




IT for Change

ANNUAL REPORT

2020-21



Annual Report 2020-21 – Annual Report

 itforchange.net/Annual-Report/2020-21

Overview

IT for Change, an NGO located in Bengaluru, India, promotes innovative and effective use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for socio-economic change in the Global South. Dominant approaches to digital technologies are steeped in ideologies of market fundamentalism, and have displaced the cornerstone ethics of participation, social justice, and gender equality.

At IT for Change, we believe that progressive development sector actors must come together to influence the techno-social structures that are redefining our societies. We seek to build bridges across different sectors to strive towards an equitable information society. Our work in the areas of education, gender, digital rights and democracy, and data and digital economy push the boundaries of existing vocabulary and practice and explore new development frameworks.

IT for Change is in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.



Thematic Areas

Digital Economy and Data Governance

Our policy research and advocacy efforts in relation to the digital economy and data governance have focused on identifying appropriate directions for the governance of platforms, data, and AI technologies, from the standpoint of equity and social justice. In global and national policy dialogues, we have consistently articulated the rights of marginalized people and groups in the rapidly platformizing and datafying economy, underscoring the linkages between data justice and the right to development. [Read more.](#)

Democratizing Digital Justice

Prakriye Field Centre

ICTs and Education

Gender Justice in the Digital Society

Directors' Note 2020-21 – Annual Report

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Directors' Note

September 2021

Much has been said about how disaster capitalism found its moment under the sun as the pandemic began to unfold, leaving societies struggling with wave after wave. The normalization of the digital in our everyday life through this sudden and unprecedented point of social inflection leaves mixed feelings. We may, perhaps, have been far more socially distanced, but for the life-giving connection possible through digital communications. But as is widely acknowledged, digitality's unequivocal coming of age during the pandemic is certainly no straightforward success story of human civilization. Those who were disconnected from the circuits of power and privilege before the pandemic are now simply left behind. The evidence here is not only about stories that make it to the mainstream of digital exclusion – like the disastrous squandering of a generation's developmental needs and aspirations – but also a deeper malaise; ironically, about the very paradigm of digital *inclusion*.

UNCTAD's Trade and Development Report 2020 defines in simple terms, our preponderant social problem – of all the pre-existing conditions unraveled by the Covid-19 shock, the increasing levels of inequality pose the biggest threat. We now face the prospect of an even more unequal future, with recovery for the wealthy and struggle for everyone else. This is where the tech barons come in. Even before the pandemic, Big Tech had changed the logic of economic organization. Feeding off of 'behavioral surplus' – a term coined by Shoshana Zuboff to describe the extraction of societal data for profit – they were steadily building up digital intelligence reserves to capture people's minds, and future markets. Like patents of the erstwhile industrial age, the Artificial Intelligence (AI) from data sets held as trade secrets was emerging as the key to market consolidation. Presenting near-insurmountable barriers to entry for smaller firms, a handful of digital behemoths were transforming services, taking over manufacturing, and platformizing agriculture. Jack Ma, founder of Chinese tech giant Alibaba, would often say how the art of new retail (based on the craft of Big Data) allowed him to grow his business in just a few years – a feat that Walmart needed decades to accomplish.

Big Tech datafication acts as a centrifugal force of the new economy, leaching away power from the peripheries. It has ushered in new trends – precarization and immiserization of labor through a carefully-crafted rhetoric of the autonomous gig; acceleration of deindustrialization in many countries of the world; pilferage of natural wealth held as the commons in the form of digitalized bioinformatics; accelerated privatization of social welfare systems through state-corporate partnerships; hollowing out of social trust with the proliferation of hate and misinformation in an algorithm-powered public sphere; manipulation of electoral democracy and re-engineering of civic sensibility by the data industrial complex, and more.

The pandemic was a defining moment for these shifts – deepening the reach of unaccountable neoliberal capitalism on digital steroids. What it means to be engulfed in this paradigm is becoming crystal clear, with our socio-political and economic systems now completely capitulating to digital mania. Tech stocks have vastly outperformed the broader market in 2020. Last year also saw a steady flow of tech mergers and acquisitions (M&A) in the global market that totaled \$634 billion, marking a year-to-year increase of 91.8%. Reports tell us that 2021 continues to be a record-breaking year for tech industry deals, with the first half already breaking global records for M&A that are worth over \$671 billion. The EdTech sector is booming, ever more so in India, and the FinTech industry, rapidly destabilizing the financial landscape, is scrambling to rake in its share – from digital wallets to asset management, credit scoring, digital insurance, and peer-to-peer lending. Meanwhile, unmindful of crumbling public systems, governments are out-pacing one another to feverishly embrace apps for everything.

At the cusp of the new post-pandemic world order, a silver lining did emerge in the discursive arena. In 2021, tech-lash was reshaping popular imagination about the hitherto unchallenged benevolence of Big Tech. Homilies about voluntary good behavior from the likes of Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook, were no longer convincing. Citizens, consumers, workers, small producers, and businesses were slowly beginning to understand and stand up against the insidious connection between data and predatory dominance. Quite eager to secure its own tech sovereignty, the EU was already coming up with a range of policies for the data market. Some developing countries were also figuring out the need to do something about the unregulated exodus of data from their jurisdictions in the new economy being recast through data-rooted value chains.

The pandemic has also seen many victories for workers in path-breaking court cases in the EU, UK and US, and deepened public consciousness regarding their plight. Similarly, citizens the world over are demonstrating great vigilance, challenging state excesses and authoritarianism in the data age.



Illustration by Jahnavi Koganti for A Digital New Deal: Visions of Justice in a Post-Covid World.

Yet, one blind spot remains – the profoundly individualistic frames that shape the meta-narrative of digital technologies. The ideas of disruption and innovation that have, by and large, scripted the story of digital capitalism are entrenched in the assumption that success is about market capitalization. Data-for-good and AI-can-fix-it solutionism has further muddled the real possibility for prudent, socially relevant, and appropriately governed digital models.

In 2008, French philosopher, Dany-Robert Dufour, rather presciently theorized that, compared to earlier systems of domination – which worked through institutional controls, reinforcements, and repression – new capitalism runs on ‘deinstitutionalization’. By destroying institutions and human collectives, neoliberalism produces “Individuals who are supple, insecure, mobile and open to all the market’s modes and variations.”

As an offshoot of the neoliberal economic order, the digital paradigm goes one step further. It unhinges the link between democracy and its institutions through the techno-material infrastructure of data, creating a social-scape ordered by a privatized data regime. The body politic in this social organization stands decommunitized like never before, even as intense statist totalitarianism built on data systems takes control. Citizens, consumers, producers, traders, workers – all of us, are subsumed into individualized

data-mediated arrangements orchestrated by platforms. Laws are simply ineffectual in dealing with the toxicity unleashed on marginalized social groups by opaque, platform-controlled algorithms, and fail to address the structural conditions necessary for smaller market players to find a level playing field.

As networked environments propelled by data and 360-degree insight, dominant platforms also cannibalize public institutions, transferring public functions to rent-seeking commercial monopoly infrastructural systems. Activists in the UK fought and won a valiant legal battle this year to stop the government from giving away public health data to a data analytics firm, Palantir. By scrapping many NHS procurement rules, the secret deal was not only opening up the door for Big Tech firms to poach on public health data sets, but also influence vital healthcare decisions. This is not an exception by any means. Emerging digitalization trajectories of Indian public agencies in agriculture, health, and several other sectors heavily favor this commercial platform model.

Neoliberal digitality also decimates the civic-political fabric. Rights become the residual claims of the subject of the market, with democracy becoming increasingly aligned to a desocialized, choice-maximizing personhood. Protections in the form of privacy as an individual contract of consent serve as the veneer of an autonomously chosen digital condition; one that then allows the market to function unhindered.



Illustration by Jahnavi Koganti for A Digital New Deal: Visions of Justice in a Post-Covid World.

What Must Digital Justice Activism do in this Overwhelming Context?

This is the main question that IT for Change is grappling with today. As networked individualism threatens the very fabric of society and its institutions as we know them, we see a crisis of justice and democracy. To take the surveillance bull by its horns, we do, of course, need a re-articulation of our human rights, but this must be through a post-liberal framework; that is, a system of norms, claims, rules, and obligations that re-instate the collective-social. This is the perspective that informs and guides our thinking and actions.

We reject the over simplification of digital injustice into the slippery rhetoric of the digital divide that hides the digital webs of systemic exploitation.

We hold that re-politicizing the digital debate and reclaiming digital justice hinges on communitization of data ownership and alternative, socially accountable models for AI.

We seek policies that can break Big Tech; disallowing businesses from operating in more than one key segment of the data value chain and the main technical layers of the digital stack.

We argue for bold new thinking at national and sub-national levels for generating public and social value from data and AI. Digital policies need to promote innovation in public and community systems, investments in public standards, protocols and infrastructures for data and AI, and sustained efforts to decentralize the digital economy.

We wish to hold platform intermediaries accountable for their failure to address hate and violence online, and their abject neglect of women's human rights. We also seek a plurality of digital media that can inter-operate to appropriately fulfill the democratic role of media.

We extend our unconditional support to the various bold initiatives that present an alternative to the neoliberal platform model.

We have no doubt that the state needs to be reclaimed and its institutions reinvigorated, away from its marked descent towards digital authoritarianism.

We seek to conceptualize and demonstrate what agile digital systems that are meaningful and empowering for individuals, communities, and public institutions look like.

And, as a learning organization, we see the symbiotic relationship between global and local engagement, and between research, advocacy, and demonstration projects, as necessary pathways to stay true to our mandate.



Illustration by Mansi Thakkar Illustration for A Digital New Deal: Visions of Justice in a Post-Covid World.

Our Work in 2020-21

This reporting period was unique for everyone. Like for every other organization, it posed significant challenges to us. It limited our field research, on-the-ground engagement with stakeholders, and physical participation in policy spaces and forums. However, we came up with alternative solutions and found new ways of engaging with relevant stakeholders and constituencies. We met our commitments, responding proactively and resourcefully to lead in new directions. Our team worked remotely in large part, measuring up to the organizational demands of this transition, contributing to the collective and supporting one another through some extremely difficult personal and family health challenges.

We feel emboldened that our work has gained considerable affirmation. As the only NGO member on the Committee of Experts on Non-Personal Data of the Government of India, we have been able to shape the nuts and bolts of a policy blueprint that we hope will be released soon and serve as a useful rubric for the world on how the unique resource of data must be governed. We were appointed by the Office of the UN Secretary-General in May 2021 to be on the 10-member expert group to support the UN's Technology Facilitation Mechanism, a key site through which we hope to inform the principles and practices of global technology governance. We worked with global groups like Transform

Health, influencing the nascent discourse on the global governance principles for health data, and worked shoulder-to-shoulder with labor unions and the International Labour Organization (ILO) to set the agenda for workers' rights in the digital economy.

The normative directions we have shaped and stayed true to, and the digital commons we helped build for schools and rural communities, were crucial in recouping and adapting as the pandemic ravaged on.

Our team in Mysuru was able to mount a coordinated and timely response to the pandemic, owing to the strong grassroots information infrastructure built over time through our interventions. Our Namma Jaaga help desks were able to offer support to many women and girls facing violence, who needed first-mile support. In the coming year, our work will expand to include a focus on men and masculinities – especially addressing pervasive online misogyny. We are also keen to undertake a systematic evaluation of our strategies through an impact study of our Namma Jaaga hubs.

Our interventions in the education track had a steep learning curve in delivering digital education to schools and teacher education institutions so that they can adapt to new pedagogical models during the pandemic. We localized video-conferencing platforms like Big Blue Button to Kannada, and created much-needed Open Education Resources (OER) for teachers. Our creative offering in Kannada, Nan Voice, Nan Choice, has grown to be a much-loved radio program among the adolescent girls we work with, and beyond.

Even as technology has allowed the fortunate few to continue their access to learning, the abject neglect of the needs of the majority stands out as a civilizational crime against children in India. Together with many other organizations in the country, we have launched a nation-wide mobilization to build a National Coalition on the Education Emergency to demand a revitalized education system that recognizes the right of all children to meaningful and humane education.

In our track on digital economy, we made vital conceptual contributions on data governance, and provided inputs on data and digitalization policies to government agencies and trade negotiators in the Global South, and the EU. Our focus on Big Tech regulation will continue to be a priority for us as we work in partnership with various national and global networks, to deepen advocacy agendas on people-centered platformization and datafication.

Our work on gender-based hate and platform accountability has brought us recognition from multiple quarters including UN organizations, government agencies, platform companies, and civil society groups. We are keen to take our advocacy on this forward. In our work on gender and the digital economy, we are excited to begin an action research project, working with women's cooperatives and enterprises on alternative platform models.



Illustration by Jahnavi Koganti for A Digital New Deal: Visions of Justice in a Post-Covid World.

Our networks of influence and circles of trust have been expanding over the past year, encompassing grassroots organizations, leading CSO networks at national and international levels, UN agencies, and donors. In the reporting period, we organized 18 events online and were invited to be part of over 60 webinars. With the Just Net Coalition (JNC), we intend to continue our campaign against Big Tech's capture of global digital governance arrangements, closely tracking the digital governance arena and its intersection with other critical multilateral processes.

We have seen a strong uptick in reader engagement with our website as well as with our alternative media platform, Bot Populi. Our social media reach has also shown a significant rise. Our Twitter follower count has increased by 35% from last year, and we add an average of 100 new followers on a month-on-month basis. Our tweets views have multiplied over 6 times in a time span of one year. Our audience-base on Instagram and Facebook spans ten countries including US, UK, Brazil, Germany, and Philippines. Our podcast series, The Davos Diaries and Feminist Digital Futures, received over 1750 streams across all platforms with listeners from 50 countries. Digital New Deal, a compendium of essays we put out with the JNC, has been downloaded nearly 2700 times and our report, Platform Labor in Search of Value, for the ILO has been seen upward of 20000 times, with almost 500 people clicking on and reading the report via Twitter.

We have received two organization-building grants from the Omidyar Network and Ford Foundation, and are part of a five-year, Dutch-government-supported global initiative to shape the rules of the digital economy. International donors like the International Development Research Centre, Canada (IDRC), EU, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and World Wide Web Foundation, along with Indian philanthropies like Kotak Mahindra Bank, EdelGive Foundation, Cognizant Foundation, The British Asian Trust, IBM India, The NASSCOM Foundation, and Tech Mahindra Foundation, have supported us through the past year. They have been extremely flexible and responsive, giving us the necessary space to re-calibrate our work flows and organizational processes for the pandemic. Many donors have also extended generous support for our Covid-relief work.

In the coming year, we hope to create the time and space for strengthening our internal organizational systems, to build the resilience needed for the long haul. As our footprint grows, we are acutely conscious of the need to step back and take stock of how organizational values, processes, systems, and practices can tie together towards people's well-being and the maximization of the organizational purpose. The support from Ford Foundation's BUILD program opens up a unique opportunity for us to integrate feminist perspectives into all parts of our work.

As we look ahead into the coming year, we are aware that we stand at a crossroads. The accelerated pace of digitalization presents immense challenges in a digitally lawless wild west that has seen the weaponization of data and AI technologies and their deployment for unrelenting exploitation. The task to confront these changes appears daunting. And yet, the message from near and far in people's resistance to the unjust order is simple and clear – we must stand steadfast on the strength of our belief, *and* join hands with others to renew and enlarge our vision for a better world.

Directors
IT for Change
2021

Digital Economy and Data Governance – Annual Report

 itforchange.net/Annual-Report/2020-21-digital-economy

Digital Economy and Data Governance

Planetary datafication and platformization directly impinge upon people's rights, with new issues and concerns for global and national governance. The linkages between rights, ownership claims, and equitable distribution of value in relation to data resources on the one hand – and the right to development on the other – are emerging as a deeply contested arena. Unless progressive forces watch over this space with vigilance, and shape it towards emancipatory futures for all, AI-powered reality may descend into the dystopian fictions that have inspired many a novel and film. Hence, our policy research and advocacy efforts in the area of digital economy have focused on appropriate governance of platforms, data, and AI technologies.

Research on Democratizing Data Value

In 2020-21, we explored policy directions necessary to rein in the monopolistic tendencies of Big Tech companies and reclaim the potential of data for equitable development. Our conceptual contributions to the Data Governance Network (DGN) were well appreciated for their innovative thinking in the network's quarterly roundtables.

Our paper, *Breaking Up Big Tech: Separating its Data, Cloud and Intelligence Layers*, demonstrates how mainstream anti-trust regulation to tackle the abuse of market power does not sufficiently deter the rise of digital monopolies. We propose a new approach, arguing for a structural separation of the four key functional layers of data value chains – data, cloud, intelligence, and consumer-facing intelligent services.

We also systematically explored new theoretical frameworks to overturn the de facto claims that have enabled first-mover firms to enclose data as their own private property. Our paper, *Economic Governance of Data: Balancing Individualist-Property Approaches with a Community Rights Framework*, argues that a data regime conceived within an individualist approach to ownership will always be skewed against smaller solidarity economy alternatives. We call for a broader, meta-level 'community ownership' policy framework for data that can incentivize meso-level stewardship models to gain ground in the data economy. In the paper, *Exploring the Constitutional Tenability of Data Sharing Policies*, we examine how the directive principles of state policy of the Indian constitution can pave the way for a new legal approach that recognizes data as a collective resource of communities.

In addition to theoretical papers furthering the idea of collectivist claims in data resources, we also explored working models and alternative pathways for workers to assert their right to a fair share of data value. We were commissioned by Public Services International (PSI) to author a paper for trade unions in the public sector to claim their collective rights to aggregate anonymized non-personal data resources. The paper also

made a case for the protection of public digital and data infrastructure from private capture, shifting the conversation on worker data rights from a narrow-band privacy and workplace surveillance focus to a broader conversation on a new data theory of value. Based on this paper, PSI has approached us to work on another paper to extend the framework to three specific sectors.

We were invited by the International Labour Organization (ILO) to undertake a landscape study on organizing strategies and alternative business models being deployed by gig workers in the platform economy. Pointing to why new age, data-shy, platform cooperatives run by Northern communities at the hyperlocal level cannot be imported to the Glocal South, the study argues for an ethically grounded, data collectivist approach as the way forward for cooperatives in the developing world. The first draft of the study was extremely well-received by the COOP Unit team of the ILO who considered it a pivotal contribution to their strategic prioritization in the lead-up to the ILO COOP 100 Symposium. The study will be published in 2021.



Cover images of papers for PSI by Parminder Jeet Singh, DGN by Anushka Mittal, and the ILO by Anita Gurumurthy, Nandini Chami, and Deepti Bharthur

Digital Policy Engagements at National and Global Levels

Continuing our work as a member of the Government of India's Non Personal Data Committee, we brought a 'community resource' governance framework to inform its work. There are no easy precedents one can turn to in shaping and articulating how data should be governed as an economic resource. Our inputs to the policy discussions in the Committee built on the fact that data is a social commons, deriving from the interactions of people and social phenomena. We submitted that, as a collective resource, data must be governed on the basis of a constitutional directive rights framework, justifying a new affirmative allocatory approach.

At the global level, we made inputs to the EU Draft Data Governance Act, 2020 as well as the EU Consultation for the New Competition Tool and Digital Services Act Package. We are co-chair of the Data Policy Circle of Transform Health, a major global coalition working in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), the Lancet

Commission on digitalization of health, etc. As a part of this initiative, we are helping frame principles for health data governance through a regionally and nationally consultative process. These principles will be launched in late 2021. We also made a submission to the South African Competition Commission's public consultation on Competition in the Digital Economy.

We examined questions of data governance, digital economy regulation, and open digital ecosystems in proposed policy measures by engaging with policy dialogues in India and other countries. This includes a submission in response to the Government of India's NODE White Paper. Our submission argued that public digital infrastructures (including platforms, data stacks, and APIs) created through state support would trigger inclusive innovation and promote social good only if backed by adequate checks and balances to govern access and use. Unconditional open access to such infrastructures would not produce fair and equitable outcomes by default. On the contrary, it would most likely lead to private capture by powerful players. We also responded to the public consultation on the Indian Artificial Intelligence Stack discussion paper released by the AI Standardization Committee, Department of Telecommunications. Our input argued for greater clarity on the institutional governance framework that would support the government's plans to develop the Indian Artificial Intelligence Stack as a digital public good.

We have continued our efforts to highlight the egregious implications of emerging digital trade deals for the right to development of countries in the Global South, foregrounding the risks of hyperliberalization in digitalizing value chains. Over the course of the year, we regularly participated in South Centre's briefings for G77 negotiators to continually emphasize the need for developing countries to protect their policy space for digital industrialization, without succumbing to unfair plurilateral and bilateral negotiations on e-commerce.

We worked with the Third World Network to initiate a webinar series on the India-US limited trade deal that was on the cards in the second half of 2020. We also provided strategic inputs to Focus on the Global South on how the liberalization of e-trading and agricultural markets in India, coupled with the prevailing Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) regulation in the farm sector, could lead to a corporate takeover of food value chains by e-commerce companies.

Fair, Green and Global Alliance

In January 2021, IT for Change was inducted into the Fair, Green and Global Alliance (FGG) – a consortium of eight global organizations whose goal is to expand civil society voices to make trade and global supply chains just and fair in Global South contexts. As part of this five-year program, IT for Change will focus on digital value chains, extending our work on Big Tech and platform regulation, data economy, platform worker rights, and gender justice.

Impact

Our impact this year can be best described over three areas. First, we made significant inroads into working with unions and cooperatives, both at national and global levels, on the digitization of work and its impact on worker rights. The theoretical framework we developed for PSI has been adopted in their union leaders' trainings. Our policy framework on platform cooperatives, developed for the ILO put the need for redistributing value in the digital economy front and center. The framework identified the need for data policies that prioritize local economic regeneration for the post-Covid context. ILO's Governing Body took note of the research and resolved to hold a general discussion on social and solidarity economy at the 2022 International Labour Conference.

Second, we contributed vital perspectives about economic rights to data, particularly along collective imaginaries. Our impact on the Government of India's framework in this regard has been cardinal. We have also shared this work with other developing countries, and received requests for providing expertise in the area. Europe is at the forefront on data regulation, and we were the only organization from the South to engage with EU's various draft legislations put up for public consultation. We also got some positive responses in this regard from the staff of the European Parliament. As a recognition of our deep domain expertise, we were invited to be a reviewer for UNCTAD's Draft Digital Economy Report, 2021.

Third, we continued to forge and strengthen larger global civil society connections on the issue of digital economy governance. Multiple requests for collaborations, inputs, guidance, and consultation over the year have been a sign of the recognition of IT for Change as a credible South-led voice in the space. Continuing our work with the South Centre and Our World Is Not For Sale Network, we have been sharing our inputs and directions for the digital economy track of the WTO with them.

We also continued to write and comment in the media on a number of issues on data and the digital economy. We wrote about community data and data commons, AI policy, and platform workers' rights, and more for Live Mint, Hindustan Times, Indian Express, and the MIT Technology Review podcast.

Plans for 2021-22

In 2021-22, as part of our work with the FGG, we will be setting up a new research repository and a monthly newsletter, addressing questions of data and the digital economy from a global and regional perspective. Through this, we aim to create a resource bank for activists, scholars, unions, and other stakeholders on the current state of affairs, emerging policy action, and fresh perspectives on Big Tech regulation and implications for workers and small actors in the economy. We will also be launching a yearly report, taking stock of Big Tech's capture of the digital economy and its implications. Further, we will initiate two research studies: first, a global research on the opportunities and risks for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) from developing countries integrating into transnational e-commerce value chains; and second, an India-specific exploration of the burgeoning ed-tech services market and its implications for education as a public good in the post-pandemic era.

We will also be undertaking two major studies directly involving trade unions in India and globally with Public Services International and UNI Global, respectively. We will continue to support national platform workers' unions in enhancing their understanding of the intersections between workers' data rights and traditional labor rights through capacity building events.

We will continue working on issues of economic rights to data and community data, and plan to frame a global model legislation with the help of a few developing countries and support from the South Centre. We hope to leverage the upcoming UNCTAD Quadrennial Conference as an opportunity to call for a reinvigorated push for digital industrialization. We will strengthen our engagement with the intensive data regulation work taking place in the EU, working with our EU-based partners, like Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES). We will also work with the Just Net Coalition to constitute working groups in areas such as global trade, finance, health, agriculture, etc. to contextualize data justice debates in sector-specific ways.

Democratizing Digital Justice

 itforchange.net/Annual-Report/2020-21-democratizing-digital-justice

Exploring the intersections between digital rights and development justice has been the primary focus of our research, advocacy, and field-building efforts. As the digital permeates multiple national and international development domains, it is vital that civil society actors build informed and critical perspectives. Neither glib solutionism nor blanket pessimism will be productive. Therefore, our effort has been to turn to normative ideas underpinning digital justice, interpreting such norms from the standpoint and through the participation of people's movements from the Global South. We believe it is necessary to urgently move the conversation towards democratic institutional frameworks for digital governance from global to local levels. Our alliance and knowledge-building efforts have attempted to address this imperative, weaving into social movement agendas and mainstream development policy dialogues the connections between digital justice and an equitable international political-economic order.

Campaign against UN SG Proposal for Global Digital Cooperation

In early 2020, the UN Secretary-General (UN SG) came out with a detailed policy roadmap aimed at addressing existing gaps in global digital governance arrangements, particularly the inability of the UN Internet Governance Forum (IGF) to produce meaningful and binding outcomes. The roadmap called for the creation of a 'strategic' and 'empowered' multistakeholder high-level body, financed mainly through non-UN private sector funding, to coordinate follow-up actions from the IGF and communicate proposed policy approaches and suggestions to relevant forums. As IT for Change and other member organizations of the Just Net Coalition noted, this development was a slippery slope to the direct entrenchment of corporate power, particularly of transnational digital corporations, in pivotal multilateral policy processes, where norms are forged for our collective digital future.



Artwork for Just Net Coalition's campaign against a Big Tech dominated body for global digital governance, which received nearly 12,000 impressions on Twitter.

IT for Change and other Just Net Coalition members launched a campaign against the proposal in March 2021, when a public consultation on the institutional framework for the high-level body was announced by the Multistakeholder Advisory Group of the UN IGF.

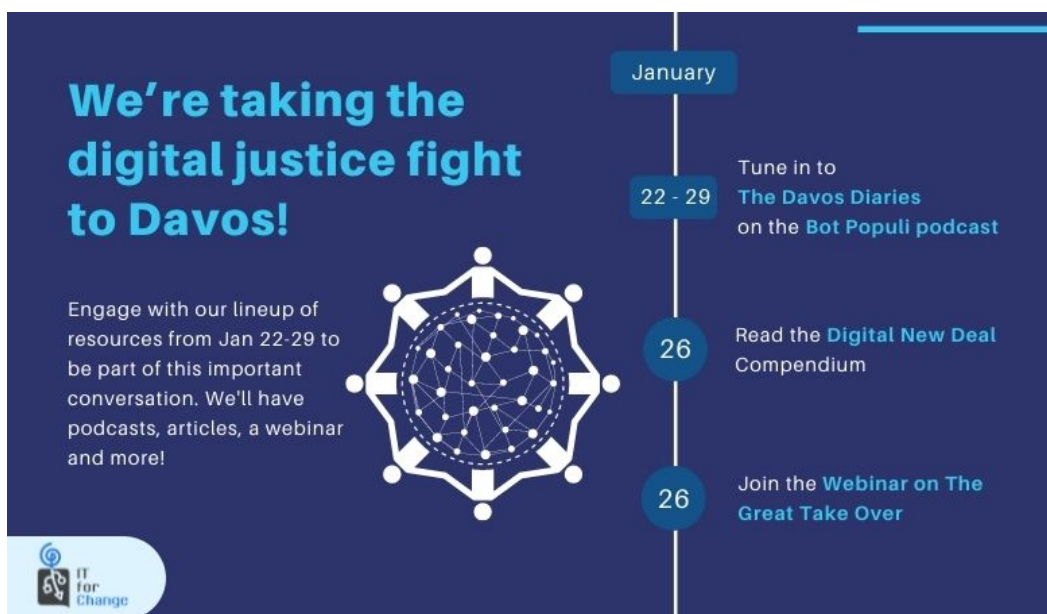
We wrote an open letter to the UN SG opposing the plans for establishing a Big-Tech-dominated body for global digital governance and launched a campaign that saw 170 civil society organizations worldwide endorsing the letter. Building on our learnings from this experience, we authored a journal article for a special issue of *Development*, focused on a new agenda for UN75, arguing for the urgent imperative to build a new radical global constitutionalism, breaking away from the corporate capture of rule-making for the digital.

A Digital New Deal: Visions of Justice in a Post-Covid World

In July 2020, we supported the Just Net Coalition (JNC) on A Digital New Deal, a thoughtfully curated project that brought together leading thinkers, activists, and practitioners to reflect on the idea of digital justice. The essays from this project provided the much-needed North Star for global civil society, interrogating the idea of 'building back' and 'recovery' in a digitalizing world of deep inequality. The collection took note of the pandemic and its debilitating aftermath, and articulated the building blocks of an alternative vision for our digital ecosphere. The collection provided pathways out of the dominant digital frame towards justice and equity, covering diverse topics from the digitalization of agriculture and food systems to issues of social protection, current stalemates in multilateral norm-building, and the fight against Big Tech. The series was officially unveiled by the Just Net Coalition in November 2020, at a pre-event during the UN IGF, and later released as a compendium. It has received wide acclaim from multiple constituencies the world over and has been downloaded nearly 3000 times, with the essays on the project site pulling nearly 10000 unique visitors.

The Davos Diaries for a New Multilateralism

In January 2021, IT for Change released the first miniseries of its Bot Populi Podcast. The initiative was part of a global effort by a coalition of civil society organizations and trade unions to coincide with the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland. Titled The Davos Diaries, the miniseries brought together prominent scholars and activists Barbara Adams, Chee Yoke Ling, Harris Gleckman, Jim Thomas, Renata Avila, and Roberto Bissio, (along with IT for Change's Parminder Jeet Singh), to critically unpack the WEF's agenda. The podcast explored the broad trends in multilateral norm-building, and the 'digital reset' issues implicated in the discussions at the Davos 2021 summit. The series was released throughout the course of the week of the WEF meetings and supplemented with a social-media campaign. These advocacy efforts culminated in a webinar jointly organized by a coalition of global civil society organizations titled The Great Take Over: How We Fight the Davos Capture of Global Governance. The podcast, a first of its kind media product for IT for Change, had an impactful run, with the Davos Diaries series raking in close to 550 downloads and listens across platforms.



Artwork announcing our participation in the global campaign to take the digital justice fight to Davos.

Alliance-Building on Feminist Digital Justice

As part of the Global Working Group on Feminist Visions of the Future of Work, supported by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), we co-evolved an action framework for policy and programming towards gender-just digital economies with leading feminist scholar-practitioners from Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America. The action framework argues for a three-pronged agenda of building back a new multilateralism for furthering development in the digital age, ensuring Big Tech accountability for protection and promotion of women's human rights, and global and national support for creating

feminist digital and data infrastructures. It was launched at the Global South Women's Forum 2020 hosted by International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAP Asia Pacific).

We continued our collaboration with Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) on Feminist Digital Justice. IT for Change and DAWN team members produced think pieces on the need for a new social contract that ensures full social and economic citizenship for the most marginalized women, the consequences of the pervasive digitalization of public services during the pandemic, and rising tensions between labor and capital in the platform economy.



Cover images for the Feminist Digital Justice Issue Papers by Anita Gurumurthy, Vanita Nayak Mukherjee, and Flora Partenio.

Integration of Data Perspectives into Health and Biodiversity Domains

We were invited by Transform Health, a global coalition committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of universal health coverage using digital technologies and data, to join their working group on evolving principles for health data governance. We have managed to bring in an innovative framework for simultaneously thinking about individual and collective rights in health data, with respect to protection from harm and benefits sharing of data value. The principles will be finalized and released in 2021.

At the national level, we have been closely tracking the National Digital Health Mission's efforts to roll out a country-wide public health data infrastructure. Our response to the public consultation on the Draft Health Data Management Policy calls attention to the lack of adequate safeguards to prevent personal data protection violations and corporate capture of health data resources in the institutional governance arrangements that are proposed. We have shared our analysis with health rights activists in the country through dialogues and conversations with the People's Health Movement.

We were invited by the Third World Network (TWN) to support their ongoing global advocacy efforts around the emerging Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, specifically to input into the construction of their policy position on digital sequence information (DSI) of genetic resources. We provided our perspectives on the intersections between cross-border regulation of data flows and appropriate access and benefits sharing regime for DSI at TWN's learning session for the global community of biodiversity activists and also co-organized an expert webinar focused on the global democratic governance of digital genomics.

New Horizons for Labor Rights in the Digital Age

The global pandemic threw into sharp relief the abject exploitation of labor in digital value chains. For May Day 2020, we came out with a special series on labor, digital economy, and Covid-19 for Bot Populi, with contributions from leading researchers, civil society practitioners, and trade union representatives. We also continued dialogues on new frontiers for labor rights in the 21st century, not only to re-articulate social protection nets for workers in the digital economy, but also to draw attention to workers' data rights. With international trade union federations such as the Public Services International and global initiatives such as Reshaping Work, we continue to shape this vital agenda.

We engaged on the frontlines of critical national-level debates on the future of workers' rights. In early 2020, India carried out a landmark project of labor law reform, harmonizing and re-casting 44 different central laws into four codes: wages, industrial relations, social security, and occupational safety, health and working conditions. We analyzed this development from the standpoint of the burgeoning class of digital day laborers, India's rapidly expanding platform workforce, and found it wanting. To highlight the shortcomings of the new labor codes and desirable future pathways for extending foundational labor rights to all workers, we produced a research paper and published op-eds in the FES International Trade Union Policy Blog and the Hindustan Times.

We forged a coalition of trade unions and civil society organizations in India, working on platform workers' rights to influence the ongoing policy dialogue. Working closely with the All India Gig Workers Union, Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers, Aapti Institute, the Centre for Internet and Society, Tandem Research, and TWN Trust, we co-drafted and submitted an input to the Ministry of Labour and Employment on the draft Code on Social Security Rules, 2020 in December 2020. Our input was extremely well-received and widely covered by media outlets such as The News Minute, NDTV, News Click, Money Control, and others.

The gig is up! Worker rights for digital day labour in India

Anita Gurumurthy, Nandini Chami, Sadhana Sanjay



ANALYSIS

A data rights agenda for platform and gig economy workers

In the long term, a well-rounded data rights agenda that acknowledges privacy and personal data protection considerations as well as workers' collective claim need to become the new 21st century frontier for the labour movement.



By Nandini Chami and Sadhana Sanjay

PUBLISHED ON DEC 23, 2020 05:52 PM IST



Cover image of the research paper for Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung by Anita Gurumurthy, Nandini Chami, and Sadhana Sanjay; and an article for the Hindustan Times by Nandini Chami and Sadhana Sanjay.

Impact

The impact of IT for Change's work in deepening the digital justice debate is visible across a variety of different fronts this year, from the immense positive feedback we received at events, the ways in which we were able to initiate new conversations and steer the discourse on particular issues through our extensive advocacy, and the many requests we have received to participate in novel initiatives within a rapidly expanding network of allies and associates.

We were invited to engage with grassroots efforts for social justice such as the Janta Parliament, the online World Social Forum 2021, the South Asia People's Forum on the SDGs, and the Campaign of Campaigns.

Despite the constraints on organizing physical events in the pandemic year, we were part of over 70 online panels, learning sessions, and dialogues in global civil society circuits. Our collaborators included leading international civil society organizations such as Transnational Institute, Third World Network, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, the Feminist AI research network (A+ alliance), the Women's Working Group on Financing for Development, London International Development Network, Open Democracy, and the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre and the Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL).

Our expertise has also been sought for capacity-building lectures, masterclasses, and other forms of pedagogic engagement in academic spaces nationally and globally. In March 2021, our Executive Director, Anita Gurumurthy, was invited to deliver the keynote at the University of Tokyo for the inaugural event of the B'AI Global Forum. We also received invites from the Indian Institute of Management and the Indian Institute of

Science, Bengaluru; the Centre for Communication Governance (NLU Delhi), Azim Premji University, and the University of Calicut. At the international level, we were invited to provide an expert input to the Online Winter School of the University of Padova.

Plans for 2021-22

We intend to continue our campaign against the Big Tech capture of global digital governance arrangements with the Just Net Coalition, closely tracking the rollout of the UN SG Roadmap for Digital Cooperation and the intersections of digital governance with other critical multilateral processes such as the Post-2020 Biodiversity framework and health data governance at the WHO. We propose to embark on a dedicated line of action for the governance of social media platforms, engaging in research, and alliance-building at the global level.

We will deepen our engagement with traditional civil society organizations and social movements to democratize narratives of digital justice, combining forces with the Just Net Coalition to set up issue-specific working groups. Bot Populi, the alternative media that we co-founded, will play a major role in our strategy for building an alternative, South-centered discourse on a just and equitable digital future, grounded in the standpoints of people's movements. We will expand our strategy for the Bot Populi Podcast and strengthen its content tracks under Big Tech Watch, the New Precariat, and the Feminist Observatory of the Internet. At the national level, as the pandemic eases, and restrictions are lifted, we hope to initiate community labs, learning sessions, and short workshops on the implications of current trends in national digital/data policies for just digital futures, with trade unions, farmers' cooperatives, small traders' groups, and health activists.

Prakriye Field Center

 itforchange.net/Annual-Report/2020-21-prakriye

Prakriye, our field resource center, deploys the creative potential of information and communication technologies to further the socio-political empowerment of marginalized rural women and adolescent girls and promote gender-responsive local governance. In its efforts to evolve a radically new development praxis that brings power to the peripheries, the center engages with rural women's collectives, adolescent girls, male community leaders, local government institutions, and community-based organizations in over 60 villages from HD Kote and Hunsur blocks of Mysuru district, Karnataka, India.

Namma Mahiti Kendra: Enabling Access to Local Information

The year 2020-21 was like no other. The Covid-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on people's employment, health, and education. It further highlighted the importance of access to local information on welfare schemes and governance processes. When the lockdown disrupted the daily lives of people, access to information on pension schemes, subsidies, job openings etc., became vital. Prakriye continued its efforts to address this need for information by expanding the scope of our information centers (Namma Mahiti Kendras). During this time, our infomediaries (locally known as sakhis) who manage Namma Mahiti Kendras relied on phone calls and instant messaging platforms to collect and share information with people. They created discrete messaging groups to target information appropriately to various constituencies eligible for welfare schemes, pensions, job openings, etc.



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/hUTwb4Z8C-g>

Nagaveni traces her journey as a sakhi at one of our Namma Mahiti Kendras and encourages young women like her to break social barriers and pursue their dreams.

In the months that allowed in-person interactions, sakhis shared information by visiting individual households, attending sangha (self-help group) meetings, and screening films, while complying with Covid-19 guidelines.

In 2020-21, sakhis processed 492 entitlement claims. Agriculture and agriculture-allied schemes, pension schemes, and welfare schemes for girls were some of the most common benefits claimed. Sakhis also assisted local community members in obtaining government identity cards and property ownership documents.

We did not have a ration card for over 15 years. We kept moving in search of work due to the pressures of debt. When the sakhi found out about us, she visited our house and facilitated the process to get us a ration card. We have been able to save some money since we got the card.

Rama and Mahesh
(names changed)

Enabling women's economic empowerment is a crucial component of our work. This year, sakhis continued to link women to job opportunities and skill-development programs. They also helped women receive government subsidies and the benefits needed to kick-start entrepreneurial activities.

We organized networking meetings in Namma Mahiti Kendras, where self-help groups engaged with our network of local public and private representatives such as bank managers, doctors, panchayat 1 members, and line-department officials. These meetings provided a platform for women to voice their specific needs and make informed choices.



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/oLoMKRWsGuo>

Sangha members attend a tailoring workshop.

Namma Maathu, Namma Jaaga: A Program Addressing Gender-Based Violence

With support from the EdelGive Foundation, the Namma Jaaga help desks have continued to support survivors of gender-based violence. Our para-counselors (40 Anganwadi² workers and sakhis who run Namma Jaaga help desks) became immediate points of contact for women seeking support.

The pandemic marked a significant increase in instances of domestic violence. However, the lockdown also stopped women from seeking support. Para-counselors employed technologies such as phone calls and chats to provide psycho-social aid to as many women as possible. They also held meetings – with due attention to social distancing protocols, regularly followed-up on cases, and linked survivors to Mahila Santwana Kendras³ and women's hostels.

Lata (name changed) lives with her husband, two children, and her parents-in-law. Her husband is a cab driver, and the pandemic severely affected his income.

"We could not afford food for our children. My husband and I started having fights and this often led to him physically abusing me. I reached out to the nearest para-counselor and shared my problems. We could not meet in person, so I called her on her mobile and sometimes messaged her. She also counseled my family and me. With her support, we are doing much better."

Lata, sangha member

This year, Prakriye regularly mentored para-counselors through virtual sessions. In February 2021, we conducted in-person refresher trainings to discuss the para-counselors' ongoing cases. Each para-counselor is equipped with a tablet pre-loaded with audio-visual curricular material that helps them initiate conversations on gender with women's groups. These conversations help women open up about their own experiences of violence and seek support. The refresher trainings gave us an opportunity to review and upload new content on gender roles, gender stereotypes, and women's rights.

Capacity Building Through ICT – Mediated Gender Dialogues

Prakriye continued to harvest the creative potential of participatory media strategies to break the silence around the normalization of gender-based violence. We used fictional and non-fictional IVR messaging that ends with a call-to-action encouraging communities to take concrete steps to make progressive changes in their families and communities. This year, we sent out 152 IVR messages covering diverse themes such as Covid-19, agriculture, health, education, and gender equality.

Audio Player

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Use Up/Down Arrow keys to increase or decrease volume.

Basavraj shares an innovative method for soil enrichment that uses easily accessible materials. It is a quick, economical, and efficient way to increase crop yield.

Audio Player

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Use Up/Down Arrow keys to increase or decrease volume.

Nagaratna is pleased to see Sanju fetch pails of water to ease his mother's workload. After all, there is no shame in boys doing household chores.

Prakriye's digital stories⁴ and short films align with the development objectives of the local communities. The videos narrate the stories of women from the community and shed light on their legal, political, and cultural rights. Screening these films for groups and individuals makes space for deeper engagement and encourages reflective learning among women, men, adolescent girls, and boys.

In 2020-21, Prakriye produced seven digital stories and nine short films. Our sakhis and para-counselors screened them for local communities. We conducted over 125 video screenings and engaged with over 1200 people across our operational areas.

Occupying Public Spaces

Public spaces, like playgrounds, are avenues for communities to participate in social and cultural life, promoting pleasure, self-expression, networking, and leisure. However, women are deprived of such public life, and their cultural right to participate in sports remains largely unacknowledged. To initiate a discourse on equality in the public sphere, Prakriye organized a sports event in March to celebrate International Women's Day, 2021.



Watch Video At: https://youtu.be/U9hJ-Evt_Eg

Towards an Equal Future: Breaking Social Barriers and Occupying Public Spaces: A short film capturing the highlights of the Sports Day

Nearly 600 women from 55 villages of our area of operation participated in games like lemon and spoon race and tug-of-war in village and school playgrounds. They also watched a film that shed light on the history and significance of International Women's Day.



Women participating in the lemon and spoon race.

Collaborations

Milaan Foundation's Girl Icon program invests in collectivizing girls at the grassroots and training them to hone their leadership skills. IT for Change supported the outreach for this program through our field networks. Over 20 girls from our reporting area signed up for this program.

We continued to work with Karnataka's Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD) to address the grievances of women and girls in the villages from our reporting area. Our para-counselors conducted workshops and one-on-one sessions to train Anganwadi workers on how to use the Anganwadi data entry portal set up by the Ministry of WCD.



Watch Video At: https://youtu.be/kVyNQ_ZDTdo

A digital story reflecting on the invisibilization of women in agriculture in India.

Impact

In 2020-21, we prioritized the challenge of mitigating the adverse effects of the pandemic on the community, including the livelihood crisis which has left many with little to no income and struggling to make ends meet.

Throughout the year, with the support of EdelGive Foundation, Tech Mahindra Foundation, and Cognizant Foundation, we distributed ration kits to over 1600 people from our reporting area. The beneficiary list was prepared in consultation with the communities and prioritized single women, older women without family support, people with disabilities, and tribal communities. We also distributed health gear including face masks, hand-gloves, hand sanitizers, and ORS packets to 600 front-line workers who have been the backbone of our fight against Covid-19.

During the lockdown, sakhis reached out to the communities by making our information-sharing model more flexible and using phone calls and instant messaging platforms. Our robust network of sakhis, sangha members, Anganwadi workers, ASHAs⁵, and panchayat members ensured continued access to information on welfare schemes and processes in the villages.

The pandemic has made women's lives more precarious. Multiple lockdowns and the ensuing lack of access to livelihoods has not only exposed them to increased violence but also brought acute financial distress upon them, and restricted their mobility, making it difficult for them to seek help. To address this concern, the Namma Jaaga help desks offered counseling through phone calls and messaging. Para-counselors also leveraged their networks to help survivors seek legal support and find safer places such as women's hostels.

Plans for 2021-22


We have several new projects lined up for 2021-22. With support from the Ford Foundation, we will be conducting a new research project that aims to understand how local masculinities are shaped by sexism on social media platforms. Based on the findings of this study, we aim to build interactive pedagogies to initiate conversations on gender justice among men.

With a view to evaluate the effectiveness of our work so far of the Namma Maathu Namma Jaaga's redress mechanism and media strategies, we are keen to undertake an impact study. This will be supported by the ATE Chandra Foundation. Given how vital it is to engage men in the community as crucial stakeholders for driving change, we propose to deepen our interventions with them, especially elected male representatives and adolescent boys.

Footnotes

- 1 The local rural government in the Indian subcontinent.
- 2 Rural child care centers run by the government.
- 3 Counseling centers set up by the Department of Women and Child Welfare.
- 4 Videos that employ creative story-telling styles.
- 5 ASHAs or Accredited Social Health Activists are trained female community health activists working in rural areas across India as part of the National Rural Health Mission.

Education – Annual Report

 itforchange.net/Annual-Report/2020-21-education

ICTs and Education

The Covid-19 pandemic exposed and accentuated the wide stratification in the Indian school system. Children from marginalized communities have been abandoned, with limited or no support from schools to tide through this crisis.

Against this backdrop, IT for Change's education team worked on two fronts in 2020-21. First, we designed and conducted workshops and courses for teachers from government and government-aided schools. These workshops and courses aimed to build teachers' abilities to use digital technologies for their own professional development and offer online education to their students. We supported teacher education institutions in offering their programs as online courses. We also conducted open online courses, and in-person camps and classes when schools were open, for students. We leveraged our experience in developing pedagogical models integrating digital technologies to support government school teachers and teacher educators to quickly adopt digital pedagogies to address the lockdown challenges.

Second, we consistently advocated with the Government of Karnataka to re-open schools carefully and in a phased manner. This was part of our work with the Vidyarthigala Nade, Shaleya Kade (Students Walk Towards Schools), a Karnataka-based coalition of parents' groups and civil society organizations.

Teacher Professional Development

To better navigate pandemic-induced school closures, teachers want to acquire the skills to adopt and adapt digital technologies in their classrooms.

Our programs for teachers, student teachers, and teacher educators focused on integrating digital technologies to enhance content and pedagogical knowledge. Our work here was in line with the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge Framework to create and share open educational resources, and support constructivist classroom engagement. In our courses, using technology is not an end in itself but a means to strengthen content and pedagogy processes in teaching.

Programs for Teacher Educators

We conducted a workshop on the Use of Technology and Open Educational Resources (OER) for e-Content Development for the faculty of the Karnataka State Open University (KSOU), Mysuru, in collaboration with the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA). Over 50 participants learned Free and Open-Source Software (FOSS) tools to access and create OER.



Teacher Educators at KSOU in the workshop.

Programs for Teachers

We believe that FOSS creates a free and open learning environment, where teachers see themselves as active participants – installing and configuring software – and not just as users. This enables schools to maintain their labs without depending on vendors.

Lack of maintenance and support for in-house capabilities is an important reason for the failure of digital technology programs in schools. To help address this, we designed and conducted an online course on Digitally Enabling Schools for the computer teachers of the Karnataka Residential Educational Institutions Society (KREIS), which runs residential schools for children from marginalized communities. The teachers installed our custom Ubuntu software distribution on the schools' and their personal computers.

We conducted an online course for the mathematics teachers of Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS) government schools using the Moodle Learning Management System for asynchronous learning and the BigBlueButton (BBB) webinar platform for synchronous sessions between the faculty and teachers. We conducted similar courses for mathematics teachers of the Zonal Institute of Education and Training (ZIET), Bhubaneswar and, ZIET Mumbai. We also conducted an Audio Resource Creation Course on language teaching for KVS English Teachers. KVS teacher educators from ZIET Mumbai conducted their in-service teacher development courses on our platforms.

We introduced a series of courses on Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Integration in Teaching-Learning for high and middle school teachers of the Little Flower High School, Hyderabad, which serves children from marginalized communities. The course supported teachers in creating context-specific resources for their classrooms.

Programs with Teacher Educator Institutions

Our association with the Regional Institute of English, South India (RIESI) grew stronger in 2020-21. We supported the RIESI faculty in conducting online versions of their Post Graduate Diploma in English Language Teaching (PGDELT) and six batches of the Certificate in English Language Teaching (CELT) course. We conducted an online program on Krashen's Hypotheses for second language acquisition, and an Audio Resource Creation course for these teachers.

For the first time, we offered a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on Teaching Technology with Mathematics with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) for 1372 teachers across the world.

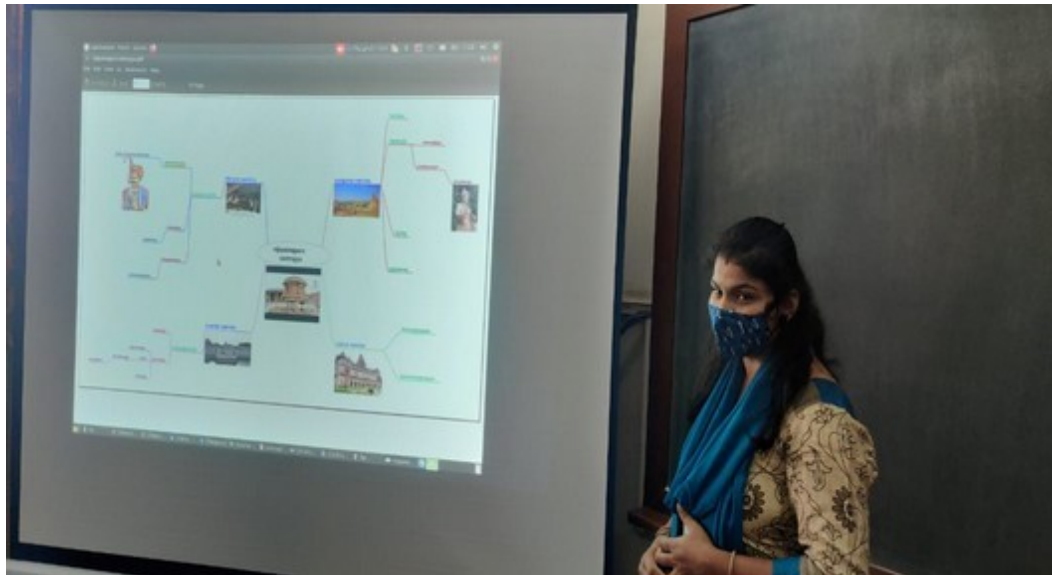
These teacher development programs were part of our Integrating Digital Technologies to Strengthen Public Education program, supported by Kotak Mahindra Bank CSR.



Audio Resource Creation Workshop at RIESI

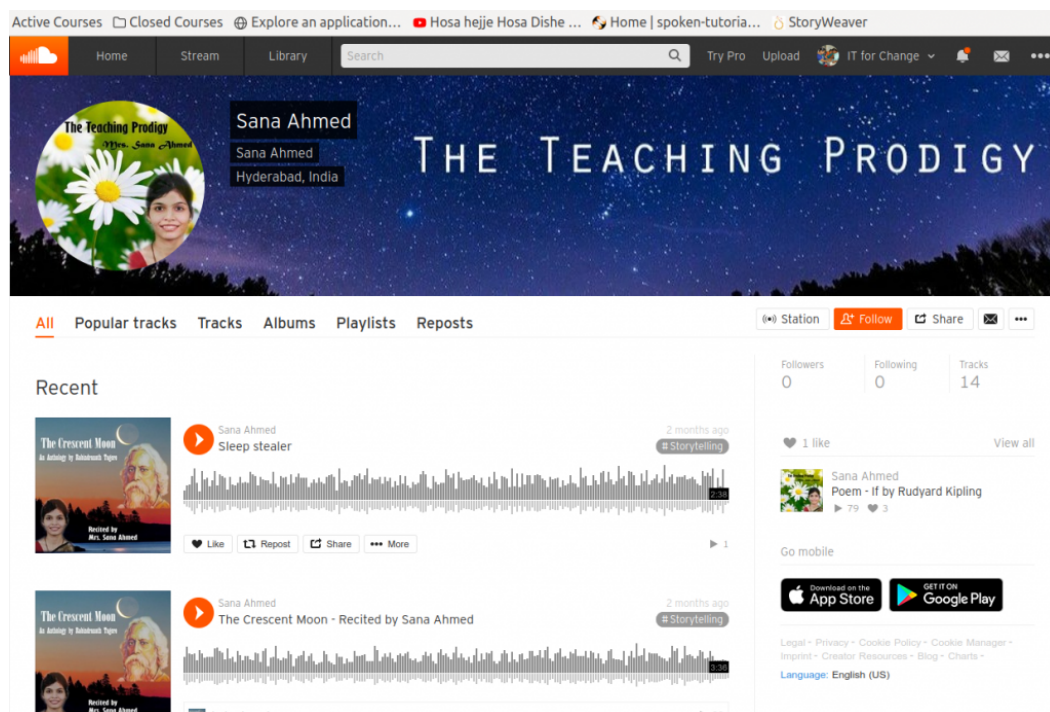
Programs for Pre-Service Teacher Education

As part of our collaboration with NMKRV College, we designed and conducted an ICT course for their four-year integrated B.Sc.-B.Ed. and B.A.-B.Ed programs. We also helped Sri Sarvajna College of Education (SSCE) offer their B.Ed. program online. Our ICT-Integrated Learning course was offered to the second and fourth semester B. Ed. students of SSCE and Vijaya Teachers College (VTC) and the Diploma in Education (D.Ed.) students of the Bharat Educational Society College (BES).



Student teacher presentation at SSCE

All our programs supported teacher educators, teachers, and student teachers in developing and sharing OER, which is crucial for imparting high quality and inexpensive education. The mathematics and English teachers we trained published their Geogebra resources and lessons on the Geogebra OER portal and audio OER on a SoundCloud repository, respectively. We also developed all our course materials as OER.



SoundCloud Channel hosted by Sana Ahmed from the English Language Teachers' Association, Telangana

Teachers' Communities of Learning Program with Bengaluru Schools

We continued to engage with teachers from government and government-aided schools through the Teachers' Communities of Learning (TCoL) program in Bengaluru, supported by Cognizant Foundation. We conducted online classes for mathematics, social science, and English, in Kannada and English languages, for students from 11 schools. Over 100 teachers participated in our capacity building workshops to create digital resources and conduct online classes for their students at school and block levels.

We published over 1,000 resources pages on the Karnataka Open Educational Resources (KOER) – our online repository of OER for teachers to use while conducting online classes. These resources included a video series on using Geogebra for Mathematics teachers and audio resources for Kannada teaching.

We also organized back-to-school camps in multiple schools, which helped students who had missed school for months transition back into structured learning in an enjoyable manner. When schools re-open, such camps will be critical for ensuring student retention.



Peer reading and presenting activity during a camp.

Adolescent Girls' Empowerment Program

Hosa Hejje Hosa Dishe – our adolescent girls' empowerment program, supported by British Telecom – aims to empower girls through an understanding of the gender-based risks they may face in the family, school, and society. Building development-oriented and responsive teaching communities that utilize digital technologies is a key component of this program.

Due to the pandemic-induced school closures, we explored different ways to develop a democratic learning intervention that every kishori (adolescent girl) could access and participate in. Our survey found that many families did not have access to smartphones.

So, we launched a community radio program called Nan Voice, Nan Choice (My Voice, My Choice) in Bengaluru.

The radio program focuses on the various aspects of development among adolescent girls. It aims to help adolescent girls articulate their rights and desires, enabling them to make decisions for themselves through relevant information about skills, career prospects, and perspectives on gender and patriarchy. Through expert interviews and a serial fictional play with relatable characters for parents, the program uses a culturally-rooted aesthetic to gain traction.

Nan Voice Nan Choice was launched in November 2020, and the 40 episodes broadcast as of September 2021, can be found on YouTube. Since the show started broadcasting, we have noticed a gradual change among the adolescent girls we work with – they have started articulating their views on many issues.

Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/videoseries>

We plan to upscale the audio materials from the radio program across Karnataka, and support other partners of British Telecom's adolescent girl empowerment program to design radio shows.



When schools re-opened between January – March 2021, we conducted classes for students focusing on topics related to mathematics and developing digital skills. There is a general impression that girls are not as good as boys in Science, Technology, Engineering and mathematics (STEM) and our classes aimed to debunk this idea, while making learning mathematics effective and enjoyable. Interactive Voice Recognition System (IVRS) was used to regularly share messages with parents, and engage them in the online classes for their children.

We designed and conducted an online course on Gender Justice in Education for student teachers from SSCE and VTC colleges' B.Ed. Programs. The course aimed to help them reflect on issues of gender and patriarchy, how they manifest in their lives, and develop conceptual clarity about these issues.

During the lockdown, we identified families in need in Bengaluru and provided grocery kits to them, with support from various donors, including Cognizant Foundation.

Community-Supported Schools

As a part of our collaboration with the Foundation of Education, Ecology and Livelihood (FEEL), we worked in the tribal areas of Chittoor district in Andhra Pradesh to initiate appropriate technology integration in school and community education. We prepared text and audio resources in Telugu for managing Covid-19, introduced an arts and crafts program for children, and shared a toolkit on learning resources.

Advocacy

In 2020-21, we participated in the Vidyarthigale Nade, Shaleya Kade program, which aimed to create social awareness about the need to re-open schools.

We also participated in awareness events with other civil society organizations, and released statements to advocate for re-opening schools and providing rations to families.



Our director, Gurumurthy Kasinathan, advocating for opening of schools in a phased manner

Publications and Events

Our research and publications continued to inform policy makers and other stakeholders about the need for equitable and humane education and the appropriate role for digital technologies in teacher and school education.

We also participated in numerous webinars and panel discussions on digital technologies and education, particularly with reference to the pandemic.

Impact

With the pandemic-induced school closures, we supported schools and teacher education institutions in providing digital education through effective pedagogical models. The teachers we worked with developed and published OER that can be used for digital education. We also supported student learning through online classes for high school students from government and government-aided schools.

We worked with 200+ students and conducted professional development programs for 848 student teachers and 1286 in-service teachers and teacher educators.

Thus, we were able to help students, teachers, and teacher educators from public institutions in mitigating the negative impact of school closure.

Plans for 2020-21


Considering the adverse impact of pandemic-induced school closures on children, we are building a National Coalition on the Education Emergency to work on resuming and renewing school education. This coalition aims to support teachers through resources and models of teaching that provide meaningful opportunities for student learning. It will also attempt to socially mobilize marginalized communities to demand empathetic and meaningful education for their children.

Even as digital technologies have started playing a more prominent role in education due to the pandemic, we plan to continue advocating for ICT integration in ways that strengthen teacher agency and support socially transformatory education for all children.

In the coming year, we will start working in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Telangana. Teacher education programs for colleges in Karnataka are also being planned. Furthermore, we will work on capacity development of the District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET) faculty. With our existing partners, we will support government and government-aided schools and institutions in providing digital education opportunities to their learners.

The content being developed as a part of the Nan Voice, Nan Choice program has enormous potential to address the challenges posed by the pandemic to adolescent girls. We plan to design a program to disseminate these resources across Karnataka.

Gender Justice in the Digital Society

 itforchange.net/Annual-Report/2020-21-gender

Gender justice in relation to technology is not a simplistic, depoliticized idea of access and inclusion. It is about transforming the potential of platform, data, and AI technologies; creating a society and economy that reflects a different set of values for the digital paradigm. Our research, policy engagement, and alliances with progressive feminist groups and organizations across the world, have attempted to re-appropriate the narrative around gender debates in the digital discourse, showing how and why democratic institutions adequate to gender equality need to be at the core of digital justice.

We have taken a three-pronged approach to this domain. First, build a feminist economics framework for emerging data economies that proposes an alternative platform model for enterprise development and future of work strategies. Second, provide conceptual leadership for new governance mechanisms in the digitally-mediated public sphere. Third, widen feminist alliance-building to collectively and effectively tackle the excesses of digital capitalism.

The sections below describe the key highlights of our work this year.



Media and research pieces by Ankita Aggarwal, Anita Gurumurthy, Khawla Zainab and Sadhana Sanjay.

Centering Women in India's Digitalizing Economy

In 2020-21, we continued our research and policy engagement efforts to bring gender perspectives into the mainstream policy discourse on India's digital economy, as part of our project, Centering Women in India's Digitalizing Economy (2020-24), a collaboration with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) supported by the European Commission. This project seeks to explore alternative platform enterprise models that can further the economic

empowerment of women workers in the informal sector. We will engage with cooperatives, social enterprises, and collectives embarking on different platform solutions and models across different locations in India, using longitudinal action research to study their socio-economic journeys.

In 2020, we focused our energies on exploring what gender-inclusion means in emerging digital economies in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. This period saw a Big Tech takeover of logistics infrastructures in core value chains of agriculture, manufacturing and services, and the digitalization of welfare systems. We wrote a series of topical and timely op-eds highlighting the expulsion of marginalized women from the post-pandemic digital future and the adverse implications of the Government of India's proclamation of e-commerce as an essential service. We showed how such measures at the height of pandemic-related lockdowns do not account for the realities of marginal and small farmers and agricultural laborers in food value chains.

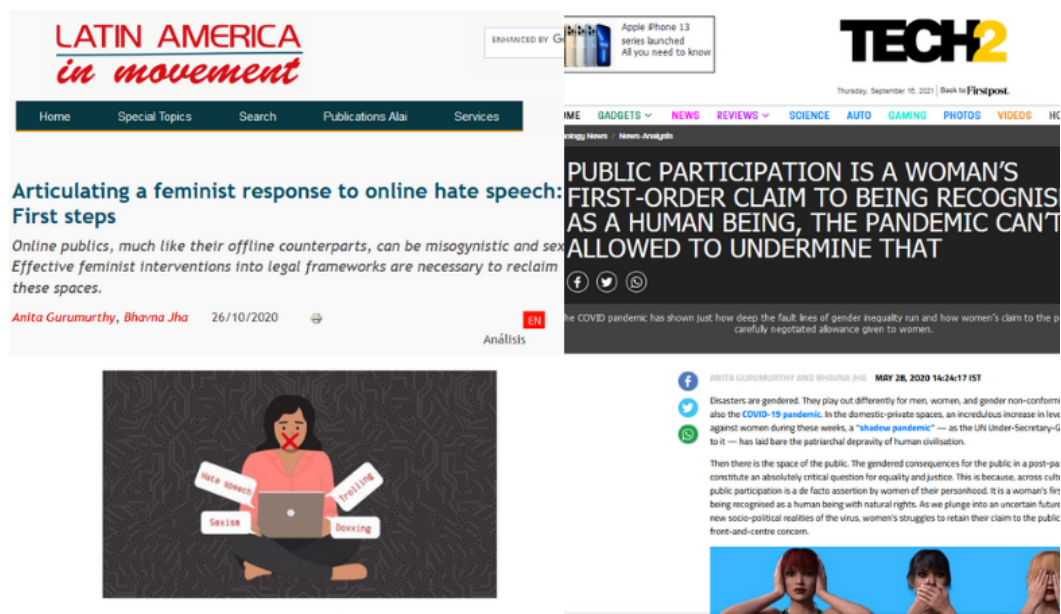
We joined a group of leading civil society organizations and the donor community to prepare an input to NITI Aayog on Covid-19 and its impact on women and girls. Our contribution highlighted how any strategy development by NITI Aayog for post-Covid economic recovery should focus on creating public digital infrastructure to support women's Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and cooperativist business models in different sectors, along with tackling the shadow pandemic of online abuse.

We also carried out a qualitative research study on the impact of Covid-19 on the working conditions of women microworkers of the online digital labor platform, Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT). The study revealed how algorithmic cultures in cross-border digital work reproduce gender hierarchies of discrimination and exploitation in global value chains. Findings from the study were also published as a research paper for the Economic and Political Weekly (EPW).

Addressing Sexist Hate and Misogyny in the Digitally-Mediated Public Sphere

With support from the International Development Research Centre (Canada), we continued our ongoing research and policy engagement on sexist hate and misogyny in the digitally-mediated public sphere. Our theoretical framing of sexist hate online as a violation of women's first-order claim to public-political participation and continued explorations of a feminist response to online hate speech pointed to the inadequacies of existing legal frameworks and jurisprudence in India on gender-based cyberviolence. Laws have been particularly slow in understanding the blurring of public and private interactions in digital sociality. We carried out a participatory action research study with 20 young women and men from marginal social locations across different geographies in rural Karnataka, associated with the community college programs of the Bengaluru-based NGO, Samvada. The research enabled the participant cohort to interrogate hegemonic masculinities and respond to the normalization of misogyny on social media platforms. We also initiated a new line of research on mapping the morphologies of hate speech against women in public-political life on Twitter in India to understand the interplay of

gender ideologies, platformized political speech, and content governance rules of the platform.



Media articles based on our research about sexist hatespeech online by Anita Gurumurthy and Bhavna Jha.

Our primary research explorations reveal the critical importance of two things: first, the need for a new feminist legal-policy approach to address sexist hate speech online rooted in women's right to equality; second, the non-negotiable imperative to build consensus around this among feminists. With support from the EdelGive Foundation, we brought out an essay series on Rethinking Legal-Institutional Approaches to Sexist Hate Speech in India with reflective thinkpieces from feminist activists/digital rights community, lawyers, and scholars to tease out the nuts and bolts of platform accountability vis-à-vis hateful content. We also convened a series of three webinars on Sexism and the Online Publics, which facilitated an in-depth, inter-generational conversation on the issue between the authors of our think-piece series and a wider public of civil society groups, research scholars, students, and independent activists.

We have submitted inputs from our ongoing research and civil society dialogues into critical policy conversations at the global and national level including the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Freedom of Peaceful Association and Assembly and the law review consultation on cybercrimes against women convened by the National Commission for Women (India).



Artwork by Harmeet Rahal for Feminist Digital Futures: A Bot Populi Podcast Series.

Breaking away from anachronistic framings of platforms as neutral conduits of content, we have argued the need for a new social media governance approach grounded in women's human rights. On the occasion of the UN Commission on the Status of Women 2021 (UN CSW 21), capitalizing on its focus on gender equality in public life, we published a commentary and released a podcast series on a feminist social media future, curating the views of feminist digital rights activists from across the world on a new multilateral benchmarking exercise for content governance and techno-design of online communicative spaces. At the UN South Asia Forum on Business and Human Rights, we initiated a dialogue with Facebook on the shortcomings of existing content moderation practices and community standards on the platform. We provided an expert input on technology and gender-based violence at a learning webinar organized by UNDP and UNICEF.

At the national level, we were invited to provide inputs on gender-based cyberviolence at a forum on Making Technology Gender Inclusive, co-organized by Breakthrough and Arthan. We were also invited by Facebook India to their national-level civil society advisory group to support the context-appropriate development and testing of pilot projects to tackle the pressing issue of non-consensual circulation of intimate images and gender-based hate.



Covers for *The Deal We Always Wanted: A Feminist Action Framework for the Digital Economy* by Anita Gurumurthy and Nandini Chami. Artwork by Ellery Studio.

Promoting Feminist Digital Justice Narratives in Policy and Civil Society Dialogues

As part of the FES Feminist Working Group on Feminist Visions of the Future of Work, we developed an action roadmap for multiscalar policy action to build gender-just digital economies. Similarly, as a member of the Feminist AI Research Network, we contributed unique perspectives to knowledge dialogues on exploring feminist AI. Our inputs focused on demonstrating how a narrow preoccupation with addressing bias and discrimination in the design of AI systems is by itself an inadequate strategy of feministizing AI. We argued that identifying the gendered marginalities stemming from unequal distribution of the gains of intelligence in emerging global data value chains is the need of the hour. Our ongoing advocacy track on gender and digital trade was more focused this year on civil society capacity-building, and less with policy spaces, given the postponement of the WTO Ministerial Conference-12 from 2020 to 2021 on account of the pandemic. At webinars organized by the Gender and Trade Coalition, the Women's Working Group on Financing for Development, and FES Asia and WIDE+, we raised critical concerns about the gender implications of unregulated digitalization of global value chains during the pandemic, especially in light of the push for hyperliberalization of e-commerce by powerful states and transnational digital corporations. At the same time, we also focused on unpacking what it would mean for nation-states to pursue an alternative model of digital transformation focused on creating gender-just local economies and governance systems. Our team members were also invited by leading international civil society groups such as the World March of Women, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era(DAWN), and Escuela de Economia Feminista to deliver masterclasses to

members of their constituencies on deploying a critical gender lens to unpack the digitalization of economy and society.

Feminist Observatory of the Internet

We received support from the Women's Rights Online network of the World Wide Web Foundation to build a dedicated go-to space for progressive and visionary feminist narratives on our co-founded online media space Bot Populi. The Feminist Digital Futures podcast series was also produced as part of this project. Between April 2020-March 2021, we published an impressive array of articles under the Feminist Observatory of the Internet track on Bot Populi, providing nuance to a range of debates on the digital economy and society from both in-house and external researchers.



Artwork for Memeing Democracy written by R Vaishno Bharati for the Feminist Observatory of the Internet.

Impact

We continue to be one of the few organizations in the digital rights domain that bring robust Southern feminist perspectives about the ongoing data-enabled transformation of democracy and economy to key multilateral spaces. We are humbled that in a year marked by huge constraints for face-to-face civil society meetings, we have been continuously approached by feminist activists and organizations in the Global South for strategic support in their analysis and action. A big feather in our cap was the expansion of the Feminist Digital Observatory track in Bot Populi. As part of this track, we commissioned several articles which have raked in nearly 6000 page views on the site, and produced the Feminist Digital Futures podcast series, which has been streamed over 1200 times across all platforms. Similarly, our dedicated track of advocacy on social media governance is slowly gaining traction, and is being noticed by critical organizations in the Generation Equality Action Coalitions.

In our work at the national level, we have managed to move the bar on the debate on gender-based cyberviolence. We have pointed to why the false binary between free speech and regulation of sexism is not productive in the context of sexist trolling, and the online public sphere may need a sui generis legal approach that accounts for the unique role of the platform company in shaping rules for digital sociality. We are glad that we have been able to include feminists from different generations and across different ideological persuasions with respect to legal reform, in this conversation.

Plans for 2021-22

As part of the Centering Women in India's Digitalizing Economy project, we will initiate action research projects with women workers in the health and sanitation sector and women farmers' cooperatives to explore alternative platform enterprise models. This is an exciting new learning area for us and will involve measuring how platform design can be feminist – by promoting women's labor rights and economic well-being.

We propose to organize a global virtual conference on social media governance as part of our work on addressing sexism and misogyny in the digitally-mediated public sphere. Plans to build a toolkit for the judiciary on addressing gender-based cyber-violence are also in the pipeline.

In early 2021, we laid the ground to initiate a study on the feminist political economy of the global menstrual apps market supported by DAWN and Web Foundation, and a gender evaluation of the information and data architecture of the National Rural Livelihood Mission of the Government of India, with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

We are also keen to step up our efforts to promote feminist digital narratives in global and national civil society circles, through an online institute targeting early career scholar-practitioners and setting up community labs to have meaningful and grounded dialogues on equitable platform and data-supported enterprise models.

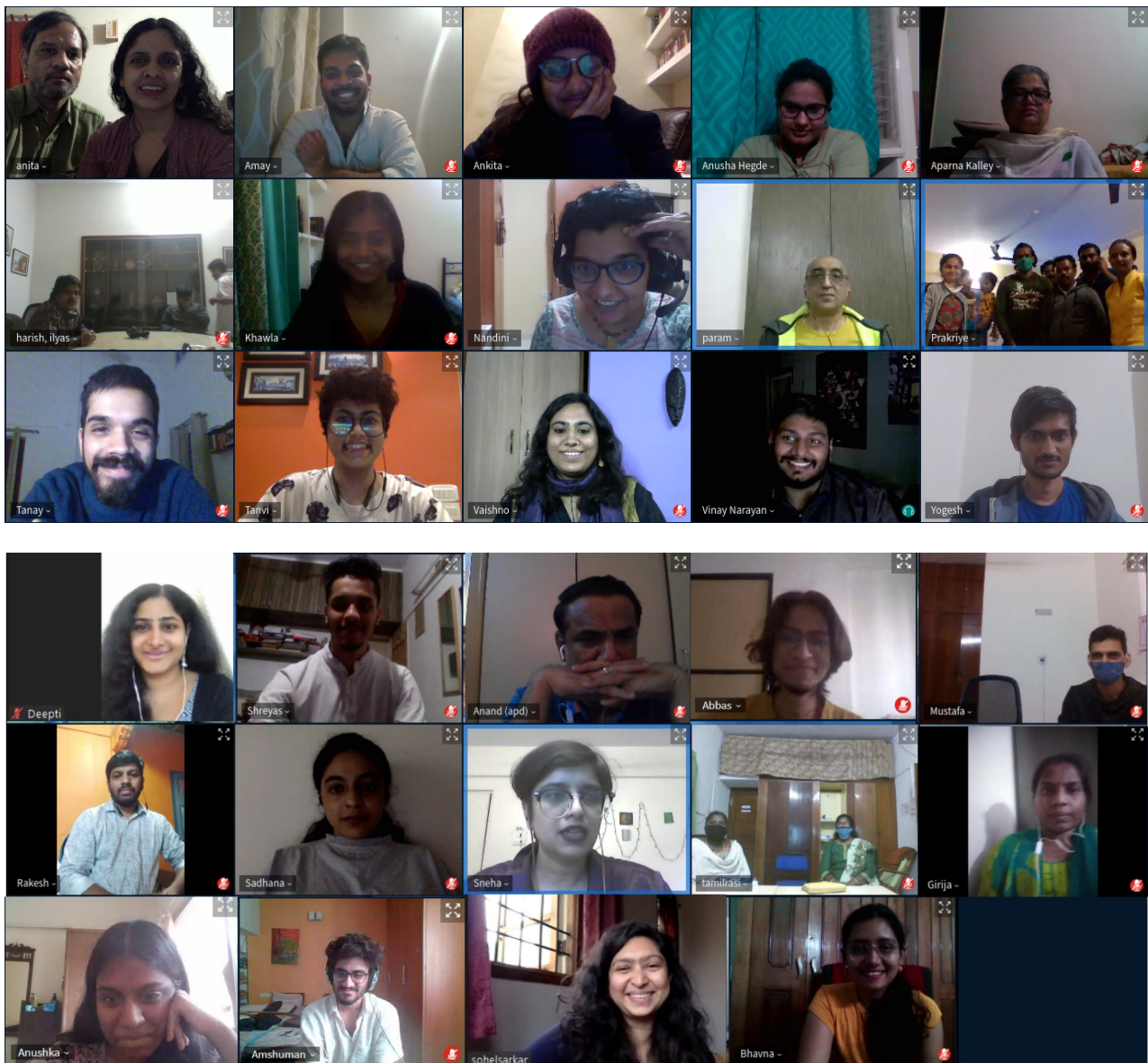
The five-year support from Ford Foundation's BUILD program opens up a unique opportunity for us to think out-of-the-box, and deepen our forays into feminist digital justice. It also urges us to think more systematically about breaking the programming silos within the organization, and integrating feminist perspectives into all parts of our work. This is a challenge we are eager to take on.

Team 2020-21 – Annual Report

itforchange.net/Annual-Report/2020-21-team

Our Team

At IT for Change, individuals from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, professional expertise, and skill sets work with a shared commitment towards progressive social change. Working across a multitude of settings, whether in schools, government agencies, multilateral and international agencies, or the community, our team brings innovative ideas to our field projects, coalition building, consulting, and research and advocacy projects.



Members of Governing Body

Geetha Narayanan, Secretary

Srilatha Batliwala, President

Padma M Sarangapani, Treasurer

Executive Directors

Anita Gurumurthy

Parminder Jeet Singh

Director

Gurumurthy Kasinathan

Deputy Director

Nandini Chami

Team*

Bengaluru Team

Amay Korjan, Research Associate

Anand Desai, Education Program Manager

Ananda Devraj, Program Associate – Education

Ankita Aggarwal, Research Associate

Anusha Hegde, Program Associate

Anusha Radhakrishna Hegde, Accounts Assistant

Anushka Mittal, Research Assistant

Aparna K, Senior Program Associate

Bharath R, Project Associate – IT

Bhavna Jha, Research Associate

Deepthi S Kotian, Accounts Assistant

Deepti Bharthur, Senior Research Associate

Girija M P, Program Assistant – Education

Harish P, Project Assistant – Technology

Karthik K, Program Associate

Khawla Zainab, Research Associate

Kishor K S, Project Assistant – Technology

Mahammad Mustafa Abdul Sab, Senior Officer Accounts

Mohammed Ilyaz M, Project Assistant – Technology

Neeta Jose, Program Assistant – Education

Prasanna Kumar B K, Office Administration Assistant

Pruthviraj Rajaram Ghatge, Technology Associate

Purnima Singh, Communications Associate

Rakesh B, Technology Associate

Roshan, Program Assistant – Education

Sadhana Sanjay, Research Assistant

Shreyas U Hiremath, Program Assistant

Sneha Bhagwat, Communications Assistant

Sohel Sarkar, Communications Consultant

Soujanya Sridharan, Research Assistant

Sunil C, Administrative Assistant

Tamilarasi, Admin Support

Tanay Mahindru, Research Associate

Tanvi Kanchan, Communications Assistant

Vaishno Bharati Radhakrishnan, Project Associate

Valli, Admin Support

Vedavathi M, Technology Assistant

Veera Nagi Reddy, Accounts Officer

Vinay Narayanan, Research Assistant

Yogesh K S, Senior Technology Associate

Mysuru Team

Anupama Suresh, Co-ordinator – Programs

Harisha N, Project Associate

Mangalamma, Project Associate

Nayana Kirasur, Project Associate – Research and Communications

Shabharisha M, Technical Associate

Shreeja K, Project Associate

Somashekhara U T, Project Associate

Tilak Rajkumar N, Project Assistant and Driver

*List of employees who worked between 2020-21.

IT for Change Annual Social Report 2020-21

 itforchange.net/Annual-Report/2020-21-social-report

Key Organizational Policies

- Policy on Prevention of Sexual Harassment
- Anti-Bribery and Corruption Policy
- Anti-Money Laundering Compliance Policy
- Policy Against Trafficking in Persons and Slavery
- Whistle-blower Policy and Procedures
- Privacy Policy

Recruitment and New Hires

IT for Change on-boarded 15 new employees in the reporting period in a remote fashion, 53% of our new recruits were women.

Sexual Harassment Complaints Received

IT for Change's Committee Against Sexual Harassment received no complaints in the reporting period.

Incidences of Misconduct

IT for Change's Integrity Officer received no complaints of professional and/or financial impropriety/misconduct in the reporting period.

At IT for Change, we have made several efforts to improve upon our human resource policies, practices, and processes in 2020-21.

We engaged in a critical review and re-haul of our employee induction process, with a view to enhance engagement, retention, and understanding of organizational policies and procedures. Employee induction was transitioned into a course on a learning management system platform with due checkpoints and evaluations. We plan to formalize a 'buddy' system in the induction process for facilitating peer-mentoring within the organization for new joiners.

We translated the organizational policy on sexual harassment into the local language, Kannada, and will be making efforts to translate other policies in due course as well. Further, a child protection and welfare policy is being developed this year, recognizing the increasing organizational work with children.

Our reliance on cloud-based infrastructure has significantly increased over the past year. At the administrative level, we undertook a consultative process among various teams to migrate to new free and open source software (FOSS) for knowledge management, collaborative working, employee induction, leave management, and financial accounting. We are happy to report that these FOSS tools have increased efficiency in output delivery.

The year of Covid-19 also challenged IT for Change's operations in many ways and necessitated adaptations to not only our research, advocacy, and field work strategies but also to our work arrangements. To account for working in the changed context of the pandemic, we focused on enhancing internal resilience around people and processes in several ways.

Prioritizing the safety and well-being of our team, we have temporarily transitioned to a work from home arrangement for all staff, except a skeletal administrative team on site. Our field operations have followed a hybrid method, maximizing remote modalities to the extent possible. All recruitment was also done on remote basis through a robust online interface that allowed us to on-board new hires in a seamless manner, with the relocation for out of-town hires left to the employees' discretion.

Medical health coverage for staff members was trebled in the year to extend health coverage for Covid-19 for employees, with an opt-in option made available for family members. Vaccination for staff members was also covered.

Lastly, employee well-being was a key focus area this year. We took steps towards addressing the challenges of working in a remote environment by organizing weekly water cooler sessions. Wellness resources are also being curated and will be included in the induction process.

Publications – Annual Report

 itforchange.net/Annual-Report/2020-21-publications

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Events – Annual Report

 itforchange.net/Annual-Report/2020-21-events

Events

In 2020-21, IT for Change had the privilege of hosting and participating in over 75 virtual events which were a mix of public roundtables, closed-door events, webinars, panel discussions and masterclasses covering both a national and global audience. We are both humbled and proud that in a year where face to face events were not a possibility, the networks and partnerships that we have built allowed us to discover and participate in new ways of keeping up the dialogue on matters that are close to our heart.

[Click here to view the details of these events.](#)