# B-Tech India Project: Fostering responsible business conduct in the Indian technology sector, May 2024

## B-Tech India Project: A part of UN Human Rights B-Tech Project

The UN B-Tech Project (short for "Business and Human Rights in Technology") seeks to foster responsible business practice in the technology sector. This is done through promoting more effective application of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) to the development, application, and governance of digital technologies.

The UNGPs are internationally agreed upon and supported by diverse stakeholders, including businesses, governments, and civil society worldwide. They have been endorsed by India which reflects the Government's commitment to promoting responsible business practises.

Their widespread support and endorsement by governments and stakeholders make the UNGPs a powerful tool to guide technology companies manage risks to people while advancing innovation and development of digital technologies.

Since the beginning of 2023, B-Tech has expanded its geographic reach, both through the launch of a regional project, B-Tech Africa, and through the introducing of a peer-learning format available to tech companies from around the world to complement the more focused Company Community of Practice (COP) which has been a key feature of the project from the outset. Going forward, B-Tech plans to expand its geographic reach further and engage with countries in Asia.

## B-Tech India Project: Overview

*"Companies should act as trusteeships, valuing social responsibility alongside profits."*

**-Mahatma Gandhi**

The United Nations recognizes the contribution of digital technologies to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the potential of such technologies to support sustainable development efforts in India. India's commitment to promote responsible business conduct - another key component of sustainable economic development - has been demonstrated by some key policy actions, beyond India's early uptake of the UNGPs. Notably measures include the adoption of the National Guidelines on Responsible Business Conduct (NGRBC) in 2018 which are broadly aligned with the UNGPs and the ongoing drafting of a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights. At the G20 summit hosted last year by the Government of India, G20 leaders committed to leverage AI for the public good by solving challenges in a responsible, inclusive and human-centric manner, while protecting people's rights and safety.

While digital technologies can catalyse positive and sustainable social, economic and development effects, it is increasingly recognised that the use and development of technologies at scale may have adverse impacts on people.

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Some Indian tech companies have adopted measures to ensure that they respect internationally protected human rights within their policies and operations. However, like companies in other countries and regions, implementation of human rights commitments can present context specific challenges and opportunities.

B-Tech India aims to engage with companies and other stakeholders within the technology sector in India on the best way to address, prevent and mitigate human rights risks related to digital technologies in the Indian context. This will include working with companies and others to develop tools and guidance on ways to continue driving sustainable innovation through India's important technology sector, while protecting users and non-users alike from human rights risks by embedding the UNGPs in their business operations.

By doing so, B-Tech India will contribute to the acceleration of responsible business practices to drive economic growth, support the tech sector for inclusive and sustainable development, boost a responsible digital transformation, and create attractive responsible investment opportunities.

## Project objectives

B-tech India's overarching aim is to demonstrate the value of the UNGPs and B-Tech guidance to the Indian tech industry and mainstream a principled and pragmatic approach towards balancing innovation and addressing risks associated with new digital technologies. To achieve this, the project plans to:

1. **Engage with the Indian technology start-up sector** on responsible business policies and practices, thus making them gain global visibility and attracting investments by adding credibility and trust.

2. **Cooperate with Indian tech companies** to embed responsible business conduct in their governance and processes, thus supporting their positioning for expanding their markets beyond India through responsible innovation.

3. **Guiding multinational technology companies** operating in India in navigating and balancing international human rights laws with domestic laws, while ushering unique context specific recommendations on the State-business nexus.

## Means of engagement

1. **Practice-oriented guidance**: Inform B-Tech project guidance and recommendations on human rights due diligence related to end-use, and access to remedy in the technology industry, consistent with the normative expectations of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, as re-articulated in the B-Tech foundational papers.

2. **Peer-to-peer learning**: Advance practical understanding and capacity among technology companies to implement respect for human rights through a) creating a safe, confidential space to exchange practices and challenges; and b) facilitating tech company engagement with leading business and human rights experts.

3. **Targeted communication**: Share insights in the form of short briefing notes, blogs, and non- attributable case studies, and dilemma scenarios–on human rights due diligence and remedy.

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