



## Will AI Regulation Stifle Potential for Social Good?

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Artificial intelligence (AI) could help to address significant societal challenges, including those identified in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), according to *Notes from the AI Frontier: Applying AI for Social Good*, a new report from McKinsey that considers the use of AI for social good. But to scale and apply “AI for social benefit will depend on the willingness of relevant groups of stakeholders, including collectors and generators of data as well as governments and NGOs, to engage.” With technology regulation at the top of minds for many, willingness to apply AI for social good might be stemmed.

McKinsey cites three examples of AI already being deployed for social good:

- **Planet Labs**, an Earth-imaging startup, creates a global map of shallow-water coral reefs by applying object detection to satellite imagery in correlation with geospatial data. “This map is used to monitor change over time and inform conservation interventions for the reef ecosystems that are under threat.”
- **Thorn** is an international anti-human trafficking nonprofit organization that uses “a combination of face detection and person identification, social network analysis, natural language processing, and analytics is being used to identify victims of sexual exploitation on the internet and dark web.”
- **MIT Media Lab** is one organization using AI to battle cancer. It has “applied reinforcement learning, a capability in which systems essentially learn by trial and error, in clinical trials with patients diagnosed with glioblastoma (the most aggressive form of brain cancer) to successfully reduce toxic chemotherapy and radiotherapy dosing.”

In addition, the report identifies 18 AI capabilities that could potentially be used for social

benefit, covering three major categories: computer vision, natural language processing, and speech and audio processing.

Use cases of AI for social good are grouped into ten social impact domains “based on examining and integrating taxonomies used by social-sector organizations, such as the AI for Good Foundation and the World Bank.” This grouping encourages understanding of the comparative relevance of AI across domains. The social impact domains examined are:

- Crisis response
- Economic empowerment
- Educational challenges
- Environmental challenges
- Equality and inclusion
- Health and hunger
- Information verification and validation
- Infrastructure management
- Public and social sector management
- Security and justice

Fellows of the Society for New Communications Research of The Conference Board (SNCR) [have identified technology regulation](#) as an area of focus in 2019 and the use of AI will likely be an area of particular interest. For organizations that seek to use such technology for social good, an understanding of the existing use cases and potential for social impact should be considered within the context of a heightened regulatory framework that might stifle successes.

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