

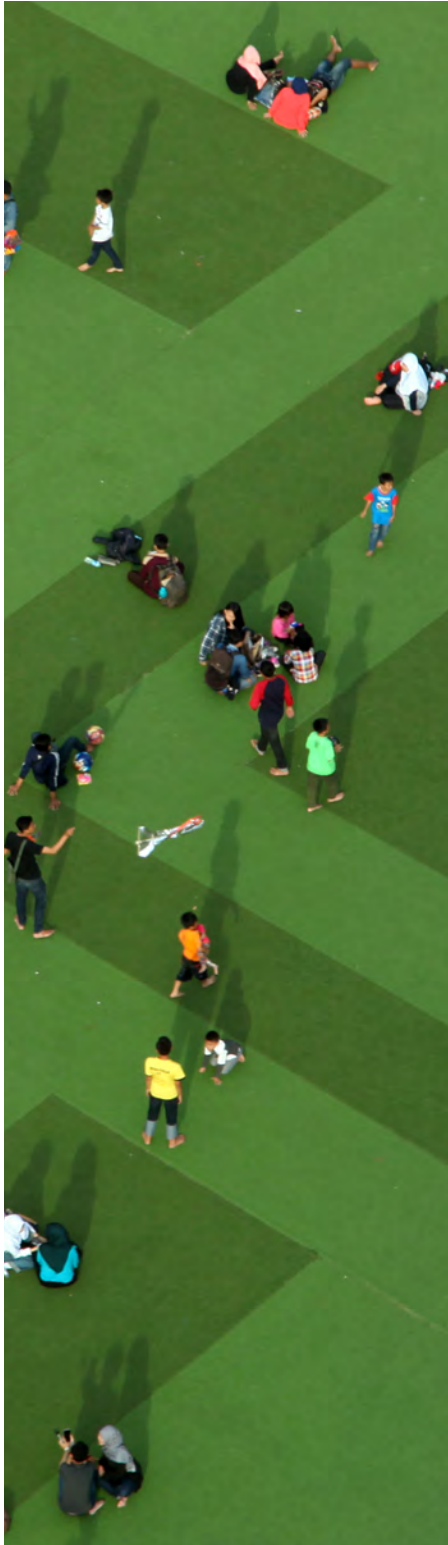
A woman wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a checkered shirt is standing in a field of young plants, looking at a tablet. The background shows a sunset sky over a field of crops.

Inclusive Innovation: an inside look at AI's potential to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

September 2024



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Foreword

On the front lines of the fight to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we have a new and transformative ally. Artificial intelligence (AI) has the power to accelerate solutions to tackle global challenges and structural inequalities. But its potential to create positive human impact will depend on a responsible, purposeful and inclusive approach that focuses on creating value for all.

In the private sector, the use of AI is accelerating. But in the social impact sector, that is not always the case. Although there are some inspiring outliers, the sector is under-resourced and can have problems accessing talent in data science and AI. There is a real risk that marginalized communities will be left even further behind unless AI is deliberately applied as a force for good to improve equity.

This report surfaces five key principles we must bear in mind if we wish to ensure inclusive development harnesses the true potential of AI. The principles are based on the knowledge and experience of people working on the SDGs right now - as well as some of the world's leading experts in AI and social impact.

We hope its findings, ideas and case studies support understanding of the transformative potential of AI across the global development community. And we call for companies and social impact enterprises to collaborate around AI-driven innovation to speed up progress towards the SDGs.

Gillian Hinde

EY Global Corporate Responsibility Leader

Alan Robbins

Co-Founder & Executive Vice President, Devex

Abbreviations

AI	Artificial intelligence	NGO	Non-governmental organization
AT	Assistive technology	OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
CEO	Chief executive officer	SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
COO	Chief operations officer	UMIC	Upper middle-income country
DIAL	Digital Impact Alliance	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
HIC	High-income country	UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
ITU	International Telecommunication Union	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
LIC	Low-income country	USAID	United States Agency for International Development
LLM	Large language models		
LMIC	Lower middle-income country		



Executive summary

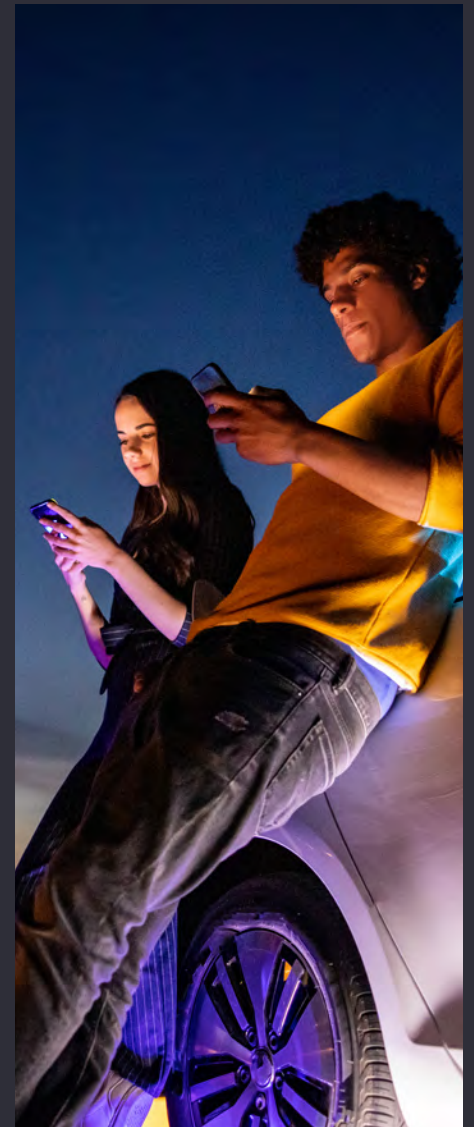
With many SDG targets lagging and a growing funding gap, the need to innovate to amplify positive impact has never been more urgent. AI offers a promising tool for accelerating progress by enhancing data analysis, knowledge access and operational efficiency. While the SDGs call for bold solutions to global challenges, there are concerns that AI, positioned as a game-changer, could exacerbate existing inequalities if left unchecked. How can we leverage AI's power to bridge these divides and facilitate inclusive, equitable progress?

To better understand what is needed to effectively embed AI into global development initiatives, this report gathers insights and perceptions from the professionals working on the SDGs themselves. Through a comprehensive survey of over a thousand professionals in SDG-aligned fields, as well as in-depth interviews and roundtable discussions with AI and social impact experts and implementers, this research aims to identify current trends, challenges and opportunities for AI as a tool for inclusive development.

The resulting report consolidates key insights and considerations to guide stakeholders in using AI to achieve the SDGs inclusively and sustainably across five critical areas:

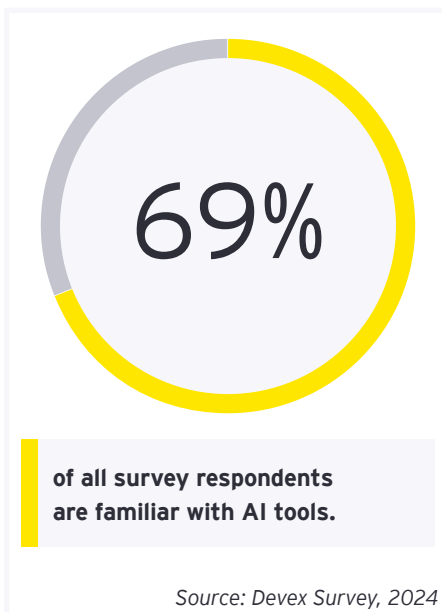
- ▶ Prioritizing connectivity and accessibility for vulnerable populations
- ▶ Fostering local ownership and empowering communities to tailor AI solutions to their needs to achieve truly inclusive development
- ▶ Building confidence, trust and transparency in AI processes to safeguard vulnerable populations and uphold the ethical use of data
- ▶ Cultivating a strong enabling environment to promote AI-driven inclusive innovation while mitigating risks
- ▶ Creating alliances and forging strategic collaborations to leverage the potential of AI for inclusive development

Harnessing AI to create a more sustainable future has the potential to be revolutionary - though as with any emerging technology, there remain risks. However, this transformative change can only occur if we can close the digital gaps and foster meaningful participation from marginalized communities, so that no one is left behind.



Introduction

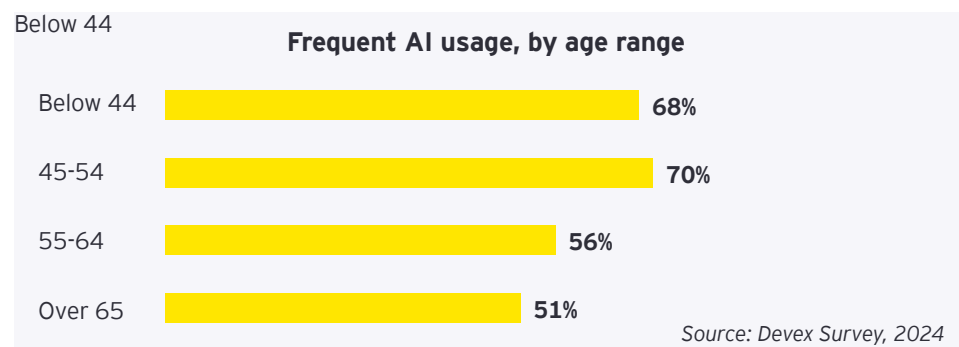
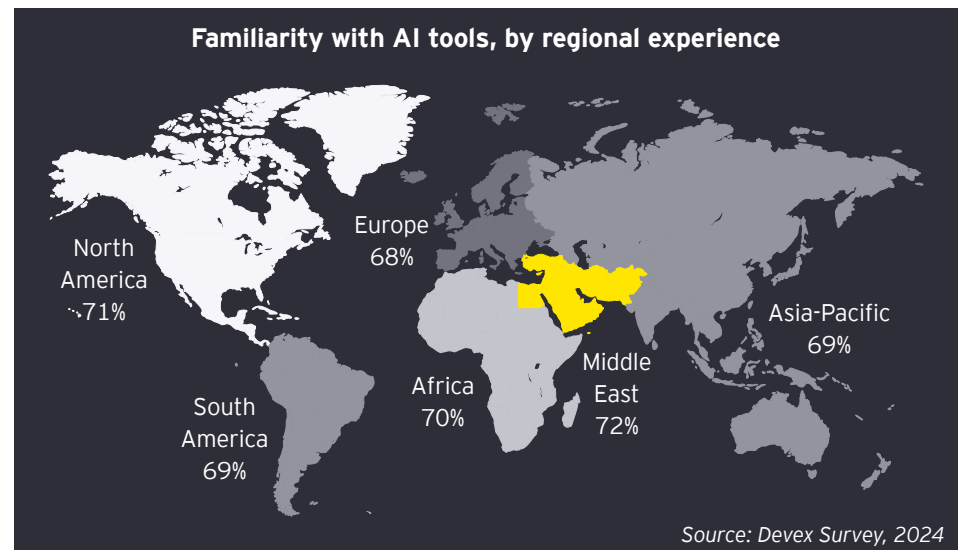
Despite significant efforts to meet the SDGs, only [12% of the measurable targets are currently on track](#), and roughly 30% have yet to progress at all. Funding commitments struggle to keep pace as the [SDG funding gap has risen to an estimated \\$4 trillion](#) - up from \$2.5 trillion in 2015. With only six years left to achieve the SDGs, the need to innovate and design cost-efficient solutions that amplify positive impact has become imperative. Many have turned their attention to AI to accelerate progress toward the SDGs with its ability to process data quickly, improve access to knowledge, and increase efficiency along value chains. But with the rapid advancement of AI tools and platforms, how can we best harness this possibly game-changing technology to bring about transformative and equitable change that leaves no one behind?



In an effort to understand how to effectively harness AI for a more sustainable future, Devex and EY surveyed over a thousand international development professionals working towards the SDGs on their perceptions of AI as a tool for inclusive development, as well as learn what AI use looks like on the ground. These findings were complemented by in-depth interviews and roundtable discussions with experts, global executives and program implementers working with AI and other emerging technologies

to advance inclusive economic growth, promote inclusion and address inequalities, representing a range of sectors and organizations.

Devex's survey finds that much of the global development community is already leveraging AI for their daily work. Half of the respondents say that there is some level of uptake of AI tools within their organization - from individuals exploring AI independently to AI tools being used widely within and across departments.

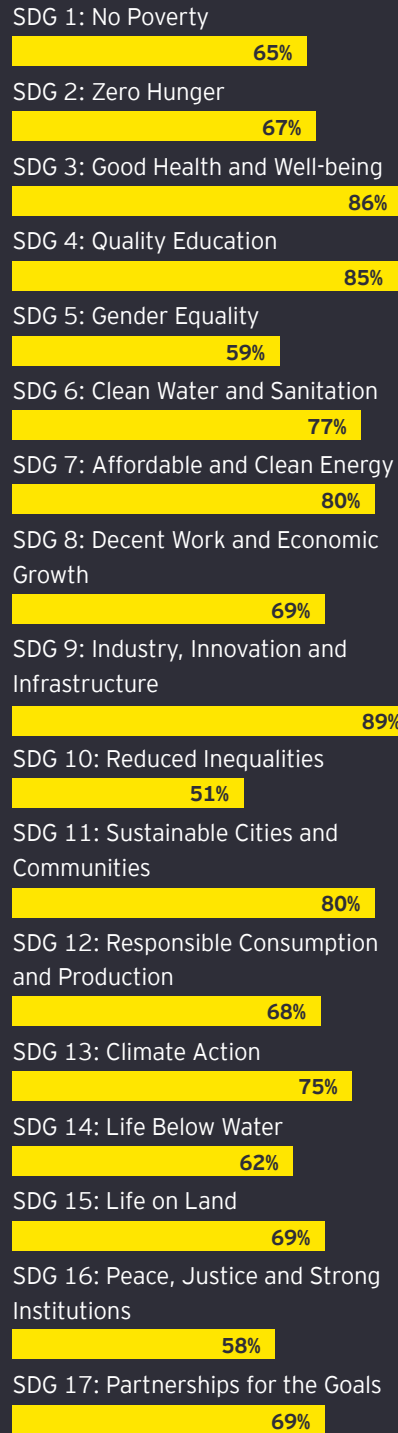


Additionally, a large portion of survey respondents believes that AI has the potential to positively impact all of the SDGs, **identifying SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure** (89%), **SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being** (86%), and **SDG 4: Quality Education** (85%) as areas where AI can do the most good. On the other hand, **SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities**, **SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**, and **SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth** are perceived as areas that may potentially worsen in the advent of AI.

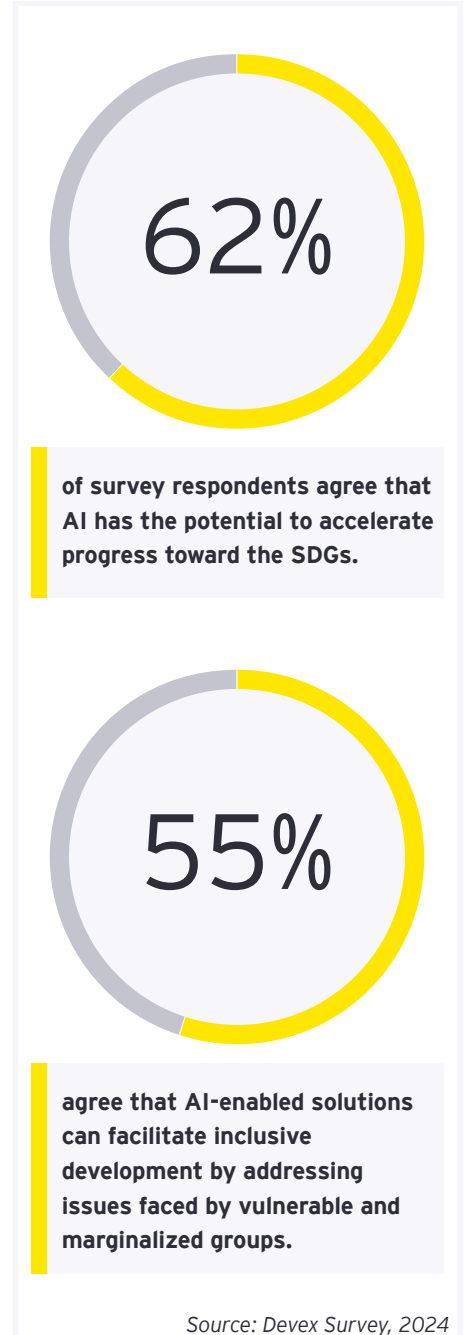
Despite AI's potential for catalyzing inclusive development, it does not come without risks. According to [research driven by KTH Royal Institute of Technology](#), AI can be beneficial for 79% of the SDG targets - but at the same time, it can also inhibit 35% of the targets. Survey data similarly shows a divide in opinions on whether AI can do more good than harm, and these perceptions around AI also differ across geographies and gender.

The Devex survey also shows that familiarity with AI greatly influences the respondents' opinions, with respondents with greater awareness and understanding of AI tools exhibiting more positive opinions of AI as a tool for achieving the SDGs and facilitating inclusive development. Conversely, those who are less familiar with AI's capabilities - as well as its risks - are less likely to consider AI as a likely means to achieve the SDGs, or to addressing the needs of marginalized groups.

SDGs that could benefit most from AI-enabled solutions

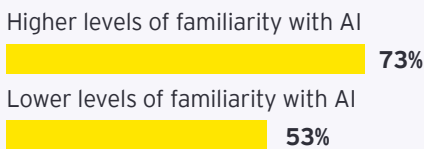


Source: Devex Survey, 2024

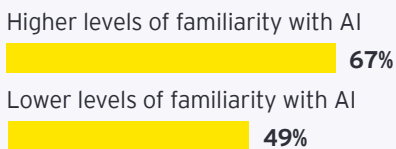


As AI becomes more embedded in global development initiatives, much work needs to be done so that any progress we make leaves no one behind. Our research finds that if we are to effectively leverage AI and accelerate progress toward the SDGs, developing AI solutions must be done alongside efforts to increase understanding of AI's benefits and risks among stakeholders. But what approaches should be taken to educate the population around AI and enable greater uptake of AI solutions in global development? What gaps and barriers need to be addressed? What role should policymakers, the private sector and other stakeholders play? And how do we equip all individuals with the skills to fully leverage AI and safeguard against the risks that come with it? This report helps navigate the complexities of AI against the fast-approaching SDG deadline.

Respondents who believe in AI's potential to accelerate progress toward the SDGs



Respondents who believe that AI can facilitate inclusive development



Source: Devex Survey, 2024

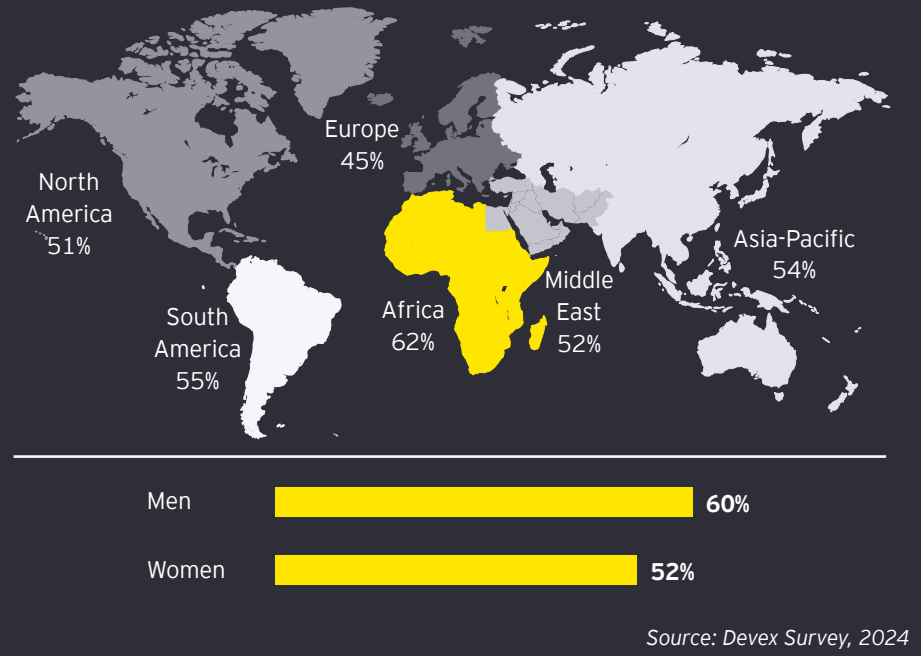
What is inclusive development?

Although the 2030 Agenda focuses on sustainable development, it also emphasizes principles of **inclusive development**. This is an equitable development approach built on the understanding that every individual and community, of all diverse identities and experiences, is instrumental in the transformation of their own societies.

These principles are further shaped by its pledge to leave no one behind and to reach the furthest behind first. **"Leave no one behind"** is a central tenet of the SDGs, which not only entails reaching the poorest of the poor, but requires combating discrimination and rising inequalities, as well as their root causes. The UN's **Shared Framework on Leaving No One Behind** outlines a strategy for achieving this goal, emphasizing equality and non-discrimination as core principles for sustainable development.

Sources: United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and UN, 2024

Respondents who believe that AI-enabled solutions can address issues faced by vulnerable and marginalized groups

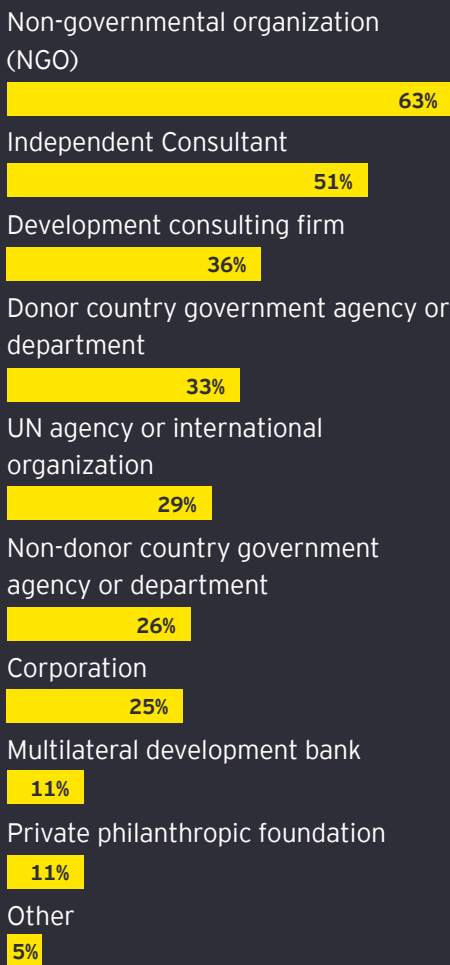


Source: Devex Survey, 2024

Methodology

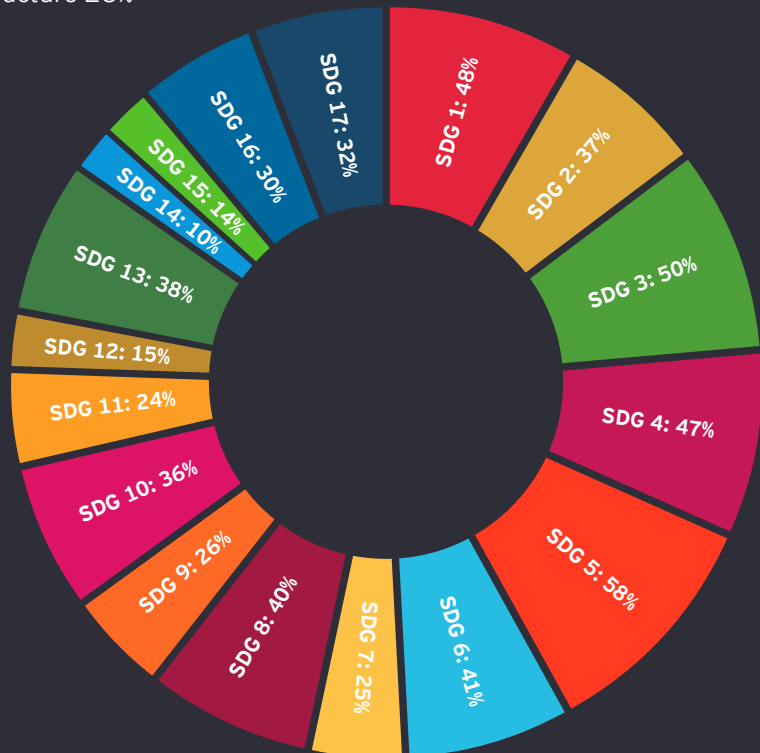
To inform this report, Devex conducted an online survey from February 5 to May 17, 2024. The survey was sent to Devex’s network of international development professionals with experience working across the SDGs, representing public institutions, development organizations and the private sector. A total of 1,098 respondents answered the online survey.

Where have they worked?

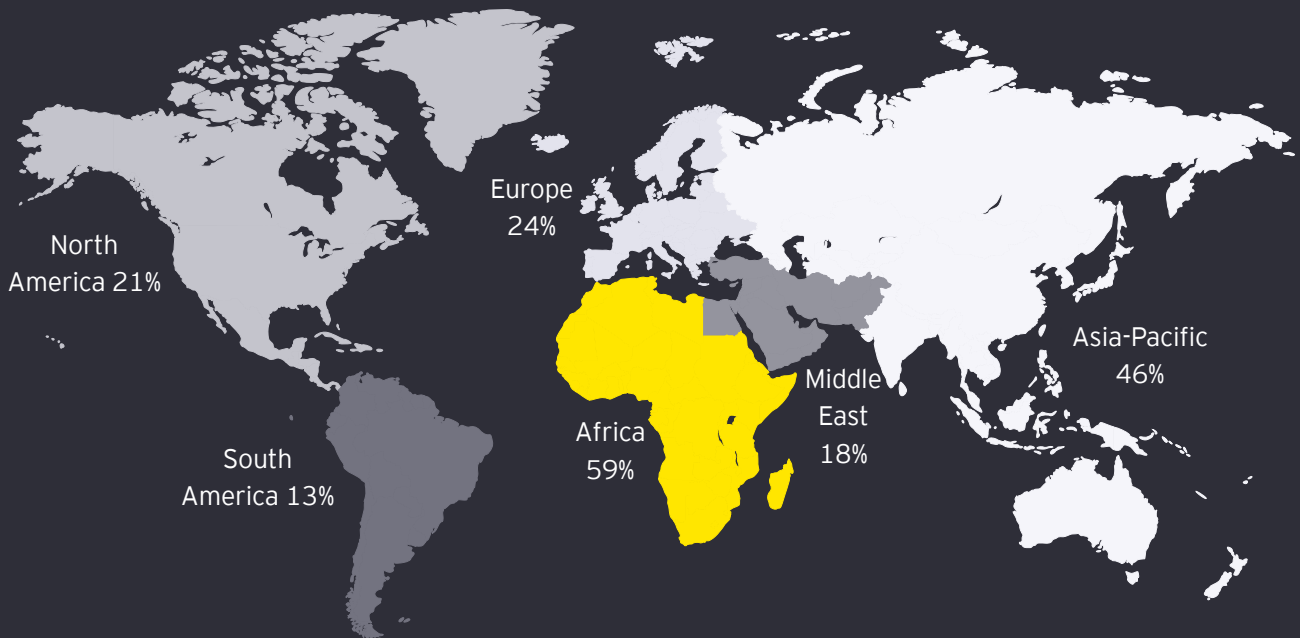


Which SDGs do they address?

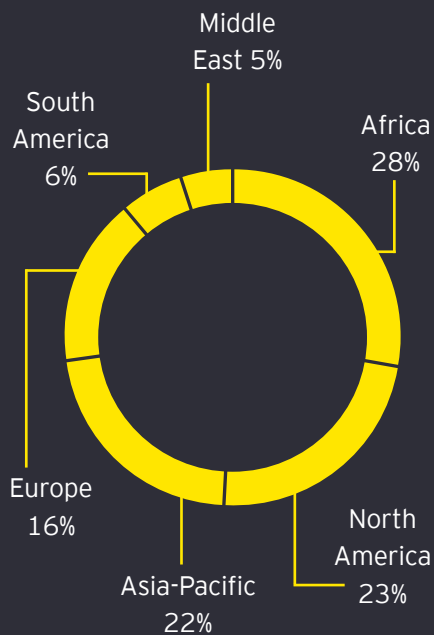
- SDG 1: No Poverty 48%
- SDG 2: Zero Hunger 37%
- SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being 50%
- SDG 4: Quality Education 47%
- SDG 5: Gender Equality 58%
- SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation 41%
- SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy 25%
- SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth 40%
- SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure 26%
- SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities 36%
- SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities 24%
- SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production 15%
- SDG 13: Climate Action 38%
- SDG 14: Life Below Water 10%
- SDG 15: Life on Land: 14%
- SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions 30%
- SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals 32%



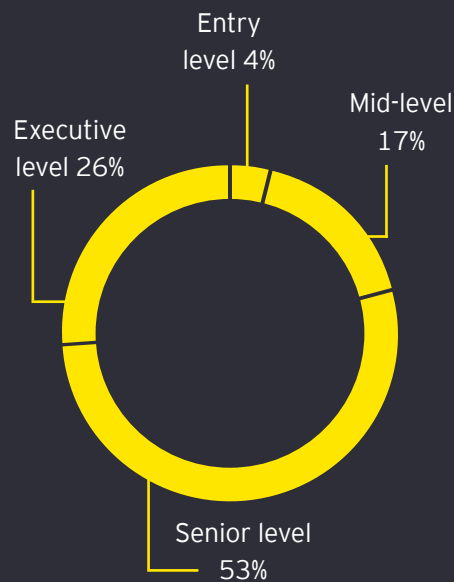
Which regions have they worked in?



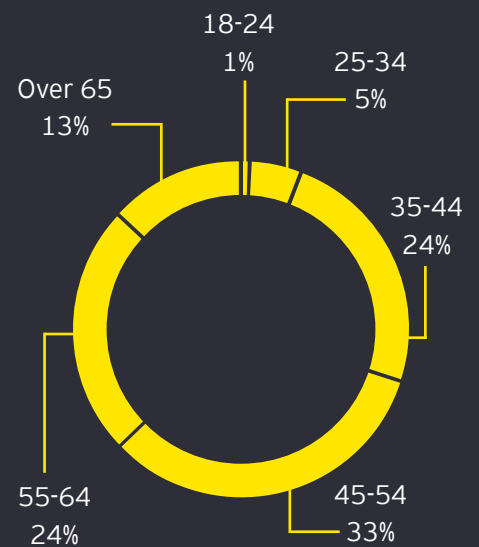
Where are they currently based?



What position do they hold at their organizations?



How old are they?



To supplement the survey findings, Devex conducted six in-depth interviews with experts working in the AI for social impact space.

Devex and EY also organized three roundtable discussions to learn about AI's transformative potential for inclusive development. We engaged dozens of industry leaders to gain insights on the challenges and opportunities presented by AI across the SDGs.

Key findings

1 Connectivity and accessibility are prerequisites to effective AI

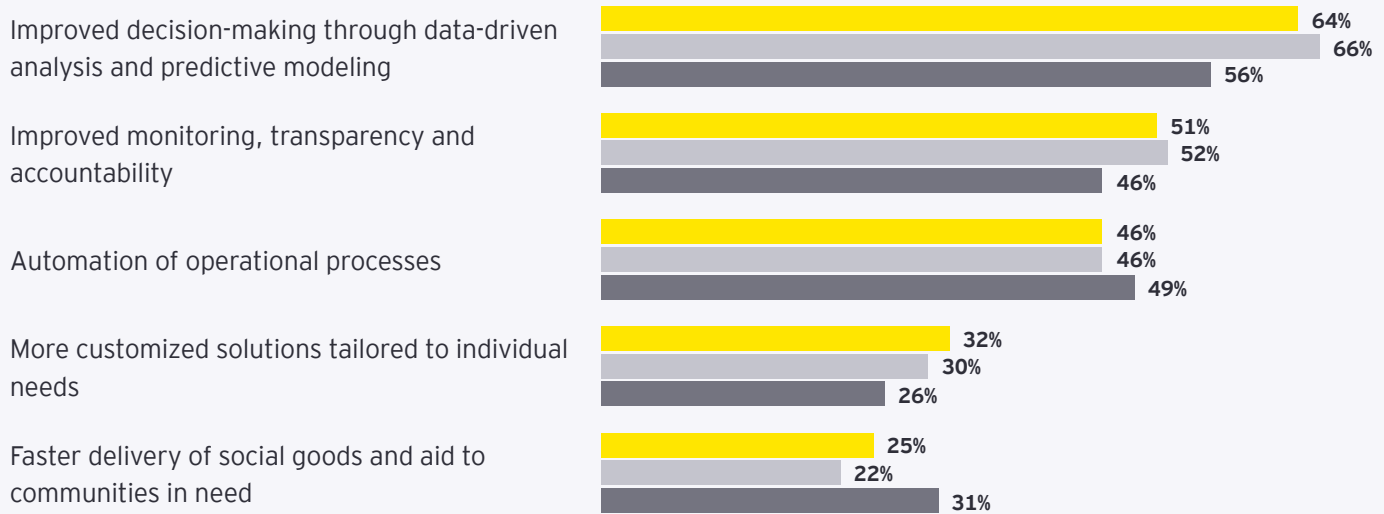
When considering an inclusive approach to achieving SDG-aligned goals through emerging technologies like AI, infrastructure and access are usually top priorities. A significant portion of the global population still lacks easy access to technologies that could enhance their lives, making it essential to address their needs as a critical first step. For example, while 17% of all survey respondents identify limited access to AI technology as a foremost barrier to utilizing and benefiting from AI tools, a fifth of respondents based in Africa and 28% of respondents in low-income countries (LICs), view the lack of access to AI-capable technology as a major hindrance. In contrast, respondents based in Europe are less likely to take this view, at 12%, emphasizing the outsized role of access in more developing contexts.

Access to technology plays a cross-cutting role in achieving inclusive development by bridging the digital divide and enhancing access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Technologies such as e-learning platforms, telemedicine, e-commerce, and fintech can provide remote and underserved populations with essential services and opportunities. While strong progress is being made on access to electricity, internet access, and mobile phone access, AI developments present new opportunities to achieve SDG-aligned objectives.



Top benefits of utilizing AI for an inclusive approach to achieving the SDGs

Overall High-income countries Low-income countries



Source: Devex Survey, 2024

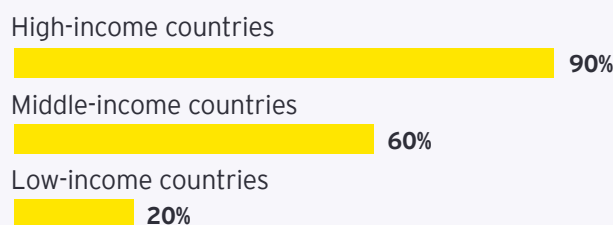
Meaningful access and connectivity can also lead to a virtuous cycle of AI, a self-reinforcing process where improved connectivity leads to the collection of richer and more diverse data, enhancing AI systems' accuracy and performance. These improved AI systems drive better services and applications, increasing adoption and generating even more data. When this is achieved, it can encourage further investment in digital infrastructure, reducing digital divides and promoting equitable access to information and opportunities. Enhanced infrastructure and AI systems contribute to [economic growth](#) and social benefits, perpetuating a continuous cycle of improvement and broader inclusivity.

Many communities still lack access to computers and the internet, with just a fifth of individuals in low-income countries connected in 2021. However, digital connectivity

is steadily growing. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the UN specialized agency for information and communication technologies, the number of people worldwide not connected to the internet [decreased by 100 million people between 2022 and 2023](#).

Currently, about two-thirds of the global population has some form of connectivity, to varying degrees. "There tends to be this biased thinking that the rest is well-connected, and that's not true either," says Sylvia Poll, Head of the Digital Society Division at ITU. "There are certain places in the least developed countries where the quality of the connectivity is so bad that they barely can send out an SMS. There needs to be the right access, the right connectivity, the right devices that are affordable, and the skills have to be there to use them."

Percentage of population using the internet in 2021



Source: World Bank, 2024

Achieving universal meaningful connectivity

Universal meaningful connectivity refers to a comprehensive approach to internet access. It goes beyond basic connectivity to provide a safe, satisfying, enriching, productive and affordable online experience for users. This approach emphasizes not just the ability to connect but also the quality, utility and affordability of that connection. It aims to create an environment where everyone can fully participate in the digital world, leveraging the internet for education, work, social interaction and accessing essential services.

Components of universal meaningful connectivity include:

- ▶ **High-speed internet:** Users need access to fast and reliable internet connections that support activities like video streaming, online education and telehealth without significant delays or interruptions.
- ▶ **Reliable broadband access:** Consistent broadband access at home, work or school is essential. A lack of data should not limit individuals from fully using the internet.
- ▶ **Regular internet use:** Regular and sustained use, rather than occasional or limited access, allows users to fully integrate online activities into their daily lives. Daily access is the minimum needed for real benefits in work, education and communication.
- ▶ **Affordable access:** Cost should not be a barrier to connectivity. This includes affordable devices and data plans. Users also need access to an appropriate device, such as a smartphone, laptop or desktop, to both produce and consume content online.
- ▶ **Localized content and digital literacy:** Access to relevant, localized content and resources is crucial, catering to the needs and interests of diverse user groups. Additionally, ascertaining that users have the digital literacy skills necessary to effectively use the internet is essential.
- ▶ **Inclusivity and safety:** The internet should be accessible to all, including marginalized and vulnerable populations. It should also be a safe environment free from harassment, misinformation and other risks.

Source: ITU, 2022

For AI to benefit marginalized groups, it must first be accessible to them. But the quality of digital connectivity must be meaningful, and able to address specific needs and contexts rather than pursuing technology for technology's sake. In doing so, it is also crucial to understand when and how to use AI effectively to elevate marginalized communities and recognize opportunities with clear benefits rather than mere necessity.

AI opens new possibilities for meaningful participation in today's global digital society. Natural language processing

can further bridge the digital divide by making AI tools more accessible and user-friendly, equipping individuals from vulnerable populations with skills and knowledge for the evolving job market. For example, [Texthelp](#) is a literacy and accessibility software that uses text-to-speech, speech-to-text, and word prediction, to help users with dyslexia and other neurodivergent conditions better engage with written content. Similarly, AI tools can localize content for different regions, enabling websites, apps and services to be culturally and contextually appropriate, broadening their usability.

Building inclusivity through AI-enabled assistive technology

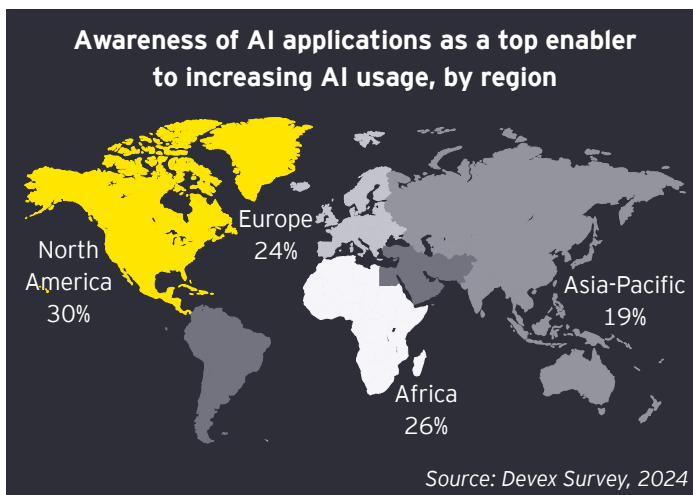
AI-enabled tools for persons with disabilities, such as screen readers for the visually impaired and voice recognition for those with motor impairments, are also instrumental in making the internet more accessible and inclusive. An estimated 2.5 billion people require some form of assistive technology (AT), from wheelchairs and hearing aids to smart glasses. However, only 10% of people in LICs have access to these essential technologies, compared to 90% in HICs.

Examples of AT that serve to bridge opportunities in education, employment and social inclusion for those with disabilities, as well as aging populations, include:

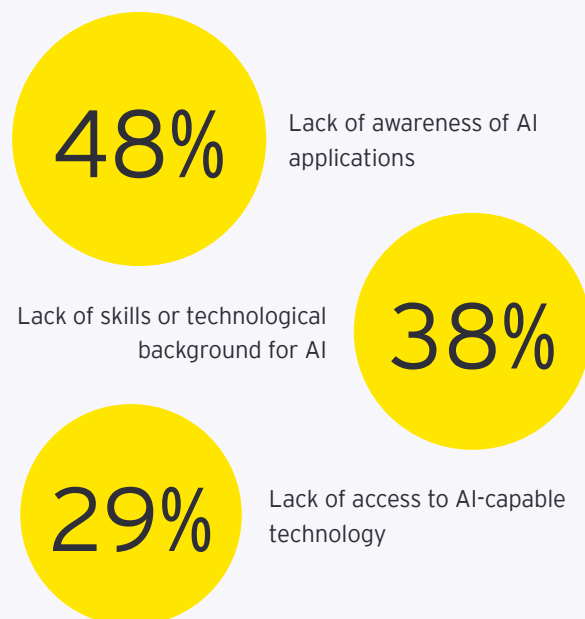
- ▶ AI-powered smart glasses
- ▶ Screen readers with text-to-speech programs in local languages
- ▶ Auto-captioning software
- ▶ Smartphones with specialized apps
- ▶ Voice-activated virtual assistants

Devex and EY roundtable participants also emphasize the dynamic between digital infrastructure and awareness of AI-enabled solutions. The relationship between digital infrastructure and awareness of AI tools can be perceived as a chicken-and-egg problem: robust infrastructure is needed for AI adoption, while awareness and demand for AI drive infrastructure development. For instance, marginalized communities may struggle to implement AI solutions due to limited access to high-speed internet or data storage facilities. Slow connectivity or outdated hardware can also make it difficult for individuals to access AI-related educational materials or online courses. These can lead to a lack of awareness and understanding of AI among these groups, as well as hinder their ability to leverage AI solutions and benefits into their daily lives.

But when meaningful connectivity and access are achieved it can result in greater utilization of AI tools, which in turn raises awareness and demand for further infrastructure development, creating a dynamic and interdependent progression. Roundtable participants also argue for building local ecosystems to support and nurture local talent that can develop, train and deploy AI-enabled solutions informed by diverse voices and perspectives. Approaching connectivity and access to AI purposefully can help make sure that AI works to benefit all, reducing inequity rather than contributing to it.



Top factors preventing survey respondents from using AI



Source: Devex Survey, 2024

Case Study: Bridging the infrastructure divide through Microsoft programs

In 2023 alone, Microsoft provided nonprofits with over \$3.8 billion in discounted and donated technology, and supported [325,000 nonprofits and UN organizations](#) with Microsoft AI and cloud solutions. At the 2023 UN General Assembly, Microsoft committed to double the number of organizations it serves with critical cloud, data and AI technology they need to accelerate SDG impacts.

As part of this effort, Microsoft launched the [Digital Development Program](#), an initiative aiming to bridge the digital divide by equipping LICs with digital infrastructure and technology as the engine for development. The program aims to help governments modernize their infrastructure and deliver critical services, focusing on digital transformation and its ability to drive inclusive growth. Features of the program include:

- ▶ Focusing on scalability and sustainability by taking a broad and integrated approach to digital development that spans skilling, public services transformation, AI integration, cybersecurity and privacy
- ▶ Emphasizing affordability by providing technology at significantly reduced costs, with discounts of up to 75%, as well as establishing a stable pricing framework until 2030 to align with the SDGs
- ▶ Developing tailored solutions by co-designing solutions with local authorities to align with national priorities and existing initiatives
- ▶ Fostering collaboration by leveraging the combined expertise and resources of a wide range of stakeholders, including governments, funding agencies, donors, NGOs and UN organizations

The program targets countries eligible for international development assistance under the World Bank's International Development Association criteria, representing 23% of the world's population. Starting with an expression of interest from the country, the selection process includes on-site visits to assess national strategies, conduct benchmarking, and produce reports summarizing key findings and recommendations.

Case Study, cont'd

Cape Verde, Angola and Ethiopia were selected as pilot countries to participate in the program, with Côte d'Ivoire and Mozambique following suit. After a consultative process with the national governments, the four key priority areas identified for the Digital Development Program are:

- ▶ Transforming public services and the public sector workplace through digital technologies, with a focus on setting standards for privacy, cybersecurity and efficiency
- ▶ Providing access to learning management platforms and digital skilling content to build the necessary digital capabilities
- ▶ Supporting the startup ecosystem as a driver of digital transformation in both the public and private sectors
- ▶ Leveraging initiatives like [Microsoft's Airband](#) to secure "last mile connectivity" in hard-to-reach, underserved areas

The participating countries benefit from pro bono digital advisory, affordable cloud solutions, and access to essential digital tools to help governments modernize their infrastructure and provide critical services. While the program is currently in the early stages of deployment, the program aspires to help these countries leapfrog milestones to modernize industries, upgrade infrastructure and develop more advanced services with the adoption of AI and other emerging technologies by 2030.

Microsoft similarly bridges the digital divide through collaborations with EY teams on its AI SDG Accelerator. Launched in 2024, the program supports pioneering AI solutions aimed at driving significant progress towards achieving the SDGs through a portfolio of pro bono services. Regen Ag, a collaborative effort between EY, Microsoft and sustainability consultancy company Bright Tide, is tailored towards startups looking to harness AI to aid farmers' transition to regenerative agriculture practices by providing tools for data collection, biodiversity monitoring, supply chain connection, process efficiency and crop resilience modelling. The six-month program offers startups pro-bono services to help ventures tackle challenges and scale, including coaching and workshops, technical and advisory AI support, as well as networking and pitching opportunities.

Key Findings

2 Building local ownership of AI solutions is key to truly equitable development

AI's potential to solve a multitude of problems is countered by challenges to effectively reach the last mile. As the technology evolves, minorities and vulnerable populations face additional obstacles using systems not designed with their needs in mind. And while local communities know their surroundings best, they often lack the platforms for voicing their concerns or ideas, especially if they come from the margins. A [2024 study on AI in social innovation](#) finds fewer localized AI-driven initiatives, largely due to a lack of resources or support in low- and lower-middle-income countries (LMICs), compared to HICs.

Significant shifts are underway as AI increasingly finds its way into the hands of marginalized communities. When AI solutions are created from the ground up, they are better suited to address specific local issues and garner greater community support, leading to more sustainable outcomes. Empowering communities, and giving them the skills to use and create AI-based solutions are critical. Organizations such as Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, TeachAI, and Technovation work on the ground to match their resources with local innovators to co-create community-led solutions.

Empowering the local population to identify the most pressing issues in their community and drive the solutions that address them not only makes development initiatives more inclusive, but also more sustainable. The [Principles for Digital Development](#) outlines the importance of designing technology with the people who will use them and understanding the existing ecosystem in which the technology will be used. Similarly, a human-centered approach to designing AI tools is at the core of the [PRISM framework for responsible AI in social innovation](#), developed by EY teams in collaboration with Microsoft and the World Economic Forum. As a strategic roadmap for social innovators incorporating AI into their work, it

“

The digital divide fuels both data and development divides, and today this data divide is creating an even larger gap. To the extent that AI is fueling and creating productivity or knowledge gains for those people who are using it, it's also fueling an equally large disadvantage among those who are not.

Priya Vora

Chief Executive Officer (CEO),
Digital Impact Alliance

underscores the importance of aligning any initiative with the organization's impact goals. It also highlights the need to factor in ethical considerations including potential biases in AI models, demonstrating transparency in decision making, as well as accountability for the decisions made.

Building local ownership also entails providing a platform for community innovators to use their digital expertise for the common good. To spur local innovation in LMICs, in 2023 the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation launched a call for proposals under its [Grand Challenges](#) program inviting local researchers and innovators to pitch solutions that incorporate AI-enabled large language models (LLMs). A total of 50 grants, each worth \$100,000, were [awarded](#) globally to address unique challenges in health, gender

equality, economic development and other development areas. By championing inclusive and community-centered design, the grants allow local innovators to develop solutions that tackle challenges that face their own communities, generating greater buy-in at the local level, and contributing to more sustainable outcomes.

Examples of Grand Challenges Grantees

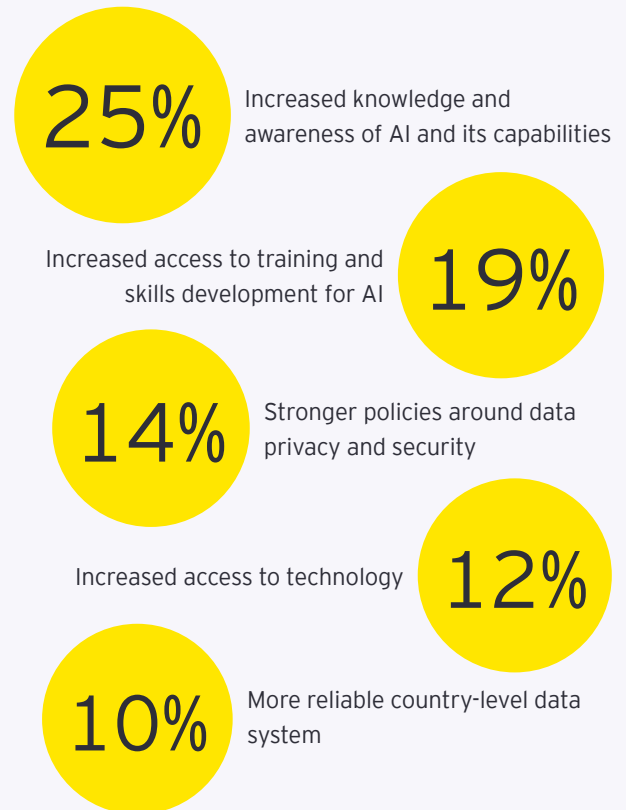
Your Choice app in South Africa: Designed to address the HIV epidemic, the app uses an LLM-based chatbot that interacts with individuals to obtain their sexual history without stigma and discrimination. By gathering an accurate sexual history of individuals, the app allows for more effective HIV risk assessments and prescription of preventive drugs.

SATHI AI bot in India: A GPT-enabled AI bot, SATHI promotes equal access to financial services by disseminating information on the latest government financial schemes supporting micro-enterprises and farms to potential customers and providers in rural and suburban communities. A translation module allows the bot to understand voice queries and respond with an audio answer in the local language.

Swahili chatbot in Tanzania: Through the use of ChatGPT, the chatbot helps smallholder farmers detect crop diseases in maize to increase crop productivity and prevent the loss of income. Combined with Internet of Things technologies, the chatbot alerts farmers on several diseases that afflict maize through non-invasive sensors to monitor early indicators of diseases, including volatile organic compounds, ultrasound movements, and soil nutrient uptake.

A critical first step in empowering the local population is to see that all stakeholders have a level of digital literacy that allows them to actively and effectively participate in policymaking and knowledge sharing, as well as the design and application of AI tools through co-creation. A quarter of survey respondents identify the need to increase knowledge and awareness around AI and its capabilities as the top enabler for fully leveraging AI for an inclusive approach to the SDGs. This is especially true for respondents who have worked extensively in South America, with a third of respondents acknowledging the importance of increasing knowledge around AI.

Top enablers to fully leverage AI for inclusive development

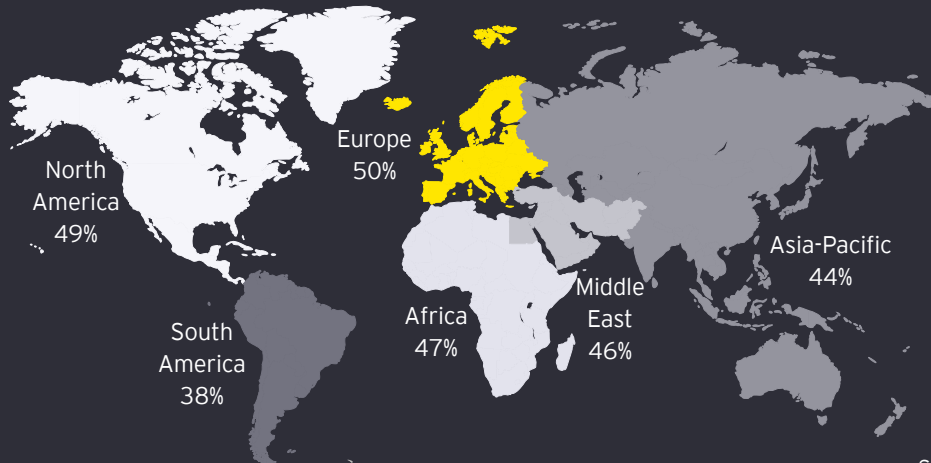


Source: Devex Survey, 2024

Roundtable participants similarly argue the need for policies that push for workforce development through skills-building to empower the population to engage with AI and help drive positive change within their communities. This not only equips the population with the relevant skill set to access more economic opportunities, but also allows individuals to contribute ideas and develop solutions for the most pressing issues in their communities.

While there is evidence that shows innovations in AI are already making a difference within local communities, there is much room to grow. Survey data confirms that there is a clear skills gap that needs to be addressed in order to take advantage of AI's full capabilities. While 73% of surveyed global development professionals believe that their use of AI-enabled solutions will increase within the next year, only 45% feel confident that they have sufficient skills and knowledge to incorporate AI into their work. Gender and age also play a factor in determining the perceived skill levels among respondents: 47% of male respondents feel that they have sufficient skills to leverage AI for their work, while only 41% of female respondents

Respondents who believe they have sufficient skills and knowledge to incorporate AI in their work, by region



Source: Devex Survey, 2024

feel the same. Among respondents aged 55 and above, confidence in one's AI skills drops to 38%.

Carol O'Donnell, the Lapp-Keiser Director at the Smithsonian Science Education Center, emphasizes the value of teaching students how to utilize digital tools at a young age - both for their safety and to prepare them for the future. "STEM educators help to build students' digital literacy skills, from a very young age, including computational thinking, basic coding and the use of algorithms, even if schools don't have access to broadband or digital services" she states. "It's a STEM educator's responsibility to prepare students for a future workforce that's not yet defined, one that's constantly changing with emerging technologies," O'Donnell adds.

To empower educators to instruct with and about AI, EY teams are working with [TeachAI](#), an initiative that helps leaders and policymakers understand and act on the implications of AI in education by guiding policy, building community and capacity, and raising awareness. Additionally, EY teams are collaborating with [Teach For All](#) to provide guidance on a GenAI curriculum framework while participating in video interviews around practical applications of AI to generate knowledge that will be shared with a network of 15,000 teachers across the globe.

When it comes to achieving the SDGs and the pledge to leave no one behind, local communities - with their intimate knowledge of their unique environments - are often best able to devise nuanced solutions. AI-enabled initiatives can help communities leapfrog development

hurdles, but these are most effective when they are human-centered, community-owned and co-designed with the locals themselves. This in turn is only possible when there are enough knowledge, skills and resources available to users, leading to a transformative change that can impact generations.

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We know there are disparities across the globe in students' access to and use of digital tools in classrooms, but there are also disparities in their digital literacy – their ability to understand how to use these tools, and use them in a safe way. That's the challenge: making certain children are safe in cyber environments. We need to ensure STEM teachers have the skills and resources to teach students digital literacy skills, and help students safely navigate online learning both in and out of school.

Carol O'Donnell

Director, Smithsonian Science Education Center

Case Study: Moving the needle on gender equality through digital education and co-creation

According to World Bank data, only 50% of women who are of working age are able to participate in the labor force compared to 80% of men globally, and tend to earn less than their male counterparts. The 2023 Global Gender Gap Report finds that despite a steady, upward trend in employment, only 36% of those working in the technology, information and media industry are women. Further, only 28% of women in this sector hold senior leadership roles.

To address gender inequality in the workforce, Tara Chklovski founded Technovation with the goal of equipping young girls with the tools to eventually lead to higher levels of participation among women in the workforce, as well as access to better economic opportunities. By providing mentorship and training in entrepreneurship, leadership, and the use of cutting edge technology, the organization allows girls to identify real-world problems within their communities and empowers them to solve these problems using technology and AI-based solutions.

Globally, Technovation's education and mentorship approach has enabled thousands of young girls to develop innovative apps that address some of the most pressing issues in their communities. Some solutions include:

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Too often, women are relegated into small businesses, and it is usually the only socially acceptable business for them to go into. But these tend to be very low growth, and they're highly competitive because all of the women will go into it. That's why accelerating that growth through the use of technology can help women to not only craft better solutions, but also create better lives for them and their families.

Tara Chklovski

Founder and CEO, Technovation

- ▶ **Quake it Off** (India): uses machine learning and AI to provide earthquake predictions for specific locations. Trained on earthquake catalog data, the app uses AI to generate the safest evacuation routes for users.
- ▶ **Usafiri App** (Lamu, Kenya): uses data from various websites to detect and alert fishermen of incoming high tides, preventing marine fatalities within the island community, which reached 166 in 2021. Apart from sending alerts, the app also provides the community with learning materials on marine safety.

To date, Technovation works in 120 countries and has roughly 400,000 alumni changemakers, but the organization has its sights set on a higher goal. Last year, Technovation launched the AI Forward Alliance with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), ministries of education, governments, and industry partners with the goal of reaching and educating 25 million girls within the next 10-15 years.

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I started Technovation almost 18 years ago to bring the most cutting edge skills and technologies to the most underrepresented communities in the world so that they could bring their firsthand knowledge of the problems they face, and then adapt the technology to solve their own problems instead of waiting for someone else who might not have the same contextual knowledge that they do.

Tara Chklovski

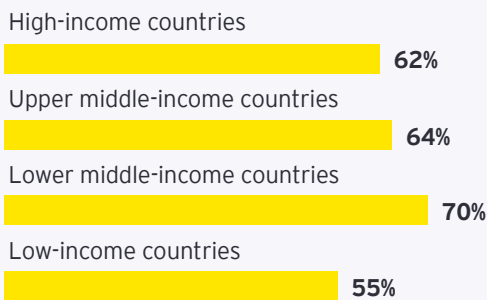
Founder and CEO, Technovation

Key Findings

3 Strengthening confidence, trust and transparency within AI and the data it returns helps see that AI protects rather than exploits vulnerable populations

As general-purpose technology that enables us to rethink how to integrate information, analyze data, and make better-informed decisions, the rapid development of AI has impacted many aspects of how we live and work. Indeed, 64% of Devex survey respondents say that they regularly use AI tools, with only 12% reportedly not using AI at all in their day-to-day work.

Frequent AI usage by economic country classification



Source: Devex Survey, 2024

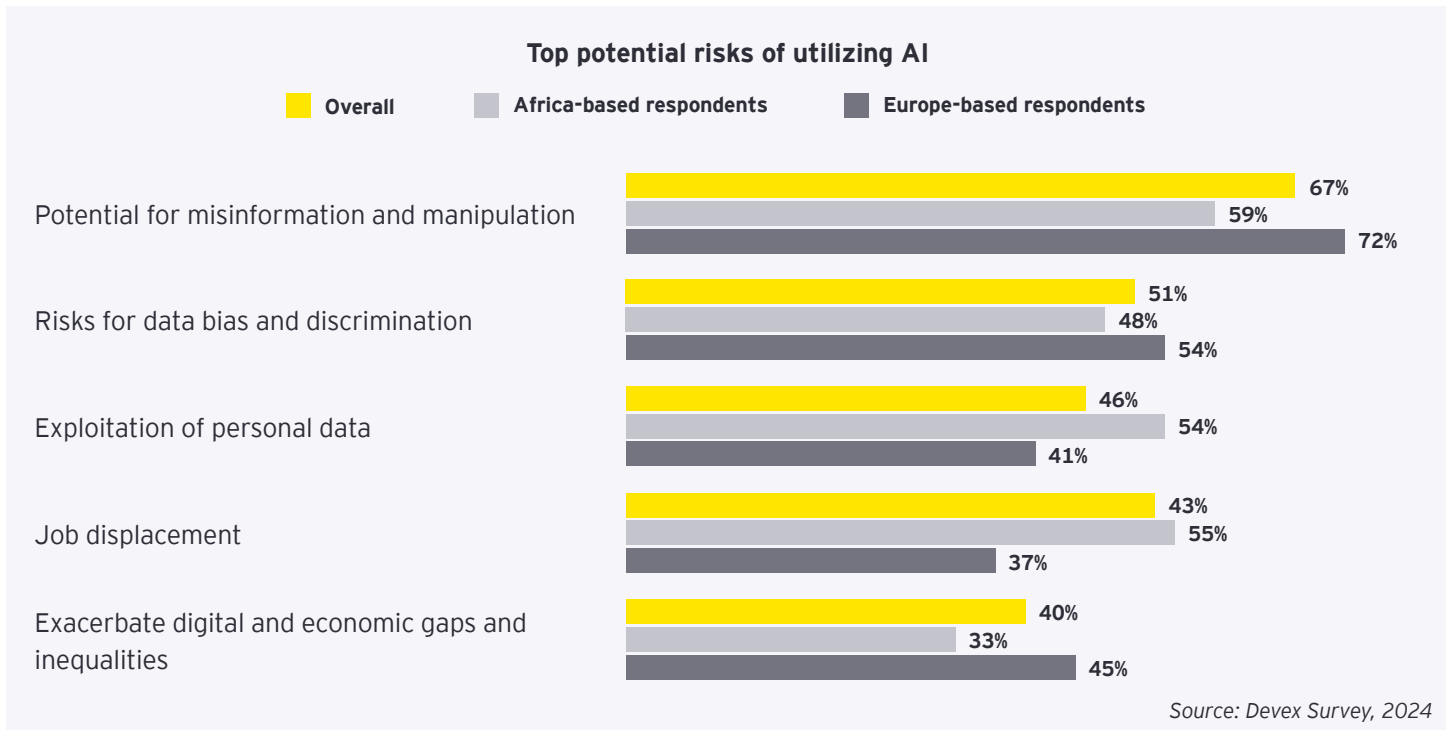
While the deployment and adoption of AI offer numerous opportunities to address global challenges, the data used by AI systems can pose significant risks. With AI systems increasingly being produced in, by, or for those in the Global North, those in the Global South frequently have to make do with AI models built for different contexts, often leading to poorly adapted models with inadequate support. North America in particular [dominates the global AI market](#), catering to a market share of almost 40% while accounting for less than 8% of the global population. Conversely, over [75% of the world's population resides in the Global South](#), but have little access to resources critical to unlocking AI capabilities that are seen elsewhere.

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There's a real investment gap, so we're not all at the same starting line. That's going to create the condition of either being a net exporter or a net importer of AI. If you're an exporter, you can potentially have more control over AI regulation, law, experience and impact on humanity beyond the country you live in. For countries that are going to be a net importer of AI, they are taking all of the privacy, safety, ethical and moral decisions that are in an imported service. So you're trusting in the decision-makers of others that don't understand your cultural context.

Katherine Boiciuc

EY Oceania Chief Technology and
Innovation Officer



When marginalized groups are underrepresented in the data used to train AI models, AI systems can potentially perpetuate biases and discrimination by reinforcing existing patterns of inequality, ultimately hindering progress toward the SDGs. AI systems trained on historically-biased data can lead to predictive policing and credit scoring algorithms that disadvantage marginalized

groups, and are unable to address the specific challenges faced by marginalized communities, particularly in sensitive domains like healthcare, housing and social services. At the same time, people without internet connectivity, digital skills, or access to tools in their language have fewer opportunities to generate data, and are often left out of data collection that fuels AI algorithms.

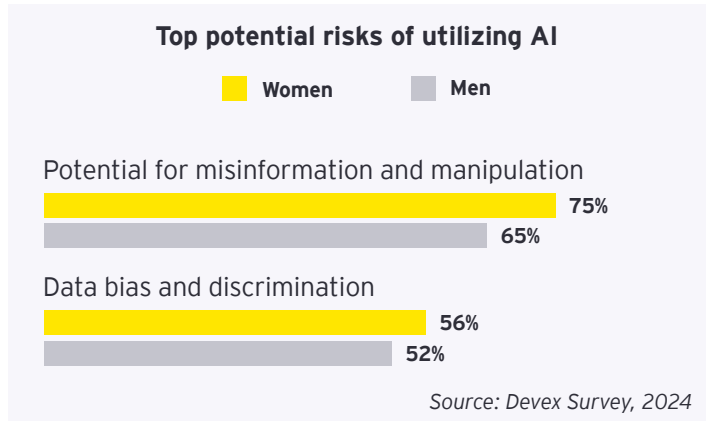
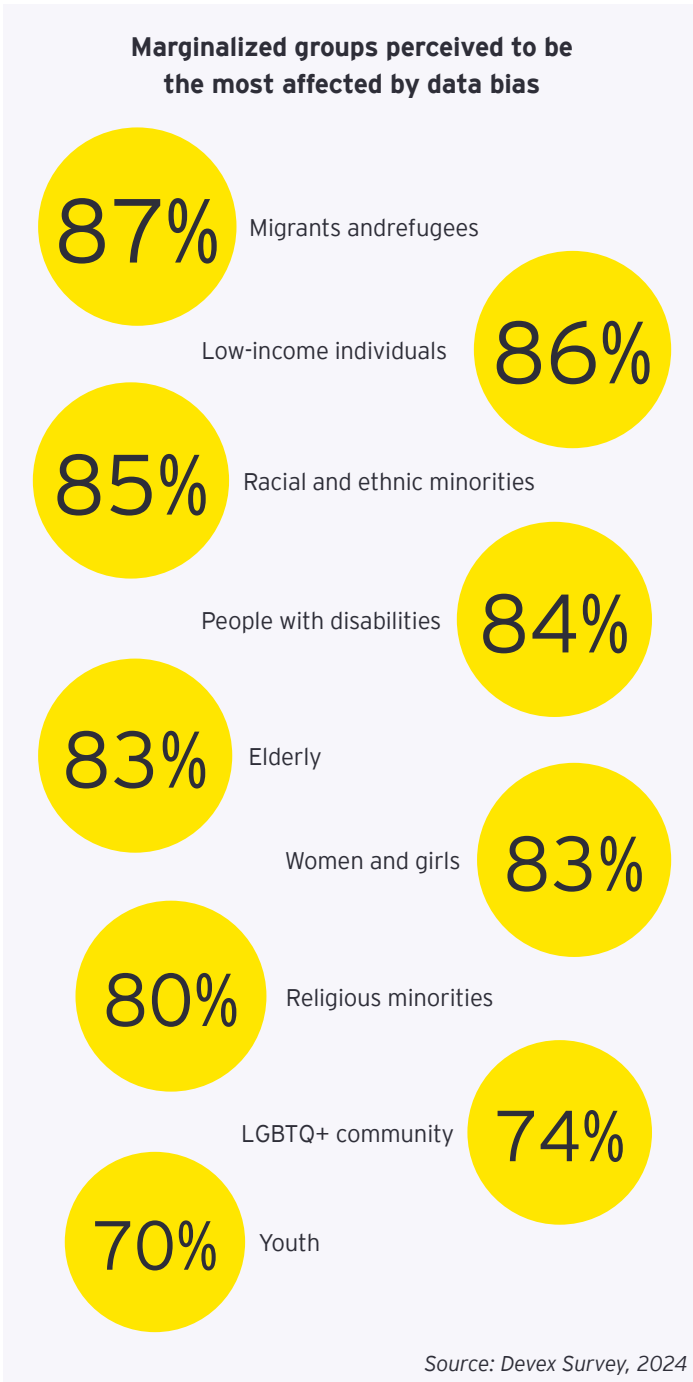
Data-invisible groups

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) refers to [data-invisible groups](#) as population segments that are underrepresented or overlooked in the data ecosystem. These groups may be excluded or under-represented due to gaps or biases in statistical or training datasets, resulting in a lack of visibility and inclusion in the decision-making processes. Traditionally underserved and vulnerable populations, such as persons with disabilities, refugees, migrants, and individuals in the LGBT+ community, usually comprise data-invisible groups, and will most likely remain invisible without creating inclusive data systems.

Source: UNESCO, 2023

For instance, the [2023 UNDP Gender Social Norms Index](#) reveals that close to nine out of 10 men and women hold fundamental biases against women. This widespread gender bias manifests in many ways, such as gender-based violence, pay disparities, and underrepresentation of women in leadership and tech roles. This can further be observed in the increase of AI-generated image-based sexual abuse, which most often targets women. These biases can also seep into AI systems, particularly LLMs, which are trained on massive amounts of human language

and can unintentionally learn and perpetuate structural biases. As a result, AI-based decision-making may lead to adverse consequences for women, such as loan rejections or biases in recruitment decisions. Additionally, AI could widen the digital divide in education through a lack of inclusion.



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 There’s a lack of diversity across not just gender, but experience and cultures and beliefs. It’s incredibly important that we position diversity not as a privilege, but as a right. One that should be recognized when designing technology for all of humanity to use, especially when that technology shapes how we live, work, communicate, create value, and create economic wealth. Diversity isn’t a nice-to-have. There should be a right to diversity of thought and inclusion with regards to particular advisory boards and regulatory considerations.
Katherine Boiciuc
 EY Oceania Chief Technology and Innovation Officer

But when used effectively, AI can be used to identify and mitigate bias in areas like recruitment, loan approvals and healthcare. By analyzing large datasets, AI can reveal hidden patterns of discrimination, paving the way for more equitable systems - so long as there is confidence and transparency within AI and the data it returns. EY and Devex roundtable participants emphasize the importance of inclusive data sets that incorporate diverse data sources, strong data protection measures, and efforts to remove data bias, especially for minorities who are disproportionately affected. Initiatives that focus on gathering and utilizing community-level data include [Fraym](#), a platform providing community-level data essential for understanding localized needs and developing effective solutions. Using advanced machine learning to produce local information about populations around the world, Fraym helps organizations tailor their programs and initiatives to specific areas in migration, food security, renewable energy and health response.

With growing awareness of the real-world implications of data bias, various measures are being taken to counteract and mitigate AI bias. This includes solutions driven by large tech companies that provide transparency in AI

models, and train them on diverse and representative data so as not to perpetuate systemic biases. The [AI Fairness 360 toolkit](#), developed by IBM and governed by the Linux Foundation AI & Data, and Microsoft's Fairlearn toolkit help developers identify and mitigate bias in AI models, and include tools for auditing and testing datasets and algorithms for fairness and bias.

Increasing diversity in AI development and leadership can lead to AI systems that better reflect the needs and perspectives of all people, ultimately reducing biases and disparities. [Diverse AI](#) is one example of a volunteer-led, membership organization working to support and grow diversity in the field of AI by supporting, championing and building diverse communities in AI through collaboration, education and research.

Generating and utilizing inclusive data and statistics, honing in on the role of transparency and explainability, and emphasizing diversity in AI development teams are key strategies to building confidence and trust in AI systems. When combined with ethical AI frameworks and guidelines, they can encourage more people to participate more meaningfully and reap the benefits that AI presents.



Case study: Helping organizations audit their AI systems to eliminate bias, protect privacy and demonstrate transparency through Fairly AI

In response to growing concerns about bias, discrimination and lack of transparency in AI systems, [Fairly AI](#) was founded in 2020 to help organizations bring safer and compliant AI models to market. The governance, risk and compliance solution tackles several critical challenges associated with AI development and deployment by developing tools that identify and mitigate bias in AI algorithms.

Key activities include:

- ▶ Developing bias detection software that audits AI models for fairness across different demographic groups and suggests adjustments to improve equity
- ▶ Creating explainable AI models, allowing stakeholders to understand how decisions are made and offering tools that generate clear, understandable explanations
- ▶ Providing frameworks and tools to help organizations align with ethical standard and regulatory requirements, including compliance checklists, automated reporting, and risk assessment tools

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Fairly AI helps companies determine how to get the right information to all stakeholders in the decision-making process so that they can make an informed decision about whether their AI application should go to production.

Fion Lee-Madan

Technical Co-Founder and
COO, Fairly AI

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Having a policy framework in place and having a system to track against these actual controls for policies are crucial because you can't improve what you don't measure. Having a system to actually track all these metrics lets you know what your baseline is and what your benchmarks are, so you can see improvements to your AI system over time. If you don't have a systematic way to measure and check these metrics over time, you won't be able to truly understand your impact.

Fion Lee-Madan

Technical Co-Founder and
Chief Operations Officer (COO),
Fairly AI

Since its inception, Fairly AI has made significant strides in promoting ethical AI practices. Various organizations now use their tools, from tech companies to healthcare providers, to make sure that their AI systems are fair, transparent and accountable.

By addressing biases, enhancing transparency, and facilitating regulatory compliance, Fairly AI is helping to build a more inclusive and responsible AI ecosystem.

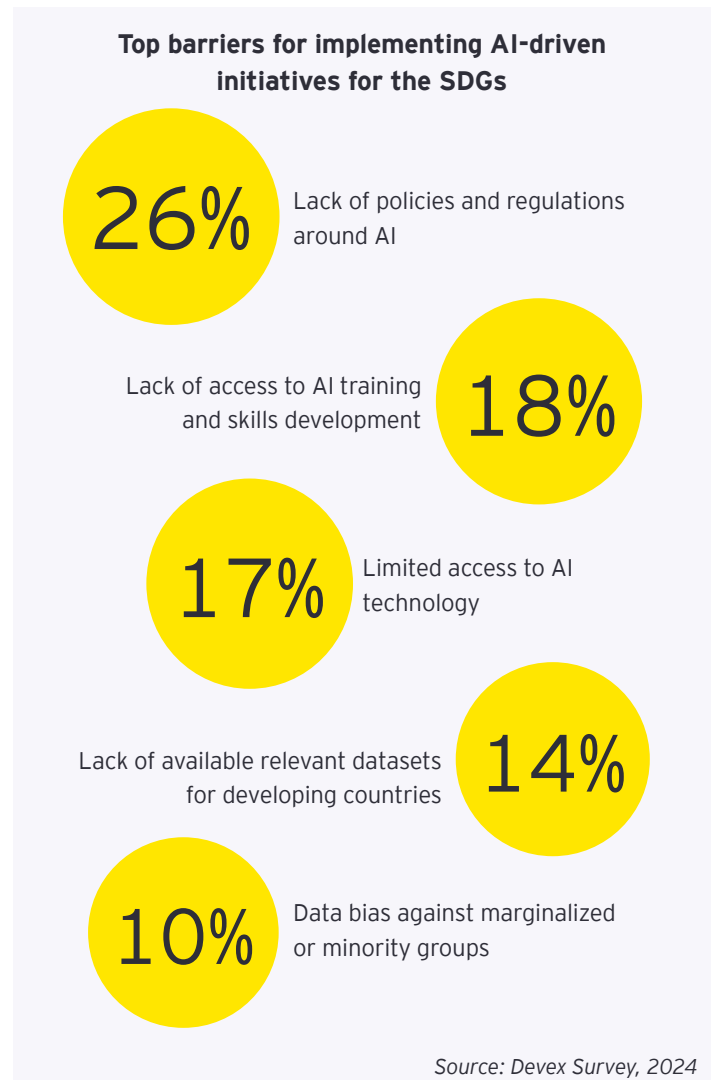
Key Findings

4 A strong enabling environment promotes AI-driven inclusive innovation while mitigating potential risks

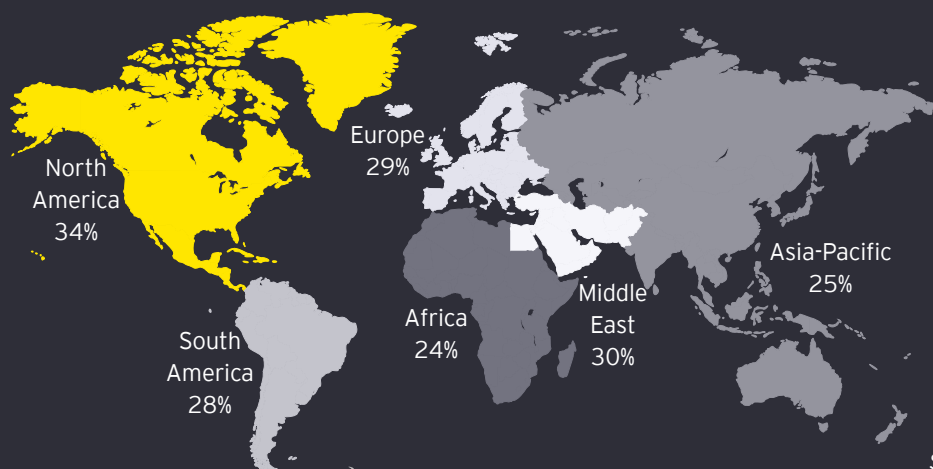
In addition to physical infrastructure and digital literacy, a strong enabling environment also entails having the right policies in place to provide guidance, align efforts with sustainability targets, and protect the safety of every individual before rolling out AI-driven initiatives for the SDGs. About a quarter of survey respondents identified the lack of policies and regulations around AI as the top barrier for implementing AI-driven initiatives for the SDGs. Respondents who are based in HICs also tend to be more concerned with the lack of policies as nearly a third of this group identified it as a top barrier. About a fifth of respondents from LMICs similarly view the lack of policies as a concern, but place equal emphasis on the lack of access to AI training and skills development.

Survey respondents also believe that there is a need for a global regulatory framework specifically designed for AI. One respondent argues that “we need a comprehensive set of global laws to regulate AI and an international watchdog to monitor compliance and possess powers to deal with respective governments in relation to AI technologies and their impact on regions, countries and societies.” Another survey respondent points out that “AI should be developed and deployed with a strong ethical framework to ensure fairness and avoid reinforcing existing biases or discrimination.” The survey respondent adds that “AI should be designed to prioritize the needs of vulnerable populations and avoid exacerbating existing inequalities.”

Major actors in global development also recognize this need and are already drafting guidelines around the use of AI and technology for the SDGs. The [2020 UN declaration](#) acknowledges both the potential of digital technologies for fostering inclusive development and its ability to



A lack of policies and regulations around AI as a top hindrance to effectively implementing AI-driven SDG initiatives, by regional experience



broaden inequalities when used irresponsibly. In the same declaration, member states pledged to strengthen digital cooperation to pursue the full capabilities of beneficial technology use while addressing digital trust and security. As a follow-up, the UN is currently drafting its [Global Digital Compact](#) which will outline shared principles for an open, free and secure digital future for all.

At the local level, policies around the responsible use of technology helps public institutions reshape their approach to fully leverage the benefits of technology and protect the rights of their constituents while delivering public goods and services in a more efficient manner. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s [Digital Government Policy Framework](#) provides guidelines to help governments take a more digital approach to public governance and defines a successful digital transformation

as one that enables public sectors to operate efficiently and effectively in the digital environment. It also aims to empower public institutions to deliver public services that are simpler and more effective.

Regulation is increasingly seen as essential for both promoting AI development and mitigating its risks. Strong AI regulations can also shield individuals from cybercrime. Katherine Boiciuc at EY shares that because some countries are more advanced when it comes to regulation, criminals are “more likely to target areas with less regulation, which are, most likely, marginalized communities.” However, governments worldwide adopt diverse approaches to policies around emerging technologies such as AI. While restrictive regulations aim to provide safety, they can stifle innovation, burden the economy, and limit AI's benefits.

Objectives of the UN Global Digital Compact

- ▶ Close the digital divides and accelerate progress across the SDGs.
- ▶ Expand opportunities for inclusion in the digital economy.
- ▶ Foster an inclusive, open, safe and secure digital space.
- ▶ Advance equitable international data governance.
- ▶ Govern emerging technologies, including AI, for humanity.

Source: UN, 2024

Six dimensions of a fully digital government

- ▶ **Digital by design:** A government that is digital by design establishes clear organizational leadership, paired with effective coordination and enforcement mechanisms where “digital” is considered not only as a technical topic, but as a mandatory transformative element to be embedded throughout policy processes.
- ▶ **Data-driven public sector:** A data-driven public sector recognizes and takes steps to govern data as a key strategic asset in generating public value through their application in the planning, delivering and monitoring of public policies, and adopts rules and ethical principles for their trustworthy and safe reuse.
- ▶ **Government as a platform:** A government acts as a platform for meeting the needs of users when it provides clear and transparent sources of guidelines, tools, data and software that equip teams to deliver user-driven, consistent, seamless, integrated, proactive and cross-sectoral service delivery.
- ▶ **Open by default:** A government is open by default when it makes government data and policymaking processes (including algorithms) available for the public to engage with, within the limits of existing legislation and in balance with the national and public interest.
- ▶ **User-driven:** A government becomes more user-driven by awarding a central role to people’s needs and convenience in the shaping of processes, services and policies; and by adopting inclusive mechanisms for this to happen.
- ▶ **Proactiveness:** Proactiveness represents the ability of governments and civil servants to anticipate people’s needs and respond to them rapidly, so that users do not have to engage with the cumbersome process of data and service delivery.

Source: OECD, 2020

AI policies within private institutions are likewise an important part of the equation, and the public sector can support meaningful self-regulation by private companies through the use of incentives. Roundtable participants argue that public regulatory systems should be structured in a way that appreciates voluntary initiatives carried out by companies that contribute toward the achievement of the SDGs.

This can include the creation of an ethics board and an ethics review system to help keep business practices in check. However, before private companies can effectively

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We know that the use of AI with ill intent is increasing and that the safety and security of data is highly valuable. As the use of AI for cyber attacks increases it’s much more likely that the investment in data actually flatlines because people are rushing to invest in cybersecurity strategies.

This shifts the attention away from investments in safe and secure data, in upskilling and rolling out AI, because you’re forced into a defensive posture.

This will most likely happen to underserved communities if the right policies aren’t put into place – they’ll be forced into a defensive posture on emerging technology, versus a proactive and positive approach.

Katherine Boiciuc

EY Oceania Chief Technology and
Innovation Officer

create policies around AI, concerns around its risks must be addressed. According to an [EY study](#), 65% of CEOs believe that more work is needed to address AI's social, ethical and criminal risks. Data also reveals that only 22% of businesses have incorporated AI into their operations on a large scale, suggesting that more work needs to be done to encourage and support companies to fully leverage AI.

Roundtable participants suggest a multi-country approach to jointly develop policies and advance R&D to create a unified understanding of AI and the broader ecosystem. This will allow public institutions to craft policies that will effectively encourage private entities to have their own regulations in place.

Knowledge sharing among private sector institutions could also help companies incorporate AI tools in their operations and lead to robust policies that promote inclusive development. For instance, [EY.AI](#) helps businesses leverage AI capabilities by allowing access to leading technologies and by connecting organizations to a network of AI practitioners. This in turn allows organizations to navigate risks safely and effectively integrate AI solutions into their business models.

Only by fostering an ecosystem that supports all stakeholders - from government, the private sector, civil society, and especially marginalized groups - can we support greater participation and involvement by those who could benefit the most from AI.



Case Study: Boosting competitiveness in Latin America and the Caribbean through the ethical use of AI

Studies predict that [AI could add \\$15.7 trillion](#) to the world economy in 2030, with North America expected to grow its GDP by 14.5% over the same period. In contrast, Latin America is expected to capture only 5.4% if current trends prevail. To address this gap, the Inter-American Development Bank launched [fAIr LAC](#) in 2019, an initiative that promotes the responsible and ethical use of AI in the region. With partners in public and private sectors, civil society and academic institutions, fAIr LAC takes a multidisciplinary approach to improve social services and mitigate social inequality by supporting governments and entrepreneurs in carrying out self-regulation and self-assessment processes, as well as establishing regulatory and data sharing frameworks. The program also supports the development of AI tools and knowledge products while providing policy recommendations so that AI programs contribute toward social good.

At the program level, fAIr LAC's pilots are designed to address issues of public concern through the use of AI components. Some of its initiatives include a health program in Mexico to combat diabetic retinopathy through the use of AI-enabled screening. In Costa Rica, AI is helping to reskill and upskill the labor force to better align their skills with the current demands of the job market. In Uruguay, the program seeks to reduce the number of students dropping out of high school through the use of predictive modeling for educational disengagement, allowing early intervention with the help of their families and the school system.

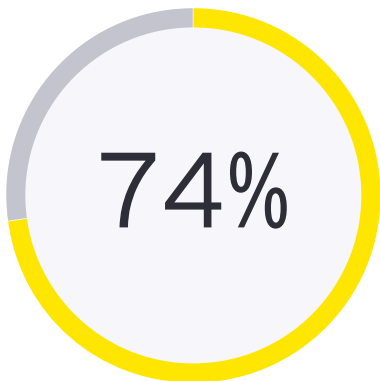
To address any challenges that arise when applying ethical principles in the roll-out of AI initiatives, the program draws from [OECD's Principles on AI](#), which highlights inclusive growth, respect for human rights, transparency, safety, and accountability.

Key Findings

5 Creating alliances and opportunities for strategic collaboration can turbocharge the potential of AI for inclusive development

[SDG 17](#) emphasizes the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships as a means to accelerate progress across all SDGs. By pooling resources, sharing knowledge and expertise, and increasing access to technology for all, actors in global development can support more individuals and empower them to drive progress quicker and in a sustained manner. The private sector plays a critical role in this ecosystem with its sizable resources and ability to drive technological innovation. The [UN SDG Partnership Guidebook](#) also recognizes that businesses that operate responsibly, inclusively and sustainably have the ability to create and sustain livelihoods, reduce poverty, and deliver essential products and services efficiently and affordably.

On the side of the public sector, state actors are best positioned to set the stage through policy and its ability



74%
of survey respondents consider public and private sector collaboration essential to maximizing the potential of AI for the SDGs.

Source: Devex Survey, 2024

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There’s a real opportunity to shift technological discussions toward things that are of real consequence to the general public. For example, imagine if the government said one of its top priorities was to use AI to create individual learning plans for all students, this could prompt collaboration opportunities between the public and private sectors to drive real positive development. Once you’ve established that feedback cycle, it can be really powerful.

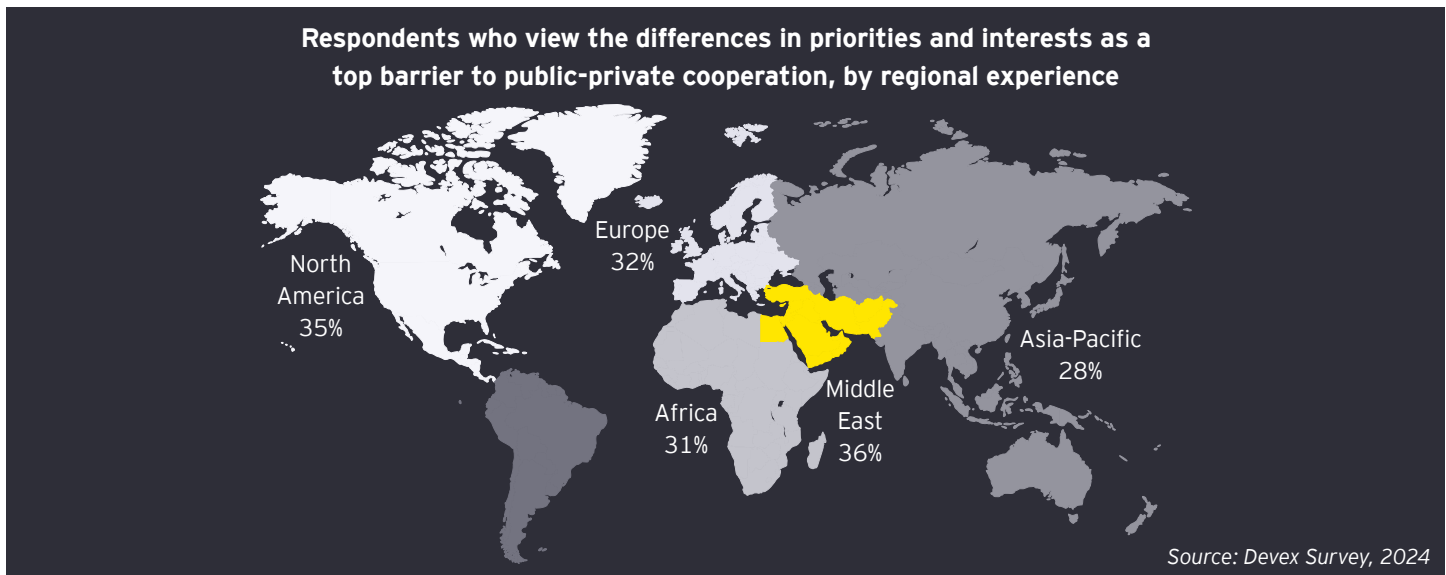
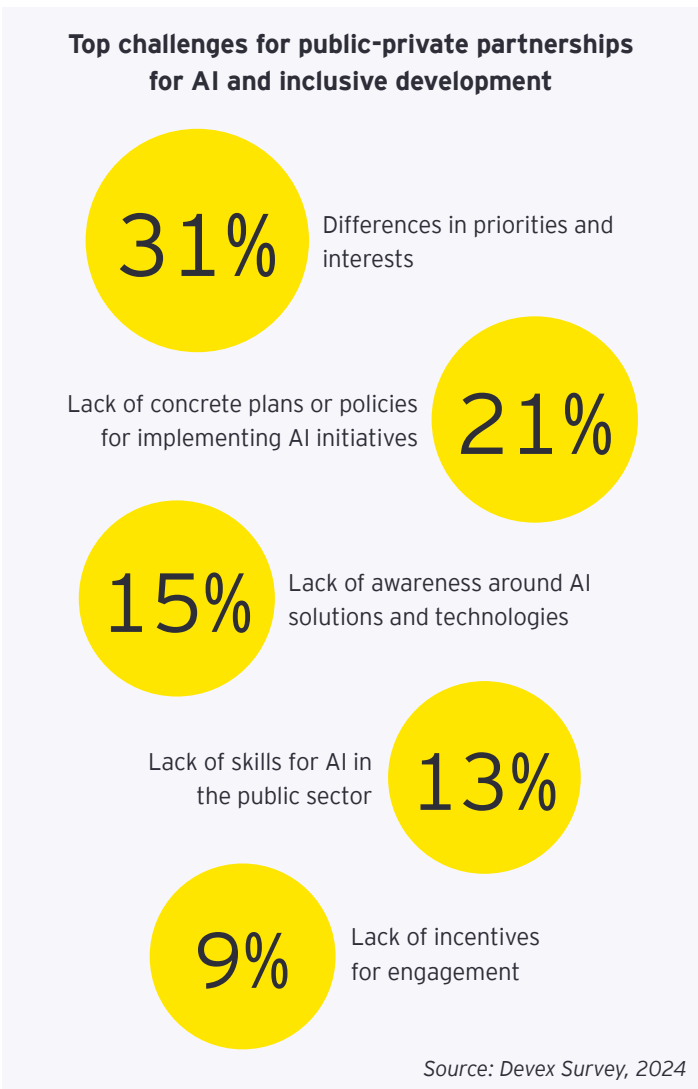
Priya Vora
CEO, Digital Impact Alliance

to act as a convener of different stakeholders. In its report [The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Supporting Development in Emerging Markets](#), the World Bank emphasizes the complementarity between the public and private sectors for leveraging AI for the public good, stating that “the private sector alone cannot make AI succeed in emerging markets.” The report argues that governments can level the playing field by providing open access to big data, setting standards and enforcing interoperability, and supporting trial-and-error phases, including through public subsidies to AI incubators.

But an alliance between the public and private sectors can also be challenging, with nearly a third of survey respondents identifying the differences in priorities and interests as the top barrier to public-private cooperation.

Despite these challenges, several alliances around AI and the SDGs have already taken shape and are working to create more inclusive outcomes. [ATscale](#), the Global Partnership for Assistive Technology, is a cross-sector global partnership with a mission to transform people's lives through AT, including AI-enabled technologies. Launched in 2018, [partners include](#) a range of development organizations and public sector institutions such as USAID, Clinton Health Access Initiative, China Disabled Persons' Federation, Global Disability Innovation Hub, the Government of Kenya, UNICEF, and the World Health Organization. The partnership aims to get 500 million people the AT they need by 2030 through service delivery and market-shaping approaches, partnerships with the private sector to build and serve markets in low-resource countries, the development of country plans for greater access, and catalyzing innovation to design and introduce suitable AT where needed.

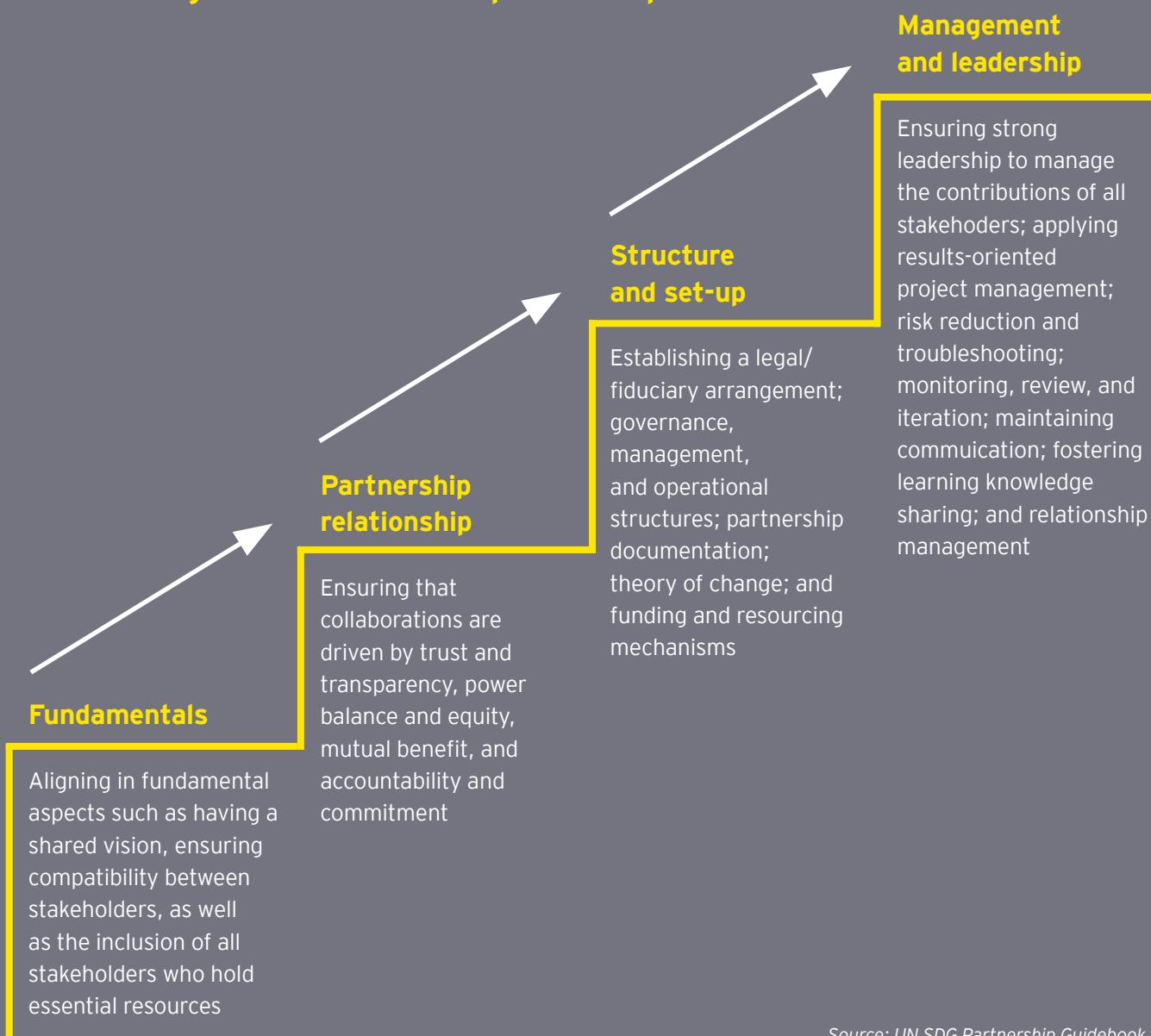
To demonstrate effective collaboration between stakeholders, the UN SDG Partnership Guidebook promotes having a shared vision among stakeholders and maintaining partnerships that foster co-creation. The Guidebook also recommends having a clear operational structure and strong leadership to manage partnerships.



For a more inclusive approach, stakeholders beyond the private and public sectors must also be involved, and having clearly defined roles for each stakeholder contributes to an effective collaboration. In 2020, the World Economic Forum and the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship launched the [Global Alliance for Social Entrepreneurship](#), which supports the social innovation sector and is the largest multi-stakeholder coalition in this space. It comprises over a hundred members, bringing together an ecosystem of corporations,

investors, philanthropists, governments, researchers, media and industry actors. Additionally, the alliance's [AI for Social Innovation](#) initiative convenes social innovators and technology leaders that leverage AI and other advanced technologies to drive greater impact and innovation in the social sector. The initiative builds on a diverse group of stakeholders with experience in AI and social innovation and is co-initiated by Microsoft and the Schwab Foundation's Global Alliance for Social Entrepreneurship, with support from the EY team.

Four building blocks of effective partnerships



The World Bank's [Digital Development Partnership](#), a partnership between the private sector and government institutions, describes the role of each stakeholder in effectively leveraging AI for inclusive development in a 2021 [report](#):

- ▶ **Private sector** organizations, including large enterprises, small- and mid-size enterprises and startups, play a dominant role in the innovation, development and application of AI in the digital economy.
- ▶ **International forums** such as the G20 and G7, as well as the UN, ITU, OECD and UNESCO, and supranational and regional organizations such as the African Union can coordinate policies and pool resources across countries to devise and implement AI strategies. Policies at international levels can also help to define and monitor regulation, practices and standards in AI applications.
- ▶ **Civil society and nonprofit organizations** can serve as an independent monitor to influence the adoption and practice of trustworthy AI applications. They can further facilitate the scalability of capacity development programs for AI adoption.
- ▶ **Government actors** can have a range of roles in conceiving and developing an AI strategy depending

on the situation, from taking a hands-off approach, to providing a suitable enabling environment, to more active direction of AI initiatives.

To create synergies between different actors in the AI field, ITU convenes the [AI for Good Global Summit](#) in collaboration with 40 UN agencies and the Government of Switzerland. The annual summit serves as an action-oriented platform where stakeholders from diverse sectors collaborate on practical AI applications to support the SDGs. Recognized as a key forum for discussions at the intersection of technology and global development, the event drew over [10,000 registrants representing 145 countries](#) in 2024. Among the notable outcomes of the summit was the establishment of a new multi-stakeholder collaboration agreement to develop unified standards for AI watermarking, multimedia authenticity and deepfake detection. Additionally, the summit launched the AI for Good Impact Initiative, aiming to connect AI innovators with solution-seekers to scale and fund promising AI solutions globally.

No matter the case, a collaborative approach to inclusive development - one that leverages the strengths and resources of each stakeholder - is key to leveraging AI's potential to accelerate progress toward the SDGs.



Case study: Accelerating inclusive digital transformation through multi-stakeholder collaboration

AI's ability to foster inclusive development relies heavily on the quality of data and an ability to harness information in an open and safe manner. But building robust data infrastructure cannot be done by a single group of individuals. When stakeholders from various sectors and practices engage and share their knowledge with each other, they are better able to reach a common understanding of the risks and opportunities involved in the use of technology and AI for development.

Founded in 2014, the Digital Impact Alliance (DIAL) is a global coalition committed to advancing positive, sustainable and inclusive digital transformation through collaboration and knowledge sharing. The alliance acts as a convener of governments, funders and other development actors so that development efforts using data and technology promote people's rights while achieving technological advancements.

In Africa, DIAL launched the [Africa Digital Leadership Initiative \(ADLI\)](#), a peer learning exchange network designed for and by African policymakers, legislators, researchers, technology experts and digital rights advocates. ADLI helps participants engage peers locally and across borders to develop solutions addressing operational and policy challenges through the following steps:

- ▶ **Establishing a shared framework** to examine the design of a data-sharing environment that facilitates participation, agency, choice and trust in the broader digital ecosystem
- ▶ **Building knowledge and sharing best practices** related to data sharing, both within public sector functions (e.g., digital identity and digital payments) and to fuel private sector innovation
- ▶ **Facilitating access to trusted mentors and advisors**, drawing from global subject-matter experts and peers so that network members can access vetted information and credible, neutral advice
- ▶ **Supporting cross-government approaches** to data sharing by developing and disseminating shared resources, eliminating project-based silos, and enabling the cross-pollination of data sharing principles and practices to promote data governance decision-making that is anchored in a shared vision for the digital future

Case Study, cont'd

ADLI has been recognized by the African Union as a critical mechanism for capacity building for data governance in Africa. In 2024, the initiative comprises 50 members across civil society, government and the private sector from the program's four participating countries, Uganda, Zambia, Sierra Leone and The Gambia. DIAL has drawn upon its ADLI learnings when publishing key documents for advancing data infrastructure, including the [Digital Public Goods Charter](#) and the [Blueprint for Philanthropists](#).

Joseph Simukoko, Co-founder and COO of Green Giraffe Zambia Limited, shares how their participation in ADLI has helped their organization support local farmers and build sustainability. "It helped enhance our understanding of data protection, trust-enhancing technologies, and data integration," he shares. The organization utilizes a blockchain-enabled digital traceability system with AI integration to create fully traceable and sustainable food supply chains. "The insights we gain will directly shape our work, helping us build a system that ensures transparency and trust in the food supply chain, while adhering to inclusive data governance principles. This will enable us to provide safer, more reliable products to our consumers and support small-scale farmers across Zambia," he adds.

While a multi-stakeholder approach is often seen as a challenge due to the competing priorities of different groups, outlining common goals and articulating a shared vision often helps to get stakeholders on board.

To support a truly inclusive approach, the voices of marginalized individuals must also be taken into account. Vora argues that establishing feedback mechanisms is essential for enabling active and meaningful participation from the community. "There needs to be redressal systems to give people some voice, some way to express concern," shares the alliance's CEO. Vora adds that using online redressal systems could be an effective way to leverage technology to not only achieve SDG targets, but also safeguard the rights of the marginalized - emphasizing how technological advancements go hand in hand with social development to be truly inclusive.

“

More often than not, there is a win-win possibility for all stakeholders. Many lower-income countries' policymakers and private sector want AI to fuel social and economic progress, so they're motivated to pursue an inclusive digital transformation agenda. Civil society groups also want to be involved so they can embed practices that create long-term adoption of these initiatives. These different actors are thus aligned to the extent that they acknowledge that breaching the trust of citizens is the easiest way to lose users, adoption and buy-in.

Priya Vora

CEO, Digital Impact Alliance

Case study: Amplifying impact through ServiceNow's Partnership for Good Grant

[ServiceNow](#) is a cloud-based, AI-driven platform, that helps organizations optimize business transformation. Key benefits of the ServiceNow platform include automating manual tasks, providing intuitive and digitized experiences, and leveraging AI and analytics to improve decision-making and issue resolution.

In 2024, ServiceNow launched its [Partnership for Good Grant](#), a \$2 million initiative to support nonprofits in leveraging technology and AI. Grants include an investment of ServiceNow technology and services alongside support from private sector partners. Through the EY team's collaboration with ServiceNow.org and the Partnership for Good Grant, the two organizations jointly enable nonprofits to do the work that matters most and broaden their impact.

Each sponsor grant supports a nonprofit's digital transformation for one of four key areas:

- ▶ Tackling the root causes and consequences of poverty and hunger
- ▶ Aiding in rapid response and recovery during crises
- ▶ Fostering learning and growth opportunities for young people
- ▶ Supporting initiatives for people facing health issues

In addition to unrestricted financial grants, each nonprofit awardee also benefits from technology donations and discounts, expertise and guidance from experts and free implementation and support consulting services by Partnership for Good Grant partners.

The EY-sponsored grant helps WaterAid in implementing ServiceNow IT Service Management throughout its organization as it works to provide clean water, sanitation and hygiene education to communities worldwide. Other partner sponsor grants include:

- ▶ CARE, which is developing an AI-enabled education program tracking tool to increase access to quality education for marginalized children
- ▶ JEVS Human Services, which is using the grant to develop a universal portal for staff and participants in its programs that focus on working with individuals to create sustainable paths to independence and economic security
- ▶ Make-A-Wish Canada, which is establishing an end-to-end workflow for providing children with critical illnesses the ability to realize their wishes

Conclusion

Complex global challenges call for bold, innovative solutions such as AI, but the breakneck speed at which this game-changing technology is advancing should not be left unchecked - especially when it comes to utilizing it to address the needs of marginalized populations. Cultivating a deeper understanding of AI among those working to achieve the SDGs is essential to fully apply AI and similar technologies to reach underserved communities and populations at the last mile. As part of this effort, this report outlines a clearer picture of the value of AI from the perspective of those working closely to achieve the SDGs.

The insights and perceptions from the global development practitioners

spoken to and surveyed underscore the transformative power of AI in advancing inclusive development and accelerating progress ahead of the fast-approaching deadline for the SDGs. However, they caution that AI must be wielded with care, especially when applied to marginalized and vulnerable populations.

In pursuing a purposeful approach to AI, prioritizing connectivity and accessibility for disadvantaged groups is critical in order to create demand for AI-enabled solutions. Fostering local ownership of AI solutions and building trust in AI processes are crucial elements for achieving inclusive development, empowering communities to tailor solutions to their unique needs, and addressing

ethical data usage that can benefit rather than exploit them. It is also essential to prioritize education, skills development and awareness-building around AI. By equipping individuals with the knowledge and tools to leverage AI effectively and responsibly, we can safeguard against risks and broaden impact on global development.

The role of collaboration among stakeholders should also not be overlooked, especially in creating a strong enabling environment that encourages AI-driven innovation while mitigating risks. By forging alliances and promoting strategic partnerships, the full capability of AI for inclusive development can be realized, leading to more equitable and sustainable outcomes.



Perceived use of AI-enabled solutions within the next year

Stay the same:

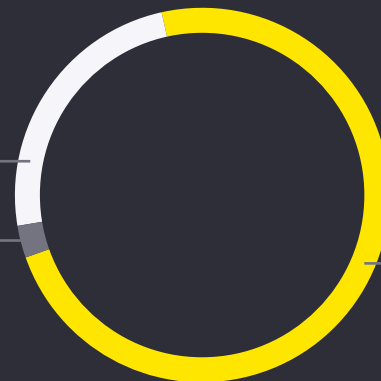
24%

Increase:

73%

Decrease:

3%



Source: Devex Survey, 2024

Ultimately, this report calls for a collective effort to leverage AI as a force for good so that no one is left behind in the pursuit of the SDGs. Readers of this report can consider the following actions:

- ▶ The private sector can develop AI applications that address social challenges and promote inclusive growth, and collaborate with local stakeholders to create culturally relevant solutions.
- ▶ Government actors can implement policies that encourage AI innovation while upholding ethical standards and data privacy. Also, invest in digital infrastructure so that underserved populations have access to technology.
- ▶ International organizations can foster collaboration among countries and organizations to share best practices and resources for AI implementation, and help define and monitor responsible and inclusive AI regulations.
- ▶ Civil society and nonprofits can monitor AI adoption to determine trustworthiness and advocate for marginalized groups, while supporting local capacity-building programs for effective AI engagement.
- ▶ Academic and research institutions can help develop AI ethical frameworks that prioritize inclusivity, and provide education and training to equip individuals with AI skills.
- ▶ All actors can contribute to forming alliances among governments, private sectors and civil society to leverage strengths for inclusive AI development, and create platforms to share insights and lessons learned in AI implementation.

By embracing a collaborative and inclusive approach to AI development, we can harness the full potential of this transformative technology to create a more just, equitable and sustainable future for all.



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