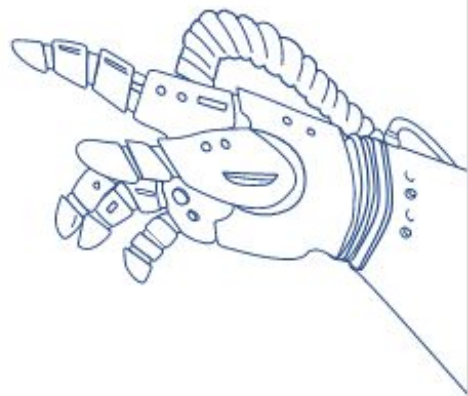# The Future of Work We Seek

A philanthropic agenda for workers
and the digital economy

➜ Developments in AI and rise of platformization have restructured value chains, transforming the paradigm of work and raising new issues for workers rights

➜ The Covid-19 pandemic has surfaced long-standing structural inequities and injustices that prop up the current labor-capital imbalance.

➜ The global economic outlook and value distribution has been consistently skewed against labor for many years now, with digitalization a key contributing factor in the current downslide

➜ The erosion of basic workers' rights and the rise of an inscrutable algorithmic management regime are signifiers of a deeper crisis in the making

Context
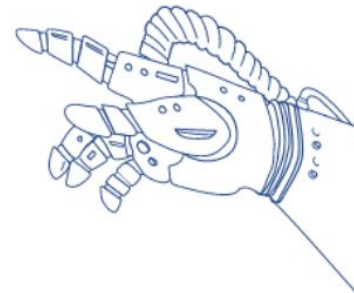
A re-imagined future of work agenda is not only about mitigating damages, but also about effecting a systemic shift to harness technological gains for global equity and local livelihood autonomy

The takeaway
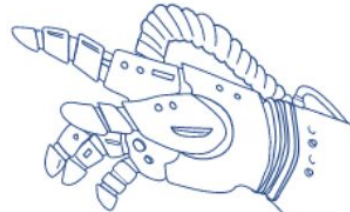
➔ Explores digitalization of the economy and the impact on workers and workers' rights to determine priorities for philanthropic programming
➔ Specifically focuses on the Global South
➔ Synthesizes insights from over 100 informants across various constituencies

About this study

50 Interviews

4 Expert roundtables

81 Survey responses

3 Regional explorations

100 Key informant voices

- Academics & researchers
- CSOs economic justice
- CSOs digital rights
- Cooperatives
- Government actors
- Legal experts
- Multilateral organizations
- Private sectors
- Philanthropies
- Social intermediaries
- Trade unions
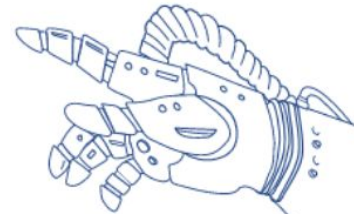
Research framework
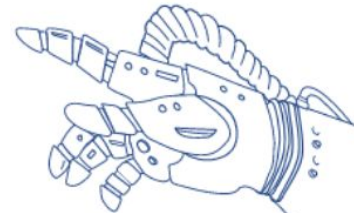
Findings

Discursive, economic, & policy barriers

Corporate capture of discourse distorts the rhetoric of digitalization to privilege disruption, innovation & efficiency in digital policy at the cost of inclusive development, equity, & redistributive justice

Deindustrialization paves the road to digital colonialism, reinforcing digitalization pathways that enable extractive data & labor practices in the Global South

Issues of workers' rights become entwined within an undemocratic, neoliberal global digital & trade ecosystem, leaving workers little room for influence

Heightened adversity for workers

Digitalization heightens worker precarity & informalization, leaving workers insecure, fragmented, & disenfranchised

Weakened labor institutions face new capacity & resource challenges in the digital age, denting collective representation & bargaining abilities

Marginalized worker groups face additional challenges in the digital economy with regard to access to opportunities & advancement debunking the myth of digitalization as an equalizing force
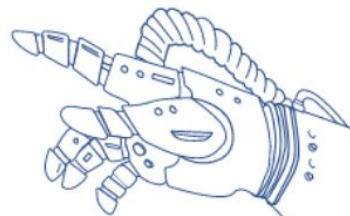
Algorithmic management normalizes opacity & lack of accountability in work arrangements, leaving workers without a meaningful right of explanation & appeal

The access divide is a persisting issue for equal opportunities in the digital economy, affecting women workers in particular

Data emerges as an important site of workers' rights issues to challenge surveillance & gamification practices as well as to harness more equitable gains from the digital economy

Digital rights vacuum

Findings

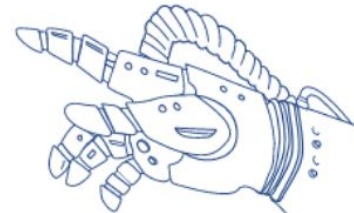CROSS-CUTTING MODALITIES FOR ACTION

Voice and participation

Solidarity and synergy

Knowledge and capacity

FOCUS AREAS FOR INTERVENTION

New work futures

Workers' rights

Equitable platformization
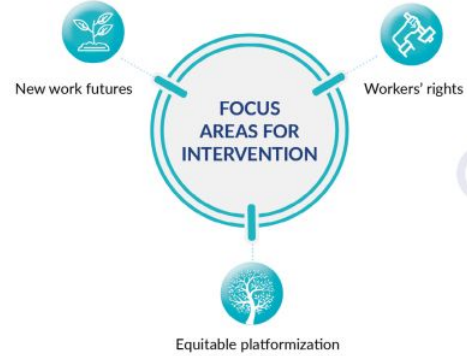
The way forward
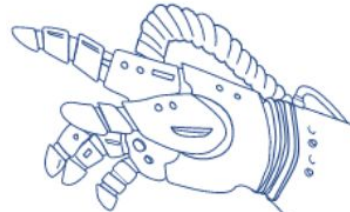
Model pathway: Workers' rights with an emphasis on the Global South

Worker mobilization & organization building

- Strengthen trade unions to counter union-busting activities & expand awareness
- Support programs to address the needs of women workers & workers from marginalized locations
- Sustain institutionalized worker representation on digital economy issues.
- Fund cross-sectoral dialogue for joint strategizing coordination & crystallization of effective transnational labor coalitions

Workers' rights

Standards for decent work in the digital economy

- Invest in building data capabilities
- Set up rapid response funds for legal challenges
- Seed national networks for policy & legal reform
- Support campaign to shape international labor laws and guarantee decent work in the platform paradigm

Data rights for workers

- Support research on workers' data rights
- Invest in perspective building & collective action of workers on data rights
- Extend small grants for workers to access/ develop shared technological tools

Model pathway: Equitable platformization
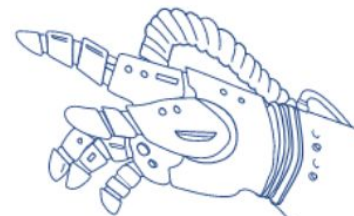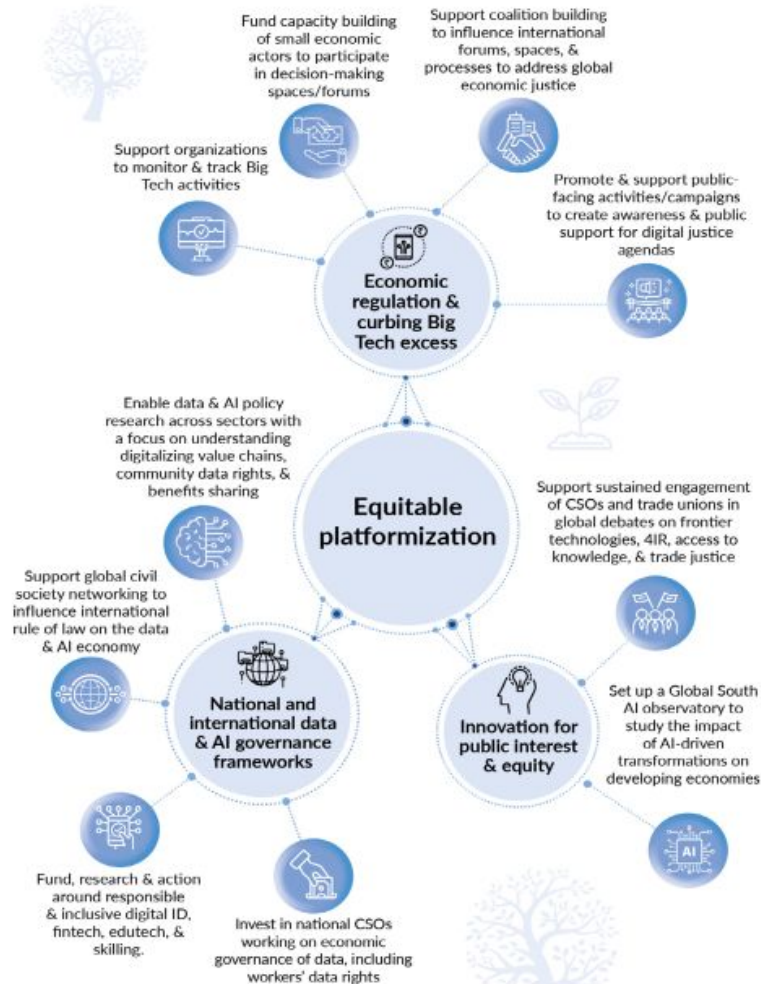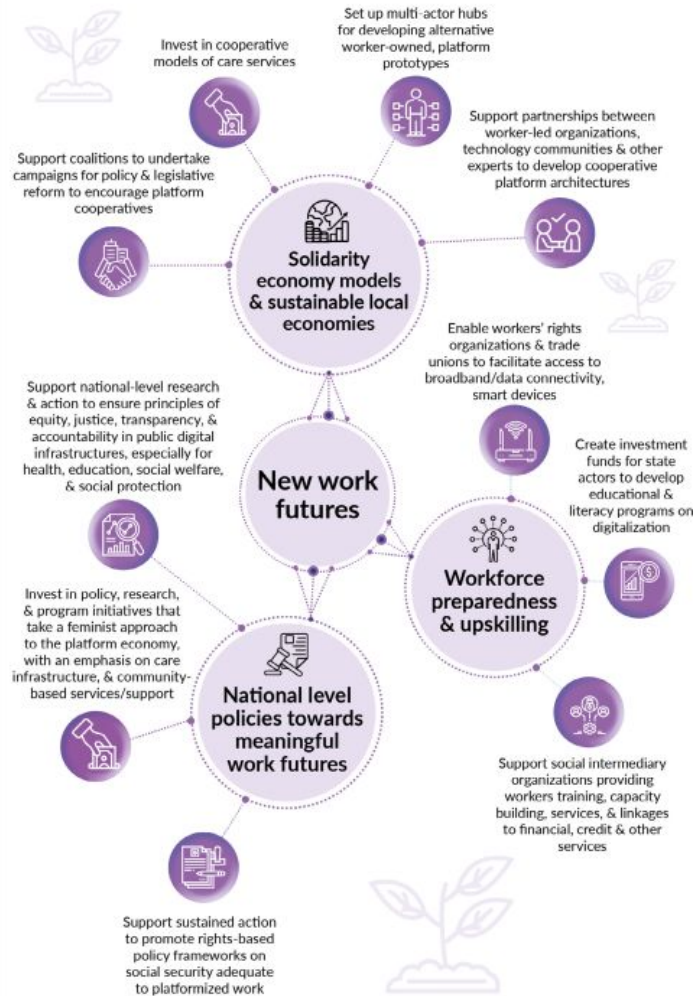
Model pathway: New work futures

Invest in cooperative models of care services

Set up multi-actor hubs for developing alternative worker-owned, platform prototypes

Support partnerships between worker-led organizations, technology communities & other experts to develop cooperative platform architectures

Support coalitions to undertake campaigns for policy & legislative reform to encourage platform cooperatives

Solidarity economy models & sustainable local economies

Enable workers' rights organizations & trade unions to facilitate access to broadband/data connectivity, smart devices

Support national-level research & action to ensure principles of equity, justice, transparency, & accountability in public digital infrastructures, especially for health, education, social welfare, & social protection

New work futures

Create investment funds for state actors to develop educational & literacy programs on digitalization

Invest in policy, research, & program initiatives that take a feminist approach to the platform economy, with an emphasis on care infrastructure, & community-based services/support

Workforce preparedness & upskilling

National level policies towards meaningful work futures

Support social intermediary organizations providing workers training, capacity building, services, & linkages to financial, credit & other services

Support sustained action to promote rights-based policy frameworks on social security adequate to platformized work