CIVIL SOCIETY MEETING
Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond
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Dialogue 1 – Strengthening the normative dimensions of the UN STI Process
Elenita (Neth) Dano
Co-Executive Director, Action Group on Erosion, Technology & Concentration (ETC Group)

As the so-called fourth industrial revolution dawns in a world that has committed not to leave anyone behind, the benefit of STI for the 'betterment of humanity' should be front and center. There is an urgent need for paradigm shift towards technology justice and governance in a world where the technology divide between the North and South, rural and urban population, across income levels and between genders remain stark. The pandemic has emphasized this even more. As 1.6 billion informal economy workers suffered massive damage to their livelihoods and over 300 million people lost full-time jobs worldwide (ILO), and about 115 million people will be pushed to extreme poverty by 2021 (WB), the wealth of tech billionaires soared by 41% (UBS) cashing in on lockdowns, social distancing and health standards. This is an ethical and development issue that the UN cannot turn a blind eye to.

In Addis, the UN established multilateral processes to ensure that STI become an effective means for inclusive sustainable development. Half a decade later, the Technology Facilitation Mechanism remains without funds to pursue the recommendations from its annual multi-stakeholder forum, and the CSTD still struggles to operationalize its resolutions to establish a global mechanism for technology assessment and horizon scanning. Meanwhile, new technologies are rapidly deployed with barely any regulation nor societal deliberation, and a handful of technology companies reap unbridled and often un-taxed profits from peddling their goods and services, shaping consumer behavior through hypernudging, and selling users data.

Measures that facilitate transition to a paradigm centered on respecting peoples' rights, social empowerment and technology justice must be an utmost priority.   As the UN, governments and institutions grapple with the governance of new technologies, there is an urgent need to create a multilateral mechanism for broad, transparent, inclusive and accessible deliberations on current and potential impacts of these technologies on the environment, the labour market, livelihoods and society, as aspired at UNCED in 1992 and at Ri0+20. New technologies must be evaluated by society before they are deployed, in anticipatory, participatory and transparent processes that put the common good above profits for a few. Horizon scanning and foresight capacities need to be developed among countries and communities and should identify options beyond technological solutions. Proven, tested, environmentally sound and accessible technologies and innovations that address the needs of peoples and communities and promote their full potentials and capacities must be prioritized.