

Will Multilateral Governance of Digital Technology Close the Digital Divide?

Organised by: Civil Society Financing for Development (FfD) Group (including Women's Working Group on FfD)

Co-organisers: Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration (ETC Group), Society for International Development (SID) and Major Group on Children and Youth (MGCY)

Date/time: 3 May 2021, Monday, 8:00 am – 9:00 am NY-time

Registration Link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZUsduGpqqzkqGtMGqd1KQHMKjmiBarXkiKwl>

The global pandemic has exposed the extent and further exacerbated the Digital Divide – the already wide and still widening gap in access to digital technology and infrastructures between the North and South, between men and women across the world, and between urban and rural communities within countries.

While the benefits and promises of digital technologies are hailed as potential solution to multiple development crises that humanity is facing, these technologies and the infrastructures that enable them are highly concentrated and advanced in the North and in urban centers in the South while the rest of the world struggles. The unprecedented demand presented by the pandemic on public health systems worldwide and the public resources and investments needed to respond to the continuing crisis have rightfully marginalized digital infrastructures and education in investment priorities.

As the digital gap widens and worsens during the pandemic, the world in both sides of the Divide have to deal with the consequences and issues around digitalization - ranging from violation of basic rights especially of women, girls and young people, racial and gender discrimination, and breach of privacy, to political repression and manipulation and disproportional power and influence of technology platforms and companies. A few countries in the North have attempted to address some of these issues and have started to put in place regulations, including sanctions, on technology companies. Governments in the South are generally grappling with how to deal with issues that are virtual and transboundary by nature within national jurisdiction.

A number of UN agencies such as UNCTAD and UN DESA, have published trends and analysis on digital technologies to guide Member-States on developments and issues that need to be tackled. More recently, the UN Secretary General has made a controversial proposal to establish a multistakeholder body led by technology companies to govern digitalization. Amid these disparate efforts at the global and national levels, there remains a huge vacuum in governance of digital technologies that needs to be addressed with a sense of urgency to protect human rights and assert the mandate of democratic institutions over corporate interests. Digital governance is key in curbing the widening Digital Divide and contribute towards the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to Leave No One Behind.

The Side Event will provide a venue for various actors to provide insights, including present proposals, on global governance of digitalization.