

Statement to Thematic Roundtable D by the Civil Society FfD Group (including the Women's Working Group on FfD)

*Delivered by Sandra Vermuyten, Public Services International (PSI), on May 24, 2017
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- Digitalization, automation and technological innovation need to be first and foremost placed at the service of people, workers and communities; not serve corporate profit and private interests. They must be part of the solution - not an additional problem - to the global employment crisis, inequality, digital and skill divide. They must be used as tools to pursue social and environmental goals, as well as part of proactive labour market policies conducive of decent work and of better occupational health and safety for all.
- If left unregulated and introduced in workplaces without prior impact assessment and democratic consultation as it is largely the case now, force higher productivity and work pace regardless of distribution and equity considerations, and displace jobs and livelihoods without providing adequate alternatives and accompanying policies. This approach has already resulted into the emergence of private, opaque monopolies; into the further financialization of the economy and to the privatization of personal and worker data and public knowledge commons by large digitech conglomerates.
- The introduction of new digital technology in workplaces must be progressive and involve worker and service user participation, social dialogue as well as freedom of association and collective bargaining at all levels. Only then can workers and service users have say on whether a certain technology improves product/service quality and working conditions or not.
- The quality of essential public services and public service worker conditions go hand in hand. When digitalisation is used to cut funding, outsource and deskill workers, services to the public inevitably suffer. This approach contains risks for privacy when citizens' data is handed over to private companies. Too often, the rhetoric of digitalisation is based on a presumption that the public sector cannot reform or be efficient and is in effect a cover for privatisation, outsourcing and job losses.
- Consulting companies and PPPs consistently preach the use of digitalization to push headcount cuts and reduce costs. But, relying on private investors, and public-private partnerships (PPPs) whose investment is driven by the profit logic will only widen and deepen the digital divide, lead to further social polarization and worse working conditions, especially in developing countries. Overreliance on foreign aid and corporate charity is unsustainable.
- Digitalization opens the door to more and new corruption, money laundering, illegal business and tax dodging opportunities. Integrated anti-corruption policy framework and whistle-blower protection are critical.

Finally – three general comments on this FFD Forum which is so dominated by the private sector:

- we will continue to demand representation on par levels for workers with business in this process
- When public money is used to leverage private finance, stronger safeguards need to be built in, while the AAAA provides such commitments for PPPs (paragraph 48), the FFD forum could usefully extend these guidelines for further forms of private financing for development.
- At next year's FFD we want to see more attention for alternatives to PPPs – we know by know they don't work for education, water and sanitation and health. Let's be truly innovative.

Thank you