



BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

Megatrend: Technological Change
Sustainability Challenge(s): Quality Education (SDG 4),
Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8) & Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10)

The rapid growth and adoption of Generative AI tools (AI tools that create content/products) such as OpenAI's ChatGPT, has the potential to transform many aspects of modern society, from education and healthcare to business and government. However, it also presents a unique set of challenges, particularly in developing countries where access to these technologies is limited, exacerbating existing inequalities. The digital divide is a term that refers to the gap between demographics and regions that have access to modern information and communications technology, and those that don't or have restricted access¹.

Generative AI tools can further increase the digital divide, and will have potential negative impacts on developing countries when it comes to *access to technology* and *democratization of know-how*.

Access to technology – Most generative AI tools are only available online. This can increase existing inequality between rich and poor countries by disproportionately benefiting those with better access to the internet and education. For example, a 2022 report by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU)², showed that 1/3 of the global population remains totally offline, with a majority of these people living in developing countries. The situation is more pronounced in Sub-Saharan Africa where, according to a 2023 World Bank report³, only 22% of population has access to the internet.

Democratization of know-how – While Generative AI tools have the potential to democratize know-how by making expert-level knowledge accessible to a wider audience, developing countries may struggle to take advantage of this due to limited internet access. For example, many people in developing countries may lack the skills or access to technology necessary to use these tools effectively, such as digital literacy or language proficiency.

What can your company do, alone or with partners, to address the potential exacerbation of inequalities by technological breakthroughs? How can you make (among others) generative AI tools more accessible to people in developing countries, considering the barriers to internet access, lower smart device ownership rates, and low digital literacy? Which strategies can you implement to ensure that these tools are used to promote greater equity and reduce inequality between rich and poor countries? How will you tailor or adapt to specific needs and challenges faced by people in developing countries, ensuring that they are able to effectively benefit from the democratization

¹ <https://www.techtarget.com/whatis/definition/digital-divide>

² 2022 ITU Report - <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/2022/11/24/ff22-internet-use/>

³ 2023 World Bank Report - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/afr/publication/digital-africa>



of know-how? Work on a solution (product, service or other) that your company could deliver, alone or through a partnership with other companies or organizations, build the business case and prove that it will work, with impact!