Third Contribution to the October 2019-January 2020 Open Consultation of the ITU CWG-Internet

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Summary

The World Bank, one of the biggest promoters of information and communication technology in developing and emerging countries, admitted self-critically in its 2016 World Development Report Digital Dividends that digital change had lagged far behind its (self-imposed) expectations. Digitalisation, it said, was threatening to destroy jobs in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It was also increasing social inequality because it is often only the better-off who participate in digital change while others – perhaps because of poverty or illness – are excluded from in.

The publication Global Justice 4.0: The impacts of digitalisation on the Global South (Bread for the World) discusses the extent to which digital technology can help tackle poverty and social inequality, and makes nine specific proposals that would help make digitalisation fair.

Background and Introduction

On 20 September 2019, the CWG-Internet decided that Open Consultations would be convened on the following issue:

> International internet-related public policy issues on harnessing new and emerging telecommunications/ICT for sustainable development. Questions:
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> 1. How will new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs impact both the internet and sustainable development, including the digital economy?
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> 2. What are the opportunities and challenges for the adoption and growth of the new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs and internet?
>
> 3. How can governments and the other stakeholders harness the benefits of new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs?
>
> 4. What are the best practices for promoting human skills, institutional capacity, innovation and investment for new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs?

Many of these issues are addressed in the Bread for the World Study *Global Justice 4.0: The impacts of digitalisation on the Global South*, available at:

https://info.brot-fuer-die-welt.de/sites/default/files/blog-downloads/global_justice_4.0.pdf

1. How will new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs impact both the internet and sustainable development, including the digital economy?

The Foreword of the cited study states:

> A weather app helps smallholder families get higher yields from their crops, cargo drones deliver vital medicines to people in remote areas and digital fingerprints make it easier for people in

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need to access basic services – digitalisation appears to unlock countless opportunities for the Global South. But are the great hopes for change being fulfilled?

The World Bank, one of the biggest promoters of information and communication technology in developing and emerging countries, admitted self-critically in its 2016 World Development Report Digital Dividends that digital change had lagged far behind its (self-imposed) expectations. Digitalisation, it said, was threatening to destroy jobs in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It was also increasing social inequality because it is often only the better-off who participate in digital change while others – perhaps because of poverty or illness – are excluded from it. In the Global North digitalisation is viewed with considerable scepticism. Political efforts often focus on ways of regulating digitalisation and on atempts to restrict the actions of monopolistic tech companies. Issues of data protection and the collection of taxes are frequently raised.

This publication discusses the extent to which digital technology can help tackle poverty and social inequality. Does it increase or restrict the opportunities for social and economic participation open to disadvantaged people?

We analyse the history of e-commerce in the light of this question. We consider current developments in the world trade regime, because a new dynamic has developed in trade policy almost unnoticed. As the Digital Agenda adopted by the US government in 2000 shows, leading tech companies – principally those from Silicon Valley – are increasingly using commercial law to promote their own interests. This is no longer just about reducing tariffs on digital products such as software, or about uniform standards for telecommunications services. Patents on artificial intelligence and the (non-)regulation of data flows are now elements of commercial regulations and the subject of controversy in the World Trade Organization (WTO). For the countries of the Global South – but not only for them – there is a lot at stake, including the risk of a new, digital colonialism.

This publication explores the potentials and limits of digital solutions. It analyses the lessons to be learned from supposedly model projects such as the mobile payment system M-Pesa and the spread of cashless payment in India. We also examine whether the digitalization of transnational supply chains not only boosts transparency but also increases value creation for workers on the coffee and soya plantations or in factories.

The question of how digitalisation can be organized so that it contributes to the welfare of everyone must focus on one issue in particular: how can disadvantaged population groups in the rural parts of Africa or the inhabitants of slums in the megacities obtain better access to work and basic services? What steps must be taken to minimise the risks of the digital transformation for people in Asia and Latin America and enhance its potential?

The study therefore concludes with a list of nine ideas that would help make digitalisation fair. Consider them as an invitation to engage in discussion of globally just and humane digitalisation.

2. What are the opportunities and challenges for the adoption and growth of the new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs and internet?

See above.

3. How can governments and the other stakeholders harness the benefits of new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs?

The cited study concludes with nine specific proposals:

1. Use public infrastructure to close the digital gap
2. Control and regulate digital monopolies
3. Enlarge the scope of trade policy to allow states to put protective measures in place if they enable the state to pursue an economic policy tailored to local need, including in particular data localization requirements
4. Promote national and regional platforms
5. Create cooperative platforms
6. Take a broader view of digital centres
7. Open up education and adapt education policy
8. View social policy in international terms
9. Support local SMEs, including financially

4. What are the best practices for promoting human skills, institutional capacity, innovation and investment for new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs?

See above.

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