



## Civil Society Forum



CONCEPT NOTE

# Discussion series Frontier Technologies, the Digital Economy and Development

4 June 2021 | 2 to 3.30 p.m. CEST

The objective of the discussion is to raise awareness and increase knowledge of civil society agents of the issues at stake concerning technology in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and Member countries' deliberations for the forthcoming UNCTAD15. The discussion will focus on two key issues: Technology transfer and e-commerce and digital economy.

It is part of a larger set of series of online discussions touching upon issues related to UNCTAD15 under the theme "From inequality and vulnerability to prosperity for all" that runs until the start of the Civil Society Forum to be held from 22 to 24 September 2021.

**Building resilience through sustainable technologies. What does it take?**

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical role of science, technology and innovation in building resilience and combating and recovering from this crisis – from the rapid development of vaccines to digital technologies for e-learning, remote working and e-commerce. The pandemic has speeded the deployment of the digital revolution around the world and the onset of the fourth industrial revolution, with great consequences for developing countries.

However, the pandemic has also highlighted the many divides in technological and production capacities between countries. For example, it has exposed digital gaps, the lack of Internet access, low network speed, gaps in skills, and social factors that affect the access and participation of people in disadvantaged communities, which are more severe in low-income developing countries. The scramble for masks and protective gears at the beginning of



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the crisis and the current unequal rollout of the vaccination in developed and developing countries reflect the gaps in technological and productive capacities across countries.

As highlighted by UNCTAD's Technology and Innovation Report 2021, waves of technological change could entrench or aggravate the great divides between countries that we see today and that started after the first industrial revolution. Very few countries create the technologies that drive this revolution, but all will be affected by it.

Resilience requires countries to have the technological and productive capacities to take on and upscale the production of goods and services in times of crises, such as vaccines and health-related equipment now during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also requires the capacities to harness digital technologies into production and trade. That is only possible if these national capacities are already in place to be fostered and upscaled. It requires a diversified and digitally-enabled economy that can withstand and adapt to shocks and continue operating.

A recovery that brings the world back to the development paradigm that existed before the pandemic will not enable the world economy and societies to bounce back and keep sustainable development on track. In this regard, the 15<sup>th</sup> UNCTAD quadrennial conference (UNCTAD15), which will be held online from 3 to 7 October 2021 will discuss four major transformations needed to move to a more resilient and inclusive world of shared prosperity: to diversify economies, make them greener and more resilient, improve the way development is financed and revitalize multilateralism for development.

Critical for these transformations are ways to facilitate and accelerate technology transfer to developing countries, particularly the least developed countries, and fast track digital transformations. The meeting will discuss the concerns and aspirations of civil society organizations in setting an agenda for international cooperation on technology transfer and the digital economy for the years ahead, taking into consideration the opportunities and challenges posed by frontier technologies while ensuring that no one is left behind.

### Questions for discussion

On technology transfer:

- What would be the elements of an agenda for technology transfer that include civil society's concerns and aspirations?
- What are the challenges and opportunities that frontier technologies can bring?



- What are the mechanisms to accelerate technology transfer and ensure that it benefits the most disadvantaged communities?

On e-commerce and digital economy:

- What would be the elements of an agenda for the deployment of e-commerce and digital economy in developing countries that include civil society's concerns and aspirations?
- What are the challenges and opportunities that frontier technologies can bring?
- What are the mechanisms to accelerate the adoption of e-commerce and digital economy, ensuring that they benefit the most disadvantaged communities?

## Programme

**Opening remarks** by Ms. Shamika Sirimanne, Director, Division on Technology and Logistics, UNCTAD

**Keynote address** by Ms. Neth Daño, Coordinator and Asia Director ETC Group, the Philippines, on the agenda for technology transfer that includes civil society's concerns and aspirations

**Keynote address** by Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh, Executive Director, IT for Change on mechanisms to accelerate the adoption of e-commerce and the digital economy leaving no one behind

Followed by an **interactive dialogue** with the participation of Civil Society representatives.

**Moderated** by Ms. Yoke Ling Chee, Director, Third World Network

The discussion will be moderated and take place through WebEX. Online registration is required.