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# Women entrepreneurship: sustainable and inclusive economic growth in the Global South post-COVID-19 pandemic.

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*This is an extended abstract accompanying a call for papers for a stream that forms part of the 13th International Interdisciplinary Conference on Gender, Work and Organization (GWO 2023), 28-30 June 2023, Stellenbosch, South Africa. The deadline for submissions closed on the 21st November 2022.*



# Gender, Work & Organization Conference

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## Gender, Work and Organization

13th International Interdisciplinary Conference

28-30 June 2023, Stellenbosch, South Africa

### Conference theme

*Marginalized gender identities - how can intellectual activism transform work and organization?*

(Read more about the conference theme on the conference website).

## CALL FOR ABSTRACTS/PAPER SUBMISSIONS

### STREAM TITLE:

Women entrepreneurship: sustainable and inclusive economic growth  
in the Global South post-Covid-19 pandemic

### STREAM LEADERS:

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Prof Joan Lockyer, Coventry University, UK  
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Global economic activity is picking up as we start to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as we embark on the road to a global recovery, it is crucial to assess local economic recovery, to allow local authorities to develop adequate policies to support economic growth. For a country like South Africa for example, with one of the highest unemployment rates in the world (StatsSA) and the largest inequality gap (World Bank), the level of survival and recovery for everyone including Previously Disadvantaged Individuals (PDIs) especially women, is crucial. The epidemic has more severely affected women entrepreneurs, who generate 37% of the world's GDP, and they continue to confront obstacles that prevent them from realising their full potential (World Bank, 2022). Women entrepreneurs play a critical role in the economic activities of their communities. For example, women from disadvantaged communities in Africa, usually use their business profits towards sustaining their households and providing better education for their children (Syden & Forget, 2012; Dolan & Scott, 2009). In turn, their children would have access to better socio-economic conditions, thus contributing to poverty alleviation and closing the inequality gap. Women entrepreneurs may be involved in various businesses and leadership positions, including leaders of innovative technology businesses, local business owners, and providers of health- and childcare services (Kamberidou, 2020). Women entrepreneurs are not only beneficial to their communities but also a vital part of the future economic growth of countries in the Global South.

Digital technologies have always provided a competitive advantage for businesses that adopt them (Irene, 2019). Now the pandemic has demonstrated the importance of integrating digital technologies in any business since those that adopt these technologies have demonstrated more resilience during this crisis. This has resulted in the acceleration and the global shift towards digital technologies. Now more than ever, it is crucial that women entrepreneurs profit from the new digital economy. Women in business need more public investment from economies all over the world, and there is a need for the expansion of protection for women engaged in both the formal and informal sectors. All types of social and systemic impediments, therefore, need to be removed, and the educational levels and rates for both women and girls must be raised in order to ensure the survival of women entrepreneurship in the Global South. Governments and policymakers need to provide women entrepreneurs with access to the digital economy by 2025 through training, education, and low-cost finance in order to achieve these goals (Nziku and Henry, 2020; OECD-GWEP, 2021; Nziku and Struthers, 2021). Supporting women to lead the way toward sustainable, equitable and inclusive growth should be a priority for the Global South (WEF, 2019).

Despite international efforts during the past two years to lessen the effects of the pandemic, women have been disproportionately affected negatively by COVID-19. The predicted time it will take to close the worldwide gender gap in economic opportunity, politics, education, and health will increase by 36 years as a result of this, which threatens to reverse decades of progress towards achieving gender equity in the workplace and in business. According to findings from the WEF Global Gender Gap Report 2021, gender gaps are likely to continue in industries that call for "disruptive" technical skills. This term has gained popularity in the business world, especially in light of the COVID-19 crisis, as it requires innovative and creative thinking to appeal to growing new customer segments or markets (MindTools, 2021). Women make up only 14% of the cloud computing workforce, 20% of engineers, and 32% of those working in data and artificial intelligence, respectively (citation needed here!). Even though there is a strong demand for an influx of fresh talent because of the pandemic, these increases are insufficient to close the occupational gender gaps that existed before the pandemic. Women's participation in cloud computing barely increased by 0.2 percentage points to 14.2 per cent in 2021, and data and AI positions only saw a 0.4 percentage point increase to 32.4 per cent (WEF, 2021). These persistent inequalities, according to a recent study from the World Economic Forum and LinkedIn, are inhibiting women from making required or ambitious pivots that will ensure the sustainability of their businesses (WEF, 2021). Women's capacity to pursue better employment, grow in their careers, raise their income, launch a business or pivot their business models where technical skills are necessary has greatly been hampered by the COVID-19 situation.

The projection and recognition of the gender gap in entrepreneurship and digital adoption cannot be simplified or explained from the perspective of individual choices and challenges but by an understanding of the practices and orientations of entrepreneurs shaped and determined by the macroeconomic and socioeconomic environment in which they operate (including deeply entrenched behaviours). Mainstream economic thinkers consider entrepreneurship as “a gender-neutral” subject and they define an entrepreneur as a rational, self-interested, money-driven, market-oriented individual who has no sex, no gender, no class, no age, no family, no religion or ethnicity and lives outside of any specific historical, social or geographic context (Irene, 2016). The proposition for gender neutrality in entrepreneurship fails to understand the barriers and challenges faced by women and therefore have the potential to limit the participation of women in entrepreneurial activities and contributing to social economic development. Such an imaginary and passive perception of entrepreneurship assumes that entrepreneurs make decisions unhindered by socioeconomic inequalities, unequal distribution of power and income and relieved of any family obligations or responsibilities (Minniti, 2009). They (mainstream economic thinkers) focus mostly on market dynamics, financial and management issues while overlooking the fundamental attributes and uniqueness of women such as family responsibilities and reproductive duties (factor considered as important determinants). An alternative framework is therefore necessary as the gender gap in entrepreneurship will persist as long as the dominant powers that shape the context of entrepreneurship remain unquestioned and unchallenged. Change will only occur when entrepreneurship is redefined to bring forward and emphasis the potential for social change and inclusion.

To nurture this budding activism, this stream aims to provide a bird’s-eye view of the need for targeted support for women entrepreneurs who have been historically marginalised in the Global South. This is critical to the economic recovery and sustainability of women entrepreneurship in the region. Accordingly, we encourage the submission of contributions aiming to cover a wide range of topics such as (but not limited to):

- Sustainable and Inclusive Economy
- Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on women entrepreneurs
- Women Entrepreneurship Policy
- Rural entrepreneurship
- Women in the informal sector
- Theories that promote women’s entrepreneurship
- Refugee Women Entrepreneurs in the Global South
- Funding and Support for women-owned business during COVID-19
- Gendered Experiences of Entrepreneurs during COVID-19 and Lockdowns
- The intersections between family and business during COVID-19.
- Intersectoral implications of women-run businesses during COVID-19
- Resilience and flexibility during COVID-19

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Abstracts of approximately 500 words should be submitted directly to the GWO2023 conference website in a ONE-page (A4-size, single-spaced, excluding references, with no headers, footers or track changes) Word document, NOT PDF. Abstracts are invited by the end of day 7 November 2022 (Central Africa Time - CAT), with decisions on acceptance to be made by stream leaders by December 2022. Prospective contributions will be independently refereed. Abstracts should include full contact details, including your name, institutional affiliation, mailing address and e-mail address. We are hoping to circulate abstracts prior to the 2023 GWO conference to those attending the conference.

Subject to full peer review, this stream may select suitable full papers for a special issue of the *Gender, Work and Organization* journal post the conference. If your abstract is accepted for this

stream, you are encouraged to submit a full paper (5 000 to 7 000 words excluding references) by 28 February 2023, which may be considered for such a GWO journal special edition.

**More information about the conference can be found at:**

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*Gender, Work and Organization* is a scholarly journal published by Wiley and edited by Alison Pullen and Banu Ozkazanc-Pan. The journal has an Impact Factor of 5.428 (2021) ISI Journal Citation Reports and a ranking of 2/44 (Women's Studies); 95/226 (Management).

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