



# ETC Group Annual Report 2023–2024

September 2023 – August 2024



## **About ETC Group**

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.

This Annual Report reflects ETC Group's activities and outputs during the fiscal year, spanning 1 September 2023 through 31 August 2024.

## **Acknowledgements**

ETC Group is grateful to its members for their trust, engagement and guidance. We also acknowledge the funders, partners and movement allies whose support enabled this work, as well as the Board of Trustees and the wider ETC team and collaborators who made it possible.

*Front page: "Trojan Horses" report cover art, Garth Laidlaw*

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## Message from the Chair

In 2023 and 2024, feelings of crisis and pessimism deepened globally, as the world watched aghast at the genocide unfolding in Palestine, the ongoing tragedy of war between Russia and the Ukraine, and the failure of governments to get to grips with the challenges and impacts of biodiversity and climate crises. Yet in ETC Group we remain optimistic that change must and will come, and come soon: surely the response to this dire present is a more hopeful future that we can collectively construct in resistance to corporate-controlled techno-industrial systems and the technological manipulation of life and ecosystems.

With a view to highlighting and promoting a systematic analysis of the issues that trouble ETC Group, we stepped up our efforts to develop, discuss and generally promote a collaborative challenge to deeply problematic corporate narratives around technology together with social movement allies and civil society. For us, this meant prioritising both targeted interventions in a range of policy-making fora and investing in capacity-building activities in various spaces, unpacking the tricks and tactics corporations use to generate profit rather than well-being, even in times of global crisis.

The corporate narrative strategy is to shut down any solution that doesn't have a profit margin and cannot be sold. They do this by dangling the alluring line that everything can stay the same if we just invent magic bullets to manage carbon or protect the right species. They argue that they just need more time and resources to develop these solutions. But we do not have more time and we already have the solutions – the challenge is to get ourselves unstuck from this corporate story.

This is all seen most clearly in the fields of geoengineering and the ongoing digitalisation of food and agriculture, including under the deceptive banner of 'Nature-based Solutions' and the 'nature tech' narratives. These are all moving up the UN agenda with alarming rapidity, even though there are so many serious implications for people and the environment in terms of climate change, biodiversity and food systems.

We can stop corporate capture though! Notable wins in 2023 and 2024, achieved together with our allies, included:

- Successfully lobbying governments to stop the potential inclusion of geoengineering as a recognised field of activity within the CBD Global Biodiversity Framework.
- Pressing the International Overshoot Commission, that saw themselves forced to include some critical language about risks and precaution in relation to geoengineering and to include a call for a ban on Solar Radiation Management (SRM) deployment and large-scale outdoor experiments and their severe risks of transboundary harm.
- Engaging with key governments such as those of Bolivia and Mexico, supporting them to take a stand on climate justice and against market-based solutions at UNFCCC COP 28 in UAE (although ultimately the outcome of COP 28 was damaging, and we know that this battle continues)

- Working with allies to support Global South governments to successfully stop a resolution on geoengineering at the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA 6), in March 2024
- Together with allies challenging Harvard University's flagship solar geoengineering experiment, the SCoPEX project, which had been intended to test Stratospheric Aerosol Injection, but had to close.

We also continued to deepen our research into, and outreach and collaboration around, the environmental and socioeconomic consequences of digitalising food and agriculture systems and corporate concentration in food systems. At the same time, we have been able to continue to prioritise and enhance our collaborative work with social movements and other allies, including La Via Campesina, GRAIN, African Food Sovereignty Alliance, the International Panel of Experts in Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food), regional technology assessment platforms such as Red TECLA, the Hands off Mother Earth (HOME) Alliance against geoengineering, the Biodiversidad Alliance, the Committee on World Food Security's (CFS) Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism (CSIPM) and the CBD Alliance.

This has been enhanced through several very well-attended in-person civil society workshops and teach-ins on the digitalization of agriculture, geoengineering and the corporate technofix agenda generally, most recently in Nairobi in 2023 and 2024. These activities have helped us to co-author, together with A Growing Culture, a new briefing on "The Politics of Technology" and a key set of tools for narrative strategy, "Autonomy in the Face of Agtech".

This area of our work aims to progressively and collaboratively build our collective capacity to unpack the powerful corporate narratives that are being used to drive the corporate technofix agenda in numerous different intergovernmental spaces at present. We are particularly concerned that the rise of agtech poses a significant challenge to movements struggling for food sovereignty everywhere. This is critical in arenas such as the CBD which is mandated to consider diverse perspectives from a range of impacted social actors for its policy decision-making in relation to environmentally hazardous technologies such as synthetic biology.

We are also progressing towards defining the institutional structures for collective management in our ongoing organizational development process. We have built on the outcome of our discussions over the last four years to adopt clear mechanisms for decision-making, and we received valuable guidance from our Board of Trustees from their discussions in Rome in October 2023.

With gratitude,

Niclas Hallström

President of the Board of Trustees

## **Organizational Development: Crossing the bridge**

Building ETC Group's operational and development capacities, as we move through our 'Bridge' organizational development process, continues to be an overriding priority, as we seek to complete the process in 2024 resulting in a transition to a stronger, more equitable and more effective organization, potentially in the form of a co-governed Global South-aligned collective. Our internal organizational structure continues to develop and change as we move through our 'Bridge' years. During the Bridge, which started in 2020, we have reviewed our mission, vision and values while evaluating and changing our organizational capabilities and ways of functioning in a more horizontal fashion. Our goal of decolonising has included a significant shift in the geographic spread of our staff. As staff in the North have left, we have intentionally recruited new staff in the South wherever possible. As of mid-2024 all our programme staff are now located in the Global South, with finance and admin staff located in Canada, and communications staff in England.

## 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.

We ran two workshops in Nairobi, on the occasion of the CBD’s SBSTTA meeting in October 2023, and again in March 2024, when participants also mapped emerging technologies in Africa. We adapted our previous online workshops to offer a new and quicker way of working collaboratively in person, in groups, to analyse 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 the 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 to maximise the impacts we can deliver as a small NGO. The Nairobi meetings also helped to strengthen the growing AfriTAP technology assessment platform.



*Participants analysing corporate geoenvironmental narratives, Nairobi workshop, October 2023*



*Participants mapping emerging technologies in Africa, Nairobi workshop, March 2024*

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).

## **Earth Manipulation: 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.
- Our opposition to a resolution on geoengineering at the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA 6), in March 2024, was vindicated when it was withdrawn.
- Together with allies, our collective efforts to stop Harvard University's flagship solar geoengineering experiment, the SCoPEX project, succeeded and the project was finally closed down in March 2024.

The years 2023 and 2024 were characterised 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 maximise 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 COP28 Coalition, and Demand Climate Justice.

Perhaps the biggest of these networks, and the most widespread, is Climate Action Network International (CAN-I), which has some 1,300 organizational members worldwide. At CAN, we mainly worked through the Science Policy Working Group and have successfully fostered a process to develop a new shared policy position on marine geoengineering. This is a vital step in the move to protect ocean ecosystems and their critical role in maintaining the planet's climate.

We continued to play an important role in supporting the HOME Alliance on geoengineering, especially in relation to its core function (especially during the changeover of staff and management personnel), and by participating actively in several of its working and regional groups, including the Legal and Policy Working Group, the Marine Geoengineering Working Group, the North American Working Group, and several project and thematic working groups, as well as various regional Asian and Latin American meetings. We also participated and helped to organize a HOME in-person strategy meeting in Bonn, in June 2024. Besides organizational support, we continued contributing substantive research and information and proposing strategies for action; and maintaining and updating the Geoengineering Monitor website, which is the main source of information on geoengineering for civil society.



*Engaging in Home Alliance strategy meeting, Bonn, June 2024*

A key new focus area during this time has been our research into marine geoengineering, published in September 2023 in “The Seaweed Delusion: industrial seaweed will not cool the climate or save nature”, and work around this issue within HOME, including at a HOME webinar in May 2024, in advance of SBSTTA 26, “Geoengineering the ocean is not a solution to climate change”.

### ***UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)***

Nevertheless, this threat continues, and we have seen supporters of geoengineering increasingly dominating UNFCCC spaces. During 2023 there were important developments in the negotiations, when Bolivia led the LMDCs in a call 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 Bolivia, Mexico and other Global South countries in relation to the relevant ‘Article 6’ clauses during the summit.

Overall, however, COP 28 in November 2023 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 and civil society participants don’t yet understand that Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) is a fraud, that distracts from the real solutions to climate change that are so urgently needed.

We kept up the pressure around geoengineering in 2024, at the Bonn intersessional meetings in June, which included participating at the Oceans and Climate Change dialogue and delivering in this forum the position of the network Demand Climate Justice. We also participated in a press conference of the HOME Alliance side event during the second week of the negotiations, on “Geoengineering: a dangerous climate fix”. We raised our concerns that geoengineering is a risky facade that is being used to divert attention away from the urgent need to address the root causes of the climate crisis.



*Silvia Ribeiro & Neth Daño, side event panel, “Article 6 on the ground: real solutions instead of dangerous distractions”, COP 28, December*



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



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

### ***International Overshoot Commission***

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 2023, 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 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)***

ETC worked with 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 recognised by governments, thereby strengthening it in the run up to the CBD negotiations in COP 16 (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 (meaning that geoengineering would definitely be on the agenda of COP 16 in 2024).

We also sent a submission on synthetic biology to the CBD's multidisciplinary Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Synthetic Biology in November 2023. We kept up the pressure in 2024, at SBSTTA 26 in Nairobi, especially voicing our concerns about the likelihood that marine geoengineering could devastate sensitive marine ecosystems. As well as participating in press and side events we were actively engaged in all CBD Alliance activities. In particular, we spoke in plenary on marine geoengineering, for the CBD Alliance (CBDA), and the statement was supported by Fiji, Egypt, Venezuela and Uruguay. We similarly delivered the CBDA statement on synbio. Ultimately, we collectively managed to secure good bracketed text in relation to the dangers of geoengineering which is vital to our objective of having the CBD explicitly reemphasize its moratorium on geoengineering, such that other UN spaces are forced to attend to it.

### ***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 prioritised 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 summarising 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 2023, in which they state 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 Environment Assembly (UNEA 6) and 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. We had anticipated that the issue of geoengineering, especially solar geoengineering, would probably appear as a key point of discussion at the 6th UN Environment Assembly (UNEA 6) in February 2024, and were accordingly involved in some regional preparations. We were correct, and it was important that we were able to participate in both and the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum held just prior to UNEA. Switzerland tabled a resolution on Solar Radiation Modification (SRM), ostensibly as a neutral call to constitute an expert group on SRM. But whether it was intentional

or not, such a group could act as a Trojan horse for the advancement of solar geoengineering, creating a base for geoengineering advocates to set themselves as the main reference in global discussions on SRM.

Countries like Canada, the US and Saudi Arabia pushed for gathering information that includes the potential “benefits” of SRM, also specifying that this information would come from sources, agencies and programs that are mostly led by geoengineering advocates. In contrast, the African group, endorsed by Colombia and other Global South countries, called for a mechanism to ensure the non-use of solar geoengineering. Additionally, they pointed out the need to request and compile knowledge on SRM from governments, Indigenous peoples, local communities, civil society and other stakeholders, accessible to all countries. It ultimately became clear that the difference between these two calls for information was too great. The refusal of the US, among others, to include the precautionary principle, while at the same time promoting the advancement of research into solar geoengineering, forced the proposal to be withdrawn. We counted this as a significant victory.

- 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)
- 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)
- Read: our briefing for delegates at SBSTTA 26, May 2024: [www.etcgroup.org/content/protect-coastal-and-marine-biodiversity-geoengineering](http://www.etcgroup.org/content/protect-coastal-and-marine-biodiversity-geoengineering)

## **Digitalization of Food and Agriculture: Claiming back food systems, unravelling the agtech digital narrative**

- Our Long Food Project with IPES-Food launched a new website, [longfoodproject.org](http://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 8th 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.
- Updating the iconic research of ETC Group, *Who Will Feed Us*, which we intend to publish with a complementary paper entitled *Why Industry Can't Feed Us*, focusing on the questions challenging the industrial food systems.
- The dialogues in North America, Asia, Africa and Latin America about the impacts of digitalization in food systems deepened more. We have a more precise image of how "digitalization" of food and agriculture occurs in reality.
- ETC Group is collaborating with La Via Campesina, GRAIN and other allies in the narrative dispute about "agroecology".
- The defense of real peasant agroecology will happen especially in the processes towards the Nyleni III Forum on Food Sovereignty. ETC is participating in the regional processes.

Throughout 2023 and 2024 we showcased solutions and spoke out repeatedly, together with our allies, about the trickiest issues of 21st 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 2023 and 2024 we have been building 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.



In 2023 we completed a further stage of our Long Food Project, with the launch of a new website 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, not only responding urgently to 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.



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

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 8th Global Assembly but to give a keynote address to the assembly. ETC's Verónica Villa's keynote speech was entitled "Peasants are at the heart of the responses to global crises". Her speech also unpacked the systemic genesis of these crises of hunger, health, climate and nature, poverty and extreme inequality, and included ETC's concerns about technofixes such as the digitalisation of food and agriculture. Kavya Chowdhry also participated in the Asia Pacific Regional Consultation.



*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'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's 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 digitalising 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 2023, told us that ETC's "Food Barons 2022" report, which is the first publication in which we began to unpack the implications of digitalisation, was his starting point for learning about the issue. 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.

Our work digging down into and unpacking the implications of the digitalisation 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 Digitalisation of Agriculture, coordinated by ETC's Barbara Ntambirweki, got off to a flying start. In September 2023 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.

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. In November 2023 it held an online narrative toolkit webinar; and followed this in January 2024 with another, on "Technofixes and toxics: understanding pesticides in digital agriculture", co-hosted with PANNA and CREPPA.



This was followed by NADAWG's first in-person event in California in May 2024, which included farmers groups and funders, where a wide-ranging discussion took place. The aim is to ramp NADAWG up as a co-learning space to take advantage of the wealth of knowledge held by the network and through which participants can provide support to each other's work.



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 2023, we also co-hosted a webinar on AgDigitalization Deployment in SE Asia, with Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung-Manila. Another in-person co-hosted event that we held in the Philippines, in March 2024, focused on “Digitalisation in Agriculture: A problem or solution for resource poor farmers?”; and the most recent, a two-day forum in May 2024, which included small-scale farmers, technicians, government employees and NGOs, considered “Digitalized agriculture: the Future of Farming without Farmers?”.



*Forum on digitalization of agriculture, in Davao, Philippines, March 2024.*

We have also been tracking the Global Digital Compact (GDC) negotiating process, including at the UN Civil Society Conference in Nairobi in May 2024. 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 expect 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 and beyond to continue engaging in processes that are expected to be adopted by UN member-states.



*Kavya Chowdhry speaking at the Asia Pacific Regional Consultation on Nyéléni 3, June 2024*

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, we chose to take our editing board ‘turn’ editing the December 2023 edition, which focused on multilateral policy processes. We contributed an introductory editorial and our own specific contribution, an article entitled “Red alert: ‘NbS’ and ‘nature tech’ are technofix traps!” We also joined the first outreach meeting to prepare for the 2025 III Nyéléni Global Forum, in Rome, in June.

- Read: Our 2024 report “Trojan Horses on the Farm: challenging the digitalisation of the agrifood chain”: [www.etcgroup.org/content/trojan-horses-farm](http://www.etcgroup.org/content/trojan-horses-farm) Read: the sequel, “Behind Sugar and Spice and Everything Nice: the environmental impacts of digitalization” [www.etcgroup.org/content/behind-sugar-and-spice-and-everything-nice](http://www.etcgroup.org/content/behind-sugar-and-spice-and-everything-nice)
- 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 digitalisation 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, and we submitted the updated the Extractive Ag list to contribute to the Extractive Ag screen in March 2024.

### ***Outreach on emerging technofixes and corporate concentration narratives***

Together with ETC Group's digitalisation program and communications team, we have also been concentrating on developing our own and allies' capacities to collectively 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 digitalisation. 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. In October and March, we co-hosted well-attended multi-day civil society workshops on geoeengineering and the digitalisation of agriculture in Nairobi.



*Barbara Ntambirweki & the Ambassador of Zambia, Global Digital Compact co-facilitator, UN Civil Society Conference, Nairobi, May 2024*

### **New “Who Will Control the Food System?” podcasts**

We launched a podcast mini-series, “Who Will Control the Food System?”, where we interviewed 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.

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. Canadian social scientist Kelly Bronson, talked about her research into the secretive legal agreements surrounding agricultural big data, including ‘digital’ tractors. In our third episode, Sagari R Ramdas, a member of the Food Sovereignty Alliance in India, described the already unfolding impact that these disruptive technologies are having in indigenous territories in India.

In the fourth episode, Camilla Moreno, an independent researcher who works with social movements in Brazil and across Latin America, linked these developments to the false technofixes being presented as solutions to climate change. In Brazil the “war against climate change” is being manipulated by the financial sector and agribusiness to impose digitalization on farms, big and small alike, at an even faster pace than in the US. Carbon is at the centre of this “new climate economy”, and it is digitalisation that is supposedly enabling invisible, intangible carbon to be measured and thereby transformed into a commodity that can be bought and traded.

### **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 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 only 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!  
[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)
  - "Disruptive digital food and ag techs invading indigenous territories in India" with Sagari R Ramdas, a member of the Food Sovereignty Alliance in India.  
[www.etcgroup.org/content/disruptive-digital-food-and-ag-techs-invading-indigenous-territories-india](http://www.etcgroup.org/content/disruptive-digital-food-and-ag-techs-invading-indigenous-territories-india)
  - "Growing carbon is not like growing watermelons: the seductive trap of carbon farming and digital tech", with Camila Moreno, an independent researcher who works with social movements in Brazil and across Latin America.  
[www.etcgroup.org/content/growing-carbon-not-growing-watermelons-seductive-trap-carbon-farming-and-digital-tech](http://www.etcgroup.org/content/growing-carbon-not-growing-watermelons-seductive-trap-carbon-farming-and-digital-tech)

## Horizon scanning with a heart: participatory technology assessment

- AfriTAP has been strengthening its presence in international fora and alliances around technology assessment, and outreach to under-informed African governments.
- 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 synbio 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.

The TECLA technology assessment platform in Latin America focused discussions on the themes of digitalization, geoengineering, energy transition and genetic editing in 2023 (and was able to update its website on all these topics). The new digitalisation 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 next year.

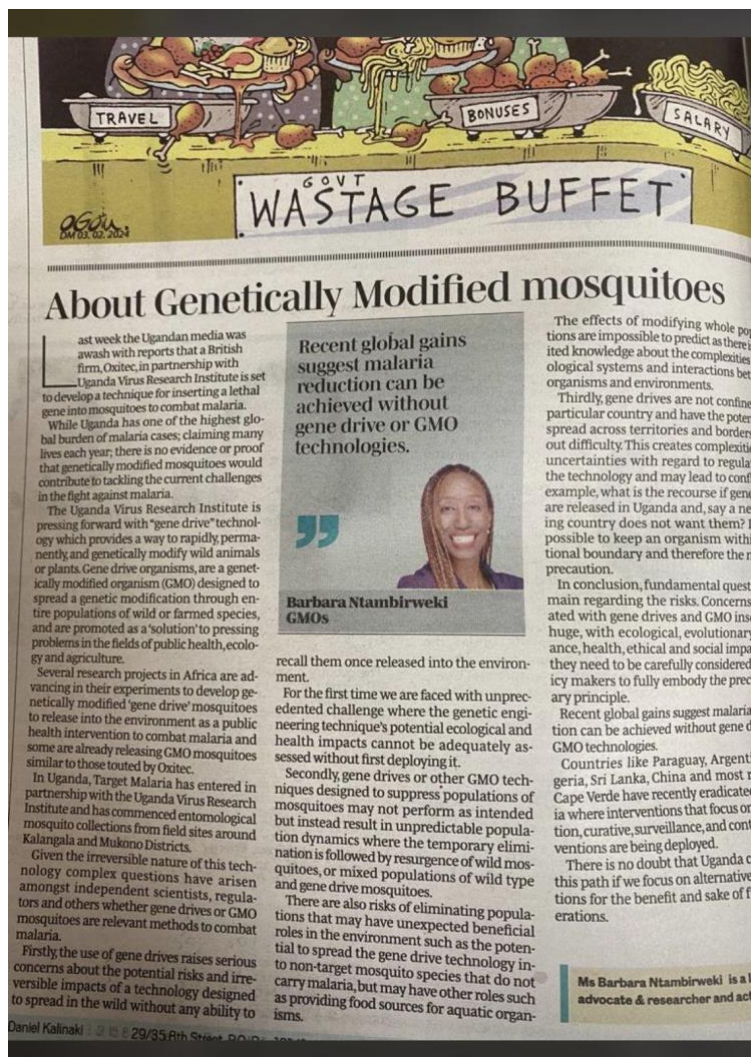
Throughout 2023 we focused on helping to develop and extend AfriTAP/PEMТАfrique, the African Technology Assessment Platform, providing support to AfriTAP partners HOMEF, COPAGEN and CESAО. AfriTAP is a space for social movements to discern and analyse new technological threats on the horizon and collaborate to intervene in culture and policy processes to properly defend their interests, disarm the worst impacts and strengthen traditional knowledge, innovations and resilience.

AfriTAP’s vision laid the foundations for a well-attended and energising 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 Digitalisation in Agriculture also hosted two online events in November considering the digitalisation 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.



*Participants mapping emerging technologies in Africa, Nairobi workshop, March 2024*

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. 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 GE, as well as participating in the alternative peoples' Summit, peoples' climate march and declaration. In September, the African Working Group on Digitalisation 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".



ETC's Barbara Ntambirweki spreads the news about gene drives in Ugandan press, February 2024

- 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” (workshop November 2023): [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 and 2024, 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 working to improve our outreach and media work. We evaluated our communications and found that while communication outputs within our projects was generally well funded, creative and successful, as can be seen from the many reports and briefings we were publishing, we remained weak in areas relating to English language media (Spanish is good), outreach, website and domains management and communications admin. There was also little capacity for any more joined-up cross- programme communications.

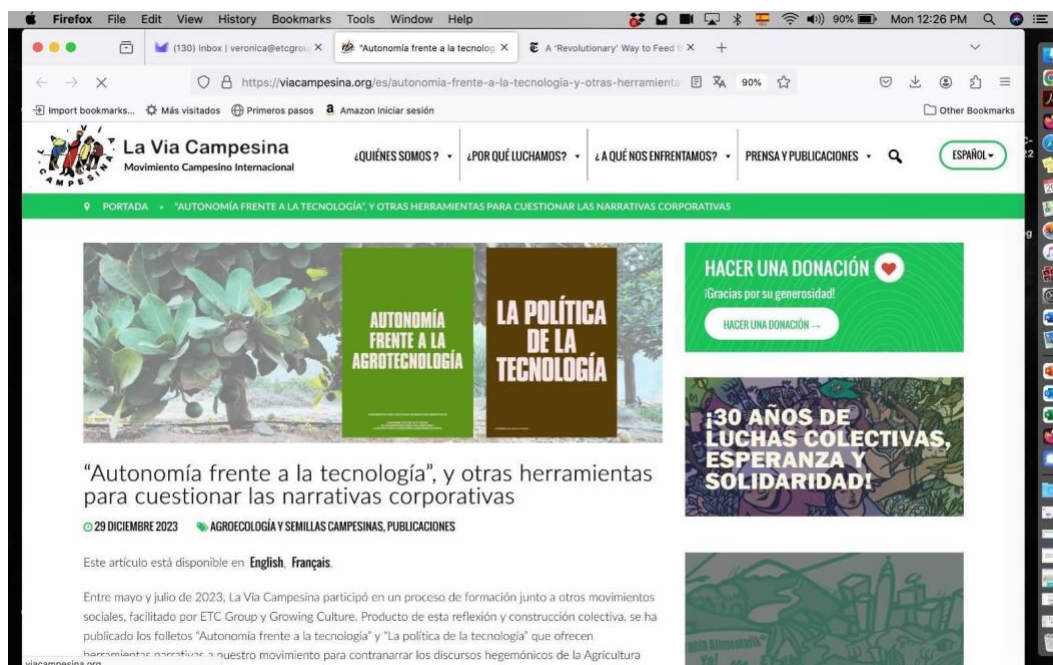
To address this we:

- successfully secured dedicated core communications funding, focused on narratives
- invested in both of our communications staffers participating in Social Movement Technologies’ Digital Campaigning Certificate training course, April-June 2024
- hired in additional external support on press work and digital content development
- improved our IT support and undertook a programme of remediation and renewal of the numerous digital spaces that ETC had acquired over the years

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 COP28 climate summit in Dubai, and we are about to seek quotes for its translation into French. 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 synthesise 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.



*ETC and AGC’s publications on the politics of technology shared on La Via Campesina’s website*

These two documents will be fundamental components of our work in all the spaces we will be reaching out to civil society in. We have therefore decided to print a significant number of them, to last throughout the year. Initially we will print, for each document, 1,000 in English, 1,000 in Spanish and 500 in French (and possibly in Swahili).

In April 2024, we published our first report on the digitalization of food and farming, “Trojan Horses on the Farm: challenging the digitalization of the agrifood chain”. Our research shows that digitalization is progressively entering farms, big and small, now in areas of the Global South as well as in the Global North! It comes disguised as an alluring high tech input, a Trojan farmhouse, with fleets of drones, smart ‘data-driven’ tractors, fancy apps and sensors. But in the belly of the beast lies the huge agribusiness corporate sector which has joined forces with the Big Data giants to strengthen its grip over our food systems. This report is offered as a resource to social movements, providing information and perspectives to help foster exploration of these complex issues. We find that the implementation of digital technologies across a wide range of agriculture and food sectors risks being deeply disruptive, as many farmers, food producers and food workers are likely to find themselves unexpectedly impacted. We followed this with a deeper dive into one particular aspect that we touched on in “Trojan Horses”, publishing “Behind Sugar and Spice and Everything Nice: the environmental impacts of digitalization”.

With digital technologies multiplying around us, Big Tech’s proponents would like us to believe that data, silicon chips, data storage “clouds”, and the other components of the digital realm –

including the batteries that power everything – are made of sugar and spice and everything nice. But nothing could be further from the truth: data is neither ethereal nor harmless. It is resource intensive, made up of sand, water, coal and harmful chemicals, and it generates toxic wastes. The blurry imagery of the fluffy “cloud” darkens the scary reality of massive data centres siphoning off resources, contaminating nature, and endangering people’s livelihoods and food security. In “Behind Sugar and Spice and Everything Nice”, ETC Group dissects the digitalization process and reveals its extractive, polluting and material nature.

We have also been able to commission 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.

Our 2023-2024 communications roll call Briefings and reports

- “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)
- “The Politics of Technology”, A Growing Culture and ETC
- “Autonomy in the Face of Agtech”: Tools for Challenging Industry Narratives, A Growing Culture and ETC
- “Briefing for UNEA6 Delegates on Solar Radiation Modification”
- “Trojan Horses on the Farm: challenging the digitalization of the agrifood chain” (ES in process)
- Protect coastal and marine biodiversity from geoengineering: Briefing for delegates at SBSTTA 26
- Behind Sugar and Spice and Everything Nice: the environmental impacts of digitalization” EN (ES in process)
- “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 <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=iDkGYtAsVOM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDkGYtAsVOM)
- “Technology and Toxics: understanding pesticides in digital agriculture” North American Digital Agriculture Working Group Online webinar, January 2024 <https://nadawg.org/NADAWG-discussion-Technofixes-Toxics>



Participants at a digitalized agriculture forum in the Philippines, co-hosted with METSA, playing ETC's game, "Disruption!", May 2024

#### 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)
- "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)
- "Who Will Control the Food System: Disruptive digital food and ag techs invading indigenous territories in India" with Sagari R Ramdas, a member of the Food Sovereignty Alliance in India. [www.etcgroup.org/content/disruptive-digital-food-and-ag-techs-invading-indigenous-territories-india](http://www.etcgroup.org/content/disruptive-digital-food-and-ag-techs-invading-indigenous-territories-india)
- "Who Will Control the Food System: Growing carbon is not like growing watermelons: the seductive trap of carbon farming and digital tech", with Camila Moreno, an independent researcher who works with social movements in Brazil and across Latin America. [www.etcgroup.org/content/growing-carbon-not-growing-watermelons-seductive-trap-carbon-farming-and-digital-tech](http://www.etcgroup.org/content/growing-carbon-not-growing-watermelons-seductive-trap-carbon-farming-and-digital-tech)

#### 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, Tagalog, 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.