



## Call for Applications

# Research Partners for Study on Digital Economic Integration of MSMEs in the Global South

IT for Change<sup>1</sup> is inviting applications for research partners for a study on the Digital Economic Integration of MSMEs in the Global South, supported under the [Fair Green and Global Alliance](#). The six-eight-month study, planned as a collaborative effort between [IT for Change](#) and [Institute of Development Studies](#) (IDS), will be conducted through a hub and spoke model with partner organizations/researchers across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. We seek motivated, strong, and committed researchers to be a part of an in-depth qualitative research study at the intersections of MSME digitalization and economic policy, with a specific focus on women-led MSMEs in the Global South. The study offers an opportunity to be a part of and learn from a multi-country research team, and shape thinking on national and global policy frameworks that can enable inclusive and equitable participation of MSMEs in digitalized marketplaces.

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<sup>1</sup> IT for Change is a research and advocacy organization that aims for a society in which digital rights contribute to human rights, social justice, and equity.

**Regions:** Asia, Africa, and Latin America

**Focus Countries:** Brazil, Argentina, Kenya, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Cambodia, and India.<sup>2</sup> (A maximum of five countries across the three regions will be chosen for the study.)

**Focus Sectors:**

1. **Agro-processing:** The digital upgrading of MSMEs in agro-processing value chains is significant to the larger workforce employed in the agricultural sector. Additionally, women workers and entrepreneurs are concentrated in the manufacturing of food products.
2. **IT Enabled Services (ITES):** Business services value chains are being transformed through digitalization (e.g., automation through chatbots in the BPO sector, data annotation markets for AI development, etc.), impacting low-end work and opportunities for MSMEs to enter and upgrade in the market.
3. **Tourism:** Micro, small, and medium-sized tourism enterprises form the backbone of local tourism. As efforts to reboot tourism accelerate worldwide, the ability of small tourism businesses to take advantage of digitization and platformization trends in travel and tourism will be important for their economic recovery.

## Background

Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are critical drivers of economic growth and development, especially in developing countries. They have also been one of the most impacted actors in the context of pandemic-induced slowdowns. There is a global consensus that restoring the health of MSMEs is a critical prescription in the long road to economic recovery for developing nations. In such a context, the uptake of digital technologies and the trajectory of integration of MSMEs into these rapidly changing marketplaces and value chains bring new questions to consider.

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<sup>2</sup> We are not looking for applicants to study India.

## Objective

The proposed study attempts to make connections between MSME digitalization and the political economy of the digital marketplace and global value chains, in order to frame opportunities and challenges in relation to development outcomes, with a particular focus on the gendered consequences. Going beyond the barriers of gender-based discrimination and the efficiencies brought about by digitalization strategies, the study intends to delve into emerging policies on global digital trade, international data flows, capital investments and flows, AI governance, etc., in order to understand how they (re)shape MSME integration into digitalized marketplaces and what implications they may have for the productive capacities of women-led MSMEs.

## Research Questions

1. How is MSME digitalization in the Global South playing out?
2. Where are MSMEs based along the data value chain?
3. How do key macroeconomic trends and regional/national/sub-national policies (such as in data governance, e-commerce, and FDI) shape the digital capacities and models of integration of MSMEs?
4. How can national and global policy frameworks enable inclusive and equitable participation of MSMEs in digitalized marketplaces?

For a more detailed concept note of the study, please [click here](#).

## What is Expected?

Research partners are expected to undertake deep dives in the chosen countries based on guidance and review from IT for Change and IDS and a prescribed template structure for research. Research partners will be responsible for:

1. A qualitative analysis of the experiences of 40-50 MSMEs in at least two sectors in one country from the list of countries and sectors indicated above, supplemented by two case studies of women-led MSMEs.
2. A state of play analysis report of macroeconomic trends and national/sub-national policies in relation to the MSME ecosystem in the sectors of study.

3. A final country-level research report integrating the findings from 1 and 2 above, with a clear policy recommendations section, including a focus on women-led MSMEs.
4. Participation in the research ideation and review workshops convened by IT for Change and IDS at regular intervals.

**Timeline:** The estimated total time commitment required over the study duration will be between 40-50 working days allocated towards the following activities.

- Five days of workshop participation over the six-eight-month period
- 12-15 days for data collection (Aug-Sept)
- 12-15 days for analysis (Oct- Nov)
- 12-15 days for report writing (Dec-Jan)

### Who Can Apply?

Academic scholars from universities, research organizations, think tanks, NGOs, as well as independent researchers are welcome to apply, either individually, or in collaborative teams. Applicants, must

1. Have research experience/immersion in one or more of the following domains:
  - Digital Rights and Economic Policy
  - Gender Equality and Economic Empowerment of Women
  - Entrepreneurship, E-commerce, and Trade and Development
2. Have experience working in the political economy of development in the Global South/with Global South frameworks.
3. Have sufficient immersion in economic policy analysis and familiarity with regional contexts they seek to work in.
4. Have access to networks of actors in the MSME ecosystem, and also to platforms and spaces to amplify the research findings.

Applicants can be located anywhere, however, they must be able to legally receive funds and be authorized to work in that location.

Applicants from different organizations are welcome to apply in teams. However, IT for Change will only enter into a grant with one primary applicant.