Livelihoods and Global Digital Platforms
Jonathan Donner, Caribou Digital

Presented at Session 3: **Opportunities and challenges for value creation that developing countries face when dealing with global digital platforms**

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Platforms are changing *livelihoods* -- how people find work, and how small enterprises sell goods and services.

What are the implications of these changes for digital development and it approaches platforms?
To discuss:

1. Introducing a “platform livelihoods” framework based on a new review of 75 studies from across the Global South

1. Implications for policy: digital and economic inclusion for small-scale buyers & sellers
75 studies and counting:

Platform livelihoods in the Global South

Built by Caribou Digital and Qhala with support of Mastercard Foundation
Platform livelihood experience elements

### Economic experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to work &amp; markets</td>
<td>Are there income generating opportunities for those who want them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earnings</td>
<td>Is there a fair return for time and assets applied?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Can people work and sell, when and where they want?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Subjective experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Acceptability</td>
<td>How do others view platform livelihoods?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose &amp; Passion</td>
<td>What mark does the work leave on the world?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurial Drive</td>
<td>Is it important to be one's own boss?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Human development experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>Can women and other marginalized groups pursue this livelihood?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectivity &amp; Professionalism</td>
<td>Do people feel they are treated with dignity and respect?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upskilling &amp; Growth</td>
<td>Can people learn and advance?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Safety</td>
<td>Are people healthy and safe when pursuing this livelihood?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betweenness &amp; Protection</td>
<td>How is this space between employment and self-employment experienced?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association, Organization &amp; Support</td>
<td>Are people in this together?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Version 1.0 October 2020. These elements come from an analysis of 75+ studies of platform livelihood experiences in the global South [http://platformlivelihoods.com](http://platformlivelihoods.com). This figure was developed by Caribou Digital and Qhala, with the support of the Mastercard Foundation. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.
Platform livelihood types

**Platform work**
- Exporting labour, staying home
- Delivery drivers
- Freelancers
- Creatives
- Ride-hailing drivers
- Trades and services

**Platform sales**
- Serving global markets
- Farmers
- Asset owners
- Micro and small enterprises (MSEs)

Shading represents the depth of platformization so far.

Notes: Version 1.0 October 2020. These types come from an analysis of 75+ studies of platform livelihood experiences in the global South. Types not to scale. There are other types of platform livelihoods - this list is illustrative. All types can involve a mix of formal marketplace platforms, social commerce, and search/advertising. This figure was developed by Caribou Digital and Qhala, with the support of the Mastercard Foundation. © This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.
These are behaviors to survive and thrive in increasingly digitized markets.

Platforms are at the heart of all these approaches.

These approaches overlap as data is shared within and across platforms.
It is a policy and design challenge in ‘digital development’ to ensure that platformization works for *livelihoods* -- for small scale platform sellers and individual platform workers -- not just for platforms or for consumers.
The evolving digital economy asks a lot of small firms and even individual gig workers and job seekers.

Digital skills and capabilities are increasingly required, even to do “offline” work.

There is an unmet need for innovation and delivery of digital skills training at scale.
The global digital companies, like Facebook and Google, uniquely gather data/insights across all three domains, across multiple platforms.

They add value to users, but also prevent choice and capture value and may make it difficult for local and regional platforms to thrive.

See: Pon, Bryan (2020) *The race to digitize commerce in sub-Saharan Africa*. 

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Platform livelihood types & the challenge of heterogeneity in use

- **Platform Work**
  - Exporting labour, staying home
    - Microworkers
    - Delivery drivers
    - Freelancers
    - Creatives
    - Ride-hailing drivers
    - Trades and services
    - Asset owners

- **Platform Sales**
  - Serving global markets
    - Farmers
    - Micro and small enterprises (MSEs)

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Thank you!

The framework and review: https://www.platformlivelihoods.com/

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us: www.cariboudigital.net

partners: www.qhala.com
Policymakers have to avoid focusing on one type of livelihood, or even one kind of livelihood practice.

What is best for a smallholder farmer is not best for a delivery driver, though both increasingly rely on the same platforms to reach customers.