Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development

Empowering women to use law as an instrument of change and promoting women's human rights in the Asia Pacific region

NGO in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

Concept Note
Labour Feminist Participatory Action Research 2023-2024:
Organising Women Workers, Striving Women's Labour Rights in the Era of Digitalisation

1. Who can apply and what our FPAR journey looks like?

The Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) will address the issue of women's labour rights and organising power in the context of digitalisation, particularly in these following three streams:

1. **Robotics and Automation** and its role in displacing millions of jobs - such as retail cashier, customer service, waiting staff, garment, textile and apparel manufacturing jobs - many of which are more likely to be filled by women.

2. **Algorithms and datafication,** which by nature, is biased against women workers - i.e women working in platform/gig economy such as food delivery, online drivers, online massage or care services - are forced to work more than their capacity despite the claim that it gives more flexibility, with no benefits and protection.

3. **Digital Surveillance in the workplace,** Employers who conduct business increase surveillance by implementing work quotas (piece and/or time basis) and more precise worker location tracking.

We invite local/national level organisations - including feminist and/or labour rights movements - who work on those issues to apply. The FPAR will look into the impact of digitalisation on women's labour rights (including gender-based violence at workplace), as well as to document strategies, labour organising and collective actions in the digitalised world of work.

Background

Technological shifts such as digitalisation pose great challenges to the future of work and workers.

The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and shift to digitalisation has been reported to result in massive job losses across traditional industries both in the developed and developing world. Certain types of jobs are declining and would be rendered obsolete in the long run, thus displacing workers who are unable to "upgrade" their skills or gain new ones. In fact, the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2018) acknowledges that there is

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already a lack of employment for women and young people at present, and the shift towards automation and robotics in the future is likely to bring about greater challenges to the creation of decent work for all.

Job loss has been worse for countries in the lower end of the global supply chain. In emerging economies--which includes most countries in the Asia Pacific region--the use of robotics from 2005 to 2014 has resulted in 14 percent drop in jobs in traditional industries compared to only a 1 percent job loss in developed countries (Carbonero et. al, 2018). Moreover, digitalisation is also seen to aggravate precarious employment and drive wages lower, as non-standard, "independent", and other forms of highly flexible work become more prevalent. And in such conditions, workers' right to self-organisation, representation and collective bargaining can further be undermined if not rendered irrelevant thus leaving more workers to the total mercy of capital and corporate control.

Digitalisation has also intensified discrimination, exploitation, violence and surveillance of women workers.

Datafication, the process through which governments and corporations gather and process personal data to create value and make decisions, are leaving migrant workers farther from receiving minimum pay and social protection and are more likely to experience unstable job and workplace discrimination as a result of algorithms.

Automation, the automatic operation or control of a process, system, machine, or very specifically robots, is endangering the jobs of 1.3 million Filipino workers, majority of whom are young women, in the BPO industry. It has also led to the closing down of Adidas factory plants in Vietnam in 2019 and the relocation of production to Germany, where work will be carried out by robots and 3D printers.

Algorithm Management (AM) also poses risks of personal data misuse, for instance, via a software that enables employers to keep an eye on keystrokes, mouse movements, screen captures of remote workers' desktops, and camera photos.

Platformisation, the method of adding datafication to the system in order to get value, is now replacing conventional market exchanges. In location-based platform work, such as the app-based taxi sector, a higher proportion of women reported experiencing discrimination, such as the customer refusing to get into the taxi upon discovering that the driver is a woman. Platform-based aggregators can monitor workers using smart moveable or wearable gadgets, some of which were forced upon the workers in the guise of "improving user experience". As these devices can never be disconnected, aggregators use them to continuously track and monitor their workers. Women workers have voiced a number of issues regarding the intrusive nature of this monitoring, ranging from calls pushing them to connect again into the app to being pushed to work during their off-duty hours. Surveillance technologies such as cameras are also used to reduce workers' time spent taking breaks and to observe interactions between workers.

Indeed, in the context of neoliberal globalisation, heightened corporate control of the global economy and widening gap (including digital divide) between the rich and poor, the future of work for workers seems daunting.

With the background explained above, the upcoming labour FPAR will unpack the outstanding questions on the impacts of digitalisation towards women workers; what does the future of work for workers and workers rights look like in the era of digitalisation? How do these shifts towards digitalisation and automation hamper decent work for grassroots women workers in the Asia and the Pacific region? How do existing neoliberal policies and global structures aggravate the potential and present challenges posed by digitalisation? How should we frame new policies to address both these new challenges and structural barriers to protect and fulfill women workers' rights and attain decent work for all, including the rights to organise, Freedom of Association (FoA) and Collective Bargaining?

2. Why Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR)?

APWLD firmly believes that feminist movements, grounded in grassroots, collective struggles and experiences, are the key to bring about real changes. Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) is rooted in movement building. Through FPAR, feminists and grassroots women collect evidence about what is happening in their communities, showcase their initiatives, solutions, and collectively take action. FPAR is conducted by and for women. With strong, locally produced research and documented evidence, women challenge violations of their human rights and gendered power imbalances. FPAR is a potent tool for enabling women to take control of development agendas and programmes that are affecting their lives.

Through FPAR, women are capacitated to assess the laws and policies, norms and traditions, and power structures through which the forces of globalisation, fundamentalisms, militarism, and patriarchy dominate their lives, and to identify and utilise platforms for engagement on challenging these structures and advancing their human rights. Grassroots partners and co-researchers should be able to demonstrate that the strategies and solutions that they are working on amplify collective voices, strengthen political activism and solidarity among movements, and pursue state and corporate accountability on the violations of women' human rights.

The FPAR methodology has been used across many APWLD programmes and thematic areas since 2012. Guided by its nine (9) FPAR principles, it aims to facilitate democratic, non-hierarchical mutual learning processes situated in the struggle for social transformation. It emphasises local knowledge, shares and develops knowledge and skills based on experiences of participants. It looks at the power relations in our daily lives and society and challenges the gendered power asymmetry which intersects women's socially/culturally constructed locations and diverse identities.

Our principal purpose of doing FPAR is to change systems and structures to improve the lives of women. We interpret 'Change' as 'Structural Change' or change to structures and systems of oppression particularly patriarchy and the fusion of patriarchy with globalisation, fundamentalisms and militarism. The participants are not objects on whom research is conducted but rather the subjects of the inquiry who set the agenda, participate in the data collection and analysis, and control the use of the outcomes, including deciding what future actions to take or directions to go in.

Overall objective

To support and foster women-led labour movements to defend and claim their labour rights and fundamental freedoms in the digitalised world of work

Specific objectives

- Develop the capacity of women workers and their organisations to document the impact of digitalisation on their labour rights and to challenge the fast tracking of digitalisation through building the capacity of legal and policy analysis;
- Foster knowledge and resources on violation of women's labour rights at the local, national, regional and international levels and the digitalisation impacts on women's labour rights including labour organising power;
- Establish strategic advocacy plans and opportunities to share evidence-based results and support women's positions and solutions for policy change in the context of digitalisation at national, regional and international levels; and
- Strengthen institutional development of partner organisations through leadership development and movement building.

3. Who can apply and what our FPAR journey looks like?

The APWLD is conducting its third Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) on Women Labour Rights in Digitalisation for 2023–2024 to foster greater unity and develop the women workers' movement across Asia and the Pacific.

APWLD will provide each of the FPAR partners with a small sub-grant to employ a young woman researcher to carry out the research, which includes a monthly salary during this FPAR journey. Overall budget proposed by a partner must not exceed USD 13,000. This sub-grant supports mobilisation, capacity building, activities and research of the selected partners, however, does not include any other costs related to institutional sustainability or maintenance.

APWLD will also support the young women researchers and mentors to participate in regional capacity building workshops, provide advocacy and networking opportunities. FPAR partners will be able to gain knowledge in International Human Rights standards and Labour rights in digitalisation related to their area of research. Through a combination of face-to-face

and online modules, they will share the frameworks within their communities, learn practical research skills, and develop a community-based research plan.

Each of the selected partners will implement the FPAR for the duration of 16 months and shall identify two women respectively as a mentor and a young woman researcher (below 35 years of age) to work together and lead the FPAR process. At least one of the women must come from the community/constituency be it grassroots and the women must be committed to community organising and feminist movement building for women's labour rights.

Programme Activities

Three regional trainings will be held as part of the FPAR -, allowing partners to conduct research related to the needs of the grass root constituency, use the results for advocacy, and foster movements.

1st Regional Feminist Participatory Action Research Training on Labour Rights in the context of digitalisation: Methodology and Approach

Participants will learn about the framework of labour rights, women's human and labour rights, decent works in the context of digitalisation, development justice and FPAR during the first regional training. Young women researchers are especially encouraged by the training to develop their leadership skills and raise future supporters of women's rights. To ensure that participants are at ease with new concepts and challenges, the training will employ straightforward, simple and interactive techniques.

Expected Outputs
- Participants understand the objective, approach, and timeframe of Labour Rights Feminist Participatory Action Research 2023-2025
- Training participants gain knowledge the dynamic concepts of digitalisation, and its relation to the labour rights, particularly women's labour rights
- Training participants gain skills and capacity on the key concepts of framework feminist participatory approach, human rights-based approach, international human rights/labour rights framework, Decent Work principles and Development Justice
- Participating organisations have more detailed research plans for research in their respective communities;
- Training participants gain skills and capacity on the tools of Theory of Change, Power Mapping and Critical Pathway to be used together with the community to plan the research and the impact objectives.

Pre-Research Consultation to the Communities

Young women researchers who have been appointed will visit their constituency for consultation following the first regional training workshop. Before the design and launch of the research, all FPARs should begin with consultations with their community. There could need to be several stakeholder discussions. To ensure that discussions of gendered power dynamics and issues that may not be easy to discuss in front of men are tackled, FPAR always involves consultations with women in women-only locations.

The objectives of pre-research community consultations should include:
● Gaining the support, collaboration and ownership of the community;
● Forming a research team with researchers from the constituency;
● Identifying the problem to be the focus of the project;
● Designing methods for the research, questions and objectives;
● Developing advocacy plans for long term change (on-going throughout the research process).

Based on the consultations, the young women researchers are expected to prepare the draft Research Design and submit it to APWLD.

2nd Regional Training on Feminist Participatory Action Research on Labour Rights in the context of digitalisation: Research Design and Analysis

In addition to receiving feedback from facilitators and other participants, young women researchers will share the research design and advocacy plan they developed with the employees at their place of employment. The theory and technique for FPAR as well as data analysis and reporting will be covered in this course. The training will also improve participants' capacity for community-based participatory monitoring and evaluation.

Expected Outputs
● Participants gain their capacity on feminism and feminist framework – as a core concept to practise and analyse the research in their respective workplace;
● Participants gain skills and capacity on the framework and methodology on feminist participatory action research – including research designs, methods and feminist analysis

3rd Regional Training on Feminist Participatory Action Research on Labour Rights in the context of digitalisation: Reflections and Ways Forward for Advocacy

The third regional training will be a collaborative learning process where participants can exchange knowledge and experiences about the analysis of qualitative data, pinpointing any gaps and difficulties, and further refining their research report. The influence of the research

will be reflected in the training, starting at the individual, organisational, and local level. The reflection will go over examples of successes, best practices, lessons learned, threats, problems, and solutions to these challenges.

Furthermore, the 3rd training will be an important venue to discuss the ways forward, including advocacy and campaign strategy, be it at local, national, regional and international levels; and also identifying ways to work together sustainably – across issues, cross countries – to strengthen feminist and labour movement building in the region.

Expected Outputs
- Participants gain their capacity and skill in data analysis, particularly qualitative data analysis and are able to share their experience in analysing the data, identifying the challenges and ways to address the challenges;
- Participants are able to identify the gaps in their research report and gain concrete recommendations for the improvement of their research report;
- Participants are able to refine their evidence-based advocacy plans and strategy, in particular, to work with the workers to advocate their labour rights in the local and national level; and also have a concrete plan with APWLD for advocacy in the regional and international level.
- Participants are able to map out their new allies and build some allies across levels in conversing with employers and governments.

Research and Reporting

The team (young women researchers and mentors) will conduct research on their specific focus. Based on the data and information collected, the team will make an interim report and submit it to APWLD for review.

Each team will also need to submit a final FPAR story by **November 2024.** The FPAR reports can be written in any language but the English version is expected to be sent to the APWLD secretariat. Guidelines for the final FPAR research will be discussed and finalised at the training.

The final programme financial report along with financial receipts will also need to be submitted by **January 2025.**

Reflection meeting

This meeting will invite FPAR partners who were involved in the FPAR journey to assess how and in what ways the feminist approach to the changes contributed by the FPAR on

women labour rights in the digitalisation journey. The FPAR is brought by partners and APWLD as a personal and collective journey following four domains of change in the Labour FPAR including capacity building, knowledge and resources tools, advocacy, and movement building. The FPAR aims for immediate changes in policies, practices, ideas and attitudes, as well as if there have been any negative or unexpected effects.

Expected Outputs
- To document and own collaborative reflection on achievements and challenges that gathered from grassroot women's organising experience during the FPAR journeys particularly during pandemic and to strengthen FPAR as a critical organising tool.
- To continue further advocacy, mobilising and solidarity building in the future, grounding in from FPAR findings and analysis, particularly in the context of digitalisation

<u>Timeline</u>

Feminist Participatory Action Research on Labour Rights 2023-2024

2023	
1st Regional Labour FPAR Training	15 - 20 November 2023
2024	
Pre-research community consultation	January - March 2024
Submission of draft research design	March 2024
2nd Regional Labour FPAR Training	mid April 2024
Final research Designs	May 2024
Conducting FPAR in communities	June - November 2024
Submission Interim financial reports	June 2024
Submission of Interim narrative Reports	August 2024
Submission of 1st Draft FPAR Story	November 2024
3rd Regional Labour FPAR Training	December 2024