

Developing countries need to wake up to the risks of new technologies

Technological advances associated with the fourth industrial revolution – including artificial intelligence – allow the automation of an increasingly wide array of processes in increasingly interactive and sophisticated ways. These advances will likely give rise to many opportunities for economic and social development in developing countries, for instance by increasing food production.

By Ralph Hamann



Photo by Octavian Rosca on Unsplash

Technological advances associated with the fourth industrial revolution – including artificial intelligence – allow the automation of an increasingly wide array of processes in increasingly interactive and sophisticated ways. These advances will likely give rise to many opportunities for economic and social development in developing countries, for instance by increasing food production.

But the new technologies also involve important risks, which have special significance in developing countries. They may build upon and exacerbate existing inequalities – both within developing countries as well as between developing and more developed regions.

Three of these inter-related risks are worsening unemployment, increasing concentration of economic power and wealth, and the spread of biases in influential algorithms. They will manifest in different ways and require different responses in diverse contexts. A cross-cutting problem is that too few developing country governments are giving these risks serious attention.

Risk 1: Worsening unemployment

The concern that new technologies especially artificial intelligence – will lead to widespread job losses has been widely discussed. Of course, the fear that new technologies replace workers is an old one. But it's been pointed out that historically new technologies have often given rise to more new jobs than the ones that have been automated away.