

**INFORMAL SPOTLIGHT SESSION**

**BRIDGING THE GAP: ADDRESSING THE VACUUM IN MULTILATERAL GOVERNANCE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY TO CLOSE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE AND SUPPORT EFFORTS TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND**

**2 February 2022, 11:00-11:50 EST**

**Draft Concept Note**

**Organizers:** Civil Society Financing for Development (FfD) Group, Asia-Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (APRCM), Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration (ETC Group) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

**Background**

The global COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the extent and further exacerbated the digital divide – the ever-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 solutions to multiple development crises that the humanity is facing, the distribution of these technologies and the infrastructures that enable them is highly unequal and most concentrated and advanced in the North and in urban centers in the South. The unprecedented strain posed by the pandemic on public health systems worldwide and the public resources and investments needed to respond to the continuing crisis have further marginalized digital infrastructures and education in investment priorities. As the digital gap is widening and worsening as a result of the pandemic, the world on 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 and cyber security attacks, to repression and manipulation, and disproportional power and influence of technology platforms and companies. While a few countries in the North have attempted to address some of these issues by putting in place regulations, including sanctions, on large technology platforms, governments in the South are still mostly grappling with how to deal within their national jurisdiction with these issues that are virtual and transboundary by nature.

A number of UN agencies such as UNCTAD have published trends and analysis on digital technologies to guide memberstates on developments and issues that need to be tackled. In his recent “Our Common Agenda” report, the UN Secretary General has proposed the creation of a “Global Digital Compact” to be agreed at a “Summit of the Future” in 2023. Amid these 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 assert the mandate of inclusive multilateral institutions over corporate interests and to protect human rights. Governance of digitalisation 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.

This Spotlight Session will provide a space for participants at the 2020 ECOSOC Partnership Forum to provide insights and present proposals on global governance of digitalization.

### **Speakers**

- Clovis Freire, Economist, Division on Technology and Logistics, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)
- Soledad Vogliano, Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration (ETC Group)
- Parminder Jeet Singh, Executive Director, IT for Change
- Ruth Hancock, agroecological farmer and member of Landworkers Alliance

**Moderator:** Wardarina, Deputy Regional Coordinator, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)