

# GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2020

*Technology, the environment and  
a sustainable world: Responses from  
the global South*



ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS (APC)  
AND SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY (SIDA)

## Global Information Society Watch 2020

Technology, the environment and a sustainable world: Responses from the global South

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APC would like to thank the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) for their support for Global Information Society Watch 2020.

Published by APC

2021

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Global Information Society Watch 2020 – web and e-book

ISBN 978-92-95113-40-4

APC-202104-CIPP-R-EN-DIGITAL-330

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# Preface

Shawna Finnegan and Valeria Betancourt (APC)

*Our world is changing rapidly as we face unprecedented and intersecting social, economic and environmental crises. Unsustainable production and rampant consumerism are responsible for a grave depletion of resources, pollution and destruction of ecosystems that have caused climate change to reach a point of crisis that threatens all life on this planet. Digitalisation is a key element of the problem, as production, use and disposal of digital technologies have complex and exponential impacts on our shared planet.*

*Digital technologies may also offer important tools to respond to environmental crises, including through monitoring changes in the environment, preparing for disasters, and addressing systemic threats to life on this planet. The internet is a powerful tool for collective action and activism to raise public awareness and push for policy and institutional changes that address the root causes of environmental crises. At the same time, the internet and digital technologies are increasingly being used to censor, surveil, threaten and attack land and environment defenders, and spread disinformation about the science of climate change.*

*Social, environmental and technology movements around the world are evolving and transforming collective action as structures of violence and exclusion are increasingly being exposed – and uprooted. The struggle for climate justice is necessarily a struggle for racial justice, health and socioeconomic well-being.*

*The 2020 edition of Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch) brings together a diverse community of authors around the theme “Technology, the environment and a sustainable world: Responses from the global South”. The extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic found authors and the APC team dealing with unprecedented challenges that extended the usual production process, as the GISWatch community adapted to rapidly changing contexts.*

*This edition addresses the twin challenges of environmental crises and digital transformation, offering perspectives that counteract dominant techno-solutionist approaches that overlook rigorous research on the negative environmental and socioeconomic impacts of digital technologies.*

*In 2010, APC asked the GISWatch community to explore the impact of information and communications technologies (ICTs) on environmental sustainability.<sup>1</sup> Ten years later, the issues and trends that threaten our collective future have become even more complex and urgent, as have the action steps needed to confront them. This 2020 GISWatch edition aims to re-approach the intersection of digital technologies, the environment and sustainability to respond to key current questions and challenges and identify meaningful paths to a just and sustainable world. Ten years later, it is necessary to*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.giswatch.org/en/2010>

*understand how the terrain has changed and define the advocacy imperatives moving forward.*

*APC's aspiration with this edition is to offer quality and diverse contributions from civil society and researchers, to frame the debate to the benefit of citizens and the planet. This critical and urgent edition of GISWatch contains 46 country and regional reports, together with a series of powerful thematic reports that explore multidimensional challenges confronting civil society in our efforts to build a just and sustainable world in the age of digital transformation.*

*GISWatch 2020 focuses on responses from the global South, referring not only to geography but to conditions of exclusion, discrimination and oppression that exist globally. Several reports in this edition highlight the devastating impact of narratives driven by powerful actors in the global North that reinforce and reproduce colonial systems of oppression.*

*The reports in this edition of GISWatch explore responses that emphasise decentralised, bottom-up approaches to sustainability that require evolving exchanges of knowledge and experience. Technology may support decentralised action, but it also presents huge risks to land and environment defenders because of increasing online surveillance, censorship, harassment and threats, in addition to threats posed to the planet by the boundless production and disposal of technological devices. The potential for digital technologies to support environmental preservation and climate justice will be unrealised until or unless these risks are addressed.*

*We hope this edition of GISWatch will contribute to shedding light on the necessary or more suitable policy/regulatory, governance, technical/technological, economic, cultural and social responses at all levels, as we work towards a sustainable future.*

# *Technology, the environment and a sustainable world: Responses from the global South*

The world is facing an unprecedented climate and environmental emergency. Scientists have identified human activity as primarily responsible for the climate crisis, which together with rampant environmental pollution, and the unbridled activities of the extractive and agricultural industries, pose a direct threat to the sustainability of life on this planet.

This edition of Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch) seeks to understand the constructive role that technology can play in confronting the crises. It disrupts the normative understanding of technology being an easy panacea to the planet's environmental challenges and suggests that a nuanced and contextual use of technology is necessary for real sustainability to be achieved. A series of thematic reports frame different aspects of the relationship between digital technology and environmental sustainability from a human rights and social justice perspective, while 46 country and regional reports explore the diverse frontiers where technology meets the needs of both the environment and communities, and where technology itself becomes a challenge to a sustainable future.

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2020 Report

[www.GISWatch.org](http://www.GISWatch.org)

