

# IT for Change Annual Newsletter

A year in review



**2020** has been marked by the coronavirus pandemic and the onset of a new normal. In the wake of this global crisis, our economic, political and social systems have been put through the most unprecedented stress test in modern history. The resilience of individuals and communities in the face of near-systemic collapse has been remarkable. It is this spirit that we can celebrate and find comfort in as the year draws to a close. Progressive civil society actors have been unrelenting, continuing to fight the good fight while also tackling head on the new, demanding challenges of our times – whether it is by advocating for universal vaccine access, fighting against state excesses or holding Big Tech’s feet to the fire.

IT for Change, too, responded to the Covid moment and its multiple discontents in diverse ways. Undertaking direct relief efforts, managing rapid response advocacy initiatives online and rescoping research enquiries in view of mobility restrictions – the year that the organization turned twenty has seen many firsts for us. Internalising these new learnings, we hope to bring renewed vigour and agility to our efforts for social justice and gender equality in the digital paradigm. In this newsletter, we share some highlights from our work in 2020.



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## HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR RESEARCH

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We launched several key research initiatives this year and furthered global-South-led scholarship in critical areas such as governance of the digital economy, data governance and feminist frameworks for the digital with support from funders such as the European Commission, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Fondation Botnar, IDRC, Omidyar Network and WACC. As part of our [new project](#), Unskewing the data value chain, we set up a global research network that will work together in the coming months to examine relevant policy issues and questions pertaining to systemic inequities in the global data value chains.

We also produced multiple research outputs as part of our work under the Data Governance Network, including [a paper on data and digital intelligence commons](#), which examined collective

data rights of communities, and an [analysis of current efforts to regulate the power of Big Tech](#).

Under our project, Recognize Resist Remedy, we continued collaborative research with InternetLab on exploring legal and socio-cultural responses to addressing the normalization of gender-based hate speech in the online public sphere. We will be publishing our research report next year. Read our initial findings in our pieces for [Bot Populi](#) and [Firstpost](#).

As part of our initiative on [Centering Women in India's Digitalising Economy](#), we also conducted a qualitative study about women workers on Amazon Mechanical Turk. Findings from this study will be published in the coming weeks as a paper in the Economic and Political Weekly.

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## EVENTS AND ENGAGEMENTS

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With mobility restrictions making in-person gatherings a non-starter, we explored virtual opportunities for convening, collaboration and dialogue, engaging with stakeholders across civil society, government, academia and industry. In the year, IT for Change was part of over 50 online events, addressing themes such as [data governance](#), [gender based cyber-violence](#), [AI and ethics](#), [Southern feminist perspectives on the digital economy](#), [free trade and human rights in a post-Covid world](#), and [the gig economy and workers' rights](#).

We collaborated with a number of international organizations and multi-

stakeholder networks to organize webinars, including [Public Services International](#), [Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung](#), [Third World Network](#), [Transnational Institute](#), and [more](#). We also participated in events hosted by the [EU](#), multilateral organizations such as the [ILO](#) and [UNDP](#), and had a strong presence at global digital rights and policy forums such as [RightsCon](#) and the [UN Internet Governance Forum](#).

Additionally, we were able to engage with networks, organizations and academic communities outside the digital policy space, exposing them to the evolving debates through [online lectures](#), masterclasses and [workshops](#).

## Digital New Deal Series

In November 2020, we launched the [Digital New Deal](#) essay series at the [online UN Internet Governance Forum](#). The series, a thoughtfully curated set of long reads authored by visionary scholars and activists, reflects on the current global Covid moment and its challenges from various standpoints and how the digital fits into this equation, and articulates a new vision for justice. This will be formally released as a compendium in January 2021.

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### POLICY INTERVENTIONS IN THE GLOBAL AND NATIONAL SPACE

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In 2020, we continued to engage with key policy processes in national and global spaces. We made submissions and inputs to critical consultations by the Government of India on the [Strategy for National Open Digital Ecosystems](#) and the Draft Health Data Management Policy. As part of a high-level expert committee on non-personal data helmed by the Ministry of Electronics Information and Technology (MeitY), we articulated the need for [community data rights](#) within framework development on non-personal data. IT for Change also contributed to [a collective input about gender and digital technology](#) to a report for the NITI Aayog titled COVID-19: Impact on Women and Girls.

IT for Change also coordinated with digital rights organizations, trade unions and think tanks to publish a [joint statement](#) on platform workers' concerns with the Government of India's total overhaul of labor legislation.

In the global arena, we inputted into key policy processes such as [the EU](#)

[Consultation for the New Competition Tool and the Digital Services Act Package](#) and the Call for Inputs by the [Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association](#).

Through the [Just Net Coalition](#), we have taken forward our thinking on digital justice by setting up working groups to coordinate and collaborate on a concerted strategy for global advocacy and cross-movement dialogue.

As part of the FES Working Group on Feminist Visions of the Future of Work, IT for Change came together with eight feminist scholar-practitioners from across the world to collaboratively develop [a feminist action roadmap for a gender-just digital economy](#), and [launch it at the Global South Women's Forum 2020](#).

In addition to this, we have continued to engage with wider audiences on critical policy issues by writing for a range of [mainstream and alternative media outlets this year](#).

## Bot Populi Finds Its Feet

[Bot Populi](#), our fledgling alternative media space, came into its own this year. We published over 40 several pieces and series in 2020 including a MayDay series looking at [labor intersections with the digital economy](#) and the role of technology in the [Covid crisis](#). Bot Populi will be embarking on exciting new lines of work in the coming year with a podcast and series of articles on [feminism in the digital age](#).

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## ONLINE COURSES AND CAPACITY BUILDING FOR TEACHERS

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The closure of schools and the pivot towards online learning created numerous challenges for the education community. IT for Change worked intensively with [teachers in the public school system in Bengaluru](#), supporting them to acquire new skills and capacities for online teaching and pedagogy.

In 2020, IT for Change conducted over 60 online courses for teachers and teacher education institutions, including the Regional Institute of English, South India (RIESI) and Zonal Institutes of Education and Training (ZIET) of the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan. In addition to this, we also implemented courses on ICT integrated learning with teacher education colleges.

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## NOTES FROM THE FIELD

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### **Prakriye**

Prakriye, our field resource center, deploys ICTs in furthering the socio-political empowerment of marginalized rural women and adolescent girls. Our 37 *Namma Jaaga* help desks in 25 villages in HD Kote district in rural Mysuru have continued to provide [psycho-social assistance to women and girl victims of gender based violence](#). Our field team also displayed unparalleled commitment to the communities they work with during the Covid lockdown period, organizing relief measures for the most vulnerable households by coordinating with local authorities and NGOs.

### **Hosa Hejje Hosa Dishe**

Our urban community project [Hosa Hejje Hosa Dishe](#) (New Step in a New Direction), supported by the British Asian Trust, claims schools as a site for adolescent girl empowerment programs and explores digital pathways to doing this. This year, we have amplified our strategy with a community radio program, *Nan Voice Nan Choice* (My Voice, My Choice). The show went live in November 2020 and will be a major component of this project in the coming year.

## Looking Ahead

Our work in 2021 seeks to continue, sustain and build on the many successes and fruitful efforts of the past year. As a member of the Fair Green & Global (FGG) Alliance, IT for Change will be kickstarting an ambitious, five-year project addressing injustice and inequality in digitalizing global value chains and countering Big Tech excesses. We will delve deeper into areas such as health data governance, AI and citizenship, and developing a model framework on community data rights. As we journey forward from a year that was like no other into a new one, which suggests a slow and cautious return to normalcy, we recognize the great promise in this moment of flux and will rise to meet it in every way. We look forward to renewed energies and collaborations and welcome old and new friends, associates and fellow travellers in our quest for digital justice.