



**Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration**

## **ANNUAL REPORT 2023**



*"The Seaweed Delusion" report cover art*

*Artist: Isabelle Morgan*

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

*ETC Group is a small, international, research and action collective committed to social and environmental justice, human rights and the defence of just and ecological agri-food systems and the web of life. We focus on understanding and challenging corporate-controlled techno-industrial systems and exposing the dangers of the technological manipulation of life, especially in relation to climate justice and food security. We uphold peasant and indigenous ways of life and knowledge systems; food sovereignty; people's control of technology; and just economies and governance. Our staff are based in Argentina, Canada, India, Mexico, the Philippines, Uganda and the UK. Our Board is drawn from five continents. We have consultative status at the United Nations.*



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# Unpacking the Politics of Technology

*In 2023 we increased our focus on reaching out to work with allies on unpacking and learning about emerging technologies and the corporate business models and narratives driving them, moving beyond specific sectors to start communicating about these trends generally as well.*

*These unproven technofixes conveniently allow fossil-fuel and agrochemical corporations to justify continued investment in their disastrously destructive activities. Almost all the proposed high-tech solutions are completely un-tested. They have potential adverse effects and impacts that are likely to be worse than the problems they claim to solve and thus constitute a planetary-scale gamble that is certain to fail. This ‘technofix narrative’ also:*

- *diverts attention from tried and tested approaches already available*
- *stifles social innovation and the community assessment of technologies*
- *evades fundamental questions about social and climate justice.*

## Challenging the technofix ‘saviour’ story

In August, we co-hosted two well-attended day-long civil society technofix workshops in Delhi focusing variously on geoengineering, corporate capture and carbon farming; and on the digitalization of food agriculture. This latter topic was the focus of two further day-long civil society workshops held in Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur.



*ETC’s Kavya Chowdhry at our “Roundtable Discussion on the Deployment of Agricultural Digitalization in Malaysia”, Kuala Lumpur, 15 August 2023.*

These were all so well received that we were inspired to run a further two workshops in Nairobi, on the occasion of the CBD’s SBSTTA 25 meeting in October. We adapted earlier

online workshops on metanarratives to offer a new and quicker way of working collaboratively in person, in groups, to analyze and start to reframe narratives, using flip-chart sized ‘canvases’. These very dynamic exercises were really appreciated, and we were subsequently invited back to Nairobi to run a second set of workshops in 2024, and to conduct an online training-the-trainer event for some participants who want to replicate the approach with their communities / constituencies. This is just the kind of domino impact we need to strive for in order to maximize the impacts we can deliver as a small NGO. The Nairobi meetings also helped to strengthen the growing AfriTAP technology assessment platform in Africa. Other co-hosted workshops have also been held in Latin America, Africa and North America (see “Claiming back food systems, unravelling the agtech digital narrative” section for more detail); and we co-hosted a Farmers’ Dialogue with GRAIN in Delhi, in June.



*Participants analysing corporate geoengineering narratives,  
Nairobi workshop, October 2023.*

Overall, the development of our narratives outreach work is going exceptionally well, and it is becoming apparent that it is a very engaging way of fostering civil society debate on the overarching technofix paradigm and need for technology democracy (enabling people to step back from the complexities of specific technologies).

Key publications both emanating from and feeding into this integrated approach to collaboratively challenging technofixes include [“The Politics of Technology”](#) and [“Autonomy in the Face of Agtech”](#), co-authored with A Growing Culture (for more details about these critical publications please see the Communications section).

## Challenging geoengineers' plans to manipulate our planet's climate

- We successfully stopped geoengineers' attempts to have text promoting geoengineering included in the CBD's Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) targets.
- With allies, we countered the International Overshoot Commission's pro-geoengineering climate report.
- At the International Maritime Organization's London Convention/London Protocol our research into the problems associated with geoengineering via seaweed cultivation and sinking was presented.
- Together with allies, we worked to transform the first version of UNHCR's report on the impact of new technologies, which was biased in favour of geoengineering, into a strong critical tool in relation to human rights at the UN.

***The year 2023 was characterized by a need to rapidly ramp up our activities in relation to both monitoring and intervening in multiple UN spaces specifically in relation to geoengineering technologies (which we also refer to as earth manipulation), as these are now being pushed heavily by their corporate sponsors in multiple arenas, in spite of existing moratoria within the UN. This has also involved increasing our support for civil society capacity-building to maximize the number of voices around the world who are challenging this technofix approach to resolving climate change, which promotes dangerous distractions instead of real solutions.***

In relation to this we engaged extensively with civil society networks operating in several UN fora. In particular, we continue to work extremely actively with groups in the UNFCCC climate change spaces, including the COP 28 Coalition and Demand Climate Justice (DCJ). The biggest of these networks is the Climate Action Network International (CAN-I), which has some 1,300 organizational members worldwide. At CAN, we worked, among other spaces, through the Science Policy Working Group and have successfully fostered a process to develop shared policy positions on geoengineering. This enables civil society to challenge geoengineering with a stronger voice.

We continued to play an important role in supporting the HOME Alliance on geoengineering, especially in relation to its core function and by participating actively in several of its working and regional groups. Besides organizational support, we continued contributing substantive research and information and proposing strategies for action; and supporting the maintenance and updating of the Geoengineering Monitor website, which is the main source of information on geoengineering for civil society.



A key new focus area during this time has been our research into marine geoengineering, published in September in [“The Seaweed Delusion: industrial seaweed will not cool the climate or save nature”](#), and work around this issue within HOME.

## UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

Back in November 2022, at UNFCCC’s COP 27 in Sharm El Sheik, Egypt, ETC Group was very involved in helping to stall a decision to approve geoengineering techniques as acceptable sources of carbon credits for polluting companies to buy their way out of having to reduce their emissions. Then, in January 2023, ETC Group made a key intervention in Mexico, informing the Mexican government and civil society about a [rogue solar geoengineering experiment](#) that led the Mexican Government to formally announce they would ban solar geoengineering experiments in their territory. This set a unique precedent, which was mentioned in many of the largest global publications and was an inspiration to other Latin American and African countries.

Nevertheless, this threat continues, and we have seen supporters of geoengineering increasingly dominating UNFCCC spaces over the past 12 months. This includes the UNFCCC ‘intersessionals’ in June, in Bonn, Germany, where we again participated actively, denouncing the risks of geoengineering and urging governments in general and the Subsidiary Body for Article 6.4 in particular (since it is in charge of defining carbon markets) to respect the moratoria on geoengineering that exist in the CBD and International Maritime Organisation’s London Convention/London Protocol. Silvia Ribeiro [spoke](#) at the Subsidiary Body’s consultation with civil society on this matter. ETC was also part of a cross-constituency protest against false solutions and geoengineering. This was the first time a public [manifestation](#) against geoengineering had taken place inside a UN building. Together with the HOME Alliance and other networks, we also coordinated and co-hosted an official side-event during the intersessionals entitled [“Real Zero pathways or dangerous distractions? Why geoengineering & risky removals are no path to 1.5”](#). The event was well attended, including by many government delegates. It was also [broadcast](#) on UN TV.



*UNFCCC intersessional, Bonn, June 2023: The first time a public manifestation against geoengineering had taken place inside a UN building.*

This battle continued at UNFCCC COP 28, in Dubai, in December 2023. ETC's Silvia Ribeiro and Neth Daño participated, speaking on key technofix challenges, especially geoengineering and carbon markets, in multiple side events and in conversation with certain governments. Our general conclusions can be read [here](#).

There were important developments in the last stages of the negotiations, when Bolivia called for a moratorium on carbon markets, on the basis that these are not a systemic solution to climate change. ETC had been engaged in discussions with several Global South countries in relation to the relevant 'Article 6' clauses during the summit. Overall, however, [COP 28 was most notable because of the incredible number of geoengineering initiatives, side events and lobbyists which swamped the event](#). This was somewhat countered by a growing number of organizations advocating against geoengineering and the consolidation of the HOME Alliance, but there is still much to do as many delegates don't yet realize, for example, that Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) is a fraud which distracts from the real solutions to climate change that are so urgently needed. This agenda will necessarily continue for ETC Group in 2024.



*Silvia Ribeiro and Neth Daño on the panel of a side event, "Article 6 on the ground: real solutions instead of dangerous distractions", COP 28, December.*





*Silvia Ribeiro speaking on geoengineering and other false solutions in the Women & Gender Pavilion, COP 28.*



*Silvia Ribeiro civil society protest against False Solutions, COP 28.*



*ETC's Neth Daño gives an interview about geoengineering to a French radio broadcaster, after the False Solutions demonstration.*

## International Overshoot Commission (IOC)

ETC Group also followed the deliberations of the International Overshoot Commission (IOC) closely and worked with allies to make a concerted media effort to counter the release of the IOC's report, "Reducing the risks of climate overshoot". The report is very much about geoengineering and came out in September, just before the opening of the UN General Assembly. The report is not good, but our collective continued pressure on the IOC commissioners was still useful in that it made them adopt at least some language about risks and precaution. They also ended up calling for a moratorium on Solar Radiation Management (SRM) deployment and large-scale outdoor experiments with risks of transboundary harm. Although ETC [publicly criticised](#) the content of this Overshoot Commission call and worked with HOME Alliance to make a concerted media effort to denounce the report overall, we still consider this a narrative victory for civil society.

## Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

At the CBD's COP 15 in Montreal back in December 2022, ETC, together with allies, had successfully stopped geoengineers' attempts to include text promoting geoengineering in the CBD's Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) targets. ETC raised the alarm about this proposal when it came up in the negotiations, and was able to collaborate with the HOME Alliance and other allies to denounce it, protesting against it in a [public open letter](#), and ultimately putting a stop to it. We also facilitated the presence of the AfriTAP (African technology assessment platform) team presence and engagement at COP 15, particularly focusing on synthetic biology, gene drives and technology assessment in the COP 15 decisions and in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

ETC's Silvia Ribeiro, Neth Daño and Barbara Ntambirweki also organized allies to influence the negotiations in the CBD's SBSTTA 25 in Nairobi in October 2023, where the issue of Biodiversity and Climate Change was being negotiated. The CBD is the 'home' of the geoengineering moratorium within the United Nations and our efforts were directed at having the moratorium once again explicitly recognized by governments, thereby strengthening it in the run up to the CBD negotiations, which will take place at COP 16 in 2024 (and in other UN spaces where the moratorium is effectively being challenged). We published a specific briefing for delegates and civil society, and conducted a well-attended official side event inside the SBSTTA 25 venue on "Affirming precaution on geoengineering and other dangerous distractions". This was well attended and included some country delegates (even though many were caught in delayed Contact Groups). As a result of our efforts, several country delegates spoke in favour of recognizing and strengthening the geoengineering moratorium. The Women's Caucus and the civil society CBD Alliance also included the point in their official statements to the negotiations. Nevertheless, the

discussion on this agenda item could not be finalised and it was left in brackets in the text in the end, to be discussed further in COP 16. We also sent a submission on synthetic biology to the CBD's multidisciplinary Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Synthetic Biology in November.



*SBSTTA 25 side event panel: Silvia Ribeiro (ETC), Neth Daño (ETC), Sabrina Masinjila (African Centre for Biodiversity), Mfoniso Antia (HOMEF) and Barbara Ntambirweki (ETC).*

## **International Maritime Organization's London Convention/London Protocol on marine dumping (LC/LP)**

The LC/LP has decided to discuss seven marine geoengineering techniques and prioritized four to start with, including the sinking and large-scale cultivation of biomass (which includes seaweed). Our research and publication in this area, [“The Seaweed Delusion: Industrial seaweed will not cool the climate or save nature”](#), was timely and relevant (more details about this report can be found below). We provided a slide deck summarizing the problems with seaweed cultivation and sinking as a geoengineering technofix approach, which was presented at the meeting of the LC/LP's scientific group by an ally from the HOME Alliance Marine Working Group. The LC/LP made a [statement](#) on marine geoengineering in October, in which they stated that “each of the four marine geoengineering techniques prioritized for evaluation has the potential for deleterious effects that are widespread, long-lasting or severe; and there is considerable uncertainty regarding their effects on the marine environment, human health, and on other uses of the ocean.” They called to defer the use of these technologies in any activity, except “legitimate scientific research”, a term carefully defined by this body. This provides a strong precautionary message for the discussions at UNFCCC on carbon dioxide removals and carbon markets at Article 6.4, where several of these techniques are being considered.

## UN Human Rights Council (HRC)

ETC continued working alongside partners from the HOME Alliance, led by CIEL, to influence the content of a report on geoengineering techniques that the council's Advisory Committee has been preparing since 2021. ETC intervened with statements in the negotiations, as a civil society observer, and also collaborated with three other organizations on a broad [submission to the HRC](#). The final HRC Advisory Committee report "[Impact of new technologies intended for climate protection on the enjoyment of human rights](#)" (UN doc A/HRC/54/47) draws on scientific knowledge, interviews with stakeholders and rights-holders, and inputs from various organizations and institutions. As a result of this concerted collaborative effort, we managed to turn the first version of this report, which was biased in favour of geoengineering, into a strong critical tool that is a reference on the issue in relation to human rights at the UN. The report clearly states that Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR) and Solar Radiation Management (SRM) pose significant, unprecedented risks to a wide range of human rights. ETC also worked to support Indigenous peoples addressing the HRC in this process.

## UN Environment Programme (UNEP)

We are finding it increasingly important to focus on the UN's environmental spaces, as geoengineers seek to further their corporate agenda in these spaces. For example, in 2023, in a surprising move, UNEP published a report on solar geoengineering, which although it was officially an independent report rather than a UNEP/government endorsed report, was still presented as being from UNEP. This was highly problematic, because even though the report had to recognize the many risks of geoengineering, it also promoted the need for more research and open-air experiments. We participated in a civil society dialogue with UNEP's Chief Scientist to raise concerns that this report had been developed behind closed doors, without any information being provided to either governments or civil society, and without any input on its scope and format.


Forewarned in this way we at least anticipated that the issue of geoengineering, especially solar geoengineering, would probably appear as a key point of discussion at the 6<sup>th</sup> UN Environment Assembly (UNEA 6) in February 2024, and were accordingly involved in some of the regional preparations towards UNEA 6 as well.







*ETC's Neth Daño presents on multiple crises to the 5<sup>th</sup> Forum of Ministers and Environmental Authorities of Asia Pacific, which focused on preparation for UNEA 6 in 2024 with the title "Effective, inclusive and sustainable multilateral actions to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution", Colombo, Sri Lanka, 3-6 October.*

#### **Find out more:**

 Read our new report: "The Seaweed delusion: Industrial seaweed will not cool the climate or save nature".

[www.etcgroup.org/content/seaweed-delusion](http://www.etcgroup.org/content/seaweed-delusion)

 Watch: our webinar from the 2023 UNFCCC intersessional meeting in Bonn, in June "No to geoengineers' technofix gold rush, yes to Real Zero!" [www.youtube.com/watch?v=7O-ulP8qGm4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7O-ulP8qGm4)

 Listen to interviews and read our blog from the alternative people's Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi, in November 2023, where we protested the capture of the summit by new technology investors, together with AfriTAP.

[www.etcgroup.org/content/africa-climate-summit](http://www.etcgroup.org/content/africa-climate-summit)



## Claiming back food systems, unravelling the agtech digital narrative

- Our Long Food Project with IPES-Food launched a new website, [longfoodproject.org](https://longfoodproject.org), an invitation to think and plan decades ahead, and forge deeper and wider collaborations than ever before, in order to collectively shape food systems that nourish all of us, and the living environment.
- At La Via Campesina's 8<sup>th</sup> Global Assembly ETC's Verónica Villa's keynote speech reminded how "Peasants are at the heart of the responses to global crises".
- We co-coordinated the Data Working Group of the Committee on World Food Security's (CFS) Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism (CSIPM). Collectively, we urged that extreme caution is needed due to the conflicts of interest entangled in data collection.
- Our metanarratives agritech project led to 10 in-depth webinars in 2023, which were co-hosted by ETC and A Growing Culture, together with La Vía Campesina, the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa and others.
- The dialogues in North America, Asia, Africa and Latin America about the impacts of digitalization in food systems deepened, and we have a more precise image of how the 'digitalization' of food and agriculture occurs in reality.
- ETC Group along with La Via Campesina and GRAIN are working to defend the original meaning of agroecology and its political, historical and economic characteristics, as the term is being used by corporations and institutions to justify agro-industrial production without a sense of social justice. This tripartite collaboration researches and disseminates critical information to counteract the 'theft of meaning' from agroecological peasant agriculture.
- The defence of real peasant agroecology will be strengthened and extended through the processes towards the 3<sup>rd</sup> Nyéléni Global Forum on Food Sovereignty, Global Justice and Systemic Change in 2025. ETC has been participating in the preparatory process as an observer and supporter.

***Throughout 2023 we showcased solutions and spoke out repeatedly, together with our allies, about the trickiest issues of 21<sup>st</sup> century food and farming. In particular, powerful economic and political actors are pushing for digital transformation of agriculture and food systems, while social movements and civil society face the challenge of assessing the potential consequences of this trend for food sovereignty, human rights and nature. In the meantime, small-scale producers and CSOs have been developing their own experiences of data collection and data-driven policies, as a tool for the food sovereignty movement.***

*Over the course of the year, we built our capacity on this topic, including by creating spaces for promoting civil society dialogue and shared exchanges and learning, and intervening in policy-making fora where strategically useful. At the same time, we gave space for community producers to share the ways they are claiming their food systems back.*

## The Long Food Project

In 2023 we completed a further stage of our Long Food Project, undertaken together with IPES-Food, by holding collaborative civil society dialogues around Territorial Markets, Biodigital Convergences and Predictable Surprises; and the launch of a new [website](https://www.longfoodproject.org) for the project, bringing all of its activities, materials and tools together in one accessible space.



In the transition between the pandemic and returning to ‘the new normal’, this project has provided a very positive civil society space, allowing us to inaugurate new lines of reflection and action, rather than simply responding to immediate and urgent food emergencies, as we have to do so often. As we were at the end of the COVID-19 lock-ins these online dialogues also served to reflect collectively on how to deal with the pandemic and define where we could go from here.

The Territorial Markets dialogues gave an in-depth account of how there has been an explosion of exchanges of goods that do not go through the large industrial and commercial systems. They showed us the extent to which communities and organizations are claiming their food systems back, and led to an updated conceptual definition of farmers' markets that can be far-reaching across a wide range of sectors.

The Biodigital Convergence dialogues allowed us to consider organizations' key concerns in relation to the technological advances that are being presented as unquestionably good, especially given the fact that the speed of expansion of these technologies makes it virtually impossible to assess their risks adequately. These dialogues raised urgent questions regarding digitalization, allowing us to consider how the digital tsunami is unfolding in the different regions of the world and whether or not digitalization can be good for food sovereignty and the planet. The interest in this area is so enormous that regional articulation processes will be deepened in 2024.

The Predictable Surprises dialogues allowed us to take time out to reflect on the future at a time when even our thinking is dominated by emergencies and the day-to-day. We were able to review the achievements of the food movements over the past 30 years and begin to identify warning signs, right now, that can be used to plan concrete actions or new alliances to strategize around collectively many years into the future. The development of the dialogue on Predictable Surprises produced a methodology aimed at enabling the replication of these dialogues through online and in-person meetings. The methodology consists of three moments where reflections on the past, the future and perceptions about how prepared we are guide the discussions. This methodology needs to be refined and tested among food organizations. It includes a written record of the dialogues and a toolbox to initiate discussions, but it needs to be fine-tuned in real contexts.

## **Committee on World Food Security (CFS)**

ETC's Verónica Villa and Soledad Vogliano have been actively co-coordinating the Data Working Group of the Committee on World Food Security's (CFS) Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism (CSIPM), which has been tracking and advocating in relation to the CFS workstream on "Data collection and analysis tools for food security and nutrition". CSIPM has collectively urged that extreme caution is needed given the conflicts of interest entangled in data collection, and in 2023 produced its own Vision Paper. This CSIPM Working Group has been an important space for fostering civil society debate about the implications of digitalizing food and agriculture. We were also delighted that Michael Fakhri, the UN's Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, who chaired the CSF 51 Side Event on Data Governance in Food Systems in October, told us that ETC's "Food Barons 2022" report, which is the first publication in which we began to unpack the implications of digitalization, was his starting point for learning about the issue.



*ETC's Soledad Vogliano discussing ETC's "Food Barons 2022" report with UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food Michael Fakhri at CFS 51, Rome, October 2023.*

ETC Group's Soledad Vogliano attended the Committee on World Food Security (CFS 51) in Rome to challenge the technofix agenda and promote technology democracy at the Food and Agriculture Organization CFS 51. We also helped to co-organize two CSIPM workshops for civil society and social movements, in March, to reflect on key issues related to the impacts of data and digital technologies on food security and food sovereignty in advance of key CFS negotiations taking place at the end of May.



## Prioritizing outreach and narrative analysis around agritech

Our efforts to promote debate around the digitalization of food and agriculture have been moving ahead well. For example, our metanarratives agritech project, started in 2022, included a series of 10 sequential webinars in 2023, which were co-hosted by ETC and A Growing Culture. These were conducted in English, French, Spanish, Thai and Bahasa (as needed), with 30-40 participants from La Via Campesina and the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa.

Our work digging down into and unpacking the implications of the digitalization of food and agriculture with civil society and social movement allies has also been developing well in the regions, including through our work around technology assessment platforms (TAPs) and other networks with allies.

For example, the new African Working Group on the Digitalization of Agriculture, coordinated by ETC's Barbara Ntambirweki, got off to a flying start. Since February, the African Working Group has been discussing the narratives around digital agriculture with a specific focus on the African context. In September it got involved in the Data Workstream of the Committee for World Food Security (CFS) and co-organized a webinar on the Digitalization of Food and Agriculture to discuss why data is an issue for farmers and food systems. This workshop created a bridge between producers on the ground and the multilateral discussions about data, to collectively assess why data is such an important issue in achieving the future of food systems we want. The group held an online civil society webinar on "Implications of AI and Digitalization for African Food and Agriculture" and another in November on "Politics of Data: Understanding the Value of Data to Farmers and Farm Systems". One of the questions raised at these sessions was: How is the climate crisis being used to justify risky geoengineering technologies, and schemes like carbon farming which undermine farmers' autonomy and rights?





These narrative sessions have been instrumental for movements, scientists and researchers to learn and to push back against the onslaught of digital technologies on the continent, and together develop a framework to understand the social, economic, environmental and governance issues raised by digital agrifood technologies in the African context. This process has had the added impact of helping to strengthen interest in and grow AfriTAP, the African technology assessment platform. An AfriTAP General meeting was held in August 2023 to discuss how AfriTAP can track, monitor and assess the development and application of new technologies.

Similar processes have been gaining momentum in other regions and spaces as well. In September, as part of the CSIPM Data Working Group, we co-hosted a civil society webinar about data in food systems in Latin America, as well as the session in Africa. The focus of both was the question: “Why is data an issue for farmers and food systems?”, to be discussed from the perspective of multilateral negotiations and bringing in farmers’ experience of data management.



The North American Digital Agriculture Working Group (NADAWG), currently coordinated by ETC’s Soledad Vogliano, has been similarly building momentum, and held an initial online narrative toolkit webinar in November. NADAWG also launched its [website](#) in 2023.

Numerous events have also been held in Asia, including a series of online webinars and offline fora in the Philippines. In October 2023, ETC Group’s Neth Daño and Nicole Lainez ran a roundtable workshop in the Philippines on AgDigitalisation deployment. At the end of November, we also co-hosted a webinar on AgDigitalization Deployment in SE Asia, with Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung-Manila.

We have been tracking the Global Digital Compact (GDC) negotiating process. The GDC is considered the ‘holy grail’ of the UN General Assembly’s Summit of the Future which will be

convened in New York in September 2024. This summit is expected to define the governance of artificial intelligence (AI) and establish key guardrails on the impacts of digitalization such as its environmental costs. ETC's Neth Daño engaged in a number of online consultations convened by the co-facilitators of the GDC, presenting the positions of the Women and Gender Constituency and of ETC Group. In order to make any potential impact on the outcomes of the closed-door negotiations on the GDC, as an observer organization that has no presence in New York, we work closely with strategic allies from across the world through the Global Digital Justice Forum (GDJF). We aim to participate in events to be organized by global networks of civil society in New York in the lead up to and the sidelines of the Summit of the Future in September 2024 and beyond, to continue engaging in the processes that are expected to be adopted by UN member states.

## **LVC Global Assembly and preparations for the 3rd Nyéléni Global Forum**

In December 2023, we continued to deepen and strengthen our ties with the global peasants' movement when we were invited not only to participate in LVC's 8<sup>th</sup> Global Assembly but to give a keynote address to the assembly. ETC's Verónica Villa's speech was entitled "Peasants are at the heart of the responses to global crises", and it also unpacked the systemic genesis of these crises of hunger, health, climate and nature, poverty and extreme inequality, as well as including ETC's concerns about technofixes such as the digitalization of food and agriculture.



*ETC's Verónica Villa (on the right) gives keynote speech to LVC's 8th Global Assembly, Colombia, December 2023.*

We also joined the editorial board of the Nyéléni Newsletter this year, another way of reaching out to important grassroots constituencies concerned about food sovereignty. In order to introduce the technofix narrative challenge issue, our initial contributions included an article entitled “Red alert: ‘NbS’ and ‘nature tech’ are technofix traps!” We also joined the first outreach meeting to prepare for the 2025 3<sup>rd</sup> Nyéléni Global Forum on Food Sovereignty, Global Justice and Systemic Change, in Rome, in June.

**Find out more:**

👁 Watch: ETC Group’s co-founder and Right Livelihood Laureate Pat Mooney explain the genesis of the Long Food Project.

[www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2349257538587958](https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2349257538587958)

📄 Visit: our new website launched together with IPES-Food, which houses a wide range of resources and tools produced in deep reflection and dialogue with movements fighting for food sovereignty around the world.

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

## Tracking the Food Barons

- We updated our Food Barons research for seven sectors, contributing the results of our research to Adasina Social Capital's Extractive Agriculture Investor Dataset.
- We deepened our research into the digitalization of food and agriculture and the developing links between Big Ag and Big Tech to be part of a new set of communiqués next year.
- We launched a new and popular mini-podcast series, "Who will control the food system?"
- We also invested time in on-the-ground field research, to track market and company activities and narratives.

*Following on from the launch of "Food Barons 2022: Crisis Profiteering, Digitalization and Shifting Power" last year, we focused on updating our research for key sectors and issues, along with an increased emphasis on outreach activities to keep social movements and policy makers informed about these murky but critical trends in corporate concentration, through a range of webinars, presentations and podcasts.*

### Keeping tabs on Big Ag

We updated our research investigating companies in seven sectors (commercial seeds, agrochemicals, synthetic fertilizers, gene-editing companies in food and agriculture, agriculture commodity traders, meat/protein, food and beverage processing) based on 2022 figures. We also participated in a linked panel discussion with primarily investors in the audience in April, on ["Investor Mobilization: Explore the Social Justice Impacts of Extractive Agriculture"](#).

### Outreach on emerging technofixes and corporate concentration narratives

We have also been collectively concentrating on developing our own and allies' capacities to challenge the corporate narratives that are being used to entrench and expand corporate power in the food system, including through current narratives about 'innovation' and digitalization.

In 2023, this included engaging in the UN process towards the planned Summit of the Future in 2024, which includes intergovernmental negotiations on a Global Digital Compact. A key

step in this direction involved reaching out to women's organizations and movements on Food Barons/biodigital convergence in food and agriculture via the 67<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 67), in New York City in March; and preparatory meetings in SE Asia, including the CSW 67 Asia-Pacific CSO Forum and CSW 67 Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation in Bangkok in February, and meetings of the Women's Caucus. During CSW 67, we published and circulated "Ditching techno-patriarchy and the 'permacrisis': What's missing on digitalization in the CSW 67 Zero Draft".

In August, we co-hosted well-attended multi-day civil society workshops covering geoeengineering, corporate capture and carbon farming, and the digitalization of agriculture, in Delhi. These were followed by two further technofix-focused civil society workshops in Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur on the digitalization of food and agriculture.

These all went so well that we were inspired to run a further multi-day workshop in Nairobi, in October, on geoeengineering, the digitalization of agriculture, and the development of the AfriTAP technology assessment platform, on the occasion of the Convention on Biological Diversity's SBSTTA 25 meeting.

## **New "Who Will Control the Food System?" podcasts**

We launched a podcast mini-series, "Who Will Control the Food System?", where we interview key figures working on food systems, creating a space for deep dives into the details of just who's pulling the strings of industrial agriculture, dissecting the latest corporate strategies, and taking inspiration from the peoples and movements fighting back.

The first two of four episodes were launched in 2023. In the first, ETC Group's Neth Daño and Kavya Chowdhry explored a recent trend: the fact that Big Tech and Big Finance corporations – that until now had nothing to do with food – are now pouring money into it. In the second, Canadian social scientist Kelly Bronson, talks about her research into the secretive legal agreements surrounding agricultural big data, including digital tractors.

## **Turning the spotlight on corporate concentration in Asia**

ETC Group and GRAIN co-organized an Asian farmers' dialogue on digitalization in August, with farmers from Sri Lanka, Thailand, Philippines, India and China, to share their experiences of using digital technologies. We collectively reflected on the corporate push behind digital technologies, the promotion of digital technologies by the governments of these countries, and the way in which the use of digital tools can undermine farmers' knowledge and experience.



We participated in the “Political Economy of Agribusiness and Labour Rights in Agricultural Value Systems” and “Labour Rights in Agricultural Value Systems” held at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, in September. We were invited to share our research on corporate concentration in the industrial food system with an audience of graduates, doctoral students and academics of the labour studies department, and union leaders working with farmers and farm labourers. The two-day workshop under JNU’s Global Partnership Network project touched on themes such as contract farming in India, labour rights in agri-value systems, and movements fighting for the realisation of labour rights and farmers’ rights.

In September, we were invited to present at a workshop organized by SEARICE (Southeast Asian Regional Initiative for Community Empowerment) in preparation for the Global Symposium on Farmers Rights in New Delhi, on challenges to the implementation of Farmers’ Rights in the context of the conservation of plant genetic resources (corporate concentration) and new and emerging issues affecting farmers’ rights (digitalization in food and agriculture).

ETC Group was also invited to present at a pre-COP28 Summit in New Delhi, organized by MAUSAM and PAIRVI, on corporate concentration in agriculture and how corporations are using the climate crisis to introduce new technologies, including digitalization, claiming to address the climate crisis but actually increasing their stranglehold over the industrial food system. Participants included civil society organizations working on the climate crisis, pastoralist groups from Rajasthan, India, members from fish workers’ unions and street hawker unions.

#### **Find out more:**

 Listen to our new “Who Will Control the Food System?” podcasts:

“Big tech jumping on the food bandwagon” in conversation with ETC Group’s Kavya Chowdhry and Neth Daño.

[www.etcgroup.org/content/who-will-control-food-system](http://www.etcgroup.org/content/who-will-control-food-system)

“The immaculate conception of data’ and why it’s a problem” with Kelly Bronson, a social scientist at the University of Ottawa, Canada.

[www.etcgroup.org/content/episode-2-our-new-podcast-mini-series](http://www.etcgroup.org/content/episode-2-our-new-podcast-mini-series)

## Horizon scanning with a heart

- The TECLA Network (the network for the social evaluation of technologies in Latin America) conducted participatory technology assessment of biotechnologies with indigenous and peasant communities in Sierra Norte of Oaxaca.
- AfriTAP has been strengthening its presence in international fora and alliances around technology assessment, and outreach to under-informed African governments, eg. in UNFCCC and Africa Climate Week, has been building momentum.
- AfriTAPs co-hosted a pivotal and well-attended three-day series of civil society workshops on emerging technologies in October, in Nairobi.
- Following the establishment of a new multi-disciplinary synthetic biology expert group within the UN CBD, we submitted comments to the CBD on horizon scanning, monitoring and assessment of the most recent technological developments in synthetic biology.

***The hype that there are technofixes for agriculture, such as ‘smart crops’ and ‘gene editing’ is now hitting peasant communities and Indigenous peoples across the planet. Our challenge is to support these communities to assess the pros and cons of biotechnologies based on their own worldview and lived experience.***

## TECLA: technology assessment with Indigenous peoples and local communities

One of our highlights in 2023 was the second stage of discussions on how to develop technology assessment pathways that allow space for the involvement of campesinos, indigenous and local community perspectives, which are generally excluded from formal evaluations of technologies, even though they are at the heart of caring for nature and harmonious, socially just and sustainable integration with human needs. This complements our ongoing work to extend and strengthen the vital work of regional technology assessment platforms, especially in Latin America (TECLA) and Africa (AfriTAP), and in relation to synthetic biology and gene drives.

One of our priorities is the promotion of alternative ways of assessing technologies, bringing in those most likely to be impacted. In April, in Oaxaca, TECLA and UNOSJO, a local organization, held a second in-person gathering discussing technology assessment that allows space for campesinos, indigenous and local community perspectives.

Technology assessment is now part of programs in at least two UN fora: The Committee on Science, Technology and Development (UNCSTD) and the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. The UN CBD's Global Biodiversity Framework and work plan on Synthetic Biology are both being negotiated with language recognizing the importance of technology assessment.

This project and its results are a direct response to the CBD's Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) on Synthetic Biology's 2019 advice on horizon scanning, technology assessment and monitoring modalities to the parties of that convention, which emphasized that "mechanisms for information gathering should seek inputs from a diverse range of actors, facilitate the engagement of Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs), among other major groups".

The workshop focused on assessing the implications of synthetic biology technologies for the milpa growing regions of Mexico. Milpa is based on systems of Indigenous knowledge, cultures and practices that underpin the provision of food and biodiversity in many parts of Latin America. The workshop was co-organized with UNOSJO (the Union of Organizations of the Sierra Juárez de Oaxaca), a platform for the collective management of local resources, and involved over 70 participants from different regions and speaking Indigenous languages alongside Spanish. Participants reached consensus that much more information was required about the potentially damaging effects of new genetic technologies in general, and gene drive organisms in particular, if there was to be an effective discussion on the issue. The findings of the project were presented during the CBD Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice meeting in Nairobi. The findings of the workshops will be also shared in an academic journal.

## **Deepening discussions in Latin and Central America**

The TECLA technology assessment platform in Latin America focused discussions on the themes of digitalization, geoengineering, energy transition and genetic editing in 2023 (and updated its [website](#) on all these topics). The new digitalization working groups that we coordinate in Africa and North America are also gathering momentum very noticeably. The former has already held two online webinars in November (described above); and the latter has been preparing for its first in-person meeting in the USA in February 2024.

## **Fostering African technology politics with AfriTAP partners**

Throughout 2023 we focused on helping to develop and extend AfriTAP/PEMTAfrique, the African Technology Assessment Platform, providing support to AfriTAP partners HOMEF, COPAGEN and CESAO. AfriTAP is a space for social movements to discern and analyse new

technological threats on the horizon and collaborate to intervene in culture and policy processes to properly defend their interests, prevent the worst impacts and strengthen traditional knowledge, innovations and resilience.

In August, the AfriTAP AGM determined that it should develop tools, platforms, questions, criteria and methodologies enabling the pre-emptive assessment of new technologies and demanding Free Prior and Informed Consent, together with people potentially or already affected. There are three priority areas: biotechnology, the digitalization of food and agriculture, and climate geoengineering. For example, on biotechnology the aim is for AfriTAP to facilitate federating organizations active in the fight against the genetic forcing experiments being carried out by the Target Malaria project.

This vision laid the foundations for a well-attended and energizing in-person three-day workshop on geoengineering and agricultural digitalization in Nairobi in October, which considered the potential impacts these technologies may have on climate change, peasant ways of life and food sovereignty and biodiversity. These sessions also unpacked and challenged the corporate configurations and narratives that are driving this highly risky and dangerously distracting ‘technofix’ agenda. The African Working Group on Digitalization in Agriculture also hosted two online events in November considering the digitalization of food and agriculture in Africa, and the politics of data in more detail. ETC Group also continued to support the AfriTAP newsletter, informing wider civil society networks about the work of AfriTAP.

AfriTAP has been active in strengthening its presence in international fora and alliances around technology assessment, and outreach to under-informed African governments is also building momentum as a result of all of these activities. For example, in June 2023, HOMEf explored the avenue of the Bonn Climate Intersessional meetings as a route to reaching out to negotiators to raise awareness about the dangers of GE proposals – and it quickly became clear that some parties knew little or nothing about the dangers lurking in proposals for advancing GE technologies in Africa.

September saw HOMEf exploring the event of the African Climate Week/Summit to follow the proceedings on GE activities and proposals in the region including the recent drive for carbon markets, credits and offsets. Once again, HOMEf engaged with delegates from the different African governments on the topic of genetic engineering, as well as participating in the alternative peoples’ summit, peoples’ climate march and declaration.

In September, the African Working Group on Digitalization got involved in the Data Workstream of the Committee for World Food Security (CFS) and co-organized a webinar on the Digitalization of Food and Agriculture to discuss why data is an issue for farmers and food systems. We are also particularly alert to the fact that the UN Committee on Science

and Technology for Development (UNCSTD) has commissioned Pilot Technology Assessment activities in Africa.

**Find out more:**

 Keep up to date by reading the AfriTAP newsletter (scroll down).

<https://assess.technology/regional-technology-assessment-platforms/africa/>

👁 Watch: Webinar on “Implications of AI and Digitalization for African Food and Agriculture”.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=f34F09LByYc&t=115s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f34F09LByYc&t=115s)

👁 Watch: Webinar on “Politics of Data: Understanding the Value of Data to Farmers and Farm Systems [in Africa]”

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDkGYtAsV0M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDkGYtAsV0M)



## Building our communications muscle

*In 2023, we continued to develop our communications capacity, focusing in particular on building ‘narrative analysis and challenge’ expertise within ETC (as described above, in “Unpacking the Politics of Technology”) and through our publications.*

*We also commissioned five new language versions of our animation, [“Big Brother Comes to the Farm: the digital takeover of food”](#). This is a really accessible way of learning about some of the potential risks associated with corporate-controlled technologies, and having it available in Arabic, Bisaya, Filipino, Hindi and Portuguese will enable us to reach out much more widely, across India, the Middle East and Brazil, in Portuguese-speaking African countries, and in the Philippines.*

### Publications launched in 2023

In March, on the occasion of International Women’s Day and the 67<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 67), we launched our first integrated briefing on the technofix narrative, whilst participating in the event in New York City. “Ditching technopatriarchy and the ‘permacrisis’: What’s missing on digitalization in the CSW 67 Zero Draft” included our first assessment of the environmental impacts of the digitalization of food and agriculture. CSW 67 was an important UN space for this because it was focused on digitalization and the Global Digital Compact that is being negotiated by governments as part of the Summit of the Future process scheduled for 2024. CSW is a new UN space for us, and we were pleased to get a positive response to our input from the women’s caucus there, where we made numerous new contacts. We also attended the SE Asia preparatory conferences for CSW 67 in February/March.

In September, we launched our beautifully designed and content-rich 40-page report [“The Seaweed Delusion: Industrial seaweed will not cool the climate or save nature”](#). As the world scrambles for a climate fix, seaweeds – or ‘macroalgae’ – have been thrust into the limelight. Buoyed up by hype and hundreds of millions of dollars of so called ‘green’ investment, a new ‘blue carbon’ seaweed industry is invading coasts and seas, ostensibly under the umbrella of the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change. The report has been drawing great attention, as research in this area is quite limited. It was very opportune to be able to use it as a tool to explain the problems and potential impacts of industrial seaweed at both the London Convention / London Protocol and the UNFCCC article 6.4 events, since both are considering seaweed-related activities as marine geoengineering. Hard copies in English and Spanish were distributed at the COP 28 climate summit in Dubai.

In November, we co-published our first two major documents pertaining directly to the technofix challenge narrative. These were the outcome of our metanarratives project which provided the springboard for our ongoing narrative work (as mentioned above). The main publication, [“The Politics of Technology”](#), is an invitation from ETC Group and A Growing Culture to explore different ways of thinking about technology and its influence at every level of our lives. It speaks to the growing recognition of the ways that the technologies that we have come to depend on are a significant driver of the interconnected crises we are collectively facing — from ecological collapse to widening inequalities. At the same time, the interventions proposed by powerful governments, corporations, and institutions to address these crises tend to centre new technologies as the answer. Through this publication, we encourage a shift towards the idea that all technology is political.

At the same time, we published [“Autonomy in the Face of Agtech”](#), a set of tools designed to synthesize the insights of social movements and civil society communicators that offers ways to respond quickly and effectively to corporate agtech narratives. It includes an analysis of key agtech industry narratives and opportunities to counter industry narratives, along with a ‘do-it-yourself’ media analysis guide.

# Our 2023 communications roll-call

## Briefings and reports

“Ditching techno-patriarchy and the ‘permacrisis’:  
What’s missing on digitalization in the CSW 67 Zero Draft”

[EN](#)  [ES](#)

“The Seaweed delusion:  
Industrial seaweed will not cool the climate or save nature”

[www.etcgroup.org/content/seaweed-delusion](http://www.etcgroup.org/content/seaweed-delusion)

[EN](#)  [ES](#)  (FR in process)

“The Politics of Technology”, A Growing Culture and ETC

[EN](#)  [ES](#)  [FR](#)

“Autonomy in the Face of Agtech”: Tools for Challenging Industry Narratives,  
A Growing Culture and ETC

[EN](#)  [ES](#)  [FR](#)

## Webinars

“Workshop: The impacts of digitalization on food systems and family farming”

Co-organized with CSIPM Data Working Group, March 15 and 20

[www.csm4cfs.org/workshop-the-impacts-of-digitalization-on-food-systems-and-family-farming/](http://www.csm4cfs.org/workshop-the-impacts-of-digitalization-on-food-systems-and-family-farming/)

“No to geoengineers’ technofix gold rush, yes to Real Zero!”

Side event at the 2023 UNFCCC intersessional meeting in Bonn, in June 2023

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=7O-ulP8qGm4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7O-ulP8qGm4)

“Implications of AI and Digitalization for African Food and Agriculture”

Online webinar, November 2023

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=f34F09LByYc&t=115s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f34F09LByYc&t=115s)

“Autonomy in the face of agtech”

North American Digital Agriculture Working Group, online webinar, November 2023

[nadawg.org/NADAWG-discussion-Autonomy-in-the-Face-of-AgTech](https://nadawg.org/NADAWG-discussion-Autonomy-in-the-Face-of-AgTech)

“Politics of Data: Understanding the Value of Data to Farmers and Farm Systems [in Africa]”

Online webinar, December 2023

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDkGYtAsV0M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDkGYtAsV0M)

## Podcasts

“Who Will Control the Food System? Big tech jumping on the food band wagon”

in conversation with Kavya Chowdhry and Neth Daño

[www.etcgroup.org/content/who-will-control-food-system](http://www.etcgroup.org/content/who-will-control-food-system)

“¿Quién controla lo que comemos?”

Episodio 1, “Los barones de la alimentación”, entrevista con Silvia Ribeiro

<https://www.etcgroup.org/es/content/los-barones-de-la-alimentacion-entrevista-silvia-ribeiro>

“Who Will Control the Food System:

The immaculate conception of data’ and why it’s a problem”?”

with Kelly Bronson, a social scientist at the University of Ottawa, Canada.

[www.etcgroup.org/content/episode-2-our-new-podcast-mini-series](http://www.etcgroup.org/content/episode-2-our-new-podcast-mini-series)

“¿Quién controla lo que comemos?”

Episodio 2, “La cadena agroalimentaria digital”, entrevista a Pepe Godoy

<https://www.etcgroup.org/es/content/la-cadena-agroalimentaria-digital-entrevista-pepe-godoy>

## Animation

Our animation, “Big Brother is Coming to the Farm: the digital takeover of food” is now available in 5 new languages bringing the total to 12 languages - please share!

[Arabic](#) 🌱 [Bahasa Indonesia](#) 🌱 [Bisaya](#) 🌱 [English](#) 🌱  
[Filipino](#) 🌱 [French](#) 🌱 [Hindi](#) 🌱 [Italian](#) 🌱  
[Japanese](#) 🌱 [Portuguese](#) 🌱 [Spanish](#) 🌱 [Swahili](#)

## New website

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

Co-hosted by ETC and IPES-Food

Here you can find collected together new resources and tools,  
to strengthen people-led food systems,  
in English, Spanish and French