

Foreword



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For minorities and indigenous peoples, technology has all too often been a tool of oppression. From the occupation of the Americas to the enslavement of millions of Africans and the abuses of colonial rule, technology has regularly been implicated in the control and exploitation of marginalized communities. In the process, their own cultures and civilizations have also been devastated or erased.

Sadly, this problematic relationship between technology and discrimination persists to this day – from predictive policing algorithms and ‘smart’ migration management to online hate speech and surveillance. The irony is that some of the most sophisticated innovations today are being used to entrench deep-seated historic inequalities. The technologies themselves may be cutting edge, but if they simply recreate old hierarchies in new ways, then they could take us back decades in terms of human rights.

Then there are further challenges around affordability, accessibility and other constraints that can prevent certain groups from enjoying any potential benefits. For instance, while assistive technologies such as wheelchairs can undoubtedly improve the lives of persons with disabilities, those belonging to minority or indigenous communities frequently struggle to secure them due to limited resources, official prejudice and added barriers around language, culture or geography that can reinforce these issues.

Is another future possible, one where technological progress can create equally progressive social outcomes? As this volume testifies, there are many examples of activists who are taking technologies into their own hands to achieve real and lasting change. When communities are able to access and use technologies from a place of equality and empowerment – such as the use of digital mapping for indigenous forest conservation and the mobilization of anti-racism protests through the #BlackLivesMatter movement – the results are genuinely exciting and transformative.

There is much discussion around the importance of a rights-based approach to technology, but there is a risk that this can at times sound like a constraint: a question primarily of checks and restrictions. In fact, the opposite is true – perhaps more than speed, bandwidth or other technical specifications, the true measure of a technology is inclusion, accessibility and non-discrimination. That, more than anything, is the surest way of promoting innovation, creativity and development for all, regardless of who they are.