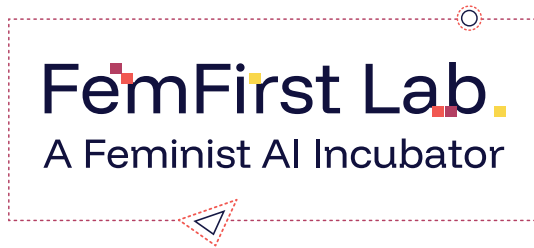


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Call for Applications South and Southeast Asia

[IT for Change](#), with support from the [International Development Research Centre](#) and the Center for Global Digital Justice, invites applications from South and Southeast Asia to join the FemFirst Lab. This initiative is part of the [Inclusive AI Research Network](#).

1. What does this initiative seek to achieve?

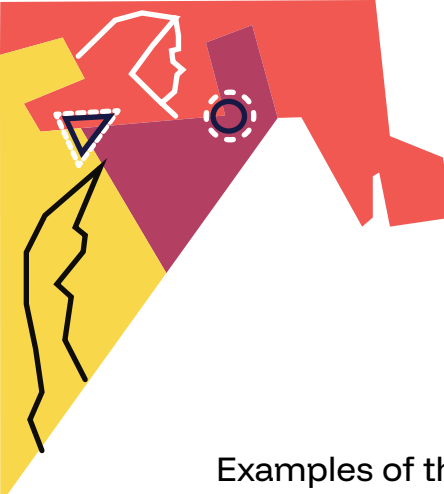
At the FemFirst Lab, we believe that Another AI Is Possible.

The Lab will incubate feminist AI prototypes that seek to address challenges of gender equality in a manner that is community-driven, responsive to local needs, and advances social justice and human rights. It aims to strengthen alternative approaches to AI development that place feminist understandings of human rights at their core and respond to the pressing societal challenges confronting South and Southeast Asia.

For the purposes of this call, this includes **all countries in South Asia and select countries in Southeast Asia**: Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, and Timor-Leste.

2. What are we looking for?

The FemFirst Lab will support interdisciplinary teams engaged in building and improving AI prototypes to meaningfully address pressing challenges related to gender equality—interpreting the Context, Care, and Co-implication (3Cs) framework in their context.



Examples of thematic focus areas with a gender perspective include, but are not limited to:

- Gender-based violence (GBV), Tech-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), and Tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse (TF-CSEA)
- Climate justice
- Disability, accessibility, and inclusion
- Healthcare
- Labor rights for women workers
- Inclusion in welfare systems
- Rights of human rights defenders, Indigenous People, and LGBTQIA+ people

Your prototype could be any idea that places feminist understandings of human rights and gender equality at its core. For instance:

- AI-enabled transit and mobility solutions for women's safety
- AI applications that address the lack of data on gender-based violence
- AI models and downstream applications that address or remedy environmental risks and costs
- AI applications that address the lack of accessible and inclusive design and deployment in AI systems
- Femtech models advancing sexual and reproductive health
- Feminist work management systems for digital labor platforms
- Tools that enable civic actors and gender equality activists to share information and coordinate

3. Why is this relevant?

The prevailing paradigm of AI innovation is ill-equipped to advance gender equality for the following reasons:

- **Entrenched discrimination:** There is mounting evidence of gender-discriminatory outcomes in today’s AI systems across a range of use cases—from the [denial of welfare](#) to marginalized women, biases in [hiring practices](#), and [exploitative labor conditions](#).
- **Extractivist logic:** The development of these systems is predicated on the widespread exploitation of [natural resources](#) (such as land, water, and energy for data centers) and labor (such as data labeling and content moderation, which are outsourced primarily to women and other marginalized communities in the Global South).
- **Gender-agnostic design and governance:** The absence of gender-sensitive data in [training data frameworks](#) and the adoption of [purely technical fixes](#) to structural problems of gender discrimination (which are framed as negative externalities) in AI operate as foreclosures on meaningful gender equality in today’s AI systems.

4. What do we mean by feminist AI?

By feminist AI, we mean that the design, development, and deployment of AI systems are attentive to, embed, and apply feminist principles of Context, Care, and Co-Implication, such that they:

- recognize the socio-historical context in which AI systems are developed, including dynamics of resource allocation and power,
- embed mutual care and reciprocity in the value creation process in ways that remain attentive to impacts on diverse stakeholders, and
- are cognizant of the environment’s co-implication in model choices.



Key terms used in this call:

- **Artificial Intelligence (AI):** An AI system, for the purposes of this call, is a machine-based system that, for explicit or implicit objectives, infers, from the input it receives, how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions that can influence physical or virtual environments. Different AI systems vary in their levels of autonomy and adaptiveness after deployment.
- **Prototype:** An AI prototype is a functional, early-stage version of an AI-powered tool, application, or system that demonstrates technical feasibility, user experience, and business value before investing in full-scale production.
- **Feminist AI principles:** Feminist principles for AI development mean demonstrating a commitment to contextual integrity in data and AI architectures, embedding care-centered worldviews, and staying attentive to ecological issues and their co-implication in AI value chains (i.e., how environmental impacts are interconnected with and mutually shaped by AI value chains). These principles aim to re-imagine and tackle entrenched power dynamics that perpetuate cycles of harm and discrimination, and move the needle towards just and equitable AI futures. We adopt an intersectional and holistic understanding of feminism that extends beyond gendered harms to also engage with a broader anti-patriarchal, anti-extractivist, and anti-colonial ethos.



5. What are the eligibility criteria?

5.1 Prototype eligibility criteria

- **Maturity:** We will support initiatives that possess either the basic infrastructure necessary for development (e.g., access to compute, GPUs, training datasets, talent, etc.) or a plan in place to acquire the infrastructure, to start work immediately on receipt of the grant. **We will not support initiatives where the end product is a blueprint.**¹
- **Level of intervention:** The FemFirst Lab will support interventions that seek to do one or more of the following:
 - Build a prototype that will demonstrate a functional and testable tool during the tenure of this grant.
 - Improve and refine an existing model to deliver better outcomes related to gender equality.
 - Develop a complementary feature or additional component for an existing model in order to strengthen gender-intentional outcomes.
 - Work on developing or building models along with datasets that serve as building blocks for future AI applications, such as for NLP or speech-to-text applications for poorly represented languages. **Proposals for work that will only produce datasets will not be considered.**
- **Open source technologies:** Open source technologies must be used throughout the prototype lifecycle. We prefer applications that commit to licensing at least parts of the prototype as open, if not all, so that the broader community may benefit from the work. As an illustration, if you publish an open-weights model without the original source code or data, you also publish sufficient information to allow others to understand the training approach, the limitations and biases in the model, and to be able to fine-tune the model.
- **Participatory approaches:** Applicants must show that their prototype is being developed in a participatory manner with communities.

¹ If you would like to propose such a project, please look out for our call for research proposals, which will be put out in May 2026.

5.2 Team eligibility criteria

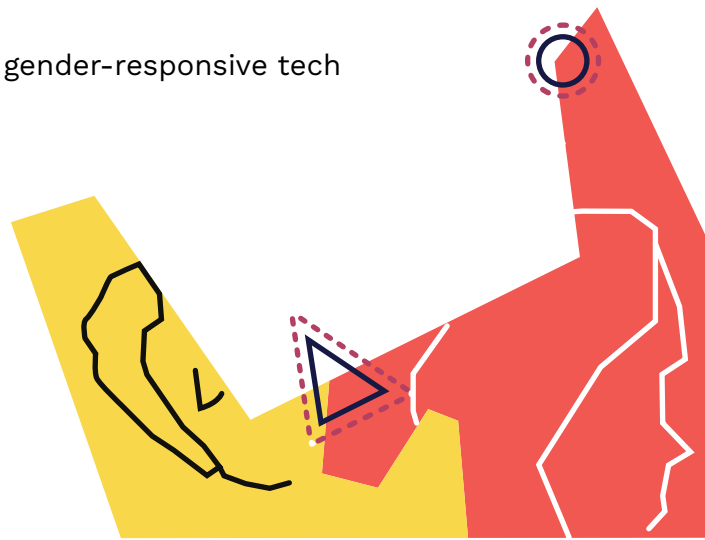
- Registered legal entities (such as a university, not-for-profit organization, for-profit firm, etc.). Joint and collaborative applications between legal entities will be accepted, but only one lead entity will be contacted.
- Any applying entity can be the lead in only one application, but may be involved in others.
- Any applying entity may collaborate with up to two additional entities, excluding the lead entity.
- We encourage applications from interdisciplinary teams with a range of expertise, including gender justice, engineering, and design.
- The call is limited to organizations from any country in South Asia and the following in Southeast Asia: Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, and Timor-Leste.
- Teams must be co-led by at least one woman or transgender/non-binary person.

6. What we offer

We will support you in taking your idea to a workable prototype through a composite offering of funding, networking, and mentorship.

We offer a **12-month incubation period** for you to develop your prototype with:

- Funding of between 10,000 and 35,000 CAD (depending on the scope of the proposed project) for building a prototype based on an idea, or improving or building a complement for an existing prototype.
- Opportunities for peer networking and wider community engagement.
- Expert mentorship on feminist ethics for gender-responsive tech design.





7. What we expect

If selected, you will be expected to:

- Integrate feminist principles and ethical practices into all stages of prototype development and deployment, including data privacy, fairness, transparency, accuracy, and accountability.
- Demonstrate a strong commitment to community engagement and participatory design, ensuring that the AI solution reflects and respects the needs and priorities of the communities it serves.
- Participate in an inaugural virtual workshop to build perspective on feminist standpoint tech design and the 3Cs framework.
- Document your work and share quarterly progress reports with the project advisory group.
- Participate in monthly Scholars Research Exchange sessions.
- Produce a prototype narrative report at the end of the program that shares insights on feminist training data frameworks, algorithmic accountability safeguards, testing processes, and ground-truthing approaches, among other feminist choices you may make.
- Attend and participate in the in-person conference tentatively scheduled for November 2026 alongside fellow prototype developers and scholars.
- Participate in an end-of-project workshop to explore possible test cases for adapting/adopting the innovations at the end of the program.

8. How can you apply?

- Eligible candidates are invited to submit applications using [this form](https://lnk.itforchange.net/femfirstlab) (<https://lnk.itforchange.net/femfirstlab>).
- **The deadline for submissions is 15 May 2026.**
- Please write to itfc.communications@gmail.com if you have any questions.

9. Timeline and key dates

Date	Milestone
15 April	Call for applications is issued
8 May	Deadline to submit clarificatory questions
15 May	Last date to submit the application
20 May – 5 June	Shortlisted applicants are contacted
10 June	Prototypes are selected and announced
First week of July	Inception meeting & workshop

- Please note that due to the high number of responses, only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.
- If shortlisted, applicants may be invited for further discussion to clarify, expand upon, or refine their proposed ideas. Please note that being shortlisted does not guarantee selection.

10. Quick Links

- Call for Applications: <https://lnk.itforchange.net/femfirstlab>
- Application form: <https://lnk.itforchange.net/fflform>
- Budget Template: <https://lnk.itforchange.net/fflbudget>
- Application Guide: <https://lnk.itforchange.net/fflguide>
- Contact: itfc.communications@gmail.com