found that higher paying categories of care work, such as child care, are dominated by white, US-born workers who are seen as class peers by clients. Workers from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds, typically blacks and Latinos, found themselves confined to low-status, low-end jobs, such as home cleaning.<sup>37</sup>

An emerging concern is that platform-mediated employment arrangements erode workers' rights to social protection. The precarisation and disposability that are characteristic of the platform economy in most countries of the Global South do not really bring empowering flexibility. Going by the increase in women's care-work burdens post-COVID, a shift towards digitalisation of the economy without commensurate changes in social spending on care infrastructure, corporate accountability for workers' rights and regulation of platforms will, in all likelihood, lead to an intensification of women's unpaid care-work burdens. Work-from-home arrangements post-COVID may not only isolate women workers, but also set the clock back by reinforcing traditional gender-based division of labour within the home.<sup>38</sup>

## 2.3 TRANSNATIONAL DIGITAL CORPORATIONS COLONISE WOMEN'S BODIES AND LIFE-WORLDS

Data extractivism – the logic at the heart of the business model of transnational digital companies – has crept into every aspect of social life. Menstrual-health histories<sup>39</sup> and intimate sexual practices<sup>40</sup> are profiled for the market on a hitherto unforeseen scale by apps that push for an increasing quantification of the self. In this repackaging of sociality as raw material for capital accumulation, akin to the exploitation of natural resources under industrial capitalism, the forces of capital have colonised the last bastion: the intimate life-world.<sup>41</sup>

Frontier technologies such as digital gene sequencing pose risks with respect to the enclosure of biodiversity resources and the capture of benefits from such resources by a handful of powerful corporations (see Box 3).



### Box 3. Earth BioGenome Project and Earth Bank of Codes

In January 2018, the World Economic Forum launched the Amazon Bank of Codes initiative. It has two main prongs: the Earth BioGenome Project that intends to sequence and catalogue all plants, animals, fungi and a large portion of all single-celled organisms on Earth by developing and implementing air-, land- and ocean-faring drones and new, cheap sequencing technologies; and the Earth Bank of Codes that will serve as a blockchain-based register of global biological and biomimetic intellectual property assets, as well as documenting the origin, rights and obligations associated with them. The intent is to create a global mechanism that enables commercial appropriation of these resources through a transparent trading system that prevents bio-piracy by corporations. However, historical evidence suggests that the commercial use of biodiversity commons has seldom brought benefits to local communities whose livelihoods and knowledge traditions are tied to these resources. It therefore seems likely that a new wave of marketisation of biological resources through an ostensibly ›open access‹ digital and data framework may easily end up dismissing the prior rights of indigenous communities. Lacking a democratic governance framework, the initiative effectively corporatises the data wealth pertaining to the world's natural resources.<sup>42</sup>

Developed countries have also sought changes to the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) in order to extend their digital corporations' intellectual property (IP) rights in respect of data and AI-related innovations.<sup>47</sup> Public-private partnerships pushed by aid agencies under the ›Data for Development‹ or ›AI for Good‹ banner are often a route to expand corporate access to data sets from developing countries, undermining the privacy rights of vulnerable women.<sup>48</sup> The framing of women's digital rights exclusively in terms of individual access and skills tends to ignore the corporatisation of data-based intelligence and the huge governance deficit in relation to data and development.<sup>49</sup>

The governance deficit also extends to the global tax regime. Tax justice, as is generally acknowledged, has a direct connection to public provisioning of care infrastructure. The continued moratorium in the global trade regime on customs duties for electronic transmissions has meant that countries of the Global South have lost valuable fiscal resources, even as the share of digitisable products in global trade increases.<sup>50</sup> In addition, proposals for a Digital Services Tax regime to prevent tax evasion by transnational digital corporations have been repeatedly thwarted by the US.<sup>51</sup>

The material foundations of the digital economy are based on rapacious exploitation of the ecological commons that sustains the livelihoods of the world's poorest women.<sup>43</sup> Rare earth mining for the production of digital devices has not only ravaged the environment, but also funded the civil war that unleashed a horrific wave of sexual violence in the Congo.<sup>44</sup> Leading global mobile phone manufacturers have exploited women's labour for decades under appalling working conditions that include insufficient protection from exposure to toxic chemicals.<sup>45</sup> End-to-end re-organising of supply chains by e-commerce platforms is fuelling an unsustainable consumerist culture with a huge energy and waste footprint.

## 2.4 GOVERNANCE DEFICITS IN THE GLOBAL DIGITAL ECONOMY IMPEDE PROGRESS TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY

Currently, there is no global governance regime for the digital and data paradigm. Developed countries, cognisant that data power is crucial to their global economic advantage, have taken advantage of this vacuum. Using trade deals to gain access to the data resources of developing countries, they push the dogma of ›free cross-border data flows‹, preventing developing countries from evolving their own digital industrial policies.<sup>46</sup> Without sovereign control over their data resources, less powerful countries will find it next to impossible to institute safeguards to protect women's claims, for instance in the case of corporate data theft of women farmers' agricultural practices or capture of biodiversity resources through digital methods.

## 3

## WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS FOR A GENDER-JUST DIGITAL ECONOMY?

It is vital to reclaim the techno-paradigm that has given women's movements the wings to organise trans-locally and mobilise globally. The co-option of this paradigm by neo-liberal forces has given rise to a global economic order that carries the very same markers of injustice as the post-war Bretton Woods system, the costs of which were disproportionately borne by women in the Global South.<sup>52</sup> The neoliberal ideologies underpinning this order have also contributed to a depoliticised public sphere in which misinformation,<sup>53</sup> propaganda warfare,<sup>54</sup> and vitriolic hate against women and people of non-normative genders abound.

The project to radically restructure the digital economy must be led by feminist wisdom so that the governance of data and digital architectures can enable sustainable, democratic and gender-just societies.

The central elements of a feminist action agenda for digital transformation are as follows:

1. A new multilateralism for development in the digital age
2. Big Tech accountability
3. Feminist digital infrastructure policies

Each of these elements must feed into a roadmap of actions that feminist advocates need to elaborate and pursue. Strategies need to be locally grounded and globally coordinated, spanning multiple scales and sites.

### 3.1 A NEW MULTILATERALISM FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE DIGITAL AGE

The fierce new digital world demands a new multilateralism in which all countries can autonomously pursue their strategies towards sustainable, equitable and gender-just development.<sup>55</sup>

#### Global digital democracy.

The digital economy requires a substantial reset. There is an urgent need for a global data constitutionalism that can form the basis of a democratic international order in the digital age and usher in a new social contract. The governance of data as an economic resource must be grounded in an irrevocable commitment to the protection and promotion of women's human rights adequate to a future digital society. Digital technologies, including AI, need to be widely debated in

terms of the manner in which they are designed, the purposes for which they are utilised, and the modalities through which they are governed. Intergovernmental consensus is crucial to define the limits of surveillance capitalism by prohibiting data business models that violate the privacy and autonomy of individuals and communities or profiteer from the viral circulation of misogyny and misinformation. Global digital democracy also presupposes the jurisdictional sovereignty of nation states to formulate appropriate national digital policies for women's empowerment. This is vital not only to curtail data extractivism by corporations, but also to ensure equitable distribution of the benefits of data-based innovations in an international development order.

#### An equitable and fair global trade order.

Market access and investment regimes in trade agreements should be reoriented towards the goal of protecting the interests of the most marginalised women.<sup>56</sup> In trade negotiations, countries of the Global South must resist the push by advanced digital economies for hyper-liberalisation of digital commerce in services. They must reject the demands of the powers-that-be for unbridled market access for their platform companies. To protect women farmers, traders and micro-entrepreneurs, developing countries must ensure that their fledgling data economies are supported by strategic, rather than extractive, foreign investment regimes.<sup>57</sup> Trade and investment agreements cannot become a route to undermine domestic data capabilities; rather, they need to enable effective technology transfer to the Global South.<sup>58</sup>

#### Tax justice.

Introducing new digital taxation regimes for Big Tech is a progressive tax measure that developing countries need to enact in order to fund essential public services and social protection programmes for women's participation in the digital economy.<sup>59</sup> The proposal to establish a universal, inter-governmental tax body under the auspices of the UN, as mooted by the Group of 77 and China at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UN ECOSOC) Special Meeting on International Cooperation in Tax Matters in 2018, assumes particular significance in a digitalising global economy.<sup>60</sup>

#### A global digital fund for women's empowerment.

Financing modalities for sustainable development must enable diffusion of data and AI technologies as well as South-



South cooperation in leveraging AI for development. Corporate-led ›AI for Good‹ initiatives do not go far enough in creating local capabilities. Sustainable and resilient pathways for women's empowerment in the digital economy require a dedicated global funding track.

#### International labour standards for platform workers.

Women workers in trade union movements must push for an International Labour Organization (ILO) recommendation that operationalises a universal labour guarantee for platform workers. This can pave the way for changes to national labour laws and ensure that women in digitally mediated employment and digital manufacturing industries are guaranteed a labour protection floor that includes fundamental workers' rights: an adequate living wage, maternity benefits, limits on hours of work, and safe and healthy workplaces. Specific attention is needed to address sexist and sexualised cyberbullying in the platform workplace.<sup>61</sup>

### 3.2 BIG TECH ACCOUNTABILITY FOR WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

The virtualisation of economic activity in the platform economy has led to corporate impunity and a direct assault on women's human rights. This corporate impunity must be urgently challenged.

#### Binding treaty to rein in Big Tech.

Civil society movements have been advocating an international legally binding instrument to regulate the activities of transnational corporations and other business enterprises in international human rights law.<sup>62</sup> It is imperative that such a treaty incorporates the context of digital capitalism and the need for accountability on the part of Big Tech companies with respect to women's human rights and the environment.<sup>63</sup> The accountability of digital corporations extends to all workers, irrespective of their employment status or location in the data value chain. In a deeply sexist tech industry, the advancement of women requires a commitment to transform the gender profiles of leadership positions.

#### Commitment to address gender bias in tech design.

Digital technologies come preloaded with sexism and misogyny in their design. Industry standards are urgently required to tackle the incentive structures that sustain viral misogyny and the underlying algorithmic cultures through which patriarchy is normalised. Platform companies need to adopt gender audits of business practices, including algorithmic processes used in workflow management.

### 3.3 FEMINIST DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE POLICIES

The potential of data and intelligence capital must be reclaimed to promote a social and solidarity-based economy that feminist economics has long acknowledged as the alternative to capitalist exploitation. National policies have a vital role to play in ushering in a future digital economy that is feminist.

Connectivity-plus approach. Women's participation in the digital economy is predicated on an ecosystem approach that combines access to high-quality connectivity with well-publicised programmes for digital skills – including reskilling of women who lose their jobs to automation –, enterprise development, credit, and grants for social intermediaries supporting women workers.<sup>64</sup> Publicly funded e-commerce market places can be a viable alternative for women traders, entrepreneurs, and artisans, offering them an alternative to private e-commerce, which tends to be exploitative. Preferential procurement policies can provide impetus to platform businesses run by women's collectives, producer organisations and cooperatives.

#### Public data, cloud and AI infrastructure.

Public data pools and public cloud infrastructure can enable women's enterprises to reap the benefits of data analytics. A national tech-accelerator policy, for example, could catalyse linkages between a women farmers' group and a women-led tech start-up to launch a new smart farming initiative. Using public cloud intelligence services, the tech start-up could provide analytics and insights to the farmers' group. AI innovations in the public sector – health, energy, transportation etc. – can enable cost-effective public provisioning of services on scale, with positive impacts for women's social and economic empowerment.

Accountability of data systems in governance. Big data and AI technologies adopted by states for welfare and public service delivery have the potential to enable women's social and economic empowerment, provided that there is accountability and transparency. An approach that is based on techno-fixes can individualise structural dimensions of marginality and exclusion. Digital inclusion projects need to be implemented with checks and balances, audited for gender biases and geared to ensure gender-responsiveness. Data-supported decision-making should have room for responding to women's claims in substantive ways.

# 4

## SEIZING THE MOMENT

The COVID-19 moment has seen a groundswell of feminist action ranging from calls for a feminist bailout strategy<sup>65</sup> to statements articulating feminist visions of development justice<sup>66</sup> and innumerable projects to capture and document the variegated and diverse experiences of the crisis through an intersectional, gender lens. Women leaders in the global trade union movements have come together through the #GenderEqualNewNormal campaign, foregrounding the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on women workers and the urgent imperative to re-centre their concerns within the labour movements.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, we are witnessing the seeds of a struggle against the dominant data-extractivist platform business model slowly take root – manifested inter alia in the ›Stop Hate for Profit‹ campaign with its roots in the racial justice protests within the United States and the strikes led by Amazon workers in the US and EU, as well as strikes by on-demand delivery workers in Brazil, Argentina, Spain, and Ecuador. Trade justice activists in Asia and Africa are building important new analyses highlighting the pitfalls of digital trade hyper-liberalisation as a post-COVID economic recovery strategy. The time is right to consolidate these impulses and consciously work towards building cross-movement linkages between feminist organisations, labour rights activists, global trade justice advocates, and pro-democracy coalitions globally and regionally.

The task of preparing for a new epoch is upon us, entailing the need to build conceptual frameworks, create awareness and make the connections for local to global mobilisation. It is time to usher in the deal that can work for all women.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Artificial Intelligence
AWS	Amazon Web Services
UN ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
GAFAA	Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Alibaba
HRC	Human Rights Council
ILO	International Labour Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TRIPS	The Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UN ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund



## GLOSARY ITEMS

1. Artificial intelligence: A class of technologies that simulates human intelligence processes for learning, reasoning and self-correction. While the field of AI has existed since the 1950s, the emergence of big data and recent advances in machine learning, paired with the evolution of robotics and sensing technologies, have led to its exponential growth in recent years.
2. Automation: The application of machines to tasks once performed by human beings or, increasingly, to tasks that would otherwise be impossible. Although the term mechanisation is often used to refer to the simple replacement of human labour by machines, automation generally implies the integration of machines into a self-governing system.
3. Cross-border data flows: The movement of data sets between servers located in different national jurisdictions.
4. Crowdwork: Labour arrangements on digital platforms in which tasks are allocated to a geographically dispersed pool of workers. This includes specialised tasks such as software/ web development and data analytics performed by freelancers, as well as micro-tasking of repetitive jobs performed by low-skilled remote workers.
5. Data extractivism: The exploitative data practices of ceaseless data mining, intrusive profiling and monopolisation of data-based intelligence that characterise the mainstream platform business model.
6. Data trust: An institutional arrangement in which individuals or organisations come together to collaboratively pool their data resources and entrust these to an independent entity for fiduciary stewardship.
7. Data value chain: The entirely new value chain that has emerged around the process of producing digital intelligence from data, including data acquisition, data storage and warehousing, data modelling and analysis, and data visualisation. As UNCTAD has observed, the data value chain is global and highly unequal. Most countries find themselves in the position of being mere suppliers of raw data. A handful of powerful platform companies from two countries (the United States and China) corner most of the raw data and produce value-added digital intelligence that is critical for control of all sectors of the economy: agriculture, manufacturing and services.
8. Digital capitalism: An advanced stage of capitalism in which a few individuals and corporations that have default ownership and control over network and data resources enjoy inordinate economic power.
9. Digital gene sequencing: The application of big data techniques to genomic sequence mapping and analysis, and assessment of evolutionary relationships among species.
10. Digital infrastructure: Foundational infrastructure that is essential for the emergence and growth of the digital economy. Originally used to refer to broadband internet and mobile phone technologies, the term now encompasses platform services and data architectures across sectors.
11. Digital intelligence: Insights produced by algorithms through a class of technologies called machine-learning technologies. Such intelligence is built on a vast array of data sets – from personal and socio-behavioural to geospatial, climatic and agro-ecological data. The internet provides the backbone for the aggregation and transmission of such data for continuous, »real-time« deployment of algorithms.
12. Digital Services Tax: Taxation of revenues generated from the provisioning of digital services by a corporation that may not have a physical presence in the jurisdiction in question.
13. Digitisable products: Products which can be traded over the internet. In the initial years of the digital revolution, there were just five broad categories: sound recordings, audiovisual works, video games, computer software and literary works. Over the years, additive manufacturing possibilities offered by 3D printing and the exponential growth of digitally delivered services have expanded the range of digitisable products.
14. Intellectual property rights: General term for the assignment of property rights through patents, copyrights and trademarks. These property rights allow the holder to exercise a monopoly on the use of the item for a specified period.
15. Intelligence advantage: The competitive advantage that accrues to platform firms because of their ability to generate and deploy data-based intelligence to reorganise production and market exchange.
16. Multilateralism: The institutional arrangement through which political and economic relations are defined between groups of nation states. In popular parlance, multilateralism has become shorthand for the intergovernmental decision-making process mediated by the United Nations.
17. On-demand work: Platform-mediated matching of workers with clients for services performed in a physical location. E.g. transportation, domestic work, home delivery.
18. Open access: Open access means free access to information and unrestricted use of electronic resources for everyone. Any kind of digital content can be open access, from texts and data to software, audio, video, and multi-media.
19. Platform economy: An economic system in which production, market exchange and distribution processes are increasingly mediated by digital platforms with intelligence advantage.
20. Platformisation: The phenomenon of digital platforms becoming the essential infrastructure for economic and social interactions.
21. Platforms: Infrastructures for value creation, value capture and value distribution. Platforms facilitate interactions among various actors (consumers, producers, advertisers, service providers, suppliers etc.), harvest data from such interactions, and generate data-based intelligence to optimise value.
22. Social and solidarity economy: Organisations producing goods, services and knowledge that meet the needs of the community they serve, through the pursuit of

specific social and environmental objectives and by fostering solidarity. This includes cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, associations, foundations and social enterprises.

23. Technology transfer: Within the UN system, technology transfer refers to the idea that developed countries must support developing countries in acquiring the technological know-how and skills that are essential to their growth. Since the Monterrey Consensus, there has been much emphasis on market-led technology transfer through the trade and investment route. However, there is increasing evidence that such an approach has failed to produce the desired results.

## ENDNOTES

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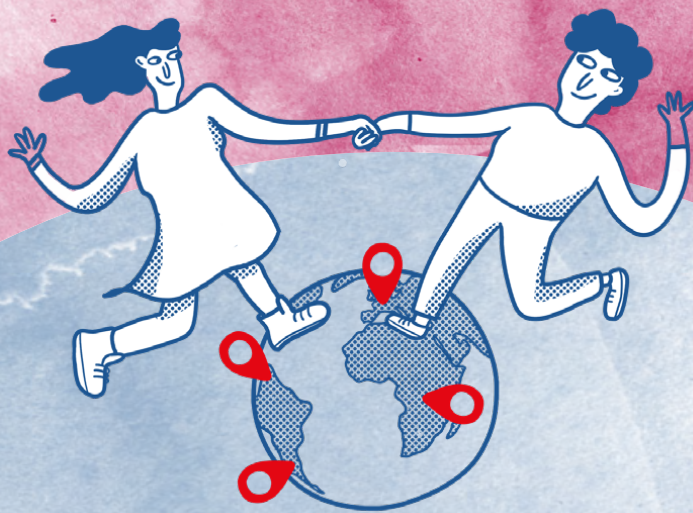
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## THE FUTURE IS FEMINIST

“The Future is Feminist” is a global project of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, working worldwide with feminists to develop positive visions for a better future that focus on economic policy issues and critical economic perspectives. The project in particular analyses the effects of digitalization and the future of work. It identifies common concerns of feminist and labour movements to create space for new powerful alliances

aiming at social change. The project is a continuation of the work of feminist networks in the Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and Northern Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa regions. It offers activists the opportunity to exchange ideas on burning issues, regional experiences and political strategies while serving as a space to experiment with new ideas.





## A FEMINIST ACTION FRAMEWORK FOR THE DIGITAL ECONOMY



Digital capitalism has given rise to extreme inequality, concentrating economic power in the hands of a few. Women are disproportionately affected by this and likely to experience greater marginalisation and even loss of livelihood.



The business model of transnational platform companies produces and reproduces racialised and gendered hierarchies in the labour market. The rhetoric of flexibility tends to hide the reality of precarisation and disposability that platform workers face in most countries of the Global South. A focus on individual access and skills to the exclusion of digital economy governance alone cannot advance women's digital rights.



A feminist action framework on the digital economy proposes powerful new visions for creating and sustaining gender-just societies. Its central elements include transformative ideas for a new multilateralism in the digital age, big tech accountability and feminist digital infrastructure policies.

For further information on this topic:  
[www.fes.de/themenportal-gender-jugend-senioren/gender-matters/the-future-is-feminist](http://www.fes.de/themenportal-gender-jugend-senioren/gender-matters/the-future-is-feminist)

