

Huawei

How ICT Can Deliver the SDGs



Support and investment in Information Communication Technology (ICT) directly affects an individual country's performance, against the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), according to new research, commissioned by Huawei and carried out by SustainAbility.

In recent decades, ICT has delivered significant economical and social progress. But, more needs to be done, as its benefits are unevenly distributed and can't always be fully enforced, to foster sustainable development and drive it forward.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between ICT and sustainable development, global communications company, Huawei, asked us to carry out a study. Our main objective was to explore exactly how ICT can help other countries get one step closer to achieving the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with a particular focus on SDGs.

The Huawei ICT Sustainable Development Goals Benchmark seeks to explore six SDGs, which potentially have a strong relationship to ICT, and thus are most likely to be achieved by 2030. It also explores country performance on SDGs and ICT development, providing insights into the successful application of ICT for

sustainable development, through country case studies and a review of sample national initiatives.

In order to meet these objectives we analysed a sample of 15 countries, which represented a range of developed and developing economies, different geographies and various phases of ICT implementation. As part of the analysis we evaluated SDG and ICT performance, using four indicators for each SDG and 11 ICT indicators that are included in the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) most recent ICT Development Index. We also examined ICT and SDG performance separately to test correlation and then combined the data into one single index, known as the 2017 ICT Sustainable Development Goals Benchmark.

From our extensive analysis we have identified a number of key findings, including:

- **ICT is highly correlated with country-level SDG performance (89%), which suggests that countries that perform well on ICT perform equally as well on SDGs.** And, those that underperform on ICT are also lagging behind on SDG achievement. While this doesn't prove causality, it certainly suggests a strong relationship between the two.
- **Progress on certain SDGs is more likely to be correlated with ICT development.** Goals with higher ICT correlation include, SDG 9: Infrastructure, Industrialisation and Innovation, SDG 4: Quality Education and SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being, which suggests that these may be the areas with the greatest potential for leveraging ICT for sustainable development.
- **Overall, developed countries tend to have higher ICT scores than SDG scores, indicating that ICT development is progressing more quickly than sustainable development.** These countries ultimately have the scope to leverage ICT more effectively, for the benefit of sustainability. And, inversely, developing countries generally have a higher SDG achievement score than ICT development score, suggesting that the speed of ICT enhancements isn't keeping pace with the progress on sustainable development. Developing nations may well benefit from policies that aim to increase investment in ICT and in turn improve the ICT infrastructure.
- **Although Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita is a factor that influences the Benchmark scores, there are several elements that make this correlation more complex.** The ICT Sustainable Development Goals Benchmark has a greater association with both the Human Development Index (HDI) and the Environmental Performance Index (EPI) compared to GDP per capita. This suggests that the key,

influencing factor isn't the amount of resources available, but in fact, how these resources are implemented.

The research clearly demonstrates that there's a significant link between sustainable development progress and ICT. However, more research will be needed to fully understand this relationship. In the full report you can see how progress on sustainability can be enabled through increased access to ICT, improved connectivity and efficiency.

ICT can improve lives in many other ways, such as through education, skill development, new service creation, innovation and automation. Investing in ICT is hugely important to supporting the progress of SDGs, particularly the ones selected for this study – education, health, innovation and infrastructure. These SDGs have the greatest potential for enhancement through ICT and as such, countries should be looking to focus and invest in developing these areas, to achieve the greatest impact towards sustainability.

In order to support our global population in an increasingly resourced- constrained world, governments and companies like yours can follow in the footsteps of leading organisations, like Huawei, to promote digital advances that focus on and drive sustainable development forward.

If you'd like to find out more about how SustainAbility can help your company get us one step closer to a more connected, sustainable future, take a look at our ['What we do' page](#). Or, to view the full report, you can [download it here](#).