SCHWAB FOUNDATION
FOR SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

In collaboration with
EY and Microsoft

AI for Impact:
Strengthening AI Ecosystems
for Social Innovation

INSIGHT REPORT

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Foreword

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Artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to revolutionize our world, addressing some of the most pressing global challenges and transforming lives in profound ways. However, with the promise of the technology comes acute risks. AI can exacerbate social inequalities and negatively affect our environment if not developed and deployed responsibly.

With this in mind, and to ensure that AI serves humanity, particularly people in underrepresented communities worldwide, Microsoft, the EY organization, the Schwab Foundation and a rich community of social innovators have launched the AI for Social Innovation initiative to highlight how AI can deliver on its extraordinary promise, address its inherent risks and inform the technology roadmap to make AI purpose-built for impact.

Social innovators are already at the forefront, demonstrating environmentally and socially responsible deployment of AI. These are the changemakers who prioritize purpose over profit, who wake up every day determined to make a difference. In their use of this technology, they demonstrate that AI can be a powerful tool, showing us what is possible when technology is guided by ethical principles and a mission to serve.

Our first report, *AI for Impact: The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Social Innovation*, highlighted the efforts of more than 300 social innovators from over 50 countries to responsibly deploy the technology. We saw how one in four innovators use AI to improve healthcare, addressing needs in both high- and low-income settings. For example, Geekie, an educational technology company in Brazil, pioneered the use of AI and real-time data for personalized learning at massive scale – affecting more than ten million students from 5,000 schools across the country while transforming traditional classroom models in the process. We also saw how, leveraging AI, they have made significant contributions to economic empowerment, environmental conservation and agriculture. This report was a testament to the incredible potential of AI when used for social good.

Building on this, our second report, *AI for Impact: The PRISM Framework for Responsible AI in Social Innovation*, offered a roadmap for deploying AI ethically and responsibly. The PRISM Framework encourages social innovators to keep their impact mission at the forefront of their activities while considering important factors such as ethics, organizational readiness, technical capability and costs.

Microsoft's Entrepreneurship for Positive Impact programme supports these innovators by providing technology access, mentoring and networks to empower social entrepreneurs.

Similarly, the global EY Ripples programme supports social entrepreneurs and for-impact organizations by extending EY teams' knowledge to provide not-for-profit professional services, as well as a variety of skills development and coaching programmes. The ambition is to positively impact the lives of 1 billion people by 2030, in part by fostering social innovation and leveraging AI for the greater good.

Together with the Schwab Foundation, we have created a strong ecosystem that supports the AI for Social Innovation initiative. We believe in the power of collective efforts to bolster social innovators and scale their impact.

The initiative comes at a pivotal time; AI is rapidly developing, and we must ensure it is used responsibly and ethically. Our vision is clear: we want AI to serve underrepresented communities and unlock AI's full potential for societal good, ensuring that its development and deployment are guided by principles of inclusivity, ethics and shared prosperity.

This report outlines how technology organizations and business leaders can align with social innovators to maximize AI's potential and help create a just, prosperous society. It highlights the crucial role of intermediaries in bridging the gap between tech organizations and social innovators, and is a call to action to all in the social entrepreneurship ecosystem to join us in this mission. Together, we can harness the power of AI to make a lasting, positive impact globally.

Executive summary

With the right support from the private sector, government and intermediaries, social innovators can scale their impactful uses of AI for the benefit of society.

The transformative potential of artificial Intelligence (AI) is widely lauded. With studies revealing that employees who deploy machine learning can realize up to 30% in efficiency gains[1] and findings that the technology has the potential to automate up to 70% of activities that take up employees' time,[2] it is no surprise that this technology is being embraced by industry.

Some 42% of 8,000+ companies surveyed under the IBM Global AI Adoption Index report that they have deployed AI to improve efficiency in customer care, information technology (IT) and marketing sales functions. Furthermore, an additional 40% report that they have begun exploring the use of the technology within their enterprises.[3] Similarly, 66% of survey respondents think that AI will significantly affect their lives over the next three to five years.[4]

While AI holds great promise for economic growth, it is crucial to recognize the growing fears surrounding the technology's environmental and societal implications. Some studies suggest that more than a third of all employees worry about losing their jobs due to AI, with variances by occupation and geography.[5,6] Open calls by prominent individuals to address the risks of AI or halt development altogether further add to both the concrete and abstract fears about the technology – such as the 2023 letter by 1,000 business leaders, including Steve Wozniak and Elon Musk.[7]

These fears generate urgency for strong public governance and policies. But they also create the need to showcase positive examples of how AI can benefit people and society – especially for marginalized groups at risk of losing out on the economic benefits of AI. Social innovators are at the forefront of this, providing tangible examples of AI being applied for positive impact.

Their proximity to the social and environmental challenges in their communities provides multiple opportunities from a technology perspective:

– It allows them to deploy AI solutions tailored to community needs, especially for underrepresented communities.

– Moreover, they are in a position to influence the future development of the technology towards positive impact through their experience and insights.

An earlier report in this series highlighted the diverse ways in which 300 social innovators have begun deploying AI capabilities such as machine learning and predictive analytics for impactful results. From improving healthcare accessibility to enhancing educational outcomes in underserved communities, social innovators have started harnessing AI to create positive impact.

However, to scale the adoption of AI for impact, these innovators rely on collaboration with and the support of tech companies, intermediaries, impact investors and public-sector stakeholders. Together, they form the ecosystem underpinning the impactful adoption of AI by social innovators. This ecosystem provides the resources, expertise and infrastructure necessary for social innovators to grow their AI solutions effectively.

Yet this report's analysis shows that out of almost 100 AI initiatives reviewed in the underlying sample set, only 31% focus on positive impact. Of these impact-focused initiatives, less than half provide direct financial resources. In comparison, from our dataset, direct financial resources were made available to almost 60% of AI initiatives not focused on impact. Furthermore, information on funding amounts, types of initiative and collaborators were more publicly available for AI initiatives not exclusively focused on impact.

Overall, global funding for impact-focused initiatives amounts to $2.2 billion in operational budgets and funding in recent years. While this is an encouraging number at face value, in reality, less than 1% of all budgets allocated to AI implementation are primarily focused on positive impact. In addition, these initiatives tend to focus on high-income countries, raising questions about equitable access for communities and innovators in low- and middle-income countries.

As well as increasing the sheer scale of support for social innovators, it is crucial to design purpose-built programmes tailored to the needs of the communities that social innovators ultimately serve. The social innovators and intermediaries surveyed for this report highlight the need for collaboration when designing programmes to ensure that interventions truly address social issues holistically. This might include, for example, "wraparound" support for recipients of AI training, such as childcare during training hours, transport to the training venue or basic digital skills training as a prerequisite. Such nuanced and comprehensive programme design is possible only with the input of social innovators and intermediaries.

This report builds on data from the previous reports in this series to examine the current landscape of support for positive impact applications of AI. It offers practical insights and examples of engagement mechanisms so that companies and technology organizations can partner with social innovators to promote the ethical adoption of AI. It also includes mechanisms for providing support, insights into the role of intermediaries and best practices for public-sector actors to foster ecosystem development.

↓ **Image credit:**
  INCO

Introduction

Social innovators are at the forefront of proving how artificial intelligence can be harnessed for positive social and environmental outcomes.

Global interest and investment in AI, especially generative AI, has exploded recently, and venture-capital (VC) investments alone in AI totalled more than $290 billion in 2019–2024.[8] The public sector has not been left behind, with a marked increase in policies on the technology and legislative mentions of AI doubling from 2022 to 2023.[9] Organizations and industries seeking to streamline their productivity have also begun integrating the technology into their process. In the financial sector alone, 91% of financial services firms have either considered or are already using AI, or report that they are using it in their organizations to drive innovation, improve operational efficiency and enhance customer experiences – with 97% of companies planning to invest more in AI technologies in the near future.[10]

The discourse surrounding AI focuses on its potential to boost productivity across industries, overshadowing the potential negative consequences of the technology. The development and deployment of AI can perpetuate social inequities if not carefully managed, particularly when it comes to issues such as data privacy and the displacement of jobs, with some studies suggesting job losses of up to 50%, spurring fears and concerns about the potential social disruption resulting from this technology. Furthermore, the datasets for algorithms are largely sourced from high-income countries and regions, with the United States, China, the European Union and the United Kingdom emerging as the leading sources of AI models.[11] These datasets can perpetuate biases, leading to harmful social outcomes when applied in dissimilar contexts. In addition, gender gaps persist,

both upstream, with women comprising 30% of the AI education and talent pool, and in AI usage, with only 25% of women-led social enterprises adopting the use of AI.

Of equal concern is the energy and natural resource consumption of AI models, especially large-scale machine learning systems, which can be substantial. These systems contribute to carbon emissions and exacerbate climate change. Reports have found that larger training models can emit up to 350 tonnes of CO_2 per year and require up to 34% more water when deploying AI models than when not.[12]

Given the social and environmental risks associated with AI, it is necessary to bring forward use cases that provide a better understanding of how AI can be harnessed responsibly and ethically, ensuring that its benefits are widely shared across society. Social innovators are uniquely positioned to use AI's ethical applications in a way that extends far beyond commercial pursuits and have begun to demonstrate purpose-driven, ethical deployment of the technology.

The first report in this series showcased how social enterprises' mission-driven approach, combined with AI's capabilities, can and does address societal challenges innovatively and sustainably. Drawing from a dataset of more than 300 social innovators from over 50 countries and six regions across the globe, the report mapped out how social innovators have deployed the technology for impactful results in sectors such as healthcare, education, agriculture and the environment.

FIGURE 1 | AI deployment by social innovators by geography
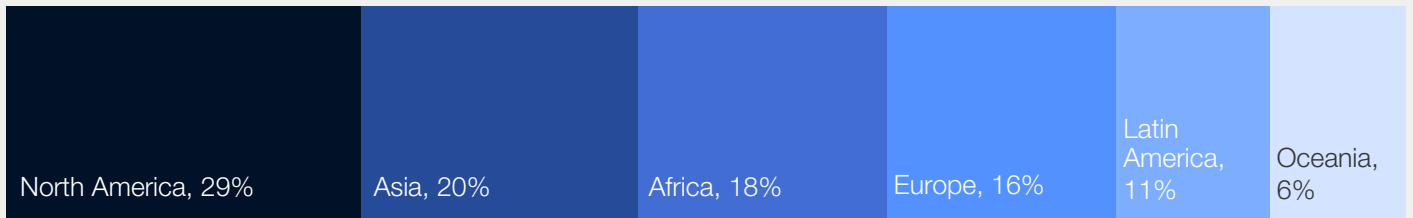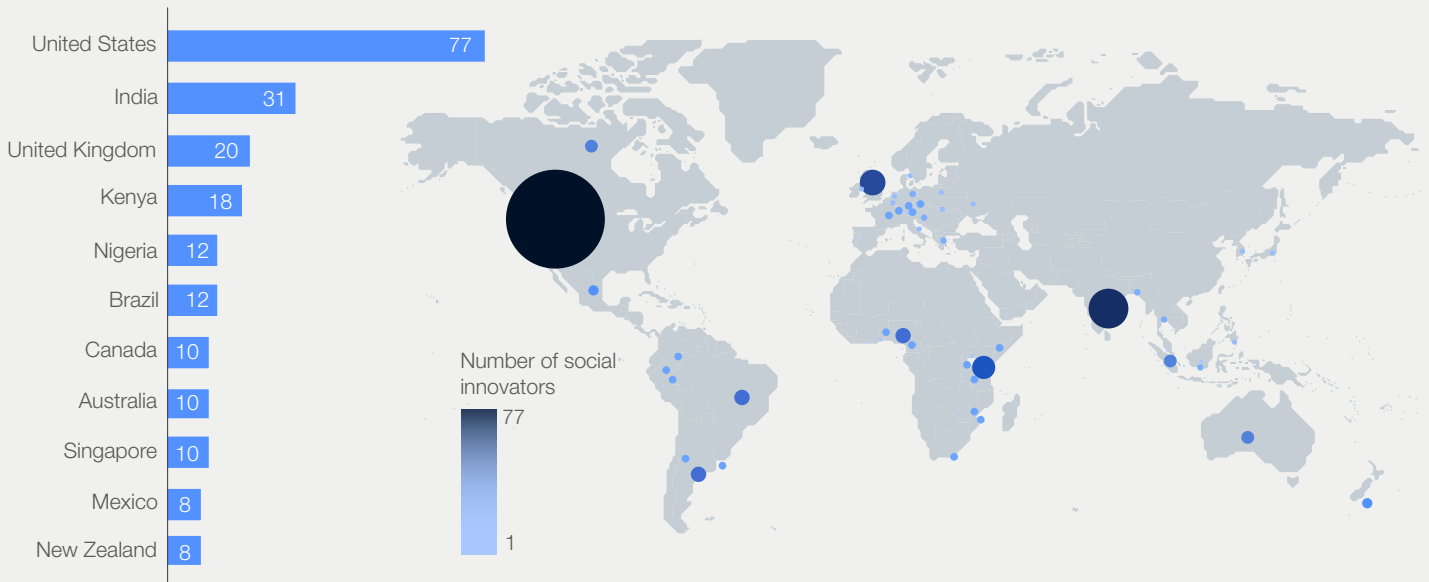
Number of social innovators

United States	77
India	31
United Kingdom	20
Kenya	18
Nigeria	12
Brazil	12
Canada	10
Australia	10
Singapore	10
Mexico	8
New Zealand	8

| North America, 29% | Asia, 20% | Africa, 18% | Europe, 16% | Latin America, 11% | Oceania, 6% |

Source: World Economic Forum. *AI for Impact: The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Social Innovation*

FIGURE 2 | AI deployment by social impact domains

Social impact domain

Healthcare	Environment	Economic empowerment	Technology	Security and justice
28%	21%	16% / Education 8%	8% / Public and social sector 5% / Infrastructure 5%	5% / Equality and inclusion 2% / Information verification and validation 2% / Crisis response 1%

Source: World Economic Forum. *AI for Impact: The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Social Innovation*

The critical role of the ecosystem in accelerating AI for impact

Contributions by private-sector organizations are central to enabling social enterprises to employ AI most effectively. Through mutual value-added partnerships and collaboration with intermediaries, technology enterprises can provide financial and non-financial resources to aid social innovators' adoption of AI and, in the process, build more AI use cases. On the other hand, social innovators can positively influence the development of the technology, ensuring that it is equitable, free of bias and fit for purpose. This aligns with the findings of the Schwab Foundation's report titled *The Corporate Social Innovation Compass: Accelerating Impact through Social Enterprise Partnerships*, which found that as corporates increasingly recognize the need to consider the environmental and social impact of their activities, social enterprises – through collaboration and by providing use cases – can provide a way for them to engage with these issues more meaningfully and sustainably.

Developing and supporting AI capabilities centred on impact is not just beneficial but also a business imperative for innovation-driven organizations. Given the nascency of the technology and its rapid pace of development, there is a strong case for building ecosystems around the technology's social impact that not only apply to the current state but can serve as a blueprint for future technologies. This is supported by the assertions of futurist Amy Webb, who labels this generation as "Gen T", a transition generation in which everyone has a role in shaping what the future will look like.[13]

In addition to the private sector, social entrepreneurs need a vibrant ecosystem that includes intermediaries and supportive government policies to make the most of AI's impact potential. Intermediaries play a crucial role in providing resources, mentorship, training and access to funding, which can enable social entrepreneurs to navigate the complex landscape of AI technology. Often, with a wide global reach, these actors can facilitate connections between social innovators and experts within technology organizations that can help them scale innovative solutions.

At the same time, government support is essential in creating an enabling environment through policies that encourage responsible AI development, offer incentives for social innovation and ensure that ethical standards are upheld. Strong collaboration among these ecosystem participants helps social innovators maximize their impact and drive transformative change with AI-driven solutions.

Current state of AI for impact initiatives

AI for impact initiatives encompass the deliberate development and deployment of AI capabilities that address societal challenges, improve public welfare and promote sustainable development by technology organizations in concert with impact enterprises. These initiatives place at their centre the social and environmental impact applications of the technology and focus on deploying AI to tackle issues relating to, for example, healthcare, education, environmental sustainability and digital equity, aiming for positive social outcomes rather than solely for-profit gains. Such initiatives are largely driven by private-sector organizations, which can play a pivotal role in deploying these efforts through planning, collaboration and investment and are enabled by a rich collaboration ecosystem for successful deployment.

Companies are increasingly recognizing AI's potential for social impact and are deploying resources to support those using the technology. Through direct and indirect means, they invest in partnerships with social entrepreneurs and intermediaries by providing financial support, technical expertise and access to AI platforms.

Programmes to encourage the adoption of AI for impact range from open-source platforms to trainings and grants and awards. The underlying dataset of global impact-focused AI initiatives presented in the first report revealed that more than half of initiatives focused on open platform, research and data as well as conferences, which may not be directly relevant to social innovators' needs.

In contrast, social innovators have frequently cited lack of access to AI skills and tools and high costs of entry as the biggest barriers to their adoption and scaling of the technology. However, the resources deployed to help social innovators overcome this barrier are generally low, with grants and rewards and AI education constituting only 6% and 7% of total initiatives respectively.
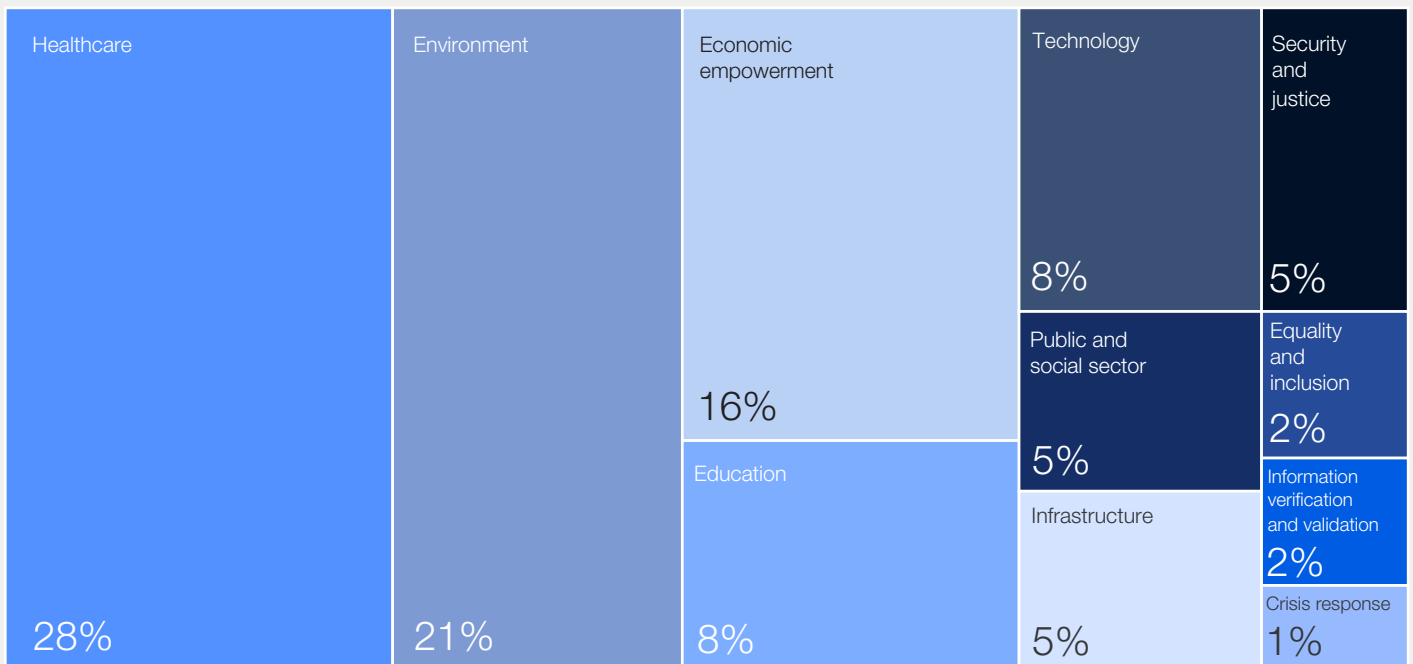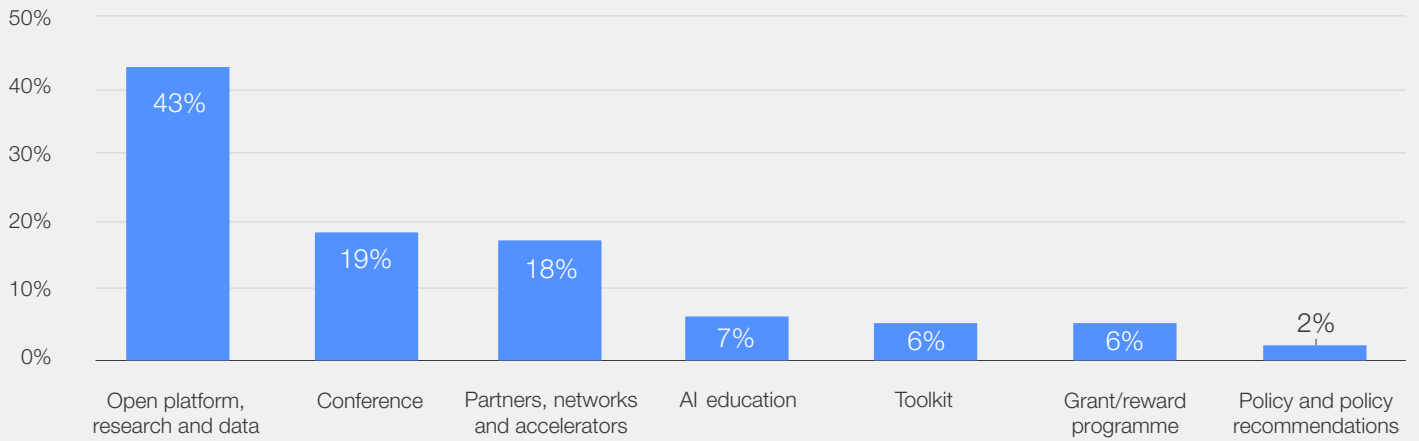
FIGURE 3 | AI Initiatives by type

Source: World Economic Forum. *AI for Impact: The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Social Innovation*

CASE STUDY 1

Microsoft's Entrepreneurship for Positive Impact (EfPI) Program

🌐	**Geographic impact**	Global
📍	**Sector focus**	Sector-agnostic
📊	**Number of enterprises reached**	1,000+

The **Entrepreneurship for Positive Impact (EfPI) Program** was launched by Microsoft to support for-profit impact enterprises that address the world's most pressing challenges. The programme includes a 12-month accelerator course, during which select members of the accelerator cohort are offered support such as executive coaching, invitations to attend relevant ecosystem events and access to workshops.

As part of the programme, Microsoft gives social innovators pro bono access to a comprehensive suite of its technologies. Upon being selected for the programme, social innovators and positive-impact enterprises receive Microsoft Azure cloud credits with which they can build their products. As these enterprises grow, they become eligible for up to $150,000 in Azure credits over four years. They also receive access to software such as GitHub Enterprise, Microsoft Office 365 and Microsoft Power Platform and receive credits for OpenAI in addition to free access to the platform.

Google.org, the philanthropic arm of Google, launched a $10.7 million fund to help Europe-based social entrepreneurs from underserved backgrounds. The fund will provide grants of up to $240,000 to social entrepreneurs currently using AI as well as training to social entrepreneurs who have not yet begun to deploy the technology but who seek to do so.

Beyond mobilizing resources, it is also critical to consider the ethical use of AI as companies and ecosystem organizations partner to accelerate technology adoption. It remains to be seen whether these partnerships are set up equitably to allow for open and transparent conversations about the boundaries for technology adoption. This report highlights how the funding relationship between

ecosystem actors and tech companies contributes to bias in the feedback loops from frontier social innovators to technology leaders.

The report builds on the first two reports in the *AI for Impact* series.[14,15] It showcases examples of how successful collaboration within and beyond the social sector can contribute to social innovators' adoption and ethical deployment of AI. It integrates the insights and perspectives of social innovators and tech leaders to offer recommendations for technology organizations, governments and the private sector to come together to ensure that AI is accessible at scale to social innovations. It also suggests avenues for improved collaboration across the social sector to achieve impact.

Methodology

This report draws on a previously featured global dataset of 300 social innovators deploying AI worldwide. It is complemented by a survey sent out to more than 40 leading technology organizations and expert interviews conducted with intermediaries in the social innovation ecosystem to generate insights on the state of AI for impact and social good initiatives. The dataset of 100 impact-focused

AI initiatives was generated through desk research on publicly available data, including sourcing from corporate websites, annual impact reports, annual ESG reports and press releases to gather qualitative data on the total resources deployed on AI for impact and proffer the recommendations detailed in this report.

1 The case for AI for impact

AI's potential to address societal challenges is vast and social innovators are at the forefront of proving its social and environmental benefits.
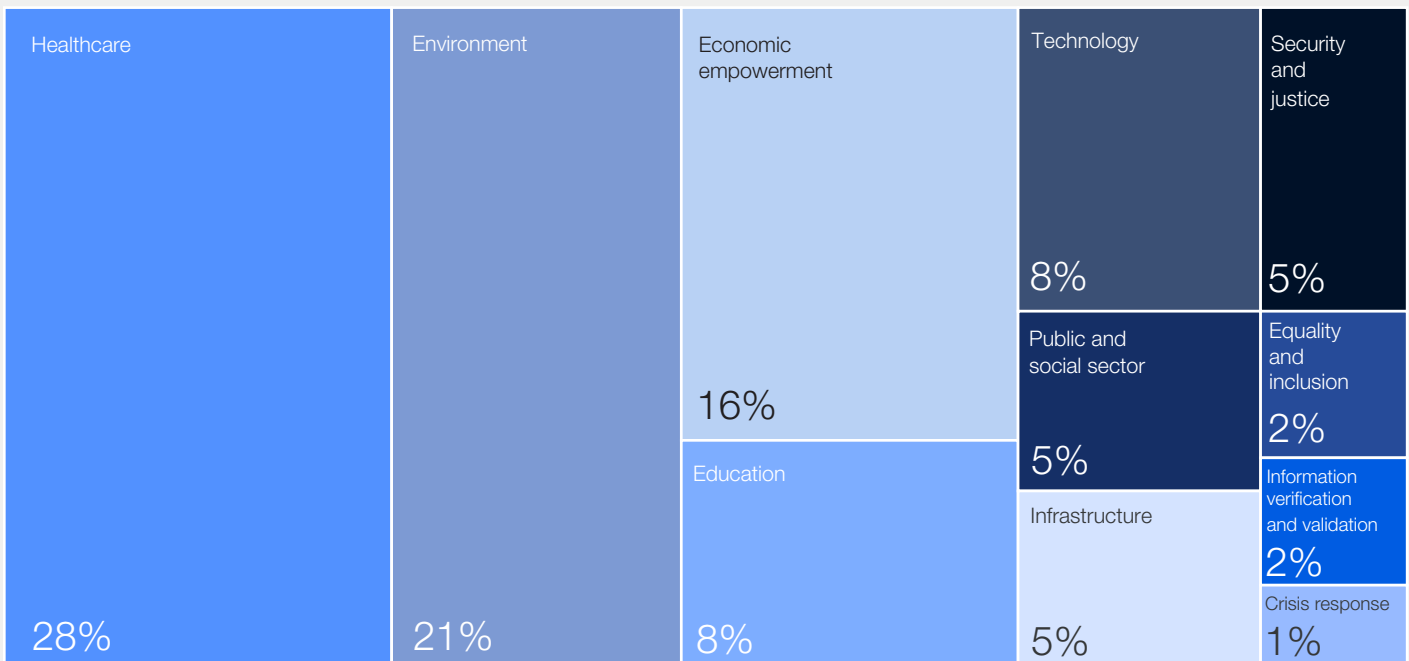
AI's transformative potential to solve global challenges is immense. With the technology, social entrepreneurs can develop innovative, scalable and efficient solutions within their organizations or as a central part of their product and service offerings, driving significant social impact at scale.

The first report in the *AI for Impact* series, *AI for Impact: The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Social Innovation*, explored the diverse applications of the technology to create impact across 50 countries. This report showcased case studies of how social enterprises are deploying the technology to improve civic participation among the underserved in India (Haqdarshak), as a tool to provide early childhood education in low-resource areas in Africa and Asia (High Resolves) and as a way to improve operational and logistic efficiencies (LifeBank).

FIGURE 4 | **Applications of AI by social impact domain**

Social impact domain

Healthcare	Environment	Economic empowerment		Technology	Security and justice
		16%		8%	5%
		Education		Public and social sector	Equality and inclusion
				5%	2%
				Infrastructure	Information verification and validation
					2%
					Crisis response
28%	21%	8%		5%	1%

In parallel, technology organizations have a strong track record of providing tools and platforms that play an important role in driving social change directly and indirectly. For example, the launch of the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) and consequent introduction of mobile internet in Africa is shown to have improved socioeconomic outcomes on the continent and is set to contribute to as much as 8.1% of the GDP of sub-Saharan Africa by 2030.[16] Downstream effects can be found in the 2005 collaboration between local Kenyan telecommunications operator Safaricom and British multinational Vodafone to launch M-PESA, a first-of-its-kind mobile phone-based money transfer service. The introduction of this service led to increased financial inclusion among the unbanked and lifted as many as 2% of Kenyan households out of poverty.[17] Similarly, and as highlighted in the PRISM Framework report, social enterprise Dimagi built a tool based on OpenAI Voice Engine to develop local language training for community health workers and thereby improve healthcare outcomes in Malawi.[18]

Any analysis of the role of the public and private sectors in promoting the adoption of AI among social innovators reveals that each participant has a crucial task. Beyond providing vital funding, the private sector has an important part to play in partnering with social innovators in a variety of areas such as enhancing data access, promoting AI education and addressing access to technology. In return, technology organizations receive first-hand insights from these partnerships on the deployment and performance of their technologies in high-impact areas. This is especially true for low-resource regions. In this way, they can generate use cases on the technology's applications in different social-impact domains. Similarly, intermediaries play a crucial role in strengthening the systems of collaboration and communication between social innovators and technology organizations.

The Corporate Social Innovation Compass report by the Global Alliance for Social Entrepreneurship highlighted a necessity fuelled, among other things,

by demand from employees, communities and consumers for companies to become more aware of their impact on society. However, progress on this front is slow. Social enterprises, with their ability to take risks in favour of outsized impact, their high agility and their ability to pivot quickly, are able to innovate and transform quickly through collaboration, direct engagement and internal integration. This makes them unique partners for companies to explore the possibilities of technology for impact.

If collaborations among technology organizations, intermediaries and social innovators are mission-aligned, they can offer mutual benefits. Meta's AI-powered population density maps[19] use its resources in computer vision technology to identify structures in satellite imagery that help estimate where populations cluster at a finer level of detail than census data alone. The Red Cross has used these maps for vaccination campaigns in Malawi[20] and rural electrification efforts in Somalia and Benin. World Vision used them as the backbone of its five-year strategic plan for water sanitation in places such as Rwanda and Zambia[21] – efforts that would be impossible without the detail provided by the maps. It is estimated that interventions supported by these AI-powered insights will help 15 million people access clean water, 14 million people have improved sanitation and 18 million experience improved hygiene.[22]

The social enterprise LifeBank, highlighted in a previous report,[23] is a Nigeria-based medical distribution company that provides a strong example of mission-aligned partnerships. LifeBank has developed innovative AI solutions that help manage supply chains for essential medical supplies, using technology to leapfrog obstacles related to limited access to capital. The firm's proprietary technology, developed in-house, is not only being used for its regular operations but is also being employed to drive innovation; to scale its innovative blockchain blood-tracking tool, LifeBank partnered with IBM, demonstrating how the private sector can collaborate with social innovators to co-create solutions.

1.1 | Landscape of private-sector support

While year-on-year global corporate investment in AI has recently fluctuated, the overall investment in the sector has shown a significant increase over the past decade, with an average growth of 33.93% in 2013–2023 (see Figure 5). This growth underscores the technology's potential to revolutionize industries and drive economic and social progress.

Yet the social impact ecosystem for AI faces underinvestment. Despite burgeoning interest and the capital flowing into AI, investment in AI for impact initiatives remains a small percentage of the total investment.

FIGURE 5 | Global private investment in AI (2013–2023)

Total investment (in billions of $)
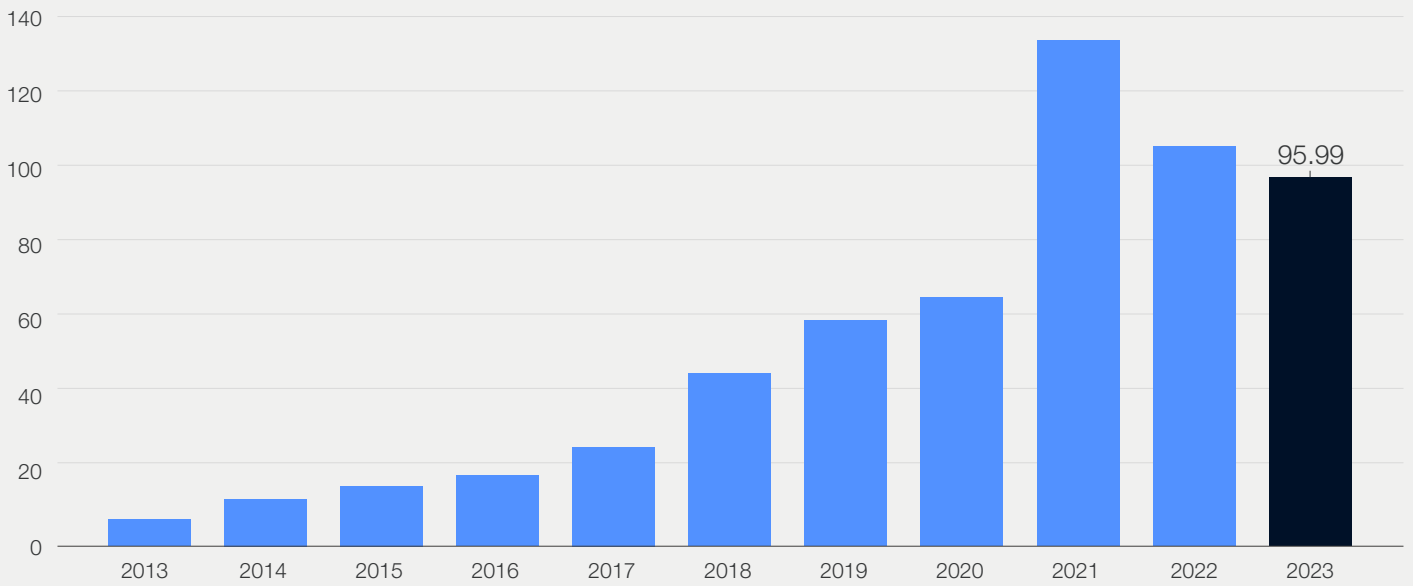
Source: Stanford 2024 AI Index Report

AI initiatives researched for this analysis encompass direct financial support or indirect funding through initiatives, training, fellowships and other interventions. From the dataset of AI for impact initiatives, only 14 impact-focused initiatives have published information about the amount of funding committed since 2016. Of the publicly available figures, only $2.2 billion was either wholly or partially committed to positive impact. When viewed from the perspective of total private investment in AI committed over the same period, amounting to $539.9 billion, total investment by the private sector in AI for impact initiatives was less than 1% (0.41%). This highlights a substantial shortfall in resource availability for impact-focused initiatives.

FIGURE 6 | Allocation of funding by type of initiative (in $ billions, 2016–present)
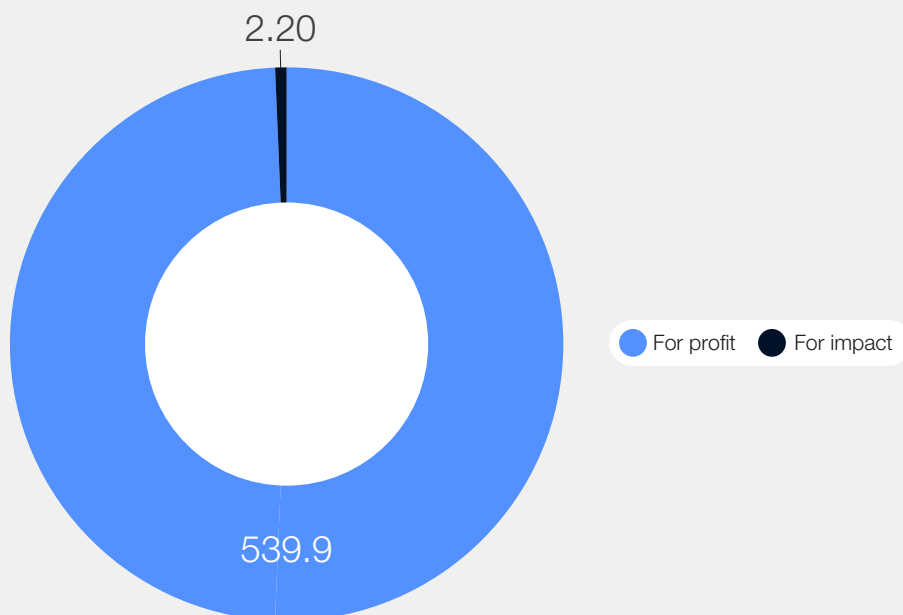
Source: Desk research and internal analysis

This disparity highlights a crucial gap in funding for projects and enterprises that prioritize social and environmental benefits alongside technological advances. Underinvestment in AI for impact can further perpetuate a cycle in which innovations primarily serve commercial interests rather than addressing critical societal challenges. Social innovators, in their use of AI capabilities, seek to address issues such as poverty, climate change and healthcare access, and promote social equity,

which require substantial resources to create meaningful impact. Without adequate partnerships, investment and resources mobilized to support their adoption of the technology, they may struggle to attract the top talent, scale their solutions and achieve the widespread adoption needed to drive systemic change. As a result, society needs to take advantage of the transformative potential of technology to address pressing global issues.

1.2 | Mobilizing resources for the ecosystem

Technology organizations can make strategic use of their internal financial, human and technological resources to increase investments in AI for impact. Resources can range from financial support such as grants, equity or loans to non-financial support such as capacity-building, mentorship and networking events for AI for impact initiatives.

Other examples in the report illustrate how some technology organizations have begun deploying resources to promote the ethical and responsible deployment of the technology. Collaborations with bodies, especially intermediaries and including non-profits and governments, can help broaden the impact and reach of resource mobilization drives.

Considerations for future resource mobilization

While AI for impact initiatives often adopt a global approach, technology organizations could consider increasing the focus on low- and middle-income countries, especially given the risk that AI could further entrench existing inequalities, leaving these countries behind in the digital age.

The dataset of 300 social innovators revealed parity in AI deployment between social innovators located in high-income countries and low- and middle-income countries. Furthermore, four of the top six

countries with social innovators deploying AI are low-and middle-income countries, with a strong footprint of deployment across India, Nigeria, Kenya and Brazil.

Yet most funding for AI for impact initiatives focuses on high-income countries. While North America and Europe account for 20% of AI initiatives, uncertainty remains about the definition of "global" initiatives and how equitably resources under this umbrella are distributed.

FIGURE 7 | **AI deployment by economic classification**
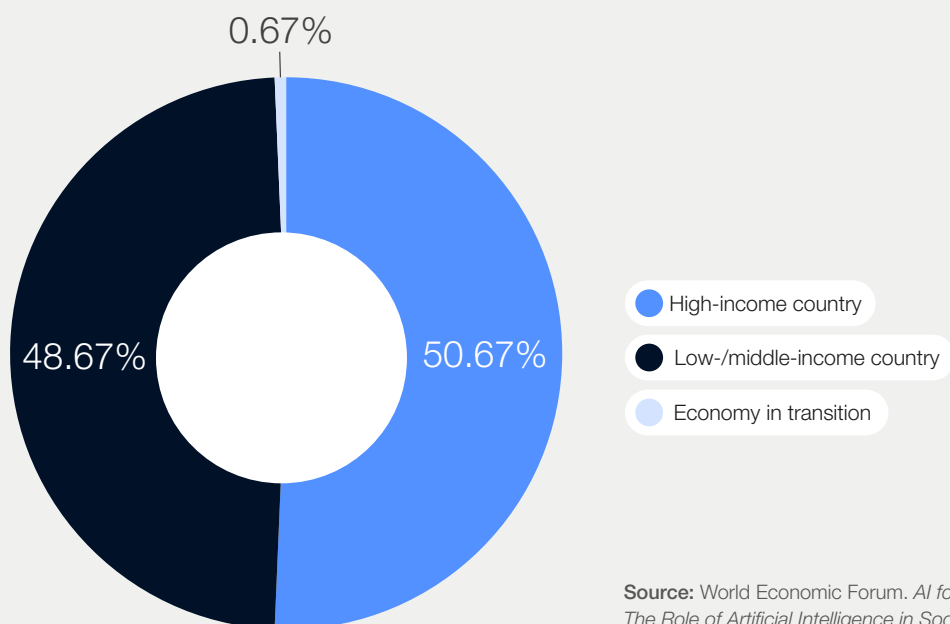
0.67%

48.67%   50.67%

- High-income country
- Low-/middle-income country
- Economy in transition

Source: World Economic Forum. *AI for Impact: The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Social Innovation*

FIGURE 8 | AI initiatives by regional focus

Initiatives by regional focus

Global 57%

Europe 7%

Oceania 7%

1% Latin America

Africa 4%

North America 13%

Asia 11%
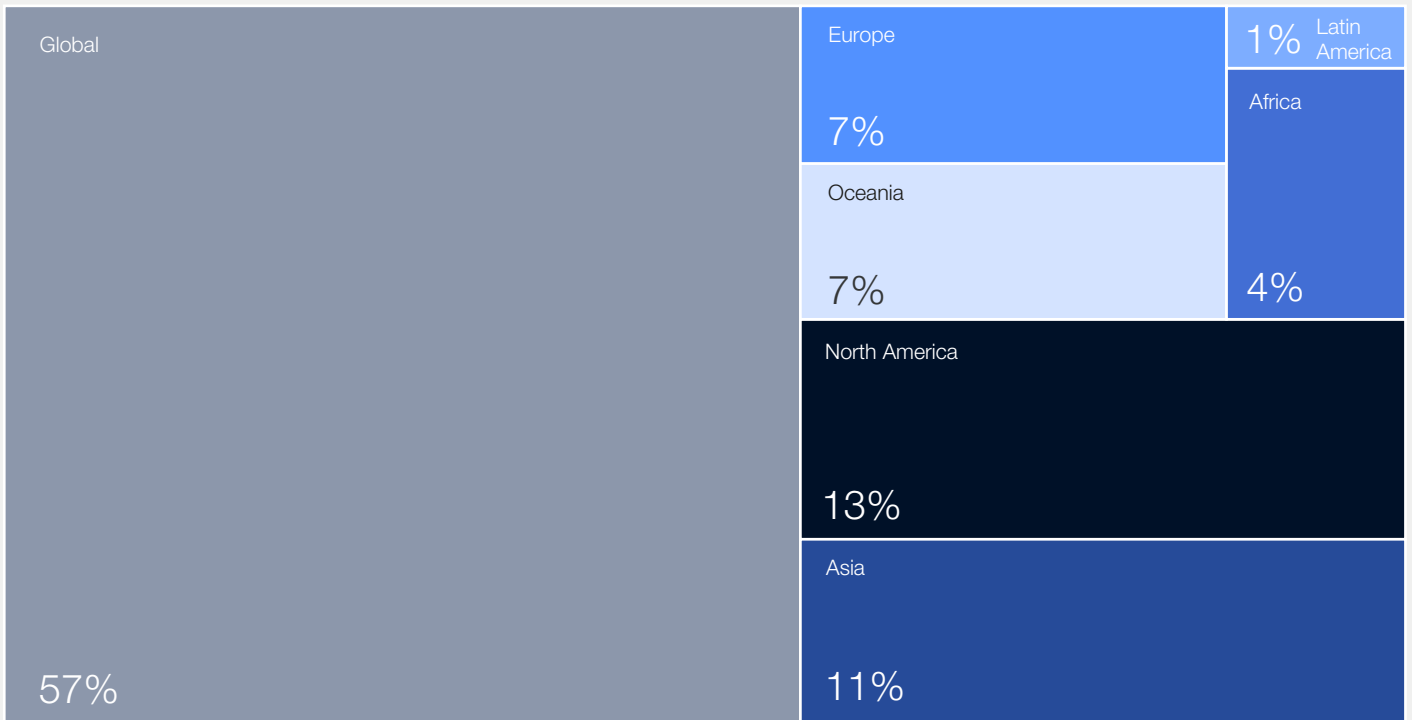
Source: World Economic Forum. *AI for Impact:
The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Social Innovation*

Clearly defining the scope, objectives and geographical priorities of global initiatives and quantifying the allocation of resources can ensure transparency and trust, thus ensuring the initiatives' long-term success.

Furthermore, a critical step currently missing from the landscape of AI initiatives in the social sector is investment in intermediaries and funders. While there is enthusiasm for launching programmes quickly, many intermediary organizations lack the personnel with sufficient expertise in AI to evaluate opportunities, design effective programmes or anticipate the needs and feedback of their communities. This gap highlights the need for a more strategic approach to investment.

To address this, it is essential to allocate financial and non-financial resources to building capacity in these organizations and developing the necessary infrastructure within them to enable them to deliver AI initiatives sustainably. Given the rapid pace of technological change, such foundational investment is crucial for long-term success.

2 The crucial role of intermediaries

With their strong networks, front-line insights and wide reach in diverse global contexts, intermediaries play a central role in strengthening the landscape of support for AI for impact.

Intermediaries are key allies in enabling transparency and trust because they possess the data, insights and networks necessary to help tech organizations understand local contexts and impacts. They can serve as bridges between technology companies and communities, providing valuable feedback and facilitating collaborations that ensure AI initiatives are not only inclusive but also reach their intended recipients. Technology organizations can use local expertise and connections to tailor their initiatives, accurately report on their outcomes and demonstrate a commitment to responsible innovation.

Intermediaries include incubators, accelerators and non-profit organizations. They provide essential support and resources tailored to the often unique needs of social entrepreneurs and the communities they serve. They are also well positioned to provide ground-up insights into the actual skills gaps that exist and the resources needed by social innovators to deploy AI for impact. Their expertise and network are invaluable in the following ways:

– Programme design

– Network and access facilitation

– Information dissemination

– Provision of training and capacity building

– Provision of grassroots insights

↓ Image credit:
INCO

2.1 Programme design

Participation by intermediaries is indispensable to the design and implementation of effective AI for impact programmes. Whether implementing initiatives from tech companies to social innovators or fostering peer-to-peer initiatives, their front-line experience with social innovators places them in a position to identify and address social innovators' needs and connect them with potential opportunities. Their intimate understanding of social innovators' enterprise models facilitates their knowledge of deployment gaps and the need for clear boundaries and standards to protect social enterprises from issues such as mission drift. They recognize the potential harm that can occur when social enterprises adopt AI tools without proper understanding or support and can provide upskilling to both corporates and social enterprises, ensuring that they speak the same language.

An example can be found in Microsoft's Entrepreneurship for Positive Impact Initiative (EfPI), which was designed and developed in partnership with leading intermediaries such as Ashoka. In 2021, the two organizations launched EfPI to embed tech, including AI, in their work. They addressed key issues and concerns ahead of the launch and in the design of the programme, with the aim of:

– Ensuring that impact enterprises have sufficient organizational capacity (e.g. that skilled staff and ethical frameworks are in place)

– Establishing a strong match between the technology benefits and business needs (e.g. tech implementations that support revenue and/or affect growth)

– Building capacity among innovators to ensure that the nuances and follow-on effects of technology implementations are well understood (e.g. long-term scalability of technology solutions or use of data)

– Providing strong mentors who can help social innovators navigate the complexities of large multinational organizations during their technology implementation

– Creating a respectful atmosphere that allows for a "two-way learning process" to ensure that knowledge is transferred back to the technology company[24]

2.2 | Network and access facilitation

Intermediaries also facilitate access to AI technology by negotiating partnerships with tech companies. They can secure discounted or pro bono AI tools, software and cloud services, making advanced technology more accessible to social enterprises. TechSoup, for example, has facilitated $15 billion in pro bono technology or funding to more than 1.2 million organizations since 1987.[25]

Similarly, TRANSFORM Support Hub[26] is a comprehensive platform purpose-built to help social enterprises achieve growth and sustainability. The platform provides a range of resources and support mechanisms tailored to social enterprises' particular needs. TRANSFORM Support Hub is powered by MovingWorlds and backed by organizations such as SAP, Unilever and the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Furthermore, intermediaries can assist in securing funding and investment for AI-driven social projects. They can connect social entrepreneurs with impact investors and grant programmes focused on technology for good, ensuring that innovative solutions receive the necessary financial support.

2.3 | Information exchange

Social enterprise networks, support agencies and intermediaries provide a platform for knowledge exchange and networking. Many of these organizations and the social enterprises they work with recognize the necessity of increasing their knowledge and awareness of practical uses of AI, as well ensuring their voices are heard in discussions about ethics. Some networks are organizing workshops and seminars or working to secure support to create opportunities for social entrepreneurs to learn from AI experts, share best practices and collaborate on projects. These events also help raise awareness about the potential of AI in addressing social challenges, inspiring more entrepreneurs to integrate AI into their initiatives.

Intermediaries also act as connectors to signpost services and available support to social innovators seeking to deploy AI. Through meetings with social innovators and online meet-ups with each other, they can share relevant knowledge about the ecosystem. The Social Enterprise World Forum, for example, is a "network of networks" that connects social enterprises and social enterprise networks, intermediaries and support agencies around the world. The organization is currently exploring ways to provide opportunities for training in AI, improve signposting to resources and ensure social enterprises have a seat at the table in discussions on ethics and AI. Through its activities, it advocates for the voices of social enterprises – across diverse regions – to be represented in discussions to ensure AI is being used for positive social and environmental impact.

2.4 | Provision of training and capacity building

Some larger tech organizations, despite the will and executive buy-in to commit resources to supporting the use of AI by social enterprises, may need more infrastructure to deploy such initiatives. Intermediaries play a crucial role in helping these organizations implement their initiatives.

Through their proven front-line experience providing training and information to social enterprises, they can marshal resources exactly where they are needed. They often offer technical support and

training programmes to help social entrepreneurs use AI technologies effectively, enhancing their capacity to innovate and scale their impact.

To deliver Google.org's AI for Social Innovation fund, the organization engaged intermediaries such as Euclid Network, INCO and Tech to the Rescue. In the case of INCO, they partnered with MinnaLearn, a Helsinki-based learning company, to provide training to 600 entrepreneurs in Europe free of charge based on the latter's online learning infrastructure.

↓ Image credit:
TechnoServe

2.5 | Provision of grassroots insights

Through their work, intermediaries can help AI for impact programmes to prioritize equitable opportunities for marginalized groups and design delivery models that ensure these groups are reached.

Technology organizations can partner with intermediaries with strong connections to communities often overlooked by the social sector and funding organizations. These communities

may have a higher potential for impact than majority groups. By supporting proximate leaders – innovators with deep ties to their communities – technology organizations can make the most of first-hand feedback from social innovators who are using AI to understand and address community concerns about the impact of the technology, especially in low- and middle-income regions.

2.6 | Engagement mechanisms for the ecosystem

Other engagement mechanisms for private-sector contribution and leadership related to AI for impact can be found in resource mobilization, enhancing data access, enabling collaborative Investment, addressing AI ethics and nurturing public–private partnerships. These are outlined in Table 1.

For technology organizations and other actors seeking more details of engagement mechanisms to collaborate with social innovators, the World Economic Forum and the Schwab Foundation's Corporate Social Innovation Compass report provides more in-depth opportunities for engagement.

TABLE 1 | Engagement mechanism

Engagement mechanism	Definition	Case studies
Resource mobilization	Organizations seeking to strengthen AI use by social innovators can strategically use internal financial, human and technological resources to increase investments in AI for impact. Such resources may include financial support in the form of: – Grants – Equity – Loans Other organizations may opt to award grants through general funds, with part of the funds earmarked for AI for impact initiatives. Non-financial support may also be deployed in the form of: – Capacity building – Mentorship – Workshops – Networking events Non-traditional means, such as the EY Ripples Better Heroes podcast,[27] have helped the organization amplify its messaging on AI for impact while reaching a more diverse global audience.	**Google.org AI for Social Innovation Fund** Google.org committed €10 million to help social innovators, particularly those from underserved communities, scale their enterprises by integrating AI technology. In collaboration with INCO and the Euclid Network, the programme provides cash grants of up to $240,000, along with training and mentorship, to overcome barriers such as limited funding and technical expertise. **NVIDIA 365 Skills for Impact initiative** NVIDIA encourages employees to volunteer and contribute advisory services to non-profits and other impact enterprises through its Inspire 365 Skills for Impact initiative. More than 150 employees have contributed over 1,150 hours at a fair market value of $240,000 to help enterprises meet marketing, communications, technical development and user experience issues. **Harnessing workforce AI skills for good** Similarly, more than 7,000 employees across the EY organization participated in AI for social good initiatives in FY24, positively impacting over 2.6 million lives.
Enhancing data access	Access to quality data is the bedrock of AI deployment. Therefore, enhancing data access and equity is not only an investment in AI applications' accuracy and potential advances within businesses but also drives societal progress and fosters innovative solutions to social problems.	**Harnessing data for impact** DataKind has been at the forefront of data-for-good initiatives for more than a decade. Since its inception, the organization has established a global network of more than 30,000 skilled technologists and experts to leverage the power of data for social change. It collaborates with diverse participants, including social impact organizations, to create and implement AI-driven solutions to pressing societal challenges. In Kenya, the organization partnered with the Global Opportunity Youth Network and Swahilipot Hub Foundation to create an AI-powered machine learning algorithm to connect young people to available jobs, training programmes and mentorship. DataKind provided further expertise and follow-up mentorship to the team members to strengthen their data-collection capabilities.[28]
Enabling collaborative investment	Cross-sectoral investment in funding unclassified AI research is crucial to the success of social innovators. By bringing together businesses, philanthropies, governments and other stakeholders, catalytic investments in research can help address fundamental technological issues. For example, the need for large pools of data to train large language models (LLMs) will remain a fundamental issue in low-resource environments – unless research allows the deployment of small language models (SLMs) at scale.	**Partnering across sectors to close the AI skills gap** Microsoft, as the lead sponsor, and EY, as the supporting sponsor, supported Data.org with its Generative AI Skills Challenge. The challenge gave awards to best-in-class impact organizations that trained and upskilled people in generative AI to advance socioeconomic mobility.
Addressing AI ethics	The private sector's commitment to tackling ethical issues and regulation considerations involved in AI strategy formulation is crucial to creating trust and shaping a responsible and accountable AI landscape. The inherent power imbalance in collaborations between tech organizations and the ecosystem remains a key risk due to open questions concerning: – Data sovereignty – Data privacy and security – Data bias – Informed consent This is buttressed by insights from the IBM Global AI Adoption Index, which reveal that concerns about data complexity and ethical issues form almost 50% of the barriers to adopting AI in larger organizations.	**Establishing trust at SAP** SAP demonstrates a commitment to ethical and responsible AI by developing a robust, publicly available framework that ensures all AI-related activities are aligned with its core values. In addition, its openness and transparency in making its ethical guidelines accessible, helps to put it in a position of trust.
Nurturing public–private collaboration	Private-sector organizations can collaborate with public and non-profit bodies via public–private collaboration to promote AI technology to social entrepreneurs. These partnerships, which combine resources, expertise and networks, can create comprehensive support systems that provide social entrepreneurs with access to AI tools, funding and capacity-building initiatives. Jointly organized programmes and initiatives complement, amplify and facilitate the development and deployment of AI solutions for social impact.	**Government collaboration to close the AI skills gap** Visa partnered with the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) in the United Kingdom to co-fund data science and AI scholarships for underrepresented students in postgraduate conversion courses at the University of Leeds and Loughborough University.

2.7 | Other ecosystem collaborators

Other participants in the ecosystem include academic organizations and regional and national governments. They can help shape and strengthen global AI policies, set AI strategies and increase the adoption of strong AI governance models that ensure accountability, transparency and ethical AI development.

Academia can provide social innovators with AI research, development and data analytics capabilities. Academic bodies can also widely distribute research in the public domain for use by other researchers, governments and social innovators. For example, the University of Minnesota, Stanford University, and TechnoServe are working with government geospatial agencies such as CIGN – Centre d'Information Géographique et du Numérique (BNETD) – in Côte d'Ivoire to deploy machine learning to map smallholder crops using satellite imagery and geospatial information systems (GIS).

Building on TechnoServe's initial work, researchers at the University of Minnesota are building a map of all cashew-farming areas in West Africa. Similarly, researchers at Stanford University Center on Food Security and the Environment (FSE), also in collaboration with TechnoServe, are deploying AI capabilities to map aquaculture and mango farms in Côte d'Ivoire. The data gathered may be useful in helping social enterprises and government agencies to more effectively allocate training and other resources for smallholder farmers.

3 Challenges in deployment

Ecosystem actors face internal, external and structural barriers that can hinder resource mobilization for AI for impact.

Lack of unified enterprise approach: Based on interviews and surveys conducted for this report, the most frequently cited barriers for companies interested in engaging in AI for impact are a lack of unified, organization-wide approaches, challenges in resource mobilization and difficulties in defining what constitutes "AI for impact". This is echoed in the discussions with intermediaries working with tech companies at large. The boundaries of classifying initiatives as "impactful" can blur easily. There is a need to clearly define and standardize what AI for impact means within each organization and which solutions and applications consistently qualify under this umbrella. Intermediaries can be crucial in helping tech organizations define the design of their AI for impact initiatives. They can assist companies to apply best practices from other impact areas, using concepts such as clear theories of change (with a clear impact, outcome and output goal) or aligning their activities with non-financial goals and reporting requirements for external transparency.

Fragmented regulatory and policy landscape: In response to the rapid adoption of AI and its immediate impact on public and domestic life, a growing number of governments around the world are exploring AI governance frameworks. While there are initiatives to harmonize global regulation – such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI)[29] – the current regulatory landscape appears fragmented, with sometimes conflicting rules. The lack of consensus about priority risks, measurement and mitigation creates uncertainty and an excess burden for smaller and mid-sized companies, including social enterprises, as they attempt to define their roadmap for AI adoption.

The World Economic Forum's AI Governance Alliance (AIGA) convenes more than 250 organizations and over 360 members across the private sector, academia, civil society and government to streamline the governance of AI and promote the responsible use of the technology in a way that delivers innovation. In a January 2024 briefing paper, *Generative AI Governance: Shaping a Collective Global Future*, the AIGA examines the landscape of AI regulation globally and offers solutions to develop trust and global cohesion for AI governance. At the same time, the report highlights the importance of ensuring representation from low- and middle-income countries in these conversations.[30] Several efforts, such as AI safety summits in London and Seoul, are seeking to increase international coordination and prevent the creation of silos in AI regulation and standards.

Aligning business objectives with diverse needs: A significant barrier to providing meaningful support for impact businesses and social innovators is transparency about the diverse needs of social enterprises. Each social enterprise has particular requirements, and addressing these effectively poses a significant challenge. Providing tailored support and ensuring efficient communication across various social enterprises is complex and resource-intensive.

Data availability: Access to quality and relevant data is crucial for developing and deploying effective AI solutions for impact initiatives. However, obtaining such data can be difficult, hindering the progress of AI for impact projects. While tech organizations, intermediaries and front-line social innovators have begun the process of collating and streamlining their data processes, a key risk and question remains about data proprietorship, especially with data obtained from low- and middle-income countries and exported to high-income countries without recourse to or discussion with the communities from which the primary data was obtained.

Technology equity and data bias: It is crucial to ensure fairness when using AI to prevent exacerbating existing inequalities, especially for minority groups. In 2023, most of the world's foundation models – large language models trained on a wide range of datasets to ensure their usage across different contexts – originated in the United States (109), followed by China (20) and the United Kingdom. Since 2019, the United States has consistently led in originating the majority of foundation models.[31]

Transparency is fundamental to building trust in adoption, and implicit biases can drastically affect the validity of outcomes and subsequently incorrectly, sometimes even unjustly, affect individuals and communities.

Data standardization and ethics: With regard to the intersection between AI and creating humanitarian impact, there are a few obstacles: the sourcing of data from disenfranchised populations (methods, frequency of collection and variability – or lack thereof); the economics of the strained infrastructure supporting these data sources; and the analysis of sporadic or unstructured data from irregular data ecosystems. In addition, a polarized social media environment tends to lead to lower acceptance of interventions among communities and higher barriers to engagement for companies and organizations developing interventions, due to the increased risk profile of these initiatives. Furthermore, while AI can ease analysis of the data, the lack of local data, its higher volatility and numerous other confounding factors can bring outcomes into question.

4 Drivers of success

Technology leaders offer insights into the key factors that have enabled previous initiatives to be successfully implemented.

A survey of 40 leading tech companies and organizations identified the following elements as essential for the successful deployment of AI for impact initiatives.

Adopting a modular and scalable approach:
As previously outlined, the need for AI for impact initiatives remains quite diverse. Some social innovators grapple with basic technological readiness while others are exploring the frontiers of AI implementation with the need to retrain entire models on their own data. A modular, methodical approach can therefore support the acceptance and positive impact of initiatives. The most effective programmes are co-created with the deploying organizations – such as intermediaries and other sectoral partners – to ensure high levels of confidence that the interventions are purpose-built for the needs of the sector.

Collaboration and cross-sectoral partnerships:
Partnerships with a solid range of stakeholders are vital to success. Visa's partnerships, for example, allow it to learn from other organizations and their management of AI use internally. The organization adapts its external programmes to ensure they are the most impactful. Similarly, industry and other multistakeholder forums help the organization learn about the latest initiatives to promote AI for impact worldwide.

Executive support for AI for impact initiatives:
Gathering executive support and senior champions for AI for impact initiatives will support their success. At Microsoft, internal sponsorship at the executive vice-president level, and public support by other board members ensure that the company's Entrepreneurship for Positive Impact programme enjoys organizational sustainability and long-term focus.

Mission alignment and strategic integration:
Mission alignment between AI for impact initiatives and a company's business and impact goals is critical to the success of initiatives. For example, SAP's AI for impact initiatives are rooted in its core values and expertise, while contributing to its business success. Its strategic work with social entrepreneurs also enables the company to promote the implementation of similar initiatives among its global portfolio of clients.

Strong fundamental demand: The dataset of more than 300 social innovators deploying AI for impact illustrates the fundamental demand for AI for impact initiatives. The fast development, myriad capabilities and diverse applications of AI ensure that there is long-term demand for training and skilling, organizational readiness support, affordable access to the technology and financial support.

(5) Key ecosystem recommendations

It is crucial for technology companies, intermediaries and governments to be strategic and intentional in their approach to strengthening the support landscape for AI for impact.

Collaborative engagement and collective action: Cross-sectoral partnerships remain central to co-creating solutions. Collective gatherings can serve as a marketplace of ideas, bringing different participants and diverse voices together to streamline demand, address challenges, proffer solutions and encourage investment in initiatives at scale. Google.org's partnership with INCO allowed the company to roll out its Social Innovation Fund by using the intermediary's network of more than 10,000 entrepreneurs and the ability to deploy initiatives globally in more than 50 languages.

Visa is a member of the Resilient Governance and Regulation working group of the World Economic Forum's AI Governance Alliance. IBM collaborated with Meta and 50 other leading technology organizations, civil society groups and academic bodies to found the AI Alliance. The coalition emphasizes the responsible development of AI and the need to ensure that open innovation in AI benefits everyone. It seeks to support open foundation models, AI hardware accelerators, skills building, exploratory research, development of educational content, public discourse and many other activities.[32]

Innovation and scaling through proximate leaders: Technology companies often prioritize customer-centric development of technology solutions, using lean approaches to design their products in user-centric ways. Interestingly, these same organizations tend to adopt a non-iterative, top-down approach when developing, deploying and scaling initiatives around technology for good. As a result, social impact organizations and impact enterprises often wrangle with the structure of these initiatives as they are not always fit for purpose.

Partnerships with intermediaries and ecosystem organizations allow tech companies to adopt a ground-up approach and stay true to their nature when developing AI for impact programmes. In that way, they prioritize use cases and the perspectives of social enterprises in local communities. This enables them to actively engage with end users to understand their particular needs and challenges, ensuring that technological solutions are relevant and impactful. By incorporating feedback and insights from community members, tech organizations can create more user-centric products and services that drive meaningful change.

Lowering barriers to entry: For social enterprises, the barriers to entry into AI remain prohibitively high due to several factors. The significant financial investment required for AI technology, infrastructure and talent can be beyond the means of many social enterprises, with costs ranging from $25 per month to deploy a GPT-enabled tool to custom solutions that can run into hundreds of thousands of dollars to wholly implement.

Recognizing that applications of AI for social good are just the beginning of what its tools could accomplish, Meta has prioritized the development and publication of open-source models that empower developers globally to identify and build solutions that address immediate needs in their communities. In building and releasing these open-source models, Meta lowers the barriers to entry so that impact-focused developers can create or launch new AI tools or ventures without significant spending on research. Open-sourcing foundational AI technologies also reduces the barriers to entry: AI can be deployed not only by the few technology companies that have the computing infrastructure to train large models but also by the broader community of developers and organizations that stand to benefit from these innovations, including social innovators.

Capacity building: One of the main obstacles to broader AI adoption among social impact organizations is a shortage of workers with AI expertise. Reuters estimates a 50% hiring gap for all AI-related skills in 2024.[33] Consequently, there is a fierce fight for talent.[34] The complexity of AI development demands specialized skills and expertise, which are often scarce and costly. Overcoming this challenge is crucial if AI's social impact potential is to be fully realized. Recognizing this challenge, EY has collaborated with the UN's International Telecommunications Union (ITU) to upskill 1,000 girls in 12 countries, as well as working with TeachAI to support educators to teach with and about AI.

Furthermore, Amazon Web Services (AWS) and Amazon are addressing obstacles to wider AI adoption through comprehensive education programmes, hands-on training initiatives, technical assistance resources and technology access offerings. This is part of efforts to empower organizations to use AI solutions in tackling some of the world's most pressing social issues.

Ethical AI use: Ensuring equity is paramount, as deploying AI responsibly is essential to avoid exacerbating existing inequities, particularly for minority groups. With the United States, China, the EU and the UK leading as sources of top AI models, low- and middle-income countries are largely missing from the map of AI development. In addition, with the number of AI incidents – unethical misuse of AI – on the rise, collaboration with local actors and integrating their voices is crucial to ensure that these models are representative and truly fit for global contexts.

Policy and regulatory considerations

By creating a conducive environment that mitigates safety risks, governments can ensure that social innovators, technology organizations and society at large reap the positive benefits of AI.

Governments play a vital role in enabling AI for good by shaping what responsible AI means and fostering trustworthy AI usage. This can be achieved using a mix of levers – including policy incentives and regulation. Clear ethical guidelines, compliance frameworks and policies aligned with international standards can facilitate greater global collaboration and innovation while tailoring regulations to address local needs and contexts.

Regulators and governments have a key role to play in shaping what responsible AI means. This includes creating supportive regulatory frameworks, investing in research and development and promoting public–private partnerships. It is important that these regulatory frameworks integrate principles that can build trust and encourage collaboration among the tech ecosystem, intermediaries and social innovators regarding AI for good. The World Economic Forum's Digital Trust Framework can provide an entryway to building a trustworthy and safe regulatory environment.

↓ Image credit:
TechnoServe

FIGURE 9 | The Digital Trust Framework
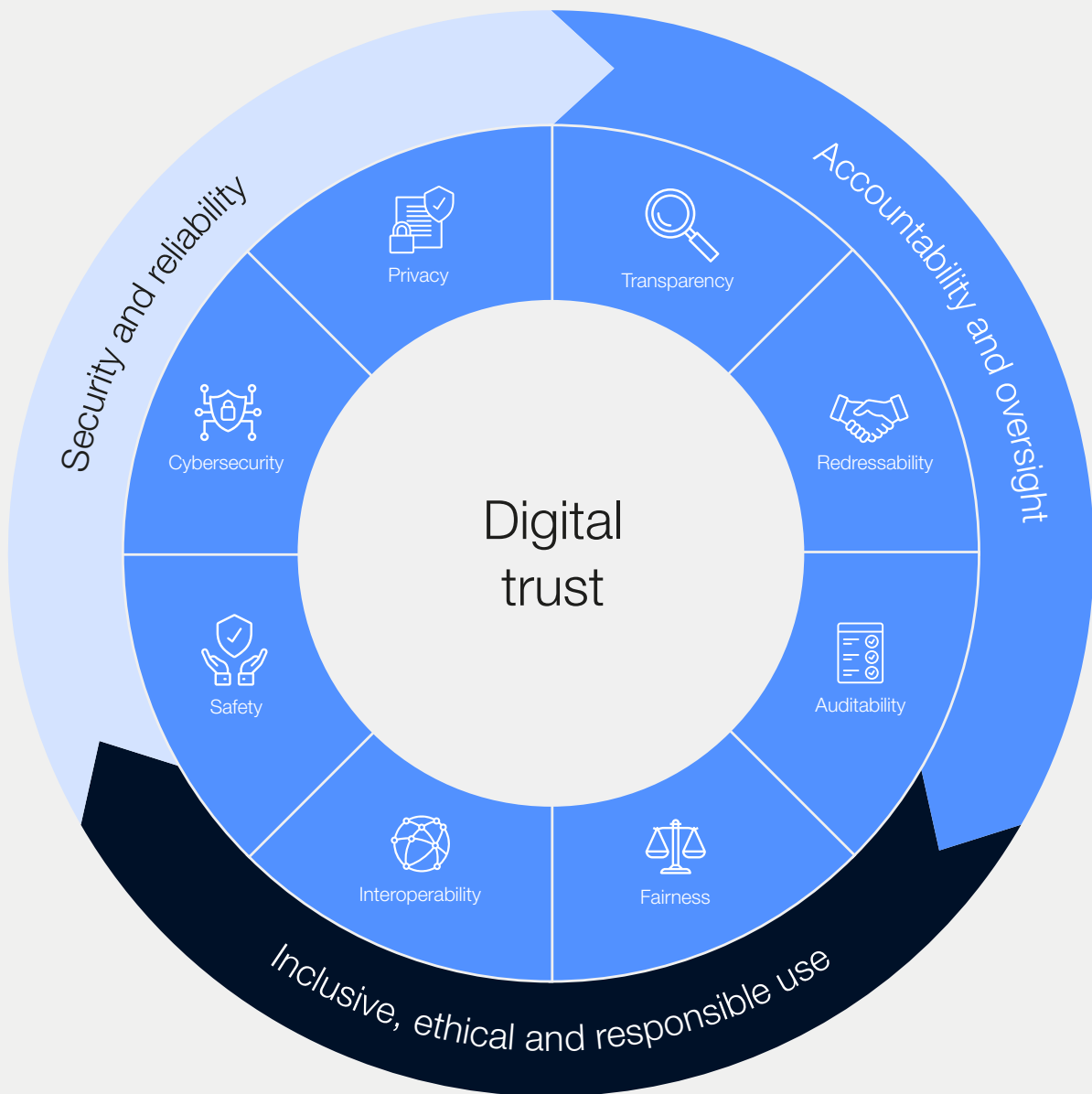
Source: World Economic Forum. *The Digital Trust Framework*

In addition to ethical guidelines, standards and compliance frameworks, supportive policies creating incentives for AI for impact applications and programmes can mobilize private-sector support for AI for social good. This may include minimum investment requirements, tax incentives or disincentives and alignment with non-financial reporting requirements.

FIGURE 10 | Countries with a national strategy on AI, 2023

Released   In development   Not released
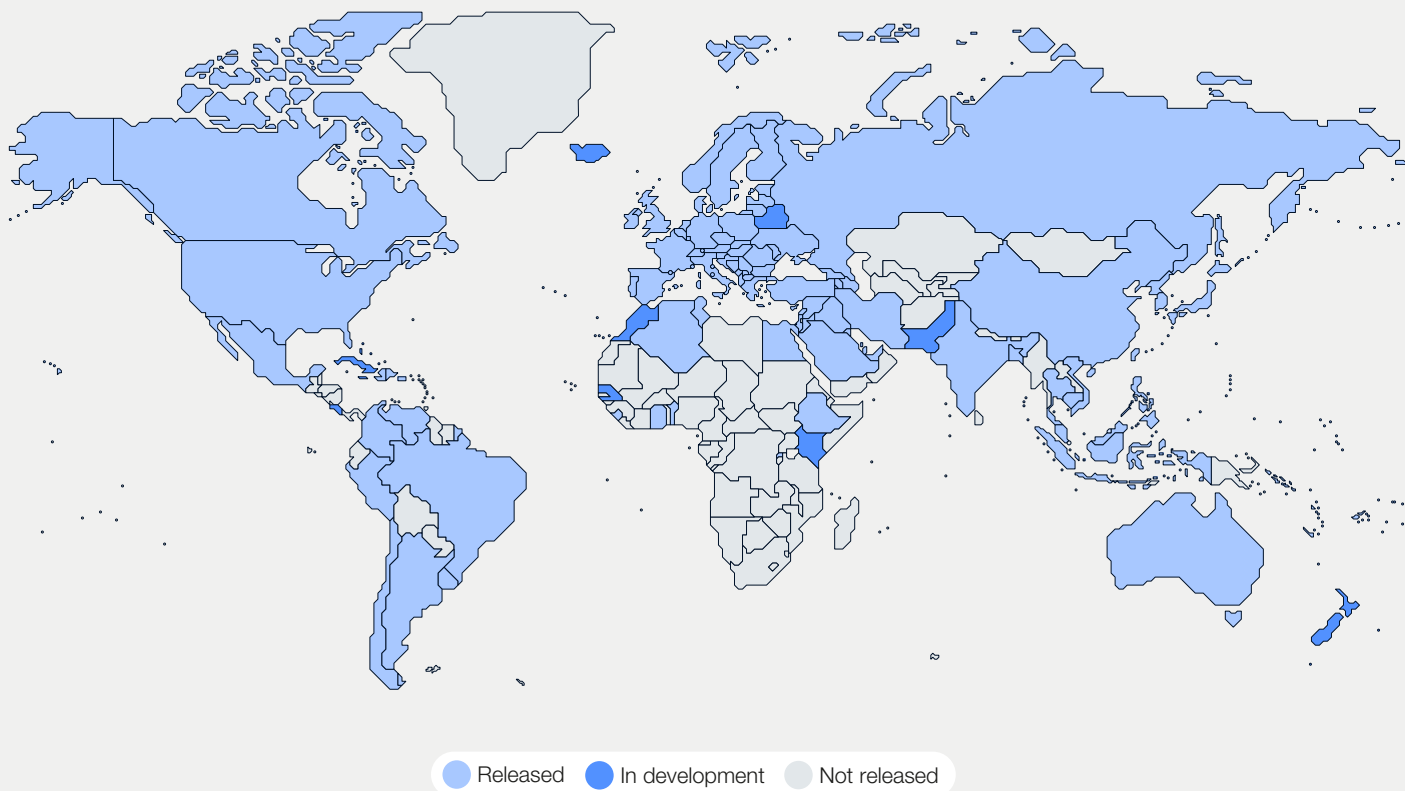
Source: Stanford 2024 AI Index[35]

Significant breakthroughs in generative AI technology have brought it to the forefront of regulatory attention and led to multiple policy-making processes running in parallel. At an international level, these efforts include:

- The EU AI Act[36]

- The G7 Leaders' Hiroshima AI Process[37]

- The Bletchley Park Declaration promoted by the UK, the OECD and the Council of Europe[38]

- The United Nations' efforts led by the recently established AI High-Level Advisory Body[39]

However, advances in AI are outrunning the current pace of governance. Governments are encouraged to integrate the voices and perspectives of diverse actors if they are to fully understand the trajectory of the technology and design policies that promote an impact-centric, sustainable deployment of its capabilities. This is supported by the Forum's AI Governance Alliance report, _Generative AI Governance: Shaping a Collective Global Future_, which highlights the need for international coordination to ensure the legitimacy of governance approaches and promotes flexible regulatory mechanisms such as regulatory sandboxes to enable organizations to test AI in a low-risk and controlled environment.[40]

Conclusion

Social innovators are using AI to drive meaningful change. Strong support and partnerships with technology organizations, intermediaries and governments can ensure AI becomes a powerful force for positive impact.

This report underscores the transformative potential of AI in addressing global social and environmental challenges, with the private sector playing a pivotal role. As AI continues to develop rapidly, its deployment by social innovators remains crucial for achieving scalable and sustainable impact. Collaboration among technology organizations, social enterprises and intermediaries is essential to overcoming barriers and ensuring the ethical and equitable use of AI. However, current AI for impact initiatives fall short of fulfilling demand, structurally addressing access issues and providing a way forward that works for all communities. Intensified collaboration and increased funding for AI for impact initiatives are needed to ensure they increase their share of financing beyond the 0.41% of all budgets allocated to AI implementation received today.

Key strategies for success include developing cross-sectoral partnerships, enhancing data access, providing financial and non-financial support to social innovators and prioritizing ethical AI practices. With its substantial resources and expertise, the private sector can contribute significantly to building a supportive ecosystem for AI for impact initiatives – not only by providing funding and technology access but also by engaging in capacity-building efforts for social innovators and creating opportunities for reverse learning from these innovators to support inclusive and ethical AI deployment.

The role of intermediaries is vital in bridging the gap between technology organizations and social innovators. By facilitating access to AI tools, providing training and ensuring that initiatives are aligned with social enterprises' needs, intermediaries can help drive effective AI adoption. Additionally, they play a crucial role in addressing biases and ensuring that AI solutions are inclusive and equitable.

Public–private partnerships are another important component of creating comprehensive support systems for social entrepreneurs. Governments can contribute by developing supportive regulatory frameworks, investing in research and fostering an environment conducive to AI for good. International coordination and flexible regulatory mechanisms, such as regulatory sandboxes, help social innovators keep pace with rapid AI advances and ensure sustainable and impactful deployment.

Ultimately, the success of AI for impact initiatives hinges on collaborative engagement, strategic integration and a commitment to ethical practices. Using AI, social innovators, supported by the private sector and intermediaries, can create innovative solutions that drive meaningful social and environmental change. Ongoing efforts to build an inclusive and supportive AI ecosystem will be instrumental in shaping a future in which technology serves as a force for good.

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