



Call for Proposals

Unskewing the Data Value Chain

– A Policy Research Project for Equitable Platform Economies

Topics/Themes: Platforms, regulation, data governance, data value chains, digital economy, tech policy

Deadline for submission of application: 14 October 2020, 06.30 UTC (12.00 PM IST)

Duration of project: One year, 15 November 2020 to 14 November 2021

Grant Amount: Up to USD 13,500 per grantee

Funded by: IT for Change

Who can apply: Academic and research organizations, researchers (independently or in teams)

Regions: The research is focused on the Global South. However, applicants from all over the world are welcome to apply for the call.

Overview

[IT for Change](#) seeks to collaborate with researchers and scholars working on issues of the digital economy and data governance in the Global South for our exciting new research project, 'Unskewing the Data Value Chain – A Policy Research Project for Equitable Platform Economies'.

Supported by the Omidyar Network, this project aims to generate high-quality, original, evidence-based research, and build a robust body of work to inform policymakers and practitioners and recommend policy directions for inclusive and equitable data value chains in the platform economy.

Towards this, we seek to forge collaborations for research studies outside India¹ and build an interdisciplinary network of scholars and researchers in a cutting-edge policy domain. We will award up to seven grants of USD 13,500 each for a period of 12 months.

Background

Development outcomes in the digital era are closely tied to the ability of countries to harness data value chains, the assemblage of intelligence infrastructure layers – comprising the base data layer, cloud computing layer, the intelligence layer, and the consumer-facing intelligence services layer ([Singh, 2020](#)) – that drive the fundamental transformation of the real economy.

As things stand, the digital economy is anything but equitable. Ninety percent of the market capitalization of the world's 70 largest Big Tech companies accrues to the US and China. The EU's share is a paltry 4 percent and Africa and Latin America together account for 1 percent ([UNCTAD, 2019](#)). This extremely unequal economic geography, where global data value chains have been captured by Big Tech companies and two countries, is the result of a governance vacuum. The ability of states to harness intelligence infrastructures stands impeded today, mired in political economy contestations around data. Our [concept note](#) discusses the issues at stake in greater detail, including:

- **New challenges that data value chains pose to old competition law.** Traditional competition law frameworks, with their focus on consumer protection rather than fairness of market structures, have failed to check Big Tech corporations. More importantly, competition frameworks have been several steps behind in recognizing the critical role data capture has played in fueling market domination by tech companies.
- **Absence of a global governance framework for data flows.** There is no appropriate global governance framework to regulate data flows across jurisdictions. This lacuna is aggravated by the intersection of the issue of cross-border data flows with trade and human rights concerns, pointing to the need for a deeper inquiry into appropriate arrangements for global-to-local governance frameworks to harness data value chains.

¹ The India component of the research will be undertaken by IT for Change

- **A stalemate in Big Tech taxation.** Cross-border digital services increasingly constitute a major share of transnational data value chains. However, existing international taxation frameworks that are based on physical presence are ineffective in curbing the profit shifting and tax evasion practices of Big Tech corporations. A deeper exploration of possible national taxation regimes to prevent base erosion and profit shifting by Big Tech companies is in order.
- **The challenge of intelligence infrastructure development.** Most developing countries face a double whammy; their legacy data systems are weak and they are trapped in a global regime of data extractivism. Building endogenous digital infrastructural capabilities is a complex, resource-intensive, but essential endeavor that these countries may not be able to achieve within the constraints of domestic fiscal resources and R&D facilities. Given that development outcomes are predicated on intelligence infrastructure, fresh thinking on the financing question is needed in these countries, from a sustainability standpoint.

The policy efforts at regulating Big Tech and the gaps that are observed here in the governance of data value chains tell us that the challenges to realizing an equitable digital economy are many. They also reflect the need for global data norms to decisively take on the systemic issues that have allowed Big Tech impunity, including the very seminal question of how the data that large corporations own should be governed.

In this context, IT for Change's project, **Unskewing the Data Value Chain**, aims to examine policies for the platform model and analyze how data value chains can be directed towards a fair and just economy.

Details for Research Applications

Research objectives

The project seeks to inform future directions for the governance of data value chains, with a focus on:

- regulatory measures to restrain the data power of Big Tech,
- digital and data infrastructure policies to promote an inclusive digital economy,
- implications of international data and AI regimes for national development priorities and pathways.

Research questions

The project will address the following questions:

- How are policy regimes addressing and restraining Big Tech data power?
- How are current policy directions and emerging institutional mechanisms able to tackle questions of market fairness and economic equity in the digital economy? What kind of data stewardship models can facilitate equitable distribution of gains from data value chains?

- How do global policy regimes on data and AI impact national development priorities and pathways? What building blocks are needed for a global-to-local governance regime for equitable data value chains?

Focus areas

Please refer to the provided schema on [‘Directions for future research’ here](#) for more details.

Research deliverables

Researchers selected for the grant are expected to undertake primary research and analysis, producing two high quality research outputs. In addition, they are also expected to produce two media pieces over the course of the project.

Deliverable/Milestone	Tentative timeline
Deadline for proposal submission	14 October 2020
Communication of selected proposals to concerned applicants	01 November 2020
Commencement of studies with inception meeting	15 November 2020
Detailed proposal for first research paper	30 November 2021
Detailed proposal for second research paper	28 February 2021
Research Paper 1 (final draft) and peer review	March - April 2021
Publication of Research Paper 1 and media piece	May 2021
Research Paper 2 (final draft) and peer review	August - September 2021
Publication of Research Paper 2 and media piece	October 2021
Project closing report	November 2021

Geographic scope

The research is focused on the Global South. However, applicants from all over the world are welcome to apply for the call.

Who can apply

Applicant/s need to demonstrate research expertise in the areas of digital society / economy. We welcome applications from individual researchers, organizations, and research teams. Researchers from different organizations who wish to apply as a team are welcome to send in a joint proposal. All applications must, however, identify a lead researcher/organization for the purpose of the grant. IT for Change will not make multiple grants for the same proposal.

Funding

Each grantee can apply for up to USD 13,500.

Language

Proposals must be submitted in English only. All outputs related to the project will be in English.

How to apply

- Proposals can be submitted on the [online form accessible here](#).
- Please read the concept note along with all additional information contained therein before submitting your proposal. The [concept note can be accessed here](#). Additional information on [indicative themes can be accessed here](#).

Evaluation

Proposals will be evaluated and shortlisted by a selection committee comprising IT for Change and two external project advisors.

Queries and further communication

In case you have any queries or need more information about the call you can reach out to us at: **vinay [a] itforchange dot net, deepiti [a] itforchange dot net**