

## Action Aid - Terms of Reference:

### Mapping of organisations working on women's rights in relation to the digital platform economy in Africa, South Asia and Latin America.

1. **Requisitioning Manager:** Fatimah Kelleher, Head of Research and Programme Policy, ActionAid UK c/o Rachel Noble, Senior Policy Specialist, Women's Economic Rights, ActionAid UK
2. **Cost centre:**
3. **Dates of the project:** May - July 2022
4. **Background:**

According to the ILO, digital platforms – a key facilitator of the so-called 'gig' or 'platform' economy, have increased five-fold in the last 10 years,<sup>1</sup> including in countries across much of the global South. Such platform working and the expansion of the gig economy present both opportunities and significant challenges for women and their right to decent work. Although research in this area remains limited, a preliminary scan of the literature<sup>2</sup> shows how the narratives of independence, flexibility, entrepreneurship and labour market formalisation pushed by the multinationals dominating the platform economy in fact mask working conditions that are all too often characterised by precarity, low and unpredictable pay, long hours, lack of contracts, lack of access to social protection, atomisation and denial of rights to unionise and engage in collective bargaining, and lack of recourse to redress or accountability.<sup>3</sup> For the vast majority of women in the global South who are already concentrated in precarious and exploitative forms of work in the informal sector or within global value chains of multinationals, the benefits of the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution are proving limited or illusory. The gendered digital divide means that women from the poorest communities and groups without access to the internet and smart phones, or who face linguistic or literacy barriers, often remain excluded from the gig economy.<sup>4</sup> Although the gig economy has reportedly helped some women from marginalised groups overcome discriminatory barriers they ordinarily endure when trying to engage in paid work based on, for instance, caste, disability, or migrant status,<sup>5</sup> the quality of this work typically remains highly exploitative.

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<sup>1</sup> [World Employment and Social Outlook 2021: Rapid growth of digital economy calls for coherent policy response \(ilo.org\)](https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/new/publications/World-Employment-and-Social-Outlook-2021-Rapid-growth-of-digital-economy-calls-for-coherent-policy-response/lang-en/index.html)

<sup>2</sup> See [ActionAid's annotated bibliography](#)

<sup>3</sup> For example, see: Heeks, R., Eskelund, K., Gomez-Morantes, J. E., Malik, F., & Nicholson, B. (s/f). Digital Labour Platforms in the Global South: 16.; Gurumurthy, A., & Chami, N. (2019, October). From ill-founded delusions to real possibilities. An e-commerce agenda for women's empowerment. Feminist digital justice, 2. [https://hummedia.manchester.ac.uk/institutes/gdi/publications/workingpapers/di/dd\\_wp86.pdf](https://hummedia.manchester.ac.uk/institutes/gdi/publications/workingpapers/di/dd_wp86.pdf); 6.; Pandemic Meets Precarity: The Case of Platform Delivery Work in Latin America. (2020, julio 6). DAWN. <https://dawnnet.org/2020/07/pandemic-meets-precariety-the-case-of-platform-delivery-work-in-latin-america/>

<sup>4</sup> Heeks, R., Eskelund, K., Gomez-Morantes, J. E., Malik, F., & Nicholson, B. (s/f). Digital Labour Platforms in the Global South: 16. [https://hummedia.manchester.ac.uk/institutes/gdi/publications/workingpapers/di/dd\\_wp86.pdf](https://hummedia.manchester.ac.uk/institutes/gdi/publications/workingpapers/di/dd_wp86.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid; see also: [World Employment and Social Outlook 2021: Rapid growth of digital economy calls for coherent policy response \(ilo.org\)](https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/new/publications/World-Employment-and-Social-Outlook-2021-Rapid-growth-of-digital-economy-calls-for-coherent-policy-response/lang-en/index.html)

Moreover, “some evidence suggests that [the digital platform economy] is reinforcing existing gendered social divisions and enabling the “remaking of women into devalued workers””,<sup>6</sup> whilst shoring up corporate power and “a global division of labor that bears the marks of race, class, gender, and geography”.<sup>7</sup> For instance, multinational corporations fiercely resist any attempt to better regulate their activities<sup>8</sup> (with some notable defeats<sup>9</sup>) and argue for the relaxation of digital trade/e-commerce rules as a means to support women’s economic empowerment by turning all women into digital entrepreneurs.

<sup>10</sup> Aside from a narrow, individualistic and inadequate framing of women’s economic empowerment and rights, and the widely reported workers’ rights violations mentioned above, platform algorithms have been found to discriminate against women who are struggling to juggle paid work with their unpaid care responsibilities.<sup>11</sup> Algorithmic systems of management lead to stark power and information asymmetries between companies and workers, amounting to systems of control that are exacerbated by the often significantly larger numbers of workers relative to demand, leading to hyper-competition between workers, a downward pressure on wages and exhaustion caused by the need to work ever longer hours to earn enough to sustain a livelihood.<sup>12</sup>

If a feminist well-being economy is to be achieved through a gender just, green transition – which is a major policy demand of ActionAid across the Federation – the digital platform economy must also be developed and managed in ways that are gender just, which advance and protect the rights of women workers facing intersecting forms of discrimination, which shift power away from multinationals back to workers and communities whilst ensuring corporations are held accountable for rights violations associated with their activities, and which protect the policy space of governments in the global South to legislate and regulate the digital economy and digital trade rules in ways that prioritise the achievement of workers’ rights within a digital commons.

This emerging manifestation of neoliberal power and the extraction of wealth by multinationals from workers and their bodies in the global South, including countless women who also continue to sustain the workforce and wider society through their reproductive labour, is being challenged head-on by a rapidly evolving nexus of civil society groups, networks and organisations, as well as trade unions and worker organisations. This includes a number of groups engaging in research and advocacy from a (more or less explicitly) feminist and/or women’s rights perspective within and across Africa, Asia and Latin America.

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<sup>6</sup> Stevano, S. (2020, abril 1). ‘Gig Economies’ in Africa: Continuity or Change? Futures of Work.

<https://futuresofwork.co.uk/2020/04/01/gig-economies-in-africa-continuity-or-change/>

<sup>7</sup> Gurumurthy, A. (2020, April). A feminist future of work in the post-pandemic moment. A new social contract as if women matter. *Feminist digital justice*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> See for example: ‘Insidious and seductive’: Uber funds new lobbying group to deny rights for gig workers | Gig economy | The Guardian

<sup>9</sup> See: [The U.K. Uber Decision and the Gig Economy Worker \(bloombergtax.com\)](https://www.bloombergtax.com/news/uk-uber-decision-gig-workers/)

<sup>10</sup> Gurumurthy, A., Chami, N., & Alemany, C. (2019, October). Gender equality in the digital economy: Emerging issues. A new social contract for women’s rights in the data economy. *Feminist digital justice*, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, see also Partenio, F. (2021, abril). Growing e-commerce and diminishing labor rights: Platform work in Argentina, 2020-2021. *Feminist digital justice*, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Wood, A. J., Graham, M., Lehdonvirta, V., & Hjorth, I. (2019). Good Gig, Bad Gig: Autonomy and Algorithmic Control in the Global Gig Economy. *Work, Employment and Society*, 33(1), 56–75.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017018785616>; and Heeks, R., Eskelund, K., Gomez-Morantes, J. E., Malik, F., & Nicholson, B. (s/f). Digital Labour Platforms in the Global South: 16.

[https://hummedia.manchester.ac.uk/institutes/gdi/publications/workingpapers/di/dd\\_wp86.pdf](https://hummedia.manchester.ac.uk/institutes/gdi/publications/workingpapers/di/dd_wp86.pdf)

## **5. Rationale and purpose**

As a first step to beginning to explore and engage in this area under our Valuing Women's Work project (funded by the Will and Flora Hewlett Foundation), ActionAid UK is keen to map out the various groups working on women's rights issues associated with the digital platform economy, as a means to identify, document and understand who they are, their analyses of the issues, key areas of concern, their policy agendas and demands, and which spaces they are taking these demands to and how. This mapping will serve as a basis to inform our work going forward in terms of further research, advocacy, potential collaborations and partnerships, as well as provide insights on how ActionAid can ensure it engages in the space sensitively and respectfully as an INGO.

## **6. Objectives of the task**

**6.1** Undertake a mapping of civil society groups, feminist networks, worker organisations and trade unions working on women's rights with respect to the digital /gig economy in the continents of Africa, South Asia and Latin America. The mapping should capture the following information:

- Basic organisational information including: Name, location, type of organisation, size of organisation, leader/s, date established, contact information
- Priority issues in relation to women's rights and the gig economy, key arguments and analysis (including any research or evidence they have generated)
- Policy demands / agendas for change
- Advocacy engagement (where, whom, how, when, with whom)
- Any political or other sensitivities we should be aware of (e.g organisational or movement politics, the wider political context groups are operating in, party political affiliations etc)

**6.2** Draw on the findings of the mapping to identify:

- The most pressing areas and issues of concern with respect to women's rights and the digital economy for civil society across the respective continents
- The key policy spaces in which CSOs, including feminist networks and WROs, are advocating for change.

## **7. Methodology**

This is likely to include:

- Desk based research including use of secondary data sources and grey literature, including active use of the Internet, Twitter and other social media platforms to identify and reach out to groups and organisations as necessary.
- Key informant interviews with organisational representatives (virtual/by phone)

## **8. Outputs**

A 20-30 page fully referenced written summary report (excluding references and annexes). The suggested report structure is as follows:

- Contents (1 page)
- Methodology (1 page)
- Summary of and reflections on findings (as per 5.2 above), including any challenges and limitations to the research in terms of scope and content (4-5 pages)

- Africa mapping (5-6 pages)
- South Asia mapping (5-6 pages)
- Latin America mapping (5-6 pages)
- Conclusion and any recommendations (3-5 pages)
- References and annexes

#### **9. What is the audience for the product(s)?**

The audience of the summary report is largely internal AAUK and AA International colleagues working on women's economic rights.

#### **Timeline and days**

The consultancy is expected to be completed in approximately 18 days.

Exact dates are being finalised but potential timeline as follows:

Activity	Date
First draft of report is produced	4 July 2022
ActionAid provides feedback	13 July 2022
Final draft of report is produced	22 July 2022

#### **10. Fees and payment schedule**

Fees to be agreed with consultant

Fees will be paid on satisfactory completion of the task and within 30 days of receiving an invoice.

#### **11. Resources to be provided to the consultant:**

- Annotated bibliography

#### **12. How apply:**

Please send your CV, cover letter outlining your suitability for undertaking this assignment and stating your daily fee, and a short proposal (two sides maximum) outlining how you would approach the task, to Rachel Noble at [rachel.noble@actionaid.org](mailto:rachel.noble@actionaid.org).

We are particularly keen to hear from and encourage applications from feminist researchers from the regions to be covered (namely Africa, South Asia and Latin America). We also welcome joint proposals from more than one researcher.

**Deadline for applications: Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> May**