Financing for Development Forum 2024
Overall theme: Enhancing on the path toward the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development

Panel 8: Science, Technology, Innovation and Capacity Building

Civil society intervention delivered by April Porteria, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development and CSO FfD Mechanism

Thank you Mr Moderator for this opportunity. I'm April Porteria speaking on behalf of the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development and the Civil Society FfD Mechanism.

We welcome the acknowledgement of the process to discuss the digital divide and the needed capacity building to fill the inequalities in access to technology. However, we would like to reiterate that systemic changes will not be possible without recognising the root causes, in order to put forward appropriate and genuine solutions to the problem.

We challenge the narrative that digitalisation will fill the gap of the SDG implementation, and the notion that technology is equivalent to digitalisation, which to us diminishes the value of traditional, indigenous and local knowledge systems that have proven to contribute effectively to sustainable development systems at the local level.

The current framework of digitalisation has also posed threats to job security as AI-powered services continue to displace millions of workers across the globe, and in particular adding to the multiple burdens of women as it continues to push them further to work informalisation, unpaid care work, unemployment and even violence.

But we want to clarify, we are not against technological advancement. What we want to emphasise here is the glaring technological divide that is reflective of the widening economic inequalities.

Industry 4.0 or the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution is very far from the realities of communities living in conflict and extreme poverty in the ground. While the SDG target indicators talk about increasing access of communities to the internet and to such technologies, it fails to recognise the power structures behind that controls the narrative and the markets, which are the Big Tech Corporations.

We want to reiterate the lack of policy space and capacity of governments to regulate the activities of these Big Tech especially in developing countries allowing them to extract massive profits from different services, agriculture, as well as people's data, which have significant consequences on consumer, data and privacy protection, taxation, employment, decent work, access to land and other resources, and human rights.

Access to digital technologies alone also does not guarantee that developing countries and their citizens will benefit from their use. And so we reiterate that policy space is needed by developing countries to ensure that they can implement laws and measures that will provide an enabling environment for digital technology to promote people and planet-centred sustainable development. These include the ability to tax the digital economy; guaranteeing the protection of human rights,

including labour rights as well as access to land and resources by farmers and indigenous peoples; equitable access to social services and protection especially of women and children, and ensuring that digital technologies and the data produced from using them are controlled by the public to pursue public interest over private.

In this regard, we would like to put forward the following recommendations especially going towards FfD4:

First, digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence must be regulated and governed, as well as ensuring just and equitable transition to avoid massive job losses, and the deepening digital divide affecting millions of the digitally deprived.

Second, policy emphasis on digitalisation and technological advancements must ensure a governance mechanism in place, and a thorough review of the potential adverse effects on livelihoods, local economies, environment, society, culture, and civil and political rights of the people. In particular, we call on regulation of Big Tech operations, as well as AI and cryptocurrencies and their trading, while the UN should lay down a process towards a multilaterally agreed global governance framework that is crucial to equitably distribute the benefits of digital technologies and effectively address and mitigate the risks.

Furthermore, we call for the establishment of a Global Technology Assessment Mechanism at the UN to ensure transparent and inclusive deliberations on the impacts of digital technologies, and facilitate multilateral cooperation to ensure the common good remains as the ultimate goal and takes precedence over profits when developing and applying digital technologies.

And more importantly, we call for the integration of these recommendations in the ongoing negotiations on the Global Digital Compact zero draft.

Thank you.

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Extra remarks:

As a closing remark, we reiterate the need to establish global mechanisms on scanning for the impacts of digitalisation, curtail scientific knowledge in this exploitative scheme, adopt societal control over digitalisation, overhaul regulatory regimes, conduct technology assessment, enable people's science and technology, insist the governance of people over digitalisation and respect rights of communities to say no to technologies that undermine their knowledge systems, practices, rights, and the environment.