



#EnablingRights

The Transformative Potential of Digital to
Enable People's Rights

"A summary preview for participants in the Brussels and New York discussions"

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About GeSI

The Global e-Sustainability Initiative (GeSI) is a strategic partnership of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector committed to creating and promoting digital technologies and practices that foster economic, environmental and social sustainability. Formed in 2001, GeSI's vision is a sustainable world through responsible, ICT-enabled transformation. GeSI fosters global and open cooperation, informs the public of its members' voluntary actions to improve their sustainability performance, and promotes technologies that foster sustainable development.

GeSI enjoys a diverse and global membership, representing around 30 of the world's leading ICT companies and partners with over 30 global business and international organizations such as the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), the World Resources Forum Association (WRFA), the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), the Responsible Business Alliance (RBA), the Centre for Sustainable Consumption and Production (CSCP), The Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (IDDRI), the Global Climate Forum (GCF), the World Green Building Council (WGBC), the Flemish Institute for Technological Research (VITO) and the International Energy Agency (IEA) - as well as a range of international stakeholders committed to ICT sustainability objectives to share and develop ideas, launch joint initiatives, and collaborate on a broad range of sustainability projects. These partnerships help shape GeSI's global vision regarding the evolution of the ICT sector, and how it can best meet the challenges of sustainable development.

For more information, see www.gesi.org.

The **Global e-Sustainability Initiative (GeSI)**, as a representative of many leading companies in the ICT industry, has a mission to **drive the global transformation to a smarter, more sustainable world with digital solutions at its core**. One of the core focuses of GeSI’s work is to develop the frameworks, tools, policies, and processes **to help enable the global ICT industry to embed considerations of human rights as part of core, responsible business practices**. Continuing the global dialogue related to the ICT industry’s human rights-related business practices and business relationships is essential. While the industry has made progress, its journey needs to continue forward.

To date, conversations about the ICT industry’s impact on human rights have focused on its business practices (i.e. adopting policies consistent with human rights standards and stakeholders’ expectations) and relationships (i.e. encouraging entities it interacts with to adopt such policies); a wide number of initiatives and partnerships already exist on these two “pillars” of action.

We believe it is now the right time to add a third pillar to this conversation: **the potential of ICT to support the efforts of those working to protect human rights** such as NGOs, law enforcement, grant-makers, activists, social entrepreneurs, social innovators, government agencies, companies, communities, and individuals themselves.

Within the above context, later this year and following a very participative consultation process with civil society and interested stakeholders, GeSI will **publish a report** addressing the potential of the ICT industry to apply its innovative technology to support human rights.

The report suggests that the ICT industry, in collaboration with all interested stakeholders, should take action to develop and apply what could be called **“technology for human rights”**. This can be defined as the application of new or existing digital solutions used for the express purpose of any one of the following:

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| Enabling individuals to access resources essential for their development (such as health and education); | Supporting efforts to identify and document human rights violations; |
| Supporting efforts to anticipate and prevent human rights abuses/violations from occurring; | Supporting efforts to stop human rights violations; |
| Enhancing safety and security that protects the rights of individuals and those working to defend human rights. | |

ICT can be applied constructively to help address and arrest human rights abuses. Yet, its potential in this respect is under-utilized. ICT has the capability to scale up technology solutions supporting a range of specific needs that human rights defenders have, such as:

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| Civic Tech: digital solutions that help citizens hold public officials to account; | Data analysis and visualization to identify and forecast human rights violations; |
| Human rights data collection and management; | Human rights data security to ensure the privacy of information collected, shared, and used by defenders of human rights; |
| Engaging digital and high-speed communication networks for human rights; | Applying fintech to support human rights (such as ensuring that aid funds reach intended beneficiaries); |
| Applying digital technology for human rights forensics and monitoring. | |

These technologies can be applied to help support a variety of human rights issues related to civil-political and socio-economic human rights, as defined below.

Human Rights Categories¹

ICT can be used as a supportive tool in efforts to protect, respect, and remedy at least two overlapping categories of human rights in particular.

1	Civil-political human rights include norms pertaining to:	2	Socio-economic human rights include norms pertaining to the provision of goods meeting:
	Physical and civil security (for example, no torture, slavery, inhumane treatment, arbitrary arrest; equality before the law)		Social needs (e.g., nutrition, shelter, health care, education)
	Individual, civic, and political liberties and empowerments (for example, freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; freedom of assembly and voluntary association; political participation in one's society).		Economic needs (for example, work and fair wages, an adequate living standard, a social security net).

¹ SUNY Levin Institute, "Three Generations of Human Rights," <http://www.globalization101.org/three-generations-of-rights/> (retrieved on April 21, 2018).

The following table identifies where ICT has great potential to support these types of human rights.

1a	Civil-political human rights related to physical and civil security	1b	Civil-political human rights related to individual, civic, and political liberties and empowerments	2	Socio-economic human rights
	Protecting child safety online		Supporting labor rights and responsible supply chain practices		Enabling access to resources essential for development
	Preventing human trafficking		Protecting land rights and identity		
	Preventing injustice and corruption		Protecting privacy and freedom of expression		
	Protecting safety and security		Strengthening the rights of citizenship		

For example:

The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) has developed since 2004 a capacity building programme enabling indigenous people to use ICT as a tool to leverage their communities' social and economic development and to promote, preserve, and protect indigenous cultures;



The Child Protection Task Team of the European Telecommunications Network Operators' Association (ETNO) has created an online knowledge base to raise awareness of risks, proactively tackle threats, and make cyberspace and ICT services safer for the younger generations;



Fujitsu partnered with the Tohoku University International Research Institute of Disaster Science (IRIDeS) and the United Nations Development Programme to build and operate a new global database in the Global Centre for Disaster Statistics (GCDS), aiming to reduce the damage caused by major natural disasters around the world;



Deutsche Telekom has developed and launched the careers4refugees.de portal. Large and small enterprises can post their job vacancies free of charge on the site, which is geared specifically to refugees;



Verizon's Innovative Learning Schools initiative provides schools with next-gen technology and tech-infused curricula preparing students for the tech-dependent jobs of the future;



Samsung's Relúmíno, meaning light up again, is an innovative visual aid application working in conjunction with the Gear VR created by Samsung's C-Lab to enhance vision for people with low vision;



A consortium led by the social R&D enterprise Benentech has developed Martus, a free, open-source software platform featuring strong encryption and cloud storage to gather and protect sensitive data, which provides security to human rights defenders when collecting, storing, and transmitting data;

In Syria, the human rights technology "Syria Tracker" found that approximately 23,000 children had been left unvaccinated for critical diseases. Syria Tracker's analysis led the NGO Save the Children to return to the region to provide needed inoculations;

The social enterprise LaborVoices uses smart phones to crowdsource information enabling companies to monitor the impact of their suppliers on the rights of workers.

For the ICT industry, the upcoming report also defines a clear business case to help develop and apply technology solutions for human rights. The core elements of the business case include the ability of human rights technology to:

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| 1 | Help address systemic risks that affect an entire industry or geographic market; | 2 | Support long-term commercial growth ; | 3 | Enhance revenue ; |
| 4 | Support a company's approach to sustainability and corporate responsibility both in terms of risk reduction and revenue generation ² ; | 5 | Help to ensure an environment of trust and responsibility . | | |

² Steve Rochlin, Richard Bliss, Stephen Jordan, and Cheryl Kiser, "Project ROI: Defining the Competitive and Financial Advantages of Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability." 2015: IO Sustainability.

For technology to reach its potential to enable human rights, the ICT industry will need to collaborate with a broad range of stakeholders to address key challenges posing risks to the effective deployment of digital solutions, such as the vital need:

To understand the double-sided nature of technology. The same instruments can support human rights or the violation thereof, depending on the way users apply them;

To understand that human rights technology is not a panacea. It has the potential to be a powerful enabler of human rights but not a determinant by itself.

For collaboration across the private, public, and civil sectors;

For vigilance by leaders across business and civil society to ensure that technology is used responsibly;

The GeSI report discusses the key trends that will either support or inhibit the progress of human rights technology. As a next step, the report calls for a partnership to advance human rights

The Innovators’ Network

GeSI proposes to create a **Human Rights Technology Innovators’ Network to Use ICT to Enable Human Rights** (“Innovators’ Network”).

The **mission** of the Innovators’ Network will be to coordinate the collective capabilities of ICT industry leaders, human rights organisations, policy makers, academia, and social innovators, to accelerate and scale-up the development and application of technology that enables human rights.

The **objectives** of the Innovators’ Network will be to enable human rights through technology and to:

Help empower human rights organisations, policy-makers, academia, activists, and social innovators with enhanced ICT solutions across a spectrum of challenges;

Advance a collective effort to increase digital access, digital literacy, and the availability of the latest generations of digital technology;

Educate people on how to better use technology to protect their rights;

Enhance the safety and security of citizens and mainly vulnerable populations with particular attention to supporting privacy and freedom of expression;

Build understanding and enhanced relationships between the human rights and ICT communities;

Work to ensure that ICT is seen as a positive, important force for supporting people’s rights;

Build the understanding of both the ICT industry and human rights community regarding the mutually beneficial opportunities that will come from scaling up the adoption of innovative enabling technologies.

The Network will achieve these objectives through the following activities:

Connecting innovators through an online Stakeholder Network Platform;	Mobilizing industry support through targeted, skills-based deployments and additional resources;
Creating virtual laboratories to generate R&D leading to human rights technology innovations;	Forming multi-sector stakeholder councils of key leaders;
Developing clear business cases for the investing, developing, and scaling-up of enabling technologies;	Creating safeguards to ensure that human rights activists are protected and cannot be compromised by the use of human rights technology;
Supporting the efforts of the ICT industry to build trust regarding its own responsible behaviors.	

GeSI will be meeting with organisations and key leaders such as human rights organisations, policy makers, academia, and social innovators and ICT leaders to discuss opportunities for involvement in the Innovators’ Network, to accelerate and scale up the development and application of technology enabling human rights.

In addition, GeSI will continue to dialogue with key stakeholders to advance ways to build trust in the responsible practices of the ICT industry. As human rights defenders become aware and engaged in the industry’s efforts, pathways should open for collaboration in enhancing the industry’s responsible business practices, business relationships, and efforts to advance technology for human rights.

The diffusion and improvement of human rights is a continuous process. Technology, while not a panacea, has an important, enabling role to play. The upcoming GeSI report illustrates some ways in which the ICT industry can support this process. GeSI remains open to engage in dialogue with all those serious in collaborating with the ICT industry.



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