**Summary of STI Forum 2021 side event:**

**Covid-19’s tsunami of new technologies: For the common good or corporate interest?**

Monday 3 May

YouTube recording: <https://youtu.be/l7sZpSsmKZE>

Speakers:

Silvia Ribeiro, ETC Group (Mexico)

Anita Gurumurthy, IT for Change (India)

Dr KM Gopakumar, Third World Network (India)

Chair: Dr Tom Wakeford, ETC Group (London)

The pandemic has impacted our relationship to industrial technology with a rapidity and at a scale that exceeds anything that has taken place during any similar period of time in history.

In some sectors, particularly those involving digital platforms, tech companies have achieved dominance in the market in a period of a few weeks, which might otherwise have never taken place, or taken several years. Intellectual property regime, trade rules and a policy vacuum have all been handy for the corporate interests that control new technologies to assert market dominance and consolidate power in key industries in the midst of the pandemic, as millions of people lost their jobs, livelihoods and access to food.

The often blinkered and self-interested agendas of corporations now threaten to lock us into future policy trajectories on key issues such as climate change and food sovereignty, replacing nascent processes of popular participation and public accountability for the common good.

This session explored what lessons we can learn from previous initiatives, particularly by local communities and Indigenous peoples in the Global South, to challenge potentially harmful technological futures, based on lived experiences and the values of social and ecological justice. It also launched a new online resource to support the assessment of new technologies: <https://assess.technology/>

Key messages (summarised by Silvia Ribeiro):

Among the contributors to pandemics are:

1) the industrial food system

* + Diseases (co-morbidities: diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular diseases, cancer)
	+ Main cause of deforestation (up to 80%) -leads to destruction of habitats for wildlife and spread of virus
	+ Main cause of zoonotic diseases
	+ Confined industrial livestock breeding (avian, swine flu, etc)
1. Destruction of biodiversity
2. Dismantling of national health systems

Digitalization has been a major feature of the pandemic:

* Big expansion of digital platforms, big data, cloud services
* Extreme market concentration. Google/Alphabet, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft (US) –Alibaba, Tencent (China)
* GAFAM & BAT control the majority of digital platforms, big data, AI, cloud services
* Penetration of all industries, also in services, education, health
* Rocketing influence in food and ag: from seeds to food
* Data extraction at all levels, from people, institutions, cities, ecosystems, transactions, behaviour

Corporate control and profits:

* GAFAM/BAT made the largest profits of any corporations during the pandemic so far
* Lack of control and regulation on all aspects
* New niche industries
* Big data + biometrics
* Hyper-nudging
* Surveillance
* New control/surveillance systems, e.g. Covid tracking
* Private profits but demand that states build infrastructure
* Unprecedented private use of space for 5G satellites

There are alternatives

* Small food providers (peasant web) are the most effective during the pandemic, no broken chains, local supplies, safe, fresh and nutritious food
* Recognition and support of local, indigenous, endogenous knowledge and technologies that can be useful for food and health
* Previous STI Forums have recognized that to comply with SDGs, we need to see how to strengthen, recognize, support and share these knowledge systems and diverse technologies