

# Thinking through the future of work debate and infusing gender perspectives

## Reflections from our research

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# Presentation structure

Part 1. Framing the future of work debate against the backdrop of the digital transformation (what we learnt from our case study of the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust, Mumbai)

Part 2. Fledgling insights from empirical explorations of digital transformation of women-dominated sectors

Part 3. Concluding thoughts/ questions for us

# 1. Framing the 'future of work' debate against the backdrop of the digital transformation

- a. What types of shifts in work processes do we need to interrogate?

Breaking down the idea of 'digital transformation' of an economic sector into its different constituent elements (technological specificities in a sector)

- b. What are the different implications for workers that we need to be mapping?

Agency and autonomy -- negative and positive impacts

Individual and collective wellbeing



Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust, Mumbai,  
2018

## 2. Key findings from our case study of digital transformation of the ports sector

### Actors

Port authority and BOT operators running container terminals

Container Freight Station Warehouse Operators

New age e-commerce/logistics companies such as Amazon and DHL

Permanent workers of JNPT and contract workers of JNPT, BOT operators and CFS operators

New Maritime General Kamgar Sangh

## 2. Key findings from our case study of digital transformation of the ports sector

Types of digital restructuring that are being observed

- Automation that is just enhanced mechanisation (Rubber Tyred Gantry cranes)
- Video surveillance intensification (proliferation of CcTV installations in port area)
- Intelligent automation/ 'Smartification' (Smart gates and container traceability)
- Platformisation and datafication of work flows (Vehicle Management Systems, Direct Port Delivery systems)

### 3. Implications for workers

Enhancement of efficiency and time savings for some workers (Vehicle Management Systems and automated gates -- as reported by truck drivers)

Unaccountable dataveillance due to 'mission creep' in use of data tracking technologies (container tracking systems also used to discipline truck drivers for number of stops) (CCTVs used to track crane operators' breaks) (Wristband surveillance in Amazon warehouses)

Datafied tracking avoided in cases where downward accountability is required (eg. Gatepasses)

### 3. Implications for workers (contd.)

Response of trade union

*“Technology and automation will come. We have to change along with that. Because there is no other way... You can call this a flow. You can't divert it anytime, and it should come.”*

Approach is one of promoting labour-augmenting rather than labour-substituting tech in the long run; dialoguing with management of CFS to absorb workers displaced by technology in other jobs



## 4. The workers who disappear

“ There were 38 CFS operators in the JNPT region, employing a workforce of about 30,000. But in the past two years alone, after Direct Port Delivery Systems came in and businesses could directly close the paperwork at the port and move containers into their own warehouses, the numbers of CFSes have nearly halved. This means at least 15,000 have lost their jobs (...) but there is no way we can accurately estimate. All these workers are in informal contracts anyway. And we don't know how these workers cope. Many go back to their unprofitable farms in their villages ”

Compression of incomes -- implications for women's care work burdens; financial stress and gender-based violence.

## 5. Emerging trends in digital restructuring of women-dominated sectors

- Agriculture : GRAIN,Asia
- Care work :FMA, Philippines
- Tourism: Bentley & Maharika, Indonesia

# Agriculture

Alternative platform models owned by women farmer FPOs (Vrutti in India, the Ek Gaon experiment)



E-commerce companies and their end-to-end restructuring of agricultural value chains (Amazon, Alibaba, Walmart-Flipkart in the game)

RCEP - removal of market access proscriptions

# Care work

Co-operativist platforms that enhance women's bargaining power and help them break out of feudal arrangements (Lingap Galing Cleaning Consultants in Caloocan City and Quezon City)



Concierge model where platform becomes new intermediary

Dependent contractors without protection

Gimmicks that are dehumanising (Bonus selfie)

# Tourism

Women-run home stays  
able to independently find  
clients without depending  
on male dominated  
patronage networks



Tripadvisor partnership a  
Hobson's Choice?

## 6. Concluding thoughts

- Terms of women's participation in the digital economy

Meaningful inclusion, co-option, exploitation, expulsion (how women situated differently experience differential impacts)

- Gender justice, economic justice and digital justice as an indivisible agenda
- Alliances:

Data and digital activism and trade justice networks? Informal workers and their relationships with unions?