



## GeSI: Promoting sustainability in the global information and communications sector

### Introduction

Insight makes extensive investments in the information and communications sector (ICT) on behalf of its clients. This briefing focuses on the work of the Global e-Sustainability Initiative (GeSI) that was set up to work with companies in the ICT sector to address a wide range of sustainability issues. Insight strongly supports the work of GeSI and welcomes the progress that the organization and its member companies have made in recent years. The following article, written by Mark Radka of GeSI, outlines the organisation's genesis, aims and activities.

### GeSI's genesis

In 2000, 189 countries committed to the Millennium Development Goals, a set of eight goals relating to matters as diverse as climate change, poverty alleviation and gender equality. Recognising the role they could play in helping countries to meet these goals, companies in the ICT sector decided to work together to develop an effective, industry-wide response and platform for action. Thus, GeSI, the Global e-Sustainability Initiative ([www.gesi.org](http://www.gesi.org)) was born in 2001, dedicated to the sustainable development of the ICT sector. GeSI, working in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme, supports companies and institutions across the ICT industry, including manufacturers, network operators, service providers, trade associations and associate organisations connected to the industry. The World Summit on the Information Society has described information and communication technologies as 'a powerful instrument, increasing productivity, generating economic growth ... and improving the quality of life of all'.

One of GeSI's central aims is to extend the influence of ICT into all the aspects of socio-economic development, making technologies available to both rich and poor countries to play a part in achieving sustainable development across the globe. It does so by fostering global and open co-operation among companies in the sector, informing the public of its members' voluntary actions to improve their performance on sustainability issues and promoting technologies that foster sustainable development.

### GeSI members

GeSI has both full and associate members. Full members are companies or organisations that, as a principal part of their business, provide a service for the point-to-point transmission of voice, data or moving images over a fixed, Internet, mobile or personal communication network, or that are suppliers of equipment that is integral to the communication network infrastructure, or that produce equipment or software associated with the electronic storage, processing or transmission of data.

Associate membership is open to any body (e.g. academic institutions or non-governmental organisations) connected with the ICT industry that can make a specific contribution to GeSI activities.

The current list of members can be downloaded from GeSI's website. [www.gesi.org](http://www.gesi.org)

### GeSI's work

GeSI's activities cover a wide range of issues, including supply chains, climate change, corporate sustainability reporting and e-waste.

## Supply Chains

The electronics industry supply chain is long and complex. Companies spread across the world supply raw materials, electronic components, sub-assemblies and manufactured equipment. GeSI's members are working towards ensuring that appropriate working conditions and robust environmental protection are in place in their suppliers' facilities. GeSI has developed the ICT Supplier Self-Assessment Questionnaire (see link on GeSI's website [www.gesi.org](http://www.gesi.org)) as an easy-to-use, self-assessment tool to help companies introduce their social and environmental expectations to their suppliers and engage with the managers of their factories on these issues. Developed with the Electronics Industry Code of Conduct Implementation Group (EICC IG), the multiple-choice questionnaire is an initial and efficient screening tool to identify labour, ethics, health, safety and environmental issues that may require more in-depth assessments, such as a supplier audit. The ICT Questionnaire helps to ease the burden on suppliers by requiring them to complete only one questionnaire which can be shared by all GeSI members, rather than completing separate differing questionnaires for each of its customers. The questionnaire also helps to establish accountability, a better understanding of the practices of suppliers and identifies potential risks or performance gaps on labour standards and environmental issues. Other tools under development include a risk assessment tool and a common approach to auditing. A web-based resource that will be available to the whole ICT sector will bring all these activities together – providing a standardized way for companies to meet customers' demands for better corporate responsibility.

### Focus on coltan

Raw material extraction lies at one end of the complex ICT supply chain. For a number of years, GeSI has supported the work of Fauna and Flora International (FFI) on the difficult issue of coltan mining in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Coltan mining in the DRC has been connected with armed conflict, the exploitation of human rights and the killing of game for food. FFI found that the mobile phone industry had been unfairly singled out for criticism as coltan-derived tantalum metal is used by many different industries. Because the DRC desperately needs the income mining can provide, rather than support a boycott of DRC tantalum, GeSI continues to support FFI who are working with the DRC Government to introduce controls on mining operations that benefit and protect people and wildlife.

## Climate Change

Climate change from human emissions of greenhouse gases is now recognised as a serious threat – and some say the most serious threat – to societies globally. As an essential part of the global economy, the ICT sector has a substantial responsibility to address climate change issues. GeSI has made this a priority activity and is working to identify both climate change impacts and solutions.

GeSI organised the first global Workshop on ICT and Climate Change in October 2004. The event brought together ICT sustainability and energy experts from Europe, North America and Japan to explore emerging challenges, opportunities and technical solutions related to energy efficiency and global climate change.

### Corporate Sustainability Reporting

Although sustainability reporting has undergone a tremendous evolution in the last few years – with an increasing number of companies engaged with stakeholders, reporting standards and verification – it is often unclear what information stakeholders would like companies to include in these reports. Last year, GeSI held a series of stakeholder workshops entitled Technology Convergence and Corporate Sustainability Reporting in the Information Society. A summary report of the workshop discussions can be found on GeSI's website.

### e-Waste

GeSI is exploring ways to reduce the increasing challenge of e-Waste, including programmes to reuse and recycle existing equipment. GeSI is working with the Mobile Phone Partnership Initiative (MPPI), a unique UN public-private partnership of the Basel Convention with representatives of mobile phone manufacturers, telecom operators, recyclers, environmental, industrial and development NGOs, and representatives of the Basel Convention Secretariat. The MPPI aims to: (1) reduce environmental impacts of mobile phones; (2) influence consumer behaviour; and (3) promote environmentally sound management of used and discarded mobile phones.

GeSI is also supporting an experimental mobile phone recycling project in Senegal.

## Other Issues

GeSI keeps a watching brief on many issues of relevance to the ICT sector. For example, due to the concern relating to some of the content transmitted over the internet, GeSI is actively exploring the boundaries of responsibility and how security, privacy and human rights can be balanced.

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May 2006

## Produced by the Insight Investor Responsibility Team

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04046-05-06