

India's G20 Presidency in 2023: Opportunities for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

As woman (women) of India what are your expectations from G20? And what are your expectations from India's Presidency of G20 in 2023?

Input from IT for Change:

The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap 2022 has ranked India at 135 out of 146 countries. India's performance on the metrics of gender equality attainments in economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment and health and survival is particularly a cause for concern. While there is much to be done to ensure that India does not leave the last woman behind in the growth and development pathways that the country pursues in the coming years, it is heartening to note that the government has identified women's empowerment as one of the critical priority areas for action in its press release of September 13th, 2022. In India's presidency, the G20 troika (the term referring to countries who are part of current, previous and forthcoming presidencies) will comprise three developing countries: Indonesia, India, and Brazil. This opportunity should be utilised to demonstrate a Southern roadmap on a gender-transformative pathway for equitable, fair and just economic transformation, cognizant of, and responsive to, the reproduction of gender injustice through socio-economic injustice.

From this starting point, we at IT for Change would like to make some inputs on defining a "women and digital economy" thematic track of focus for India's G20 presidency.

1. India should design and develop a gender-inclusive future of work strategy which ensures that women are able to participate in the rapidly expanding digital economy on an equal footing without being gig-ified in the guise of 'empowering' flexi-work.

The Open Network on Digital Commerce that India is building should be utilised to create sectoral e-commerce platform marketplaces for women micro, small and medium entrepreneurs to integrate into retail markets on an equal footing without being caught up in the exorbitant commissions and algorithmic opacity of private e-commerce platforms. It could have specific strategies for priority treatment to cooperative and SSE enterprises, and so on. Similarly, the agricultural data stack that the government is building should be utilised to equip marginal and small women farmers without land titles to strengthen their agricultural livelihoods – through the creation of local government- women farmers' groups partnerships for local data and AI innovation, rather than relying on the integration of women farmers into the large agricultural value chains now jointly controlled by Big Tech and Big Agri that may be exploitative and lack local contextual knowledge.

There is some promise in the cooperative and solidarity economy approaches - the ILO's June 2022 Resolution concerning decent work and the social and solidarity economy calls for integrating: "social and solidarity economy enterprises into national development, recovery, and employment strategies to support pro-employment macroeconomic, tax, industrial, social, environmental and other policies for promoting just, digital and environmental transitions and reducing inequalities". The rich history of the

cooperativist movement in India should be an inspiration to revitalise cooperatives and social enterprises to embrace the digital opportunity for a federated growth strategy to achieve scale and success, and transforming the lives of millions of workers in the informal sector for the better.

2. India's pioneering public digital infrastructural development strategy – the creation of national open digital ecosystems in core public services – welfare, health, and education – should integrate a gender equality perspective in its techno-institutional design. For example, the national digital health ecosystem should be deployed to create data-supported targeting of health advisories and health support services at the grassroots that augment frontline health workers' capacities without displacing them; and retain the essential character of health as a public service without aiding corporate capture of the public health data commons and vendor lock-ins into private health products and services (This will need learning from casestudies of PPPs that were not citizen-centric – such as the health data partnerships the UK's National Health Service entered into). Most importantly, the insights from India's pioneering efforts should be used to inform South-South technical cooperation efforts within developing countries in the G20 to exchange insights on the creation of public digital infrastructures that preserve citizens' rights in welfare systems and public service delivery.

3. Last but not the least, in order to appropriately evolve a gender-transformative digital economy strategy, developing countries such as India need to push for data sovereignty of their citizens as a cardinal principle of international digital cooperation. Powerful members of the G20, such as the EU, have been pushing for a 'data flows with trust' policy position that reduces the data sovereignty debate to a narrow concern of protecting privacy interests and sidesteps the critical concerns of women of the global South seeking to define their autonomous pathways to develop flourishing local digital economies. India, which has always donned the mantle of the voice of the global South in international trade forums, should continue to play this role – in order to carve out a unique "data flows with rights" policy stance grounded in an intergenerational human rights ground-norm, recognizing data governance to be a question of respecting peoples' territorial sovereignty over resources as a sacred component of the right to development.