

Report LACIGF 13

Session title: **Session 3** - Digital transformation, acceleration and use of new technologies in a post-COVID-19 world

Prepared by: Carolina Fiorini Ramos Giovanini (UFJF, Brazil), Cristian Henrique Martins de Souza (IFRN, Brazil), Eduarda Costa Almeida (LAPIN, Brazil), Thobias Prado (UFU, Brazil)

Translated by: Juliana Novaes (Youth Observatory, Brazil)

Summary:

The first part of the session addressed the promotion of digital technologies and was moderated by Rodrigo de la Parra (ICANN). Rodrigo highlighted the pandemic and how it reveals a scenario of growing digital transformation due to confinement measures. The moderator raised the need to discuss the technical, economic, and social impacts caused by the increasing importance of ICTs.

Luis Arancibia (LACTLD / NIC Chile) was asked about the impacts of the pandemic on technical and operational issues. Luis commented that social confinement implied a greater need for internet access and, consequently, there was a significant increase in the demand for domain names. It was highlighted that the DNS proved to be robust and secure, as the operations continued without any risk or compromise. Subsequently, Luis Arancibia and Miguel Ignacio (who joined the session during a moment of instability in Luis's connection), highlighted projects aimed at digital transformation in Latin America during the pandemic, promoting Internet access and capacity building.

Héctor Faya (Facebook) was asked about the impacts of the pandemic on small and medium-sized companies. Héctor presented the study “Global State of Small Business” and clarified that small and medium-sized companies are starting to reopen and recover as containment measures are being relaxed. According to Héctor, sectors such as communication and logistics were less affected by the pandemic, while hotels and restaurants were more affected. The existence of gender inequality was highlighted, as companies run by women were 7% more likely to close during the pandemic. Therefore, it was observed that the recovery strategies need to be inclusive, taking into account the situation of vulnerable groups.

Mercedes Aramendia (URSEC) highlighted the challenges faced by governments as regulators of technology in the context of a pandemic. She pointed out that the pandemic changed the relationship between regulators and regulators, so the importance of quality, unity, and security of the state system as a whole became more evident. For Mercedes, regulators must be close to people and must seek to resolve technical obstacles with freedom, responsibility, and cooperation. She pointed out that, in Uruguay, fixed bandwidth traffic increased by 100%, compared to the same period last year and mobile bandwidth traffic increased by 38% compared to the same semester in 2019. In addition, Mercedes stressed that the flexibility of government agencies is of paramount importance to provide a balance between citizens and companies. Thus, she stressed that regulators must work and think according to the entire ecosystem, being realistic about the need to update some standards or make them ineffective.

Carolina Barada (Wingu) affirmed the importance of the challenges faced by society after the pandemic, such as remote work and other new tools that will remain even after the end of the current health situation. For her, some difficulties brought by the pandemic

are the need for online teamwork and the lack of access to the internet or technological devices. In addition, she noted other deeper problems, such as the sustainability of teamwork, engagement in online events, and the inevitable reductions of personnel in the various organizations that she had contact with. For Carolina, the functioning of the service and work mechanisms will not be the same as before the pandemic. According to Carolina, the responsible for such profound changes is the Internet, since the relationship between humans and technology has changed forever. Therefore, Carolina understands that, given today's experiences in Latin America, technology has enabled the creation of new types of legitimate social manifestations. Still, all this transformation has created a sense of collaboration even among different organizations, since the problems identified are similar to each other and do not face that many territorial boundaries anymore.

The second panel of the session, moderated by Beatriz Rodríguez (AGESIC, Uruguay), dealt with the future of work, an important and worrying issue given the current global pandemic scenario. In addition, she also briefly explained some concepts about the “new normality” and some challenges imposed by the post-COVID-19 world.

Ana Inés Basco (IDB - INTAL, Argentina) started, in fact, the session with a general contextualization of the subject, focusing on teleworking concepts. The speaker highlighted a report produced jointly with Google, in which a high increase in remote working was found. However, the same research reports the possible decrease of such a number at the end of the pandemic, since many corporations still prefer the traditional model of work. Another point that was highlighted was the inclusive automation accelerated by digital transformation, which deserves to be highlighted, especially in a world that is increasingly globalized and dominated by artificial intelligence algorithms. In this sense, a number of factors must be taken into consideration, such as connectivity, access to new technologies, and a look at the structures and systems of companies. Without critical thinking, social and gender inequalities may increase.

Carolina Caeiro (LACNIC, Haiti) shared some experiences obtained through the LACNIC women's training project. Caeiro pointed out that the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can act as a way to democratize knowledge in less developed countries. She mentioned the concrete example of Haiti, which proved the effectiveness of ICTs, but it also saw some difficulties suffered by the participants. A limiting factor is the devaluation of online work, as the inhabitants tend to look for what is faster, mainly for financial reasons, and end up ignoring remote vacancies that have high competitiveness and lengthy hiring processes. In addition, barriers such as the lack of access to credit, bank accounts and even cultural prejudice against the digital environment end up being factors that made a considerable number of women withdraw from the program.

Rodrigo Galindo (Google, Colombia) presented good perspectives in relation to the digital transformation process in Latin American companies. Galindo points out that the pandemic has positively boosted the performance of emerging markets in the international economy since corporations are mainly using the Internet in their business transactions. In addition, the speaker also mentions the new online training programs offered by Google to help train professionals in this difficult time. Finally, he says that there will be job opportunities and the key for job seeking is to look at the needs that these jobs demand and innovate to qualify for those jobs.

Erick Huerta (Sociedad Civil, Mexico) points out that COVID-19 caused a huge surprise for the telecommunications industry and we are currently responding to this emergency. Huerta highlighted that the current monopoly of big tech exposes the implications that automation can cause in the current model of labor, such as the replacement of humans by artificial intelligence algorithms. The speaker highlighted the need to think about the

future in an environmental way since new viruses can be discovered because of global warming. In addition, the panelist sees with pessimism the idea that we will achieve a balance between unemployment caused by automation and the creation of new jobs. Huerta cites the development of artificial intelligence created to replace humans in several areas and ends by saying that we need to think of ICTs as tools and not as resources in itself.

Gerhard Reinecke (ILO, Chile) presented examples of two inhabitants of Chile who portray the precariousness of work. Reinecke highlighted the difficulty these people suffered when applying for social benefits, such as insurance or unemployment benefits. In addition, he questioned how it is possible to guarantee the rights of apps workers, such as Uber. Reinecke argues that we can have good uses for these technologies if they are regulated in such a way as to transfer control over platform data to individuals. This same technology should be used beneficially to monitor working conditions.

Outputs and other relevant links:

The project developed by Carolina Caieiro (“Learning for LACNIC: What left Ayitic goes Global”): <https://www.ayitic.net/pt/aprendizaje-carolina.html>

The study presented by Héctor Faya (“Global State of Small Business”): <https://dataforgood.fb.com/global-state-of-smb/>