GENEVA GRADUATE INSTITUTE

INSTITUT DE HAUTES ÉTUDES INTERNATIONALES ET DU DÉVELOPPEMENT
GRADUATE INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

impact investing solutions

Final Report

Accelerating Fundraising Through AI: **Enhancing Matchmaking Between Impact Investors and Impact-Driven Enterprises to Help Achieve SDGs**

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In Collaboration with Impact Investing Solutions

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"Just as electricity transformed almost everything 100 years ago, today I actually have a hard time thinking of an industry that I don't think AI will transform in the next several years."
—Andrew Ng

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List of Acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
AGI	Artificial General Intelligence
API	Application Programme Interface
BERT	Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers
GIIN	Global Impact Investing Network
GPT	Generative Pre-training Transformer
IHEID	Institut de Hautes Etudes Internationales et du Développement
IIS	Impact Investing Solutions
IOs	International Organizations
KCV	Kenya Climate Ventures
LLMs	Large Language Models
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NLP	Natural Language Processing
RAKE	Rapid Automatic Keyword Extraction
ROI	Return On Investment
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals

I. Introduction

Impact investing[1] has become a powerful tool for directing funds to businesses that tackle urgent global issues in the framework of sustainable development[2]. Since their creation by the UN in 2015 (Sachs, 2015), the Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] have grown to become a global framework for advancing environmental sustainability, peace, and prosperity.

However, despite impact investing's potential, challenges exist. Currently, many impact investors struggle to identify businesses that align with their specific goals and risk appetite (Blue Earth Capital, 2024). Similarly, impact-driven enterprises often face challenges in securing funding from investors who share their values and long-term vision. As the need to drive progress toward the SDGs intensifies, accelerating capital flow to these impact-oriented businesses has become more crucial than ever.

Within impact investing, matchmaking algorithms connect investors to opportunities that align with their values and impact objectives (GIIN, 2024). As the application of Artificial Intelligence[3] [AI] in the field is still in the nascent stages, the use of AI in impact investing is relevant and still has scope for development, particularly relating to how it can matchmake impact investors to impact-driven enterprises.

Impact Investing Solutions [IIS] is an impact investing firm based in Zug, Switzerland, dedicated to democratizing global impact for both small and large enterprises (Impact Investing Solutions, 2025). To date, IIS has helped raise over $500 million for impact ventures, garnered 8 million views in 2024 for its global TV show *Swiss Impact with the Banerjis*, and built a network of more than 8,000 impact investors (Impact Investing Solutions, 2025). Most recently, the firm

[1] According to the Global Impact Investing Network [GIIN], impact investments are investments made with the intention to generate positive, measurable social, or environmental impact alongside a financial return (GIIN, 2024).
[2] According to the United Nations, "Sustainable Development has been defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (United Nations, n.d.).
[3] Artificial Intelligence [AI] is defined by the European Union Artificial Intelligence Act as a "machine-based system that is designed to operate with varying levels of autonomy and that may exhibit adaptiveness after deployment, and that, for explicit or implicit objectives, infers, from the input it receives, how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions that can influence physical or virtual environments" (Official Journal of the European Union, 2024).

has developed a prototype AI-driven algorithm that matches impact investors with impact enterprises, further supporting the achievement of the SDGs.

Therefore, this research is conducted in partnership with IIS and aims to explore avenues for enhancing matchmaking between impact investors and impact-driven enterprises to help achieve SDGs, focusing on ways to improve IIS' prototype AI-driven algorithm. Additionally, the research will examine current trends in impact investing, along with the present and future role of AI in sustainable development and the potential risks this may involve.

To achieve this, the methodology for this research project was divided into four stages:[4]

- **Literature review** of existing research on AI in sustainable development, finance, impact investing, and matchmaking platforms, highlighting both opportunities and challenges.
- **Stakeholder interviews** with impact investors, enterprises, and individuals harnessing AI to gather insights on opportunities and challenges for IIS' matchmaking platform, potential uses of AI in impact investing, current trends in impact investing, and risks associated with the use of AI for such a platform.
- **Surveys** to assess the perspectives of a broader community of stakeholders, including those within academic, financial, and development sectors, regarding the potential and limitations of an AI-driven matchmaking platform.
- **Documentation of main findings**, work which is reflected in the present report.

The findings of this research will contribute to practical recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of IIS' AI-powered matchmaking platform and supporting stronger alignment between impact investors and enterprises. More broadly, the goal is to share these insights with the impact investing ecosystem to strengthen collaboration and advance progress toward the SDGs.

[4] Initially, an additional stage was foreseen, aiming to test existing matchmaking platforms to assess their strengths and weaknesses. However, due to time and capacity limitations, it was decided to exclude it. A detailed description of each stage of the methodology can be found in Annex 1.

II. Literature Review

The Role of AI in Sustainable Development

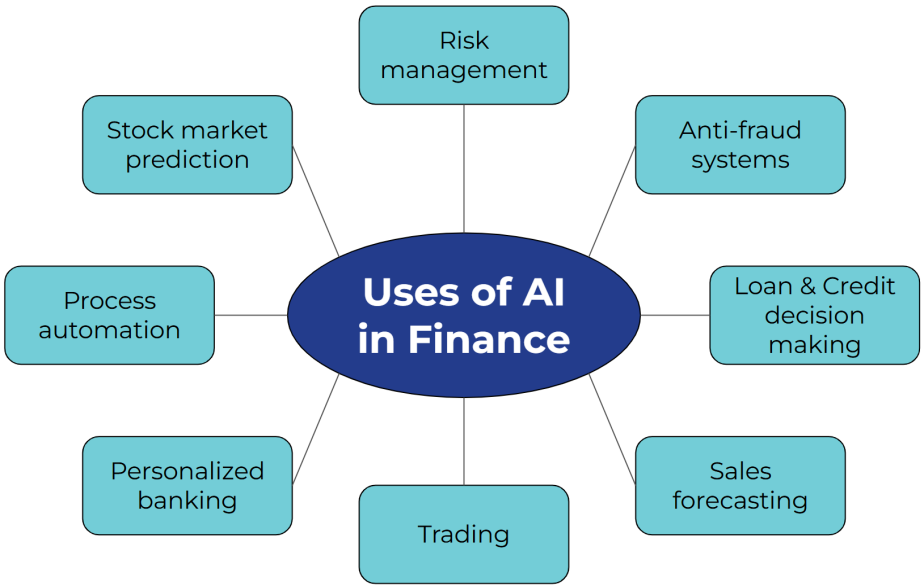
Recent literature, including reports from the United Nations and the European Economic and Social Committee, has recognized AI as a transformative tool with significant potential to advance sustainable development (Golić, 2020). Ametepey *et al.* (2024) conducted an in-depth qualitative study to assess the impact of AI on SDGs implementation, concluding that AI could act as an enabler across 79% of SDGs targets, offering solutions to issues such as poverty, healthcare, and climate change, mainly through innovative technological advancements. However, they also cautioned that AI should support, rather than replace, human contributions to the SDGs (Ametepey *et al.*, 2024).

Recognizing AI's potential to advance social and environmental causes, national development agencies, NGOs, and international organizations have sought to adopt AI and boost its applications for sustainable development. By 2019, over 30 of the UN agencies and bodies were working towards integrating AI in their initiatives (Tomašev *et al.*, 2020).

The Role of AI in Finance

The role of AI in the financial sector has been transformative, as seen through its use for sustained growth and innovation (Douglas, 2024). In particular, uses of AI in sectors such as risk management, process automation, and decision-making are further discussed in the present report due to their importance in investment strategies.

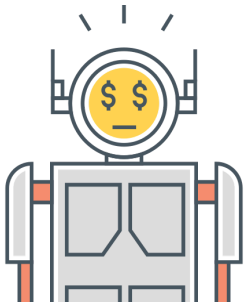
Figure 1: Uses of AI in Finance



Source: Based on Maurya, et al. (2024).

Additionally, the use of AI in investment banking focuses predominantly on market behavior, removing human cognitive biases in the process (Bolesta et al., 2024) and assisting investors in overcoming emotional vulnerabilities (Ridzuan et al., 2024). A great example of AI in investing strategies is the robo-advisor, which helps humans with investment or portfolio rebalancing through specific recommendations. It is a financial advisor tailored to consumer needs using data analysis, machine learning, and personalized recommendations (Noonpakdee, 2020).

In terms of potential implementations for impact investing, AI can integrate structured data such as financial statements with unstructured ones such as news articles and provide a holistic market view to investors (Bolesta et al., 2024). This could precisely help investors trying to seek potential project matches through IIS' platform.



Current approaches of some existing AI matchmaking platforms

The use of AI approaches in impact investment platforms is still in its infancy, despite their use in other matchmaking contexts like dating and job recruitment. The majority of studies within the literature focus on keyword-based, statistical, or mathematical matchmaking (Güttersberger et al., 2023; Gabriela et al., 2023; Mur Planchart, 2024). A key issue with it is that keyword-based methods frequently lack accuracy and efficiency in meaning (Medved et. al., 2024). Keyword-based approaches in matchmaking platforms often result in a limited ability to understand the context behind search terms. This can result in irrelevant matches, where keywords are present but the actual meaning or intent doesn't align with the user's needs. Additionally, keywords can be ambiguous [e.g., homonyms] or have multiple interpretations [e.g., synonyms], leading to inaccurate matches. For instance, a search for 'bank' could refer to a financial institution or the edge of a river, causing confusion and reducing the effectiveness of the matchmaking process (Medved et. al., 2024).

To overcome this problem, one of the authors of the referenced papers suggested using Skip-Gram architecture to determine the contextual meaning of words when using keyword-based methods (Gabriela et al., 2023). Other academics have suggested experimenting with different mathematical similarity methods for matching, such as Cosine[5] and Jaccard[6] (Güttersberger et al., 2023). Another paper identified issues with using AWS Bedrock for matchmaking and observed significantly improved results when it was replaced with GPT-4[7] Turbo (Mur Planchart, 2024). Lastly, an alternative to keyword-based matchmaking was proposed, resulting in more precise outcomes (Medved et al., 2024). This method employed an AI-driven harvester for automated data collection, NLP for enriching and classifying metadata,

[5] Cosine similarity measures the similarity between two vectors of an inner product space. It is measured by the cosine of the angle between two vectors and determines whether two vectors are pointing in roughly the same direction. It is often used to measure document similarity in text analysis (Han et al., 2012).
[6] Jaccard Similarity is also known as Intersection-Over-Union (IoU) and is defined as the ratio of the area of the overlap between the predicted segmentation and the ground truth segmentation to the area of union between the predicted segmentation and the ground truth segmentation (Haque et al., 2020).
[7] GPT can be used to assist in computer code generation, which can be a valuable tool for developers who are looking to automate tasks or speed up the development process. This can free up developers to focus on more complex and creative tasks (Google Cloud, 2025).

and large language models [LLMs] like BERT[8] and GPT to extend keywords and capture semantic similarities. This approach could be useful for improving IIS's matchmaking algorithm as well.

Table 1. Comparison of Key Papers on Matchmaking Algorithms

Güttersberger et al. (2023)	
Description	Uses keyword-based methods. It outlines the development of JamBank, a platform that matches start-ups looking to enhance the SDGs with public institutions offering grants and loans. Focus solely on singular and plural nouns, which improves specificity, reduces noise, and increases relevance.
Algorithm	Uses an Application Programme Interface [API] to scrape data and Natural Language Processing [NLP] in the form of a Rapid Automatic Keyword Extraction [RAKE] algorithm. RAKE identifies and extracts the most relevant keywords from a given text by looking at frequency and relevancy.
Contributions	Information on 425 entities focused on impact was captured from 2 different sources. Most entries come from NGO Explorer, a global NGO database, and Dealflow.eu, which focuses on impact startups. The data was manually downloaded from their websites. The value in using NGO Explorer is highlighted as it offers insights into NGOs active in specific countries or regions. This allows for keywords to be engineered that match organizations with relevant projects. This capability is powerful because it enables both the matching of existing users to projects and the identification of potential matches, which is a significant advancement for businesses, as it allows for direct user acquisition with a tailored value proposition. The author notes that the description of start-ups tends to have fewer keywords than the description of project funding.
Limitations	Outliers with an unusually high or low number of keywords can skew the results as having fewer keywords makes it easier to find matches for the algorithm, leading to disproportionately higher scores.
Recommendations	To experiment with and compare different mathematical similarity methods for matching, such as Cosine and Jaccard.

[8] BERT is one of the best models for different NLP tasks such as question answering, natural language understanding, sentiment analysis, and language inference (Cesario et al., 2024).

Gabriela et al. (2023)	
Description	A paper on the creation of the Wisdom of Age platform that focuses on keyword-based methods, so that companies could hire a specialist for a particular assignment.
Algorithm	The platform integrated an AI-based matching system, which used an NLP in the form of Word2Vec, to calculate the percentage of semantic similarity between words.
Contributions	A contribution to the literature is made here as the paper explains that it used Skip Gram architecture to find out the contextual meaning of words and implicitly the similarity between certain words. This is significant and could serve as a potential solution to the keyword-based issue of insufficient contextual understanding highlighted by Medved et al. in their paper.
Limitations	To analyze the validity of the results, two people specialized in employee hiring for IT and Tech companies were asked to inspect the profiles of 10 mentors. Four out of ten mentors were ranked differently by the human reviewers and the AI system.
Recommendations	The authors acknowledge, however, that more varied and rigorous testing would be needed to further emphasize the validity of this platform.
Mur Planchart (2024)	
Description	An interesting contribution was made in enhancing the matchmaking AI algorithm for a dating agency called “Cites a Cegues”.
Algorithm	Large Language Models, AI models designed to understand and generate human language integrated with AWS Bedrock as well as Cosine similarity were utilized. However, confusion between user attributes and partner preferences and the inconsistent mention of key requirements were problematic with AWS Bedrock. As a result, AWS Bedrock models were replaced with GPT-4 Turbo, which delivered the most promising results and showed potential for addressing these issues and improving the matching process.
Contributions	The new algorithm was more precise in identifying when a date will be successful compared to when it will not be. The new algorithm was able to identify lower compatibility scores more frequently.

Limitations	A limitation of this study was that it was conducted with an unbalanced dataset.
Medved et. al. (2024)	
Description	Proposes an alternative approach to the previous literature.
Algorithm	The backend of this model incorporates advanced AI elements, such as an AI-driven harvester for automated data collection, NLP for enriching and classifying metadata, and LLMs such as BERT and GPT to extend keywords and capture semantic similarities.
Contributions	The paper found that the AI-driven harvester guaranteed continuous data updates, while NLP enrichment processes improved the semantic understanding of metadata, resulting in more precise matchmaking outcomes. Additionally, the integration of a private vector database, powered by LLMs and advanced graph algorithms, enabled dynamic visualization and analysis of complex relationships within the research and innovation ecosystem.

Considerations and Limitations of AI

Some vulnerabilities in the use of AI must be carefully considered, particularly its limitations in understanding emotional intelligence. While human emotions play a central role in interpersonal interactions, current AI training models are not designed to prioritize emotions. As Ridzuan et al. (2024) consider, AI systems lack empathy when dealing with customers, which could be a big difference between human matchmaking and AI matchmaking in an impact investing context. A useful analogy can be drawn from dating apps that rely heavily on AI tools to suggest partners. Despite advanced algorithms, many users feel that these platforms fail to capture the emotional dimensions that humans value in romantic partnerships. Similarly, AI-driven matchmaking in impact investing may overlook subtle yet critical emotional compatibilities between investors and enterprises. Therefore, retaining a human element in matchmaking platforms not only adds value but also helps bridge this empathy gap.

In terms of adoption, some individuals still do not trust completely in the automation process and AI competence. In particular, these individuals tend to be less experienced investors who could benefit significantly from using AI recommendations (Hang and Chen, 2022). This could potentially pose a problem for investor adoption of an AI-driven matchmaking algorithm as designed by IIS.

Nonetheless, there is utility from driven AI failures that could be used more effectively for the improvement of impact investing. For example, AI technologies could help detect and understand what did not work in previous investment outcomes (Bolesta et al., 2024). By taking careful analysis of unsuccessful attempts, investors can identify defects in assumptions, pinpoint execution errors, and recognize the impact of unexpected market conditions that could help in the precision of matchmaking (Bolesta et al., 2024). This will help in the development of more resilient AI matchmaking systems for investment and, more particularly, impact investing.

III. Interview Results

Context

Between January and March 2025, the research team conducted interviews with 12 stakeholders involved in the fields of impact investing and/or AI. The interviewee profiles and interview reports can be found in Annex 2 and Annex 3, respectively.

The purpose of these interviews was to gather insights on market trends, the current role of AI in impact investing and advancement of the SDGs, as well as to receive feedback on IIS' prototype AI-driven matchmaking algorithm. Following these interviews, the main insights were subsequently organized into four distinct topic areas as follows:

1. Impact Investment and AI Trends in Sustainable Development
2. Challenges in Securing Impact Investment and How AI Could Help
3. AI-Driven Matchmaking Algorithms
4. Risks and Future of AI for Sustainable Development

Topic 1: Impact Investment and AI Trends in Sustainable Development

This section provides a summary of interviewees' insights on trends in impact investment and the use of AI for sustainable development. First, it discusses the current impact investment landscape, including concerns about declining government funding. Second, it highlights key trending impact investment topics raised during the interviews. Third, it presents an overview of the main characteristics of impact investment across regions. Finally, it includes a summary of how AI is being applied to advance sustainable development from the interviewees' experiences.

- ***Impact Investment Current Landscape: Setback of Governmental Funds and the Role of Private Investment***

A common concern among various interviewees was the decline in government funding, which is reshaping the role of the private sector. **Partha Gopalakrishnan,** Founder of PG Advisors, shared his views on shifting dynamics around sustainable investments. He notes that while public funding plays a critical role in sustainable investment, governments are stepping back. Interestingly, despite public regulation becoming diluted, ESG-aligned private portfolios continue to grow, highlighting the increasing role of private funding, especially for social causes, as public investment declines. The emphasis now must be on attracting these private investments while ensuring they align with the SDGs.

Similarly, **Cory Steinhauer**, Head of Quality & Impact at Save the Children Australia, notes that large INGOs have faced significant setbacks due to the recent governmental crackdown on funding, particularly from the US administration. He also points to impact investment as a counterbalance to governmental funding, but argues that it often falls short because many investors struggle to engage sustainably. The underlying logic of these investments sometimes prioritizes financial returns over sustainable outcomes, in his view.

Additionally, according to Gopalakrishnan, public-private partnerships are evolving with governments providing incentives for private investors to take the lead. However, there is still a need to establish standardized methodologies across sectors and regions to ensure consistency

and transparency in impact investments. Sharing this view, **Eduardo Pacheco**, Founder of Novygi, points to blended finance as a key trend, combining private, governmental, and philanthropic financing. Nevertheless, **Victor Ndiege,** CEO of Kenya Climate Ventures [KCV], believes there has been insufficient application of blended and catalytic finance in underserved markets. This is the challenge he aims to address at KCV —attracting financing to underserved areas such as arid and semi-arid regions, as well as rural and humanitarian markets.

In contrast with other interviewees' perspectives, **Dr. Lola Olukuewu,** the Co-Founder and COO of Aivira Technologies Inc., mentions that the private sector (which holds most of the capital) has become more selective, given her experience in Nigeria. Olukuewu argues that investors are now more prudent and careful with their funding decisions, leading to a more rigorous screening process.

In this landscape, a recurring theme in impact investing is the need for authenticity. According t**o Dr. Maher Al Kaabi**, a banker with over 29 years of experience, many investors approach impact investment with a traditional mindset, prioritizing high returns rather than social or environmental benefits. He argues that it is crucial to shift these investors' perspectives so they begin to see the value of aligning financial goals with sustainable outcomes.

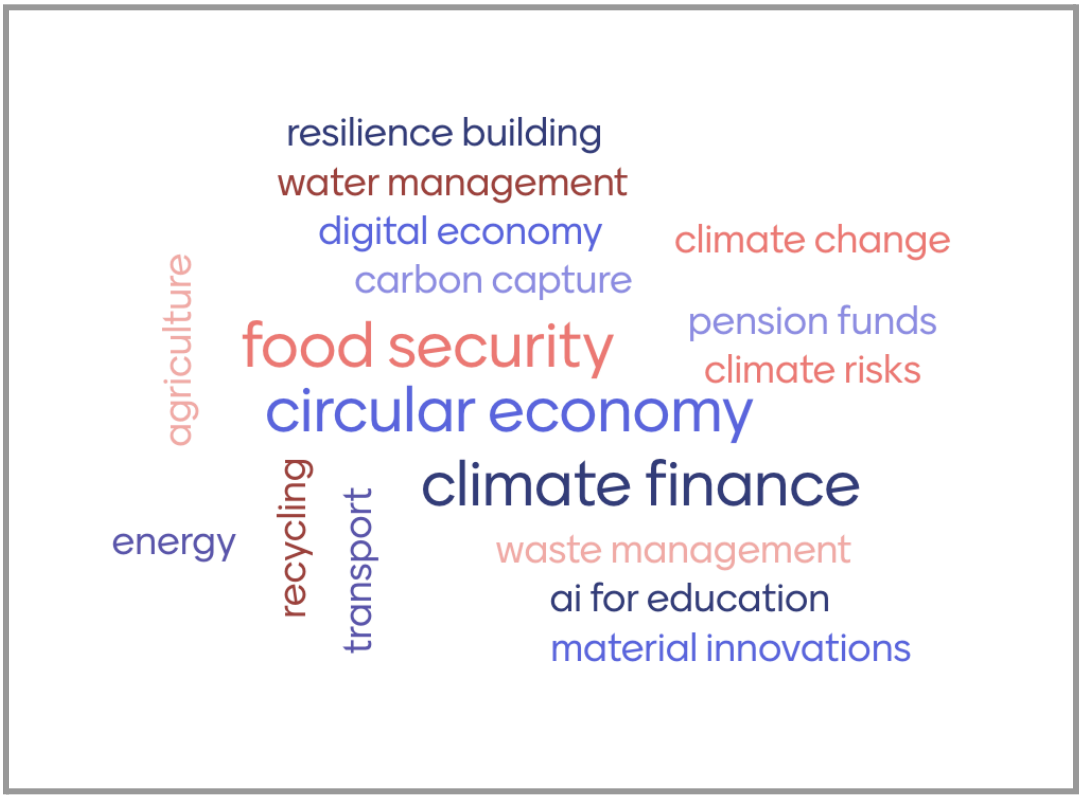
- ***Trending Topics in Impact Investing***

Impact investment represents approximately 12% of global investment, according to **Al Kaabi,** who underscores the connection between impact investment and sustainable trends. Among the key topics pointed out by interviewees, many had to do with climate-related initiatives.

The following word cloud was created using the tool 'Menti' by uploading the main topics mentioned by interviewees. It highlights the main trends they identified as central to the impact investment ecosystems they are part of. As stated above, most of the trends cited have to do with climate-related issues. The topics that were mentioned the most were **food security, circular**

economy, and climate finance.[9] Nevertheless, these topics are often interrelated, and investment in one issue has the potential to impact others.

Figure 2. Impact Investment Trending Topics Word Cloud



Source: Interview results.

[9] To consult interviewees' specific views on trending topics in impact investing, please refer to the interview reports contained in Annex 3.

- ***Impact Investment Across Regions***

The infographic below presents a summary of key insights from the interviews regarding the attractiveness and trends within different regions for impact investment.

Figure 3. Impact Investment Across Regions

Source: Interview results.

- ***Current Role of AI in Impact Investing and SDG Advancement***

Interviewees mentioned examples of real-world AI applications, particularly in areas directly linked to the SDGs—such as climate action, agriculture, food security, and healthcare.

Table 2. Interviewee Insights on Industry-specific AI Applications

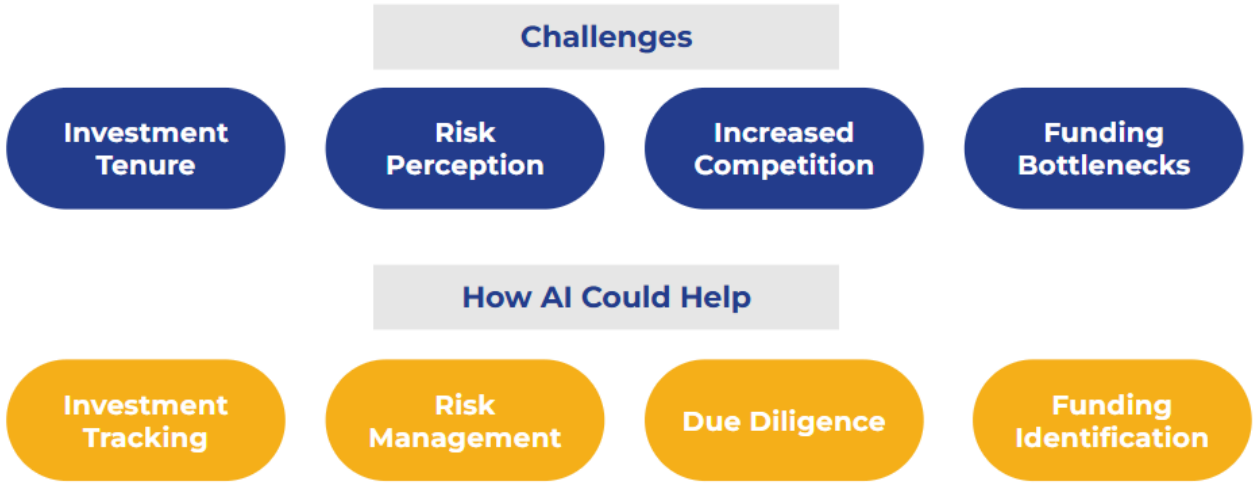
AI Application	Insight
Climate Action	AI is being used for climate change mitigation and informing policy making for disaster planning (**Gopalakrishnan; Pacheco; Epema**). For example, machine learning has introduced the ability to predict weather patterns before they occur (**Olukuewu).**
Agriculture & Food Security	AI has been applied in the field of agriculture. According to **Pacheco**, numerous initiatives are utilizing data analytics, satellite connectivity, and automation to optimize agriculture, pest control, and crop monitoring, enabling better precision farming, water management, and food security solutions.
Healthcare	AI has been playing a role in both prevention and curative care. **Ndiege** emphasizes that AI can predict areas difficult for vehicles to reach, which can be addressed through drone programs. **Olukuewu** mentions that AI is speeding up the analysis of medical data and images.

Interviewees also shared company-specific use cases from their own experiences:

- One of **Dr. Maher Al Kaabi**'s group companies is developing an AI model to manage Fat, Oil, Grease (FOG) waste from 14,000+ food establishments, which is considered hazardous waste. The model will predict waste generation frequency and quantity considering seasonality's to improve operations and identify high-emission sites. This allows the group to proactively reduce CO2 and methane emissions—potentially lowering costs by up to 25%—while generating a positive environmental impact.
- **BrainBox** (**Jean-Simon Venne's** company) uses AI to enhance energy efficiency in buildings. Their system runs on three independent AI "judges" that monitor building activity and must unanimously agree before making decisions, ensuring accuracy and reliability. This AI-checking-AI approach is inspired by systems used at SpaceX.
- **Microsoft** exemplifies AI integration, especially in workplace tools. As **Tim Laverty**, a Partner Architect at Microsoft, explains, the company uses AI both in its products and to support customers. Tools like Co-Pilot and Bing Chat exemplify this. AI is also embedded in OfficeSuite—Word, for example, now generates instant summaries when a document is opened.

Topic 2: Challenges in Securing Impact Investment and How AI Could Help

Figure 4: Summary of the key challenges and ways AI could help in securing impact investments according to the interviewees



Source: Interview results.

- ***Challenge: Investment Tenure***

One of the main concerns highlighted throughout the interviews was that the private sector should contribute to achieving environmental goals, but this is challenging since such goals typically require long-term commitment. The typical tenure of investment facilities is often predetermined with fixed horizons, usually 3 to 5 years. For example, **Victor Ndiege**'s KCV operates on a 7-year horizon. Ndiege believes there needs to be more flexibility in the tenure of investments to accommodate longer-term projects.

For investors, it is difficult to commit funds due to factors like the volatility and unpredictability of carbon markets, especially in terms of carbon credit pricing. However, Ndiege observes a steady increase in financing for specific value chains related to environmental products and services, such as forestry, marine ecosystems, and freshwater systems, which have started to attract significant investment. **Dr. Lola Olukuewu** and **Eduardo Pacheco** share

Ndiege's belief that investors are looking for faster returns on their investments. Olukuewu believes that if your proposal offers a quicker ROI, you're more likely to secure funding.

However, interestingly, **Raymundo Aguilar**, the Chief Risk & Innovation Officer at ACCSE, believes that investor patience regarding these investments is shifting. While he acknowledges that private equity investors typically seek a return on investment within four to five years, he believes this trend is changing. He states that even within organizations, there is now a growing focus on longer-term projects.

→ ***How AI Could Help: Investment Tracking***

One potential way to address the challenge of longer investment tenures is through AI-powered investment tracking. **Dr. Lola Olukuewu** and **Victor Ndiege** believe that AI can assist in report analysis and simplify the process from end to end. It can also help predict the potential outcomes of investments based on the data already available. However, they emphasize that human involvement remains crucial when using AI. AI can only predict based on past data, and the human touch is needed to interpret these insights and make informed decisions.

Similar to Olukuewu and Ndiege, **Cory Steinhauer** believes that AI-driven transparency is crucial for impact investing. Without robust data and due diligence, the risk tolerance for investment in the sector remains too high, discouraging capital flow into sustainable initiatives. However, we must acknowledge that major impact investing funds are already moving in this direction. The reality, he believes, is that any tool we develop today can be replicated tomorrow, increasing direct competition in this space.

- ***Challenge: Risk Perception***

According to nearly half of our interviewees, the perception of risk is a challenge in securing impact investments. For example, **Victor Ndiege**'s KCV is an early-stage fund manager, and the risks associated with their work are often perceived as high. Ndiege believes that if they were not focused on the climate agenda, it would be much easier for them to generate profits and attract capital into their fund. However, because they are targeting some of the most

underserved areas of the market—such as climate, gender, and socio-economic and geographic regions—there is an inherent risk that makes it difficult to gain buy-in from conventional investors.

Eduardo Pacheco, **Roland Dominicé** (Symbiotics' Group Managing Director)**,** and **Sander Epema** (Investment Consultant at SEE the Future**)** also stated that difficulties in fundraising vary by region with Dominicé highlighting currency risk as a significant hurdle for many investors. Eduardo also highlighted that many US investors focus heavily on local opportunities—one investor even stated to him, "If I can't reach the company within a two-hour drive, I won't invest." This mindset significantly limits cross-border investment opportunities for Mexican businesses. However, he believes that the decision to invest is not just an individual one—it depends on economic conditions, competition, and market dynamics. Even within Mexico, economic uncertainty discourages local investors from funding domestic projects. As a result, raising money and serving these underserved areas of the market takes longer, especially because concessional finance makes it unrealistic to achieve the high-margin returns that conventional investors typically seek.

Additionally, **Dr. Lola Olukuewu** has discovered that if you haven't yet achieved cash flow or entered the market, it becomes even more difficult to engage in funding discussions. Investors want to see proof of what you're already doing in the market in order to be able to gauge the risk level involved. Lastly, **Roland Dominicé** highlighted that determining the right pricing for a given level of risk is also a challenge.

→ ***How AI Could Help: Risk Management***

One potential way to address the challenge of risk perception in impact investing is through AI-powered predictive tools to help reassure investors and manage risks. **Victor Ndiege** and **Eduardo Pacheco** believe that AI can help by providing more predictive insights to identify and mitigate high-risk value chains. This would help investors make more informed decisions and increase confidence in emerging markets. It's important to note that not all sectors carry the same level of risk. Sectors tied to livelihoods and human transformation—such as water, health,

and agriculture—are generally at higher risk. Tools that can stabilize and generate enough data to show investors that, while certain sectors are high-risk, mitigating factors exist, could be crucial. High risk to the extent that it does not really lead to an increased cost of capital, but it would lead to creating mitigative measures that can create comfort to investors.

- ***Challenge: Increased Competition***

One of the key insights from the interviews was that while competition for securing funding has increased, the quality of investable opportunities has not improved. **Dr. Lola Olukuewu** believes that the pool of people vying for the same opportunities has grown substantially. While some founders are still figuring things out and don't present high-quality investable opportunities, the number of knowledgeable and capable founders has also increased, making it harder to stand out and secure funding.

Additionally, **Cory Steinhauer** goes on to state that Save the Children has its own impact fund, and he has been struggling to find enough high-quality, investable opportunities. He believes that capital isn't the issue—the issue is that there's nothing truly impact-driven to invest in. He suggests looking at The Rise Fund, for example, and what they invest in. He believes that in reality, many of these companies receiving impact investments were never built to drive impact toward the SDGs. Their marketing and communications teams may tell an SDG-aligned story, but at their core, these companies are profit-driven and aim to keep the shareholders happy.

→ ***How AI Could Help: Due Diligence***

AI could play a valuable role in distinguishing between high- and low-quality investable opportunities by enhancing the due diligence process. **Roland Dominicé** stated that this is an area where improvements have already begun, with processes becoming more efficient over time. Likewise, **Sander Epema**, believes that AI can support due diligence by managing documentation and improving efficiency.

- ***Challenge: Funding Bottlenecks***

For Foresight, a leading think tank focused on transformative future technologies, **Niamh Peren**, Chief Strategy Officer and AI Safety Co-Director at Foresight Institute, highlighted her frustration with funding bottlenecks. She is working with high-net-worth individuals to raise $20 million, having secured $6.1 million so far. However, the program cannot be launched until the full amount is raised. She wishes there was a way to speed up the process, with quicker responses regarding commitments and hard funding commitments in place immediately. That would make a huge difference and allow for faster progress toward their goals.

→ ***How AI Could Help: Funding Identification***

A possible way of addressing the challenge of funding bottlenecks is by using AI to identify additional funding opportunities, according to **Cory Steinhauer**. He believes that AI could help uncover invisible opportunities—potential areas of impact that are currently overlooked. The challenge is that many organizations lack the skills and expertise to navigate this transition.

A good example of this is Steinhauer's organization's work in Vietnam, where they developed an ed-tech application that is now moving toward commercialization. Over the next two years, they will focus on Series A funding and engaging impact investors through potential equity arrangements.

Topic 3: AI-Driven Matchmaking Algorithms

The perspectives shared by interviewees on AI-driven matchmaking highlight a blend of optimism and caution. While many see the potential of AI to streamline and enhance the matchmaking process, there is a strong emphasis on the irreplaceable role of human judgment. Concerns about trust, privacy, and the need for transparency also feature prominently, while some interviewees also shared particular features that they think would be useful for such a platform.

- ***Algorithm Development***

Tim Laverty was the only interviewee to share specific feedback regarding the backend algorithm development. He believes it is possible for the Microsoft CoPilot platform to be leveraged for matchmaking and is generally hesitant about people wanting to build their own models. He advises that it's essential to first verify whether existing foundation models can provide the desired results before attempting to build an algorithm from scratch.

Microsoft Azure, which is a cloud computing platform, offers various models and services that third-party customers are already heavily utilizing. One such product, which he believes is called 'Bing Copilot,' is more specialized. It uses the exact platform underlying BingChat and 365Chat, offering a set of services that aren't available through OpenAI's models, such as enhanced AI safety and plugin support. This could be particularly beneficial in the context of privacy-conscious impact investors on a matchmaking platform.

- ***Human Relationships***

The importance of maintaining human interactions when matchmaking was a heavily emphasized topic throughout the interviews. One-third of the interviewees explicitly highlighted the importance of this for matchmaking. **Roland Dominicé** shared with us his experiences with his own matchmaking platform when Symbiotics tried to launch it. Dominicé found that ultimately, buyers and sellers want to meet, and so it was hard to make it work. They also explored matchmaking through Tameo—a platform that provides independent, data-driven

solutions—and encountered a similar challenge: it's difficult to 'force' parties to work together in a way that is standardized, as matchmaking is much harder than we think. As a result, they no longer use this system. Instead, they now manage over 500 projects on one side and 50+ institutional accounts on the other, relying on emails and one-on-one discussions to secure deals.

Victor Ndiege shared similar views to Dominicé regarding a matchmaking platform. In his view, convincing an investor to commit money requires physical human interaction. This interaction helps investors understand what kind of enterprise or entrepreneur they are engaging with. If the application of such tools limits these interactions, it could be detrimental. For this reason, Ndiege believes the process must be blended, incorporating both technology and human input. He claims to have witnessed cases where a lack of this human approach resulted in disastrous outcomes. **Dr. Lola Olukuewu** also emphasizes that human involvement is still essential to avoid any potential slip-ups in a matchmaking process.

Raymundo Aguilar thinks that a matchmaking platform is a very good idea, nevertheless, he shares the same view as Olukuewu, Ndiege, and Dominicé when it comes to the human element for such a platform. Aguilar states that he doesn't want to speak on behalf of all investors, but at least for him, he likes "shaking people's hands" and being invested in the intentions of the projects. This matchmaking algorithm might work for younger generations, in his view. He shared a similar platform named Badavas with us, which is an interesting avenue for future research.

- ***Suggested Platform Features & Requirements***

Table 3. Interviewee Insights on Suggested Platform Features & Requirements

Suggested Platform Feature	Insight
Video Pitches	**Raymundo Aguilar** and **Jean-Simon Venne** believe that the incorporation of asynchronous video pitches may be useful for a matchmaking platform. They both encountered issues when trying to attend pitches through their fields of work.
Financial Insights	**Eduardo Pacheco** highlighted that essential details such as ROI expectations, investment amount required, and risk assessment would be a useful feature for a matchmaking platform.
Regional & Industry Analysis	Pacheco also highlighted that a tool that allows investors to filter opportunities by geographical region and industry focus would be something he would expect on a matchmaking platform if he were an investor.

Suggested Platform Requirement	Insight
Ensure Inclusion of Niche Enterprises	**Niamh Peren** expressed concern about the potential for an AI matchmaking algorithm to exclude more niche or radical impact enterprises. If investor preferences are input into a database and used by an algorithm to match projects, these unconventional enterprises might be overlooked, even though they could be of interest to an investor. This exclusion risk is something she sees as problematic and needs to be addressed in the design of any matchmaking platform.
Project Timeline Rules	Peren also mentioned the requirement of setting clear rules around project timelines—how long a project will stay up for and how long donors will have to contribute.

Source: Interview results.

Pacheco also shared a relevant example named Impact Database from the EU, which he believes addresses a similar need to the algorithm IIS seems to have. The database connects investors with enterprises. He also recommends looking into Top Tier Impact. To his knowledge, they are not currently leveraging AI, but they do facilitate potential investor-entrepreneur matchmaking. They could be a strong potential client for the matchmaking platform IIS has.

- ***Lack of Trust***

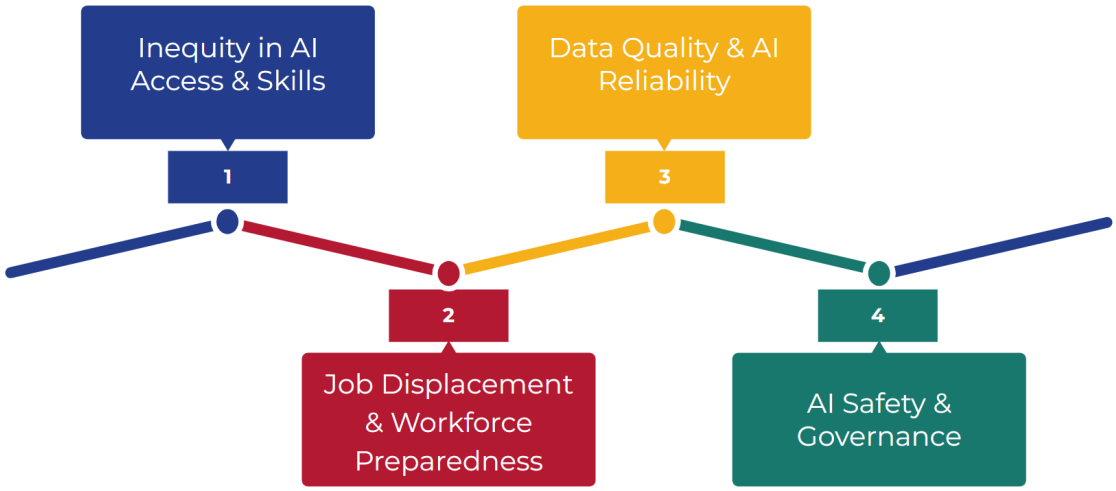
The issue of trust and data privacy surrounding a matchmaking platform was another heavily emphasized topic throughout the interviews. One-fourth of the interviewees explicitly highlighted the importance of this for matchmaking. **John Staehli,** Symbiotics' CMO, points out that the main challenge with using AI for matchmaking is trust—many people still don't view it as reliable enough. **Niamh Peren** finds the matchmaking concept really interesting and beneficial. However, likewise to Staehli, she also notes that most major donors in the space are privacy-conscious, which could make it challenging to get them to engage with a system like this. **Dr. Lola Olukuewu** also believes that privacy is a critical concern in this context. If she were to use such a platform, she would want to ensure there is no algorithmic bias. She stresses the importance of human oversight throughout the process to ensure fairness and accuracy in the decisions being made. According to Olukuewu, AI should always be used as a tool to support, not replace, human judgment, particularly in sensitive areas.

- ***Need to Differentiate***

Cory Steinhauer outlines that the AI-driven matchmaking platform itself isn't the differentiator—coding is highly accessible today. The real point of difference lies with the asset owner and how capital is being leveraged. He believes IIS' idea is great, but the reality is that once he sees it, he can code it and build it himself. According to Steinhauer, what would truly make a difference is not the platform itself, but the assets and capital under management. Fundamentally, IIS shouldn't be selling the algorithm—it should be selling access to capital. If they have a fund worth $100M, $150M, or even a billion dollars, people will be interested.

Topic 4: Risks and Future of AI for Sustainable Development

Figure 5: Summary of the risks associated with AI in terms of the SDGs according to the interviewees



Source: Interview results.

- ***Inequity in AI Access & Skills***

One of the biggest risks, highlighted by one fourth of our interviewees, including **Cory Steinhauer**, **Dr. Maher Al Kaabi,** and **John Staehli**, is inequity—both in access to AI and the ability to effectively engage with it. A massive skills gap is emerging between those who are proficient in AI and those who are not. At work, many professionals lack the skills to integrate AI effectively into their workflows. Whereas from a broader perspective, different countries and regions have varying levels of access to AI, leading to divergent developmental outcomes that could widen the gap in sustainable progress over time. Nonetheless, it is not merely a technological divide but rather a result of politically driven agendas that benefit certain nations. While these disparities will persist, the rise of emerging economies should help reduce the gap and promote greater global equality.

- ***Job Displacement & Workforce Preparedness***

Another big concern is the labor market disruption caused by AI-driven automation, especially youth unemployment in an AI-transformed economy, as highlighted by **Cory Steinhauer**. AI is evolving at an unprecedented pace, which will replace a significant number of low-cognitive, repetitive jobs that currently form the foundation of many economies, particularly in the Global South. **Dr. Maher Al Kaabi** emphasized that it is important to leverage predictive models to our advantage as they have the potential to simplify processes and improve efficiency, but this should go hand in hand with re-skilling initiatives to help workers adapt to the changing technological landscape. For example, while AI boosts productivity, there is a risk that it may diminish creativity and originality. Maintaining a balance without losing the human touch in creative industries is imperative.

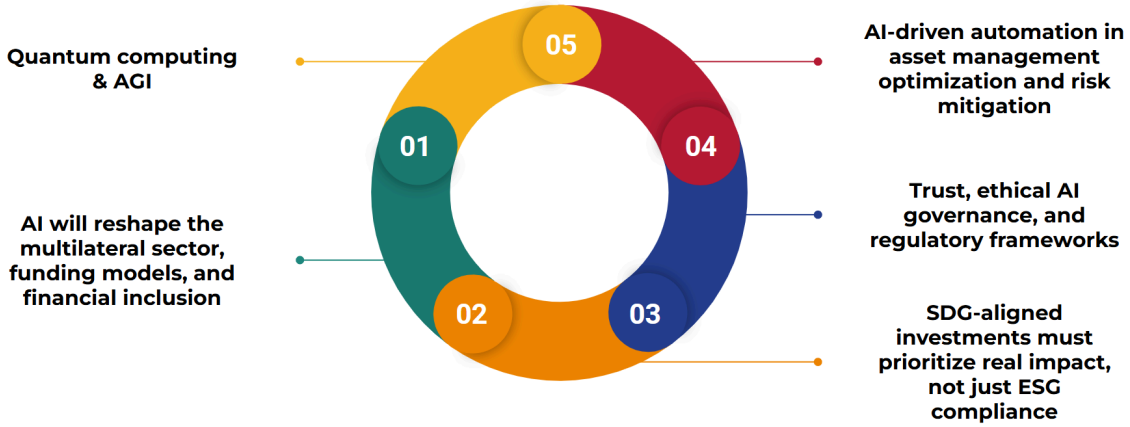
- ***Data Quality & AI Reliability***

Globalization has led to technological homogenization, meaning that most systems function similarly worldwide, according to **Jean-Simon Venne**. However, data quality remains a major challenge. For example, a faulty temperature sensor can compromise AI-driven decision-making, yet detecting such issues is not always straightforward. Ensuring the accuracy of input data is crucial for AI to function effectively and minimize risks. Similarly, **Partha Gopalakrishnan** highlighted that AI's learning process and reliability predictions are entirely dependent on the availability and accuracy of data. Another critical challenge is standardization and accessibility across different sectors due to the absence of commercial data exchanges. Each industry has its own approach to managing data, adding complexity to AI implementation.

- ***AI Safety & Governance***

Niamh Peren emphasized that there is an urgent need to prioritize AI safety, particularly regarding privacy. The rise of weaponized robotics is being dangerously overlooked and it is alarming that some of the largest AI budgets are being allocated to surveillance and torture technologies. Above all, there should be a critical need to embed strong safety measures into AI development, warning that much of today's AI is being designed without adequate safeguards.

Figure 6: Future trends associated with AI in terms of the SDGs according to the interviewees



Source: Interview results.

- ***AI will reshape the multilateral sector***

Cory Steinhauer highlighted that once NGOs achieve full AI augmentation and truly understand the technology, they won't just improve operational efficiencies and save money—they will also enhance how they design and execute both traditional (institutional investment) and nontraditional (impact investment) strategies. With the current international development sphere getting defunded, the real question is, where will future capital come from? AI must help leapfrog past existing barriers and directly reach those individuals in need, while multilateral organizations and civil society groups need to refocus their roles in this new landscape.

Eventually, as stated by our interviewees, performance will improve, and the cost of AI will decrease. **Tim Laverty** pointed out that further tuning and conflation of models is expected, where different models will excel at answering different types of questions. Just as the transition from physical books to ebooks changed the way we read, AI could simply answer questions directly from data, eliminating the need to create documents altogether. Nonetheless, this data needs to be inclusive, measurable, and verifiable.

- ***SDG-aligned investments must prioritize real impact, not just ESG compliance***

For **Eduardo Pacheco**, SDGs are critical, but past corporate commitments often leaned toward ESG compliance rather than genuine action. Sustainability must not become a mere trend—it requires a long-term commitment, regardless of political shifts. Keeping SDGs at the center of corporate boardroom discussions will be essential to maintaining progress. SDGs are about people, society, and the planet, and sometimes AI is not involved in this. Hence, a risk management perspective can be critical to bring forward real impact and not just ESG compliance. For example, climate change will be a central focus, with AI playing a pivotal role in developing intelligent strategies to address and mitigate environmental challenges.

- ***AI-driven automation in asset management optimization and risk mitigation***

Several interviewees emphasize that the future of AI will revolve around asset optimization, productivity gains, and decarbonization technologies. Each time machine learning systems make a recommendation, data is collected, which helps refine these systems and make them more accurate. This will be pivotal for risk mitigation, particularly following the OECD risk categories, and portfolio management, where AI could help optimize the impact of investments by helping to identify how to maximize the positive effects of money invested. However, this will eventually lead to minimalized human involvement in the selection of impact founders in the matchmaking process.

- ***Trust, ethical AI governance, and regulatory frameworks***

In terms of immediate changes, **Roland Dominicé** and **John Staehli** don't expect significant changes in the next year, but they believe that more developments will take place as more people engage with technology. **Dr. Lola Olukuewu** believes that as AI becomes more integrated into society, there will be an increasing awareness of the responsibility that comes with its use. People are becoming more concerned about AI's impact, and responsible AI will take center stage.

For others, such as **Victor Ndiege**, AI's knowledge and practical application will play a key role in creating solutions for real-world challenges, particularly in sectors such as renewables and healthcare. Additionally, he expects to see greater adaptability and flexibility in policies regarding the use of AI. For example, in Kenya, the Cabinet is working on the AI Bill, marking the first time such legislation is being developed. At the same time, he emphasizes the need for caution in the gradual application of AI frameworks in development. Overall, the tools developed must drive outcomes that ultimately improve lives.

However, in the scope of ethical AI governance, **Niamh Peren** relates the absence of a clear definition for consciousness of the concerning implications of uploading sentient beings onto digital platforms. She highlights the necessity of establishing ethical safeguards in AI and neurotechnology before such advancements become a reality.

- ***Quantum computing & AGI***

Beyond AI, **Dr. Maher Al Kaabi** believes that quantum computing and its applications will have a far more significant impact on industries and economies in the future. Along the same lines, **Niamh Peren** believes that AGI could redefine the global landscape within the next two to five years, potentially disrupting banking, legal systems, healthcare, and privacy frameworks. Specifically, AGI might lead to a world where humanity is no longer the dominant force, underscoring the urgency of responsible AI governance.

IV. Survey Results & Analysis

Context

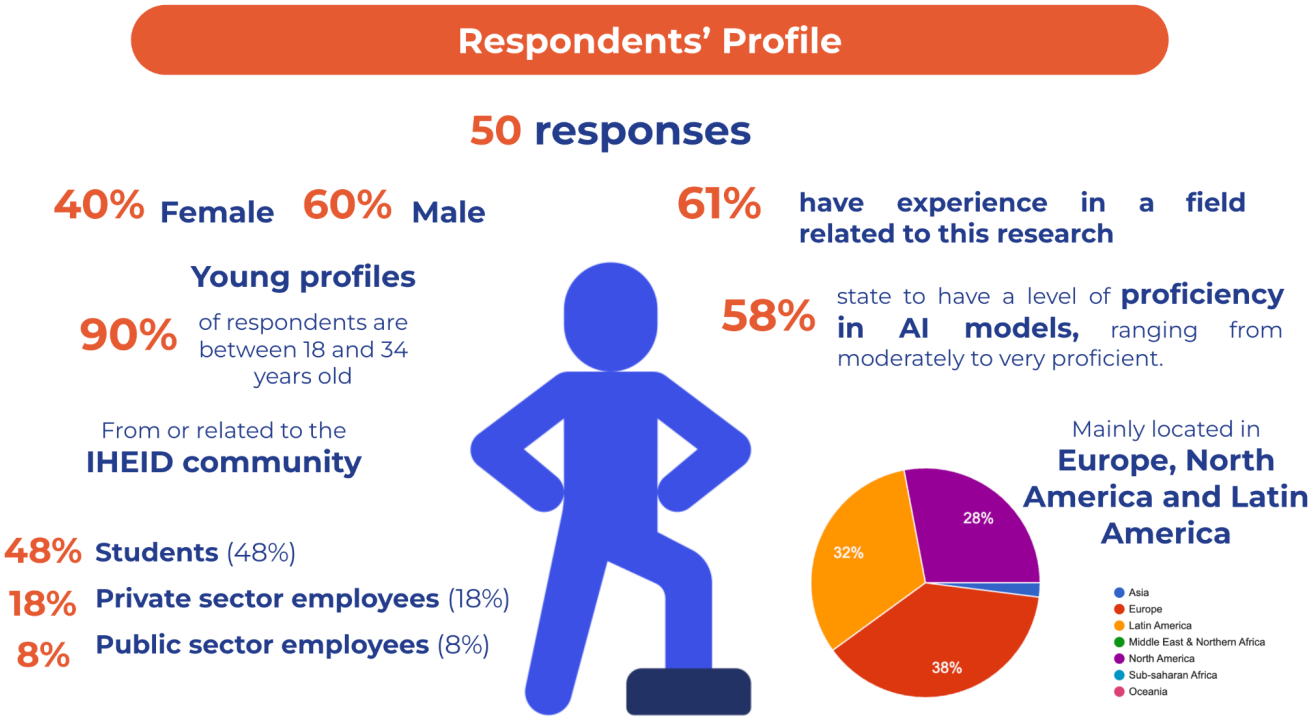
During April 2025, the research team conducted a survey to assess whether the insights from the interviewed stakeholders were also shared by other individuals working, studying, or interested in the fields of impact investing and/or sustainable development. This stage helped to build a clearer understanding of areas for improvement and concerns related to an AI-driven matchmaking algorithm for impact investors and enterprises.

While this section summarizes the main findings stemming from the survey, the full questionnaire used to gather these insights can be found in Annex 4, and the data containing the survey responses is available in Annex 5.

Respondents' Profile

The infographic below provides information on the respondents' profiles. The general profile of respondents consisted of people between 18 and 34 years old, from or related to the IHEID community, often being students. Most of the respondents claimed to have experience in a field related to the research and proficiency in AI models. Respondents came mostly from Europe, Latin America, and North America.

Figure 7. Respondents' Profile



Source: Survey results.

Survey Results

The survey contained ten questions to gather the respondents' perspectives on impact investment and AI. The main results can be summarized as follows:

- When asked to what extent respondents believe **impact investment efforts have been successful in advancing SDGs globally, 48%** feel neutral, **28%** disagree, and only **18%** agree on their success.
- **74%** think **AI can be effective in advancing sustainable development** (54% believe it can be somewhat effective, and 20% that it can be very effective). Only 4% think it would be very ineffective.

- The following are the most **relevant AI-related risks for respondents** (more than 50% find them relevant):
    1) Data privacy and misuse of personal information (74%).
    2) Misinformation and fake content generation (72%).
    3) Loss of human agency in decision making (62%).
    4) Bias or discrimination in AI systems (52%).

- The following are the main factors respondents would consider when **selecting an impact investment opportunity** (more than 50% find them relevant):
    1) Alignment with values and impact goals (74%).
    2) Financial viability and ROI expectations (60%).
    3) Project transparency (56%).

- **84%** think **AI** can be very or somewhat **effective for matchmaking**. Only 6% don't believe it could be effective.

- **84%** think that **human relationships** are important for matchmaking (54%: extremely important; 30%: very important).

- **70%** believe **integrating video-pitching** would be useful up to some extent, while **26%** prefer traditional in-person meetings.

- The following are the main **concerning topics** that respondents would consider when **using an AI matchmaking platform**:
    1) Exclusion of non-mainstream or niche enterprises (58%).
    2) Lack of trust in the algorithm decisions (52%).
    3) Insufficient transparency in the matchmaking process (50%).

- **38%** state being likely to **trust an AI-driven matchmaking platform** to be connected with an investable opportunity, while **38%** are neutral, and **14%** are unlikely.

- **45%** are likely to invest in **impact enterprises requiring longer investment tenure** if AI could effectively predict the long-term outcomes and mitigate associated risks.

Inferences and Key Findings: Bridging the Survey and the Interview Results

→ Contrasting perceptions: skepticism toward impact investment and confidence in AI for sustainable development.

The majority of the surveyed sample feels neutral or disagrees when asked if impact investment can work as a tool to advance the SDGs. This resonates with the views of interviewees such as Steinhauer, who sees impact investment as insufficient or increasingly centered on returns.

At the same time, the majority of the survey sample believes AI to be effective in advancing sustainable development. It appears AI has already proven to be a tool that helps advance a range of SDGs, as evidenced by the real-world examples provided in the interviews in areas such as climate, healthcare, agriculture, and food security, among others.

→ Similar AI-related risks were identified by survey respondents and interviewees.

Respondents identified risks at the individual level, while interviewees highlighted risks at the macro level. These risks are interrelated:

- The issues of data privacy and misuse of personal information are related to the concerns of interviewees around the need for AI safety and governance.
- Respondents identified issues of misinformation and fake content generation, similar to interviewees who highlighted data quality and reliability as central concerns.
- Loss of human agency was a key concern pointed out by both interviewees and survey respondents. Additionally, this human component also links to the interviewees' risk concerns around job displacement and workforce preparedness as a possible negative effect of AI.
- Bias or discrimination in AI systems was also mentioned as central by respondents, which relates to interviewees' general trust concerns.

→ While survey respondents would prioritize alignment of values and impact when investing in an impact-driven venture, a majority also consider returns a key element in their choice.

This reflects the market-based nature of impact investment (mentioned by Al Kaabi), and the importance of considering ROI as well as impact. At the same time, 45% of respondents state that they would be willing to invest in opportunities with longer investment tenures if AI could effectively predict long-term outcomes and mitigate associated risks—a possibility highlighted by Olukuewu. Additionally, respondents' prioritization of an alignment in values over returns in their answers (while both are important to them) reflects shifting trends, as mentioned by Aguilar, pointing to changes in investor patience and focus on longer-term projects.

→ A majority (84%) state they believe in AI effectiveness for matchmaking; nevertheless, only 38% would be likely to trust such a platform to be connected to an opportunity themselves.

This highlights the importance of developing an adequate algorithm, as suggested by interviewees, and of building audience trust in such platforms—an issue identified by Staehli, Peren, and Olukuewu as central. At the same time, respondents also expressed concern about excluding niche enterprises, as noted by Peren.

→ Survey respondents and interviewees consider human relationships central.

While AI is trusted as a tool to advance sustainable development and enable matchmaking in impact investing, human relationships remain highly relevant —particularly for younger generations, as reflected in our sample and echoed by interviewees such as Dominicé, Aguilar, and Ndiege. For this reason, integrating human elements into the algorithm is essential. Respondents supported the proposal to incorporate video-pitching, suggested by Aguilar and Venne, with 70% indicating it would be useful. Additionally, 84% of respondents believed human relationships to be extremely/very important when it came to matchmaking, highlighting that even younger generations continue to value face-to-face interaction.

V. Conclusions & Recommendations

To conclude, this paper aimed to explore ways to enhance matchmaking between impact investors and impact-driven enterprises to help achieve the SDGs. It focused on ways to improve IIS' prototype AI-driven algorithm while also sharing insights with the broader impact investing ecosystem to strengthen collaboration and accelerate progress toward sustainable development. Additionally, this paper analysed current trends in impact investing, along with the present and future role of AI in sustainable development and the potential risks this may involve. Following this research, the following recommendations were drawn:

1) Use Existing Foundation Models for Matchmaking When Building In-House AI

Data privacy and trust when using an AI-driven matchmaking platform were key concerns highlighted throughout the interview stage of this research. These concerns were also shared by the pool of survey respondents, with less than half of them stating that they would be likely to trust an AI-driven matchmaking platform. However, despite concerns around trust in using such a platform, the general sentiment among interviewees and survey respondents was that an AI-driven matchmaking platform would at least be somewhat effective and a valuable tool for impact investing.

Therefore, to address these issues surrounding data privacy and trust, it is recommended that platforms like Bing Copilot, which offer enhanced AI safety features and plugin support, are utilized for matchmaking platforms. This would help mitigate data privacy concerns and slowly enhance trust in the use of AI for matchmaking. Tim Laverty, who is the Partner Architect at Microsoft, also advised to first verify whether existing foundation models can provide desired results before investing time and resources in trying to develop a custom algorithm from scratch. Lastly, existing academic literature highlighted that keyword-based approaches for a matchmaking platform regularly lacked accuracy and efficiency. Using the Cosine and Jaccard mathematical similarity methods for matching were suggested instead.

2) Ensure a Blended Human and AI Matchmaking Approach

The importance of maintaining human interactions when matchmaking impact investors and impact enterprises was a clear theme throughout both the interviews and surveys. The most noteworthy inputs came from Victor Ndiege and Roland Dominicé. Ndiege stated that he has seen cases where a lack of a human approach in matchmaking has resulted in "disastrous outcomes". Additionally, Roland Dominicé—who has been in the impact investing market for over two decades with Symbiotics—shared that he once attempted to launch a matchmaking platform, but his group eventually stopped using it. They found that, ultimately, buyers and sellers want to meet, and it was difficult to 'force' parties to work together in a standardized way. Therefore, the use of an AI-driven matchmaking platform should only be used to help facilitate interactions between investors and enterprises and not fully replace them.

3) Incorporate Video Pitching into the Platform

Incorporating the idea of video pitches—proposed by Raymundo Aguilar and Jean-Simon Venne—into the matchmaking platform is strongly recommended. This feature was positively received by survey respondents, with 70% indicating it would be helpful. In addition to enhancing the decision-making process, it could also support the human dimension of matchmaking by fostering more personal and engaging interactions between investors and enterprises.

4) Reduce the Risk of Exclusion of Niche Enterprises on the Platform

If investor preferences are input into a database and used by an AI algorithm to match them with investment opportunities, there is a risk that unconventional or niche enterprises may be overlooked—even if they could align with investor interests. This exclusion risk was highlighted by Niamh Peren, who works with enterprises in niche sectors such as nanotechnology and neurotechnology, and emphasized the need to address it in the platform's design. Similarly, survey respondents identified this as their greatest concern regarding AI-driven matchmaking platforms. Therefore, it is essential that the design of such platforms ensures broad

access to funding, including for non-traditional enterprises in emerging fields aiming to advance the SDG goals.

5) Leverage AI for Risk Management, Investment Tracking, and Due Diligence

In order to address the main challenges in securing investment that interviewees said they encountered, leveraging AI in the areas of risk management, investment tracking, and due diligence is recommended. An AI tool that can use historical data to help investors assess and mitigate risks more effectively to help them make more informed decisions would increase confidence in emerging markets and, therefore, investment. Regarding investment tracking, an AI-powered tool could improve investor sentiment and encourage longer-term commitments. The majority of survey respondents indicated they would be more likely to invest in impact enterprises with extended tenures (e.g., seven years) if AI could accurately predict long-term outcomes and mitigate risks. Lastly, it was highlighted that AI is already being used to assist with due diligence in impact investing and is making this process more efficient as a result. Therefore, developing or implementing such tools is recommended for IIS and other impact investing firms.

6) Consider Impact Investment Trends While Maintaining Inclusivity

Interviewees frequently emphasized environmental issues as a key trend, suggesting that prioritizing enterprises in this area could increase investment appeal to investors. However, this focus also risks overlooking other underserved sectors, potentially undermining broader goals of inclusive economic development.

Additionally, Roland Dominicé noted that Central Asia offers the most favorable risk/return profile for their firm, Africa is the most attractive region for impact-first investors and has shown the fastest growth, while Latin America—although consistently comprising around a third of Symbiotics' portfolio—has experienced comparatively slower growth. Therefore, prioritizing high-growth industries and regions such as the ones above, while ensuring a balanced approach that does not exclude other markets, may be beneficial.

7) Address AI Inequities and Workforce Disruption in Investment Offerings

To mitigate the risks of inequity and workforce disruption associated with AI adoption, it is recommended that IIS, and the broader impact investing community, actively support initiatives that promote equitable access to AI tools and invest in reskilling and upskilling programs. As emphasized by interviewees such as Cory Steinhauer and Dr. Maher Al Kaabi, disparities in access and AI literacy—both between regions and within labor markets—pose a significant threat to inclusive sustainable development.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the survey sample consisted of only 50 respondents, all of whom were closely affiliated with the IHEID community. A larger and more diverse sample would provide a broader perspective and enhance the generalizability of the results.

Secondly, while interviews provided valuable insights, the number of participants was limited. Notably, there was little input on the development of AI-driven matchmaking algorithms, as it was challenging to secure interviews with individuals possessing specific expertise in this area.

Lastly, the existing academic literature on AI-driven matchmaking platforms is scarce, particularly in the context of impact investing. Most available literature focuses on matchmaking applications in other domains, such as dating and job recruitment. This research aims to fill this gap by exploring the potential for AI-driven matchmaking in impact investing and hopes to stimulate further academic inquiry into the improvement of matchmaking algorithms in this field.

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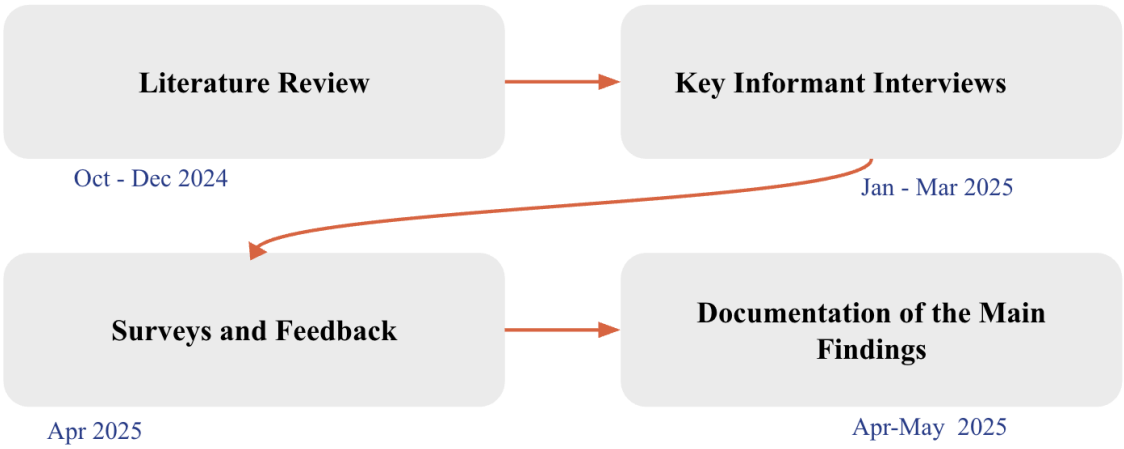
VII. Annexes

Annex 1: Methodology

The methodology of this project was divided into four stages, spanning from October 2024 to May 2025.[10]



1. Literature Review

The first step consisted of conducting a literature review, through which an identification of existing AI-driven matchmaking platforms was made. The aim was to reveal how these approaches to matchmaking could be transferable to impact investment matchmaking. Additionally, the literature review also sought to explain the current role of AI in sustainable development and within finance.

2. Stakeholder Interviews

The objective of this phase was to gather insights from stakeholders on AI technologies and trends in impact investment. The stage consisted of:

[10] Initially, an additional stage was foreseen, aiming to test existing matchmaking platforms to assess their strengths and weaknesses. However, due to time and capacity limitations, it was decided to exclude it.

i) **Stakeholder Identification:** Identification and outreach to stakeholders, including investors, enterprises, AI stakeholders, and platform developers. A list of the interviewees' profiles can be found in Annex 2.

ii) **Questionnaire Design:** Design of semi-structured questionnaires for the identified stakeholders. The questionnaires were then further tailored for each interviewee.

iii) **Interview Conduction**: Conduction of interviews with 12 stakeholders, gathering insights on challenges and opportunities in using AI for match-making in impact investing. The questionnaires and summarized notes from the interviews can be found in Annex 4 and Annex 3, respectively.

3. Surveys and Feedback

The objective of this stage was to assess whether the insights from the interviewed stakeholders were also shared by other individuals working, studying, or interested in the fields of impact investing and/or sustainable development. This stage helped to build a clearer understanding of areas for improvement and concerns related to an AI-driven matchmaking algorithm for impact investors and enterprises. The survey respondents were mainly from the communities of IHEID.

The survey used to gather these insights can be found in Annex 4. The data containing the survey responses is available in Annex 5.

4. Documentation of the Main Findings

The final stage consolidates the takeaways and outcomes derived from the activities conducted throughout the project. These findings are presented in the current final report, which synthesizes the methodologies, insights, main results, and recommendations generated from the entire process.

Annex 2: Interviewee Profiles

Raymundo Aguilar is the Chief Risk & Innovation Officer at ACCSE (Acción Social Empresarial), with extensive experience in operational risk management, internal control, and corporate governance. He has held key roles such as Internal Control SVP at Citibanamex and Associate at Diagnostico & Gestion. Based in Albi, France, he combines financial expertise with sustainability initiatives, mentoring impact investment startups in Mexico.

Dr. Maher Al Kaabi is a visionary leader and a seasoned banker with over 30 years of experience in the Banking, IT industry, and Family Business. As an advisor to the Group Chairman of Al Serkal Group of Companies and Independent Board Member of various organizations, he works extensively with ministries in future technologies, circular economy, and sustainability of family businesses. He is also the Co-Founder of Blink, a Partner at Capizona and The Optimisation Hub, and a Council Member of the UAE Circular Economy Committee. Dr. Al Kaabi plays an advisory role in Impact Investing Solutions and Impact Boards Emerging Markets.

Roland Dominicé has been with Symbiotics since 2005, initially as Head of Business Development and CEO before becoming Group Managing Director. His career spans financial management roles at BlueOrchard Finance, PWC, McKesson, and UBS Switzerland.

[Sander Epema] is an investment consultant at SEE the Future, specializing in ESG and impact investing. With over 20 years of experience in the financial sector, he has worked in private equity, investment management, and banking. His impact investment experience includes projects focused on food waste and sustainability.

[Partha Gopalakrishnan] is a business transformation expert with over 25 years of experience leading global teams in AI, Web3, and digital transformation. Passionate about sustainability, he integrates AI-driven cognitive technologies with ESG principles. Through PG Advisors, he provides board advisory and digital risk management services. His previous leadership roles include 17 years with Infosys and Tech Mahindra, where he spearheaded AI and circular economy initiatives.

[Tim Laverty] leads a team in the CTO Office at Microsoft, shaping the company's AI, developer, and platform strategies. He has played a pivotal role in Microsoft's AI initiatives, including advising CTO Kevin Scott and working on projects like Semantic Kernel and BingChat infrastructure. His research focuses on AI's impact on software development and Microsoft's future business strategy.

[Victor Ndiege] has spent 20 years in impact investment, working with institutions such as KPMG's International Development Advisory Services and Africa Enterprise Challenge Fund. His expertise lies in designing catalytic grants to stimulate markets, particularly in renewable energy and climate finance across Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. In 2020, he joined Kenya Climate Ventures (KCV) as its CEO to build a premier commercial climate financing institution in Kenya.

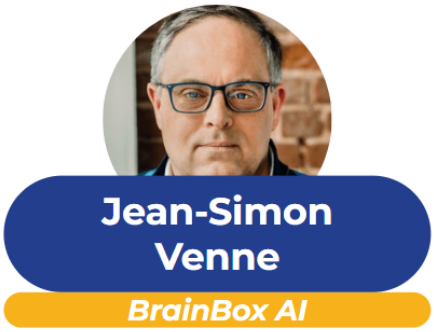
Dr. Lola Olukuewu is a serial entrepreneur, consultant, mentor, green advocate, and impact investor in tech companies. As the Co-Founder and COO of Aivira Technologies Inc., a leader in multilingual AI automation solutions, she has demonstrated a strong ability to foster innovation and economic growth. She is also the founder of TOPAS Hub, Lagos, Nigeria's most eco-friendly tech and business hub, incorporating upcycled materials to promote sustainability in line with SDG 14. Her professional background includes collaborations with global tech giants such as Google, Facebook, and Amazon. She is a member of the International Association of Privacy Professionals, with certifications in AI Governance and Information Privacy Management.

Eduardo Pacheco is the Founder and Managing Partner of Novygi, a consulting firm specializing in top management strategies across industries such as consumer goods, entertainment, agriculture, automotive, and manufacturing. With over 35 years of experience in C-suite roles and global consulting firms, Eduardo has a strong track record in impact investment, particularly in Smart Cities. During his tenure at Deloitte, he focused on impact investments in security, mobility, health, and urban planning. His expertise includes collaborating with leading automobile firms on future mobility concepts, contributing to the Smart Cities Index, and assessing smart city initiatives in Latin America for the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). He is also an active member of the Top Tier Impact investment community.

[Niamh Peren] serves as the Chief Strategy Officer and AI Safety Co-Director at Foresight Institute. Her diverse background includes film production, environmental activism, and academia. She has worked with renowned filmmakers such as Dame Jane Campion and Jonathan Glazer through her company, Poignant Productions, which champions women in filmmaking. She also founded Thumbs Up New Zealand, a waste minimization initiative that successfully influenced national policy. Her work bridges creative industries with sustainability, and her current role focuses on strategic innovation and AI safety.

[John Staehli] has nearly 25 years of experience in finance, marketing, and communication, having worked across international banking, asset management, and corporate strategy. As Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) since 2014, he oversees marketing and communication while actively supporting business development and the coordination of market development strategies.

[Cory J. Steinhauer] is the Head of Quality & Impact at Save the Children Australia. A senior impact expert with 20 years of experience, he has led complex programming across Afghanistan, Australia, Cambodia, Jordan, Korea, Laos, New Zealand, Mexico, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Timor, Turkey, and Vietnam. His diverse career spans the United Nations, international NGOs, the private sector, universities, and governments. Cory is at the forefront of next-generation impact strategies, blending commercial, social, and academic rigor to drive sustainable, scalable outcomes in Australia and globally.



Jean-Simon Venne is the Co-Founder and CTO of BrainBox AI. With over 25 years of experience, he specializes in efficiently migrating technological innovations into commercial applications. His expertise spans telecommunications, biotechnology, and energy efficiency. Before BrainBox AI, he led the integration of M2M technology into over 200 smart buildings across North America, Europe, and the Middle East.

Annex 3: Interview Reporting

Interview reports can be accessed through this link.

Annex 4: Survey Design

Sample Targeting

Survey open to all profiles interested in impact investment and entrepreneurship, distributed through IIS, IHEID, and the team's personal networks.

n > 30

Objective

To verify whether the perspectives of interviewed stakeholders regarding a platform that uses AI to match investors with impact-driven companies are also shared by other individuals in the field. More specifically, the respondents to the survey will be a sample from the communities of IHEID and IIS, interested in the impact investment field and the sustainable development ecosystem.

Method of Distribution (IIS Social Media, IHEID Social Media, Personal Social Media)

Our survey will be distributed through various social media platforms to reach our target audience effectively. While leveraging our personal social media channels is important, we also plan to utilize those of our partners and our institution to maximize engagement.

We suggest the survey on LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook, as these platforms provide broad reach and engagement opportunities within our intended audience.

The time frame considered to gather responses for this survey is from April 9th to April 28th 2025.

Survey Form for Distribution

Introduction

This survey is part of a broader research effort conducted by the Geneva Graduate Institute in partnership with Impact Investment Solutions. The research seeks to explore the potential of AI to support matchmaking between investors and impact-driven initiatives. Your input will help us gain a better understanding of public perspectives on such efforts.

Participation is voluntary, and your responses will be kept strictly confidential and used solely for research purposes. You are free to withdraw at any time. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us.

The survey takes approximately 5–10 minutes to complete. We truly appreciate your time and insights!

Questions (10-12 questions focused)

I. General information

- **Email** *(open question)*

- **Age**
  - *18–24*
  - *25–34*
  - *35–44*
  - *45–54*
  - *55–64*
  - *65 or older*

- **Gender**
  - Male
  - Female
  - Non-binary
  - Other
  - Prefer not to say

- **Which region do you live in?**
  - Asia
  - Europe
  - Latin America
  - Middle East & Northern Africa
  - North America
  - Sub-saharan Africa

- **What is your current occupation?**
  - Academic / Researcher
  - Consultant / Freelancer
  - Entrepreneur / Business Owner
  - Investor / Venture Capitalist
  - Nonprofit / NGO / International Organization Professional
  - Retired
  - Salaried Employee (Private Sector)
  - Salaried Employee (Public Sector / Government)
  - Student
  - Unemployed / Looking for work

- Other (please specify)

- **In which of the following areas have you been involved with and/or have experience in?**
  - Entrepreneurship
  - Impact investment
  - Corporate Social Responsibility and/or ESG
  - Academia with a focus on sustainable development or investment topic
  - I have not been invested in any of these areas
  - Other

II. Perspectives on impact investment and AI

- **The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are set to expire in 2030. Do you believe impact investment efforts have been successful in advancing them globally?**
  - Strongly Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neutral / Not Sure
  - Agree
  - Strongly Agree

- **How effective do you believe AI can be in advancing sustainable development?**
  - Very Ineffective
  - Somewhat Ineffective
  - Neutral/Unsure
  - Somewhat Effective
  - Very Effective

- **On a scale ranging from "Not Proficient" to "Very Proficient," how would you rate your ability to engage and interact with AI models?**
  - Not Proficient
  - Slightly Proficient
  - Moderately Proficient
  - Proficient
  - Very Proficient

- **What are your most important factors when selecting (or if you were to select) an impact investment opportunity? (Select all that apply)**
  - Clear alignment with values and impact goals

- Financial viability and ROI expectations
- Entrepreneur background and personal engagement
- Transparency in terms of project progress and outcomes
- Platform usability and accessibility
- Other (Please specify)

- How effective do you believe AI can be in matching investors with impact-driven enterprises?
  - Very effective
  - Somewhat effective
    Not very effective
  - Not at all effective
  - Unsure

- **When it comes to matchmaking between investors and impact-driven enterprises, how important are human relationships to you?**
  - Extremely important
  - Very important
  - Somewhat important
  - Not very important
  - Not at all important
  - Unsure

- **Would video pitching (where enterprises submit video presentations instead of traditional meetings/pitches) improve your experience using a matchmaking platform?**
  - Yes, it would be very helpful
  - Yes, it might be useful
  - No, I prefer traditional in-person or virtual meetings
  - No, I don't see the value in video pitches

- **What would be your biggest concern about using an AI-driven matchmaking platform for impact investing?**
  - Lack of trust in the algorithm's decisions
  - Exclusion of non-mainstream or niche enterprises
  - Insufficient transparency in how matches are made
  - Concerns about privacy and data security
  - Difficulty in integrating AI with human interaction
  - Other (Please specify)

- **How likely are you to trust an AI-driven matchmaking platform to connect you with potential investable opportunities that are based on your preferences in the impact investing space?**
    - Highly likely
    - Likely
    - Neutral
    - Unlikely
    - Highly unlikely

- **How likely are you to invest in impact enterprises that require a longer investment tenure (e.g., 7 years or more) if AI can effectively predict the long-term outcomes and mitigate associated risks?**
    - Very likely
    - Likely
    - Neutral
    - Unlikely
    - Very unlikely

- **Which of the following concerns or potential risks related to AI are most relevant to you? (Select all that apply.)**
    - Job displacement or automation of your role
    - Data privacy and misuse of personal information
    - Government or corporate surveillance
    - Bias or discrimination in AI systems
    - Misinformation or fake content generation
    - Loss of human agency or decision-making
    - Lack of transparency in how AI is used
    - Other (please specify): _____
    - None of the above

- **Would you like to share any thoughts or experiences on how AI can support matchmaking in impact investing?**

Thank you for participating in this survey. By clicking "Submit," you consent to the use of your responses for research purposes by IHEID. Updates and findings from this research will be shared in the coming months through IIS and/or IHEID communication channels.

Annex 5: Survey Results

The data collected through the survey can be found in this link. In accordance with survey statements, personal data ought to remain private and confidential.