data.org

2025 DATA AND AI FOR SOCIAL IMPACT REPORT

Accelerate What's Possible

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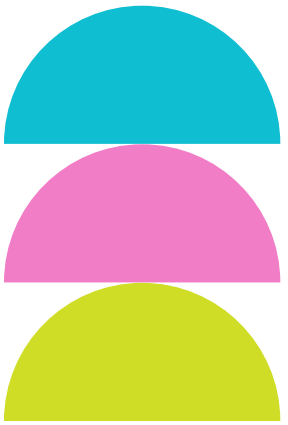
Cover: Quipu

Contents

Acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
AI2AI	Artificial Intelligence to Accelerate Inclusion Challenge
CAN	Capacity Accelerator Network
DMA	Data Maturity Assessment
DSI	Data for Social Impact
DPGs	Digital Public Goods
HEWs	Health Extension Workers
LMIC	Low- and Middle-Income Countries
LLM	Large Language Model
MoH	Ministry of Health
ML	Machine Learning
MSMEs	Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIO	Social Impact Organization



Foreword

Data and artificial intelligence are reimagining what's possible.

Deploying AI agents to protect communities when climate disasters hit. Increasing small business owners' access to capital through AI-driven alternative credit scoring models. Using geospatial data to track pandemic outbreaks and inform public health response through open-source dashboards.

These aren't theories of what data and AI *can* do–they're concrete examples of what data and AI tools *are doing* when leveraged by people who want to do good.

And in many ways, that's what this report is about: people.

data.org was launched in January 2020 as a connector, a convener, and a catalyst to unlock the power of data for the nonprofit and social sector. Since then, we have scoured the world for bold solutions, lifting up best practices and building connections across sectors and borders between people with the potential to take novel ideas and sustainably scale them to the greatest possible impact. Five years later, we know what great looks like. We know what it takes to get there, particularly when it comes to the skills and training necessary for the people doing the work. Our growing library of practical use cases and workforce development success stories has crystallized that the benefits of using data and AI are tremendous, yet the social sector still lags behind its private sector counterparts. As our spring 2025 **updated AI for Good Landscape** illustrated, the swift rise of generative AI has further upped the ante—for the opportunities and the risks.

We explore both in this report. We illuminate the limitations of the social sector to fully realize the potential that new AI technologies offer, from the baseline—2.6

billion people still lack internet access—to emerging challenges, like the 5 billion people whose native language is absent from AI products. Many have looked at AI as an equalizer, but we have seen firsthand that in order for data and AI to drive meaningful growth, you need an intentional approach to workforce development. While AI can be—and is—used to displace human talent, the social sector may be uniquely positioned to reap the benefits, as low-resourced organizations can expand their existing workforce capabilities. At data.org, we lead with localism, anchoring in the community at every stage of the process. Only when solutions are co-created and deployed in partnership with the people they are meant to serve can sustainable growth take root for all.

The globally informed, locally led exemplars we have identified over the past five years light the way in this report, serving as a roadmap for our insights and recommendations and reinforcing how data.org and our partners will accelerate progress as the ecosystem evolves from a moment to a movement.

When we started this work at data.org, we had a lot of explaining to do. What is data for social impact? What do you mean by capacity building? What is AI and how could it possibly apply to the immediate work before me, providing direct services to people in need? Today, those 'what' questions have evolved. What tech do I need? What tools should I use? The 'what' is a moving target, which is why we are tool agnostic. What is considered innovative today, in the fall of 2025, can quickly be replaced by something else with vastly greater capabilities.

Instead, data.org avoids the hype cycle of what is shiny and new. We stand as a global leader on the 'how' and, most importantly, on the 'who'—the people powering change.

We **connect** people and communities in our quest to train one million purpose-driven data practitioners by 2032. In five hubs across four continents, our Capacity Accelerator Network (CAN) develops rigorous training and hands-on learning opportunities for a community of practice anchored in implementation and impact. We **convene** leaders across higher education, social impact, government, the private sector, and beyond for thoughtful, solutions-based conversations, like at our Accelerate 2024 conference—which is returning in 2026 in Bogotá, Colombia. And lastly, we **catalyze** change, as well as vital follow-on-funding, through global innovation challenges that have become powerful engines of discovery.

That is how a moment becomes a movement.

The bright spots are there and, ultimately, it's not the underlying tech or the tools that are making a difference. It's the people doing the work. When people who are committed to solving our world's greatest challenges have the skills, training, mentorship, and support they need—when they are part of an interconnected community that shares and celebrates what works—*that* is when the power of data and AI can be unlocked for all.

Perry Hewitt

Ginger Zielinskie

Danil Mikhailov, Ph.D.

Mississippi AI Collaborative

Executive Summary

In a world increasingly shaped by data and artificial intelligence, the potential for transformative change is undeniable. But so too are the risks.

Which side wins out—whether we drive progress or exacerbate challenges—is determined not by the technology, but by the people leveraging it.

That is the key theme throughout this report as we examine opportunities, risks, trends, and recommendations, informed by data.org's work as a connector, convener, and catalyst over the past five years. Across our global innovation challenges, our Capacity Accelerator Network that is strengthening the workforce and building demand for purpose-driven data and AI practitioners, and our growing library of resources and digital learning opportunities, it always comes back to people.

- People who believe that data and AI should be collected and designed not just for but by the communities they seek to serve—and in the languages they speak.
- People who understand that good intentions aren't enough, and that we need to do more, collectively, to establish standards, guardrails, ethics, and accountability that protect against the further marginalization or exclusion of vulnerable communities.
- People who consistently pursue innovation and develop promising new solutions, including in emerging roles tailored to the changing sector, like the data ecosystem designer we have helped envision.
- People who prioritize building trust with those closest to the work to improve the quality of life for people everywhere, across critical challenges like financial inclusion, climate change, and public health.

In every case study we encounter, the same is true: be smart about how you invest in people, and the potential for sustainable progress will grow exponentially. At data.org, our focus has always been on identifying, amplifying, connecting, and empowering people. Guided by our commitment to be globally informed but locally led, we empower the social sector with a community of practice to collaborate with, with a library of tools and resources to learn from and build upon, and with hands-on training and workforce development. Because technology will never stop changing. To stay resilient and relevant, we are—and must remain—tool agnostic. We focus instead on the skills, knowledge, experiences, and connections that people need to not only be successful individual contributors to the workforce, but to also be part of the movement that is harnessing data and AI for impact in every corner of the globe.

So how do all stakeholders in the data and AI for social impact ecosystem set the stage for taking a more people-first approach to this work?

1. Build digital and data fluency with more representative data and a more representative workforce. You don't need a degree in data science to do this work well.
2. Create more localized resources across languages, disciplines, and borders, including in software development.
3. Ground workforce development and capacity-building strategies in real-world problems and practical applications.

Generative AI can help accelerate progress across this trifecta. It creates opportunities for translation, fuels the rise of low-code, no-code solutions, and allows even organizations at the start of their data maturity journey to access tools that can be adapted to their local context. The need for custom builds—and the upfront investment that requires—is reduced as more open-access tools become available. Generative AI can also save time for resource-constrained leaders and organizations so that they can focus on more mission-aligned tasks. As long as we are intentional about simultaneously addressing risks like the digital divide and embedded bias, these opportunities can translate into meaningful change for people who need it.

As we explore in this report, the applications of data and AI are as diverse as the organizations using them. The case studies come from different sectors and different continents, but what ties them together is a fierce and fearless commitment to solving some of the world's most intractable problems. They embody the best of the sector and bring to life our three key recommendations for how all organizations, and especially nonprofits, can keep up with the pace of innovation and leverage data and AI for social impact:

- **Stay focused on practical applications.**
- **Harness the power of partnerships.**
- **Remember, always, who it is you seek to serve.**

Over the past five years, data.org has learned what great looks like in data and AI for social impact. And as we look ahead to the next five, we cannot predict how the technology will change, but we do know, from experience and without question, that 'great' will always look like purpose-driven people who have the will and the skill to do good.

Solar Sister

From a Moment to a Movement

OUR WORK AND OBSERVATIONS

January 2020: A Nascent Field
data.org launches with the support of our founding partners, the Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth and The Rockefeller Foundation. Our mission is to build the field of data for social impact, at a time when the case for data in the social sector is not unilaterally understood. In addition, we find that many resource-strapped social impact organizations (SIOs) have no in-house capacity, or very limited capacity, to collect, analyze, or leverage data to meaningfully inform their programs or develop solutions.

January 2021: Cross-Sector Collaboration
Inclusive Growth and Recovery Challenge awardees identify breakthrough ideas that harness the power of data to help people and communities thrive. This first global innovation challenge influences and fine-tunes our programs, reinforcing the importance of open access tools and cross-sector collaboration to grow the talent pipeline.

August 2021: Understanding the Landscape
data.org and our fellow Dr. Jake Porway, the co-founder of DataKind, publish a landscape on data for good that helps us understand how the field is evolving and is designed to be used as a tool for nonprofits to identify and partner with peers.

March 2022: Yes, We CAN

The Capacity Accelerator Network (CAN) is launched. With support from the Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth, Wellcome, and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the network now has five hubs, in the United States, India, Africa, Latin America, and Asia Pacific.

Capacity Accelerator Network

THE CAPACITY ACCELERATOR NETWORK, POWERED BY DATA.ORG

ACCELERATOR	CORE PARTNERS	AREA OF FOCUS
United States	University of Chicago Data Science Institute, California State University, Fresno, City Colleges of Chicago, Howard University, Morehouse College, North Carolina State University, The University of Illinois at Chicago, University of Texas at San Antonio	Financial inclusion
India	Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) South Asia, Ashoka University, Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani (BITS Pilani), and Indraprastha Institute of Information Technology Delhi (IIIT Delhi)	Climate and health
Africa	The Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD), OpenUp, Elements	Climate and health
Latin America	Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (Javeriana)	Public health
Asia Pacific	The Asian Institute of Digital Finance (AIDF) at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and the Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU)	Financial inclusion

June 2022: An Extraordinary Workforce Opportunity
Workforce Wanted: Data Talent for Social Impact illuminates the scale of opportunity in data for social impact talent. With our partners at the Patrick J. McGovern Foundation and Dalberg, we identify a need to develop 3.5 million data purpose-driven data professionals in low- and middle-income countries over the next 10 years. This report comes out five months before the launch of ChatGPT and the meteoric rise of generative AI, which have only accelerated the demand for a stronger data for social impact workforce.

CALL TO ACTION

Workforce Wanted was a clear call to action, and we have answered the call. To be competitive in today's workforce, everyone—not just data scientists—needs to understand data and AI. The demand outlined in the report is the basis of our goal to train one million purpose-driven data practitioners—a goal we are steadily marching towards by working both top down and ground up across four key pathways.

EXAMPLES OF CAPACITY BUILDING IN ACTION

PATHWAYS	PARTNERS	STRATEGY
Recruiting new talent	Educational institutions	Incorporate applied learning into rigorous curriculum
Upskilling existing talent	Social impact organizations and government	Make professional development and training available to the social sector
Engaging transitional talent	Private and tech sector	Provide hands-on fellowships, like those through CAN, or opportunities for tech professionals to apply skills to the social sector
Enhancing leadership	Ecosystem	Host cross-sector convenings

January 2023: Accelerating Aspirations
Accelerate Aspirations: Moving Together to Achieve Systems Change is released at the World Economic Forum. This comprehensive report on key trends and tensions in data and AI for social impact raises urgent questions about how to collectively move the field forward.

November 2023: Leading with Localism
Generative AI Skills Challenge awardees develop innovative ways to train, upskill, and reskill the workforce to use generative AI. Generative AI empowers people to use data and AI without necessarily having in-depth coding skills, opening up significant opportunities for the social sector and the workforce most often left out of the digital economy. This shift, at the same time that we expand our initiatives to become more AI-focused, increases our emphasis on locally developed and led solutions.

November 2023: A New Kind of Data for Social Impact Leader
We release a report that describes a new workforce role, the data ecosystem designer, charged with creating the data ecosystem that allows digital public goods to thrive and scale in the social sector. These designers are akin to city planners, weaving together data flows, stakeholder needs, and political processes to meet the needs of as many people as possible.


GIEVA

June 2024: The Power of Convening
We host [Accelerate: Data and AI for Social Impact Conference] with our partners at the Harvard Data Science Initiative and observe the strength and energy that are building for an engaged network of funders, thought leaders, practitioners, students, researchers, governments, and private sector partners.

> **The Accelerate conference was really, really exciting on multiple dimensions. But I would say what appealed to me the most was the session on how do you go from the university to the field? How do you go from research to implementation? The conference has been about listening, learning, sharing your experiences, and then trying to find ways to partner."**
>
> IQBAL DHALIWAL
> J-PAL

December 2024: Focus on Scaling
In partnership with the Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth, with additional support from Dasra and Capital One, the **Artificial Intelligence to Accelerate Inclusion (AI2AI) Challenge** awardees reveal how fast the sector is moving. What was groundbreaking innovation in our first global challenge is already table stakes technology. We start homing in on scalability.

> **Today, there is a greater urgency to understand what data companies have, what shape the data is in, and what data is missing. Having mature, representative data means more inclusive AI solutions, so everyone can benefit."**
>
> **PAYAL DALAL**
> **Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth**

May 2025: Monitoring Progress
We revisit our 2021 Data and AI for Good Landscape, and with support from AWS, **publish an update** that showcases how the explosion of AI tools has further shaped the social sector. In the report, we identify five branches of AI for good that capture the varied perspectives and priorities of organizations and leaders working in the field.

THEN AND NOW

When we started, the data for social impact field was just beginning to emerge. We moved quickly to build a foundation for the sector that allows social impact organizations, government, funders, and tech leaders to go further and move faster to build capacity and deploy data and AI solutions for the good of all.

We've helped ensure that the field exists, and now AI is revolutionizing it. The speed at which AI technology is developing is testing the resilience of the social impact sector. The age-old problem of fragmentation and silos in the sector—something we called out in our first Accelerate report of 2023—is now raising existential risks for even well established organizations.

More than ever, the social sector and the communities that rely on it need to forge partnerships to survive and prosper. The openness to and desire for cross-sector collaboration is something we, as data.org, would not have imagined possible at our founding. Then, creating a truly global, interdisciplinary network felt unique; now, we see that as the norm and the need of the hour to work together at this fast-moving pace.

Five years in, our mission and approach are the same, and data.org remains a connector and catalyst in tracking and advancing the field.

The Promise of Progress

To date, over 3,500 people from more than 2,600 organizations have completed data.org's [Data Maturity Assessment (DMA)], which provides a snapshot of their data maturity and offers relevant tools and resources to move forward. When we launched the tool in 2022, many of the organizations participating were still operating at a very rudimentary level.

Fast forward to today, and there is a growing collection of global use cases that are leveraging data and AI to solve even the most intractable problems.

- In Colombia, Quipu is bridging the financial inclusion gap for micro-small, and medium enterprises, leveling the playing field for emerging entrepreneurs with an AI-driven credit alternative scoring model.
- In the United States, the Mississippi AI Collaborative is building a statewide AI ecosystem, including a growing network of teachers to leverage AI in their classrooms.
- In India, the Myna Mahila Foundation is using AI to answer women's most urgent and private health questions, while at the same time training and upskilling a female workforce.

As illustrated by these examples—which you will read more about in the case studies in this report—great work is geography agnostic. Data and AI for impact are being developed in local contexts and applied to local problems all over the world. And there are no signs of slowing.

Mississippi AI Collaborative

AT A GLANCE

- AI is already being used across all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).[1]
- Generative AI, in particular, is opening up exciting new possibilities, with 97 percent of leaders pointing to it as playing a major role in their reinvention over the next three to five years.[2]
- Google.org research funding has seen a 300 percent increase in the application of AI to address SDGs since 2018.[3]

Increasingly, social innovators and social impact organizations are leveraging the power of AI to achieve impact. And when we reflect on what we've seen with the DMA, AI has the power to enhance data maturity in its own right. Machine learning and natural language processing are among the most common AI capabilities deployed in the social sector[4], allowing SIOs to analyze vast amounts of data and, for the first time in some cases, execute data-driven solutions that are high efficiency and low cost.

The sector is clearly evolving, often in exciting ways. But it is critical to remember: **progression is inevitable, but progress is not.**

There is often a significant gap between the desire to use AI and the practical skills to do so. Creating opportunities for hands-on training and upskilling is valuable for social impact organizations, but also for the individuals gaining new skills.[5] We are moving to a world where most people, if not all, will need some AI literacy to stay competitive and protect against job loss.

> **"It's important that we move AI from a buzzword to a practical tool. The true potential of this technology lies in enabling organizations to ask and answer questions that were previously impossible with human systems alone.**
>
> **HEMANG JANI**
> **World Bank**

To do this right—to foster more Quipus or Myna Mahilas in the world—we need to invest in the workforce and in organizational capacity. The majority of both funders and nonprofits—78 percent and 77 percent, respectively[6] —believe that their organization would benefit from using more AI, which brings us to a core value for data.org: practicality.

If data and AI are reimagining what is *possible*, the data.org network is here to define what is *practical* to make change happen.

1. McKinsey, AI for Social Good: Improving Lives and Protecting the Planet, 1
2. UN Global Compact & Accenture, Generative AI for the Global Goals: The Private Sector's Guide to Accelerating Sustainable Development with Technology
3. Stanford Social Innovation Review, Mapping the Landscape of AI-Powered Nonprofits, 3
4. World Economic Forum, AI for Impact: The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Social Innovation, 20
5. LinkedIn, Work Change Report: AI is Coming to Work
6. Project Evident, Inspiring Action: Identifying the Social Sector AI Opportunity Gap, 9

AI2AI CHALLENGE AWARDEE
PRESENTED BY DATA .ORG AND MASTERCARD CENTER FOR INCLUSIVE GROWTH

Case Study: Quipu

Fintech solution addressing the $1.4 trillion funding gap for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Latin America

Quipu

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

Capital provided to 22,000+ businesses

AI IN ACTION

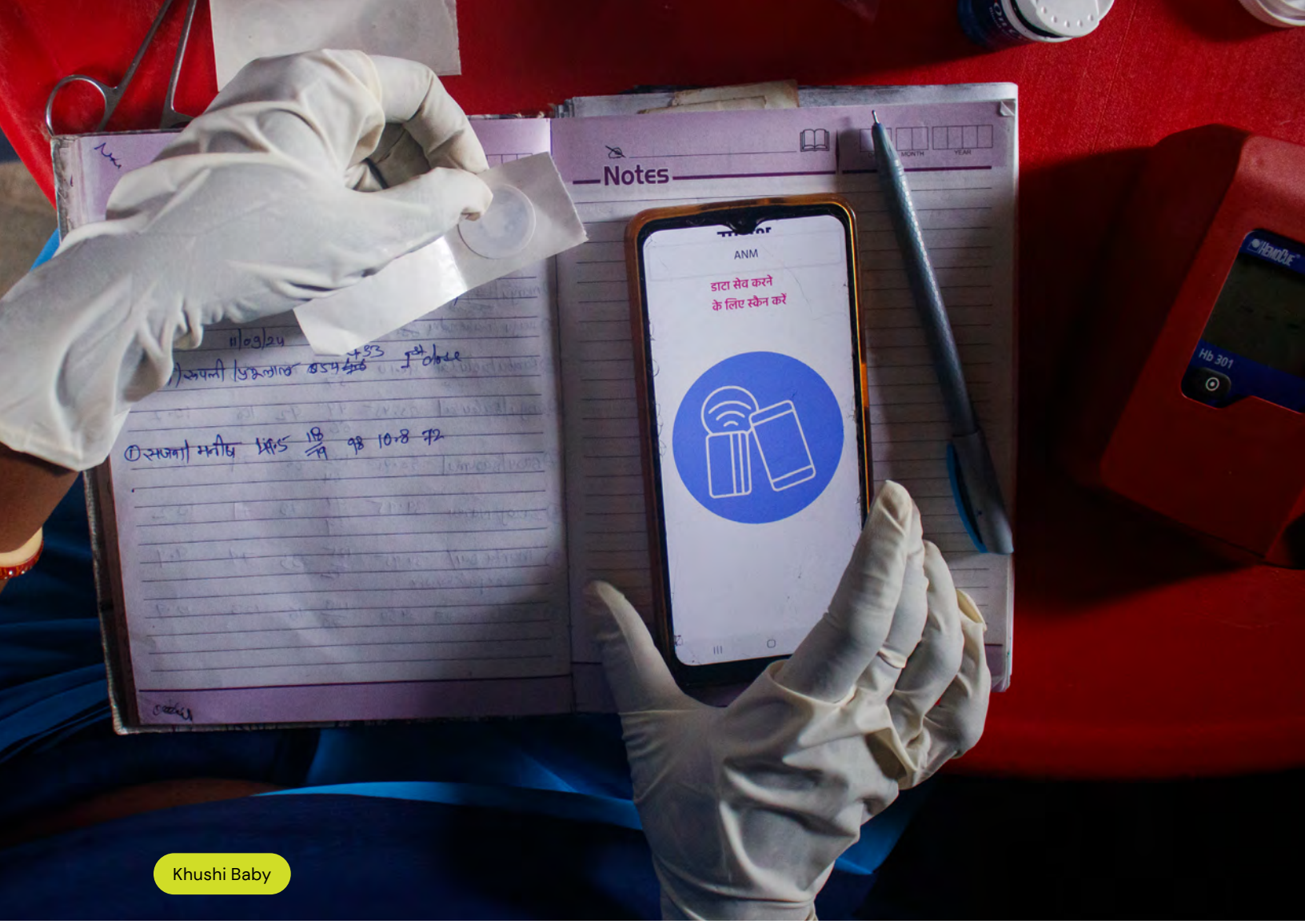
Small businesses and emerging entrepreneurs often lack adequate access to capital to grow their operations. They don't always perform well on traditional financial metrics like credit scores, obstructing them from real growth and financial inclusion. In fact, in Colombia, only nine percent of six million microentrepreneurs have access to formal credit. But using AI, Quipu analyzes over 80,000 alternative data points to create fair and accurate credit assessments for businesses first in Colombia with expansion plans across Latin America.

> **"Where are we building technology—not in the Bay area, but in the Global South—and building it a different way? When we build technology from the Global South, we are more aware about the negative externalities. It helps to solve some big problems that matter to our communities."**
>
> MERCEDES BIDART
> Quipu

NEXT5: TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO WATCH

Look for the next generation

Innovation isn't always going to come from the usual suspects. Look at emerging markets for innovative approaches and solutions. Fostering centers of innovation around the world will spur new ideas and benefit everyone.



Khushi Baby

Opportunity Landscape

Later in this report, we'll dive deeper on the bright spots, barriers, and risks when it comes to leveraging data and AI for social impact. At a high level, these are a few of the key opportunities we see for digital transformation as a runway to maximize AI's potential for social impact.

BUILD DIGITAL AND DATA FLUENCY

"Those who have access to these data systems are most likely to be represented in the outputs of the machine learning and artificial-intelligence systems."[7] We need more representative data and a more representative workforce, which is increasingly possible with the rise of low-code, no-code solutions.

> **"You want to build these models. Your input is data. Data is everything, but having access to that data is difficult. You find bits and pieces everywhere—you have a few rows of data somewhere, another person has data, data sources are behind paywalls. I started realizing that there is a lot of injustice in the system of how data is collected and made available."**

DAN POKU
Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data
CAN Africa Fellow

Capacity Accelerator Network

CREATE MORE LOCALIZED RESOURCES

Nearly 43 percent of AI initiatives are in high-income countries, with 35 percent headquartered in the US.[8] SIOs around the world need resources tailored by geography, focus area, and economic classification.

7. Atlantic Council, THE DATA DIVIDE: How Emerging Technology and its Stakeholders can Influence the Fourth Industrial Revolution, 3

8. World Economic Forum, AI for Impact: The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Social Innovation, 23

TAKE A PEOPLE-FIRST APPROACH

Data and AI are potentially transformative tools, but for these tools to be used effectively, you need people with the skills to analyze and utilize them. Hands-on workforce development that is grounded in practical applications of data and AI is essential. The training and fellowship programs in the CAN network drive impact because they center on real-life problem statements. These programs allow us to increase the supply of skilled workers, meet the demand of organizations that need greater in-house capacity, and work to protect against job loss by building a workforce that is enhanced, not replaced, by AI.

> **"It is risky to over-rely on artificial intelligence, which is why we still lead with the people-first part of our work. Many of our patients are smart but they may not have digital literacy. You need to have a human being there and they need to trust them."**
>
> **DR. ALISTER MARTIN**
> **Link Health**

Last Mile Health

MAKE THE MOST OF THE MOMENT

Use the hype around AI to engage funders and invest in better data infrastructure. As Sid Ravinutala from IDinsight points out, you need solid data systems before you can fully tap into AI. "This shiny AI thing at the end of the tunnel has actually motivated a lot more interest in data," he says. And as our **recent AI for Good Landscape** reminds us, generative AI is on the rise, but that doesn't mean we should abandon "traditional" AI and ML approaches.

SPEAK THE LANGUAGE

As Dr. Uyi Stewart from the Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth—formerly data.org's Chief Data and Technology Officer—has pointed out, linguistic inclusivity is an imperative for AI development.[9]

> **"Until AI can 'speak' the languages of these vulnerable communities, its potential to advance the Sustainable Development Goals, reduce global disease burdens, and address global inequities will remain limited."**
>
> **DR. UYI STEWART**
> **Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth**

Data Science Nigeria

FILL THE EVALUATION GAP

A major takeaway from the 2025 AI for Good landscape is that social sector organizations are struggling to project how much impact AI will have for them, making it difficult to justify the investment. More robust evaluation tools and estimation models could help spur philanthropy.

9. Devex, Opinion: Localizing AI through languages is a 2025 imperative

GENERATIVE AI SKILLS CHALLENGE AWARDEE
PRESENTED BY DATA .ORG AND MICROSOFT

Case Study: Mississippi AI Collaborative

An ecosystem leveraging AI in the State of Mississippi, including an apprenticeship program and an intensive AI curriculum program for teachers, students, and businesses

Mississippi AI Collaborative

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

4,000+ Mississippians engaged in AI skills

Mississippi AI Collaborative

AI IN ACTION

Through its partnerships approach, the Mississippi AI Collaborative builds a sustainable career pipeline, starting with an intensive curriculum for educators in K-12 education, advancing to higher education and boot camps, and driving small business opportunities. The organization also hosts a "Skill-AI-Thon" to develop AI capabilities statewide for universities, employers, and libraries. They have launched The Mississippi AI Agency, an apprenticeship program, where Jackson State University students work with small businesses and nonprofits to leverage AI tools to boost their online presence, optimize their marketing strategies, and craft more engaging communication with their customers.

> **"When generative AI came out, that was when we really formed the collaborative in recognition that this was about to be a game changer. Generative AI has this amazing capacity to almost leapfrog some of the issues with digital literacy that were and are pervasive in Mississippi, provided we continue to improve broadband access across the state."**
>
> **DR. BRITTANY MYBURGH**
> **Mississippi AI Collaborative**

NEXT5: TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO WATCH

Think about scale

Sustained approaches that move beyond 1:1 funding models and emphasize scaling are going to yield the greatest impact. We learned during the pandemic the incredible cost and duplication of effort when many different players create many different systems. AI's promise is in solutions that address large-scale social problems and have the greatest potential for replicability. We have found that to be true in training, as well. We set parameters for partnerships to build capacity and then tap into trusted local partners to lead on execution.

Democratizing Data with Generative AI

Historically, data for social impact roles have been filled by data and computer scientists, engineers, and other technical experts with a deep understanding of data, technology, and the platforms on which they operate.

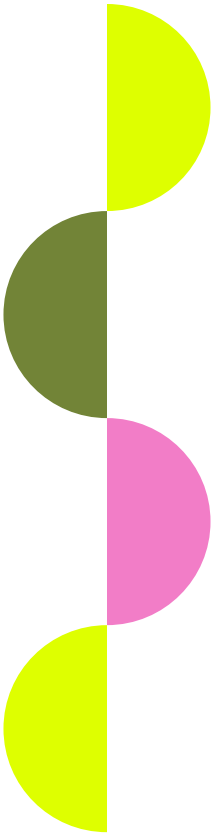
GENERATIVE AI IS CHANGING THE CONVERSATION

In a May 2024 McKinsey survey, 70 percent of respondents reported believing that generative AI will have a net positive impact on SDG progress by enhancing productivity, personalization, and language translation, and democratizing access to knowledge.[10] The emergence of simpler generative AI tools opens the door for people from more diverse professional backgrounds and for organizations with limited technical capacity.

Link Health

> **"AI has the potential to serve as an accelerant, integrating disparate, non-standardized datasets in a way that we can uncover deep insights about how programs work together to improve outcomes, and that is very exciting."**
>
> **AMBER OLIVER**
> **Robin Hood Foundation**

Workforce development and capacity building, as a result, must now address not just the most technical aspects of AI, but its myriad applications and the ways in which it works across disciplines. In our Capacity Accelerators, we work with data science experts and also with professors and departments representing fields like finance, climate, and public health to ensure we are exposing students with varied backgrounds and interests to data and AI. An approach to upskilling in AI and a specific field, where people are taught both technical and domain-specific interdisciplinary skills in a holistic way, is the future of jobs. And with the rise of consumer-facing AI tools, more people with more diverse skill sets can master and apply these technologies for impact.



> **"Traditionally, careers in data and AI have required deep technical expertise, but today, with advances in technology, that narrative is shifting. The rise in low- and no-code AI tools is breaking down some of these barriers, making it possible for more people—and in many cases, women—to leapfrog into AI-driven innovation."**
>
> **PERRY HEWITT**
> **data.org**

At the same time that we develop talent, we must help social innovators understand exactly how technology can amplify their impact models.[11] The CAN Fellowship program meets both needs—giving people on-the-job learning experiences in using data and AI to solve real challenges, and simultaneously building in-house organizational capacity that will benefit their missions long after the fellow has left.

The push for capacity building is about more than credentialing in response to escalating data and AI hype cycles. This work is about preparing people for good new jobs in a way that substantially impacts people's lives and communities. We need to build a workforce skilled in responsible use of data and AI to respond both to the demands of the moment and of the future.

10. McKinsey, AI for Social Good: Improving Lives and Protecting the Planet, 20

11. World Economic Forum, AI for Impact: The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Social Innovation, 3

AI2AI CHALLENGE AWARDEE
PRESENTED BY DATA .ORG AND MASTERCARD CENTER FOR INCLUSIVE GROWTH

Case Study: IDinsight

Advisory, data analytics, and research organization dedicated to improving the well-being of vulnerable populations through data and evidence


IDinsight

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

40,000+ health workers empowered by AI

AI IN ACTION

IDinsight works with policymakers, nonprofits, and governments around the world to bridge data science and field expertise to solve pressing social challenges across sectors such as health, education, agriculture, and governance. For the AI2AI-identified initiative, they partnered with Last Mile Health to support the Ethiopian Ministry of Health (MoH) in strengthening the delivery of care. Their AI-powered call center provides Health Extension Workers (HEWs) with real-time medical guidance on complex cases, pulled from comprehensive MoH guidelines.

> **"I've appreciated that tech forward funders have given organizations the freedom to pivot. I would love for some of the more traditional funders who are not familiar with tech to share this openness. People will learn and we want to be agile, and not necessarily stick to what we decided a year ago."**
>
> **SID RAVINUTALA**
> **IDinsight**

NEXT5: TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO WATCH

Process makes perfect

Watch the advancements in moving from the pilot phase to scaling. Grant requirements will need to advance to better support iteration, learning, adapting, and refining. And while not as flashy as new programs, ecosystem investments are valuable to underpin more equitable AI tools, such as "training datasets that are accurate, representative of the populations they would serve, and collected with informed consent."[12]

12. Stanford Social Innovation Review, Investing in AI for Good

Accelerating the Movement

As technology accelerates, so too does the data and AI for social impact movement, ushering in a new era of innovation. But to accelerate and meet the velocity of the moment, you need gas in the tank. In this case, that fuel comes from having the right process, the right people, and the right partnerships to bring them together.

PROCESS

- Reducing process debt with generative AI, saving time on things like content generation and cumbersome workflows, thereby reserving human power hours to focus on higher level tasks
- Opportunities for translation into other languages
- Increasing speed to insight by processing and synthesizing information more quickly

ACCELERATE ACTION

Not sure where to start in using generative AI in your organization? **Check out our guide** to improve productivity and support your staff in leveraging generative AI.

PEOPLE

- The faster things move, the more important trust becomes, and that means centering the community and designing with and for the people you seek to serve, as we outlined in our 2022 **RECoDE report**
- Private sector investment brings tools, talent, and treasure to the table
- Government, because of rising urgency for investment and reach, is essential to scale
- Increasingly, there is a need for a point person who allows digital public goods to thrive and scale in the social sector—a role we have described as a **data ecosystem designer**

ACCELERATE ACTION

Khushi Baby, a partner in the India Data Capacity Accelerator, is driving better outcomes for people at the intersection of climate and health, through partnerships with state governments. **Access our playbook for civil servants** interested in using generative AI to work more efficiently.

Khushi Baby

> **"Problems are not solved with AI–they're solved by people. We need more humanity, not more AI, to build more inclusive futures for everyone."**
>
> **IVANA FELDFEBER**
> **DataGénero**

PARTNERSHIPS

- Funders need to provide flexibility and freedom to pivot in this changing landscape.
- Similarly, investment is often too focused on pilots and not enough on scaling. According to McKinsey, 72 percent of survey respondents say most efforts to deploy data for social impact are focused on research and innovation rather than adoption and scaling.[13]

> **"A lot of funders are excited to fund pilots but the work that really matters is the next growth stage, moving to scale, and there's limited capital for public good AI systems that are scaling. We're finding there's a missing middle there."**
>
> **LEONIDA MUTUKU**
> **Intelipro**

- As a connector and catalyst, data.org threads the needle across process, people, and partnerships. We identify best practices and share resources, lead with localism to build trust, and bring together SIOs, funders, academia, government, and beyond to drive change.

13. McKinsey, AI for Social Good: Improving Lives and Protecting the Planet, 18

ACCELERATE ACTION

With partners around the world, we continue to grow our digital learning offerings. Our **online resource library contains a number of courses**, on topics like fintech literacy, responsible data management, and data storytelling.

Capacity Accelerator Network

MEET THE INNOVATORS

A few examples of the people and partners advancing the field through best-in-class data and AI use:

- **Ivana Feldfeber and the DataGénero team** created AymurAI, a product that uses AI to anonymize documents and collect and make available data on gender-based violence based on court rulings.
- **Adaapta, formerly Community Lattice**, partners with both state and federal government agencies in the US to drive brownfields redevelopment and community financial health.
- In a great example of private sector impact, **Microsoft's AI for Good Lab** is using AI technology to help relief organizations more quickly assess damage and where assistance is most needed in the aftermath of a disaster.

> **"Most of the community-based organizations, local governments, and philanthropic funders that we're working with are so overwhelmed with their mission that they're having a hard time pausing to fully understand AI and emerging technology. Nobody can keep up on their own. We need trusted partners like data.org and their affiliates to fully harness the power of AI and data science for good."**
>
> **DANIELLE GETSINGER**
> **Adaapta**

GENERATIVE AI SKILLS CHALLENGE AWARDEE
PRESENTED BY DATA .ORG AND MICROSOFT

Case Study: Myna Mahila Foundation

AI chatbot providing sexual health and family planning information in local languages, backed up by economically disadvantaged women upskilled in prompt engineering

Myna Mahila Foundation

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

1.5 million direct beneficiaries

AI IN ACTION

The Myna Mahila Foundation developed an AI chatbot providing sexual health and family planning information in local languages and dialects. The tool is backed up by a workforce of RANI health workers trained in prompt engineering and generative AI. Women participating in the program have improved confidence and digital skills, while effectively addressing misinformation and sensitive health topics through AI-enabled anonymous responses.

> **"The kinds of problems that we're dealing with in our part of the world, the benefits far outweigh the kinds of costs. We're trying to minimize the cost, but the benefit is just so large that I don't think we have the luxury to pause."**
>
> **SUHANI JALOTA**
> **Myna Mahila Foundation**

NEXT5: TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO WATCH

Meet SIOs where they are

Different organizations will need different types of support, depending on where they are in their data journey. SIOs currently lag the commercial and private sector in key ways, including limited financial resources, competition for scarce data talent, and the underlying systems that make data actionable. Investing in these gaps will both meet organizations where they are and support a stronger data ecosystem overall.

Responsibilities and Risks

Progress is promising, but both the barriers to access and the risks of misuse remain significant. We can't ignore the digital divide and we must allocate resources accordingly. People need internet access, digital fluency, and access to AI trained on representative data in their own languages, as well as training in how best to leverage it. How we build infrastructure, capacity, and adoption strategies will generate the new reality of the social impact sector.

Solar Sister

CLOSE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Globally, 2.6 billion individuals lack internet access.[14] For these hard-to-reach communities, AI is a nonstarter because they lack even the most basic digital access. In other cases, the foundational access is there, but trust is not. Brittany Myburgh of the Mississippi AI Collaborative says that when they send invitations to free online training, uptake still may be low. It's the in-person sessions where they can build relationships that get people engaged. Then there is the second tier challenge–*digital literacy*, having the skills to use technology effectively.

> **The infrastructural costs are impeding those who really need to be plugged into our digital world. No longer is it enough to give them access to the internet or even buy a handbook for them. They need bandwidth. They need to know how to download an app. They need to know how they can create AI. We want to share that knowledge with everyone in the world in a way that allows them to better their life.**
>
> **EDWARD TAY**
> **National University of Singapore**

14. Edison Alliance

INCREASE DATA ACCESS

The Atlantic Council has called data the "new oil of the digital economy."[15] Social impact leader Kriss Deiglmeier has called data as a form of power.[16] In short, data access is critical. Yet there is a counterintuitive trend that, as investment and interest is funneled to AI, progress toward better data access and sharing is slowing–and at risk of backsliding. Stefaan Verhulst, co-founder of the Governance Laboratory at New York University, warns of this "data winter" and "AI summer."[17] Data informs everything from credit rates to urban planning, so when the data sources are limited—often with the most robust inputs coming from the Global North—decisions are made and policies developed that can widen disparities for low- and middle-income countries. We need better data sharing frameworks and more open source data, and this is possible without sacrificing privacy.

Accelerate Conference

> **"We're not sitting in a place that we were 10, 20 years ago where the data didn't exist and we didn't know how to analyze it. We're sitting in a place where it's possible. We just need collaborations that allow us to go from our bespoke data sets and our little tiny flashlights looking for problems, to having the giant searchlight that will help us solve these very human problems that we're all working on."**
>
> **DR. BREE MCEWAN**
> **University of Toronto**

15. Atlantic Council, THE DATA DIVIDE: How Emerging Technology and its Stakeholders can Influence the Fourth Industrial Revolution, 3

16. Stanford Social Innovation Review, Seize the Future by Harnessing the Power of Data

17. Medium, Are we entering a "Data Winter"?

TACKLE EMBEDDED BIAS

Regardless of the good intentions with which they were developed, even the most responsible AI tools can still do harm, especially in the hands of bad actors or unskilled ones.[18] The lack of guardrails around this emerging tech contributes to a culture of fear about misuse and unintended consequences. So, at a moment when open access data is more critical than ever, there has been an unintended chilling effect on private sector data sharing. And while funders often write in grant requirements that products must be open access or source, many social impact leaders are concerned that the data and its benefits still often don't reach the communities they intended to serve. Making data and associated tools *available* does not always ensure they are *accessible* and *actionable*.

Moreover, AI tools can have bias embedded in them, both from their creators and their underlying data sets. According to a Project Evident survey, the most significant barrier to AI adoption is concern about this kind of bias.[19] Language is a key factor in creating those biases. Currently, AI technology is driven primarily by English and Mandarin, to the detriment of over 7,000 other languages spoken by about five billion people worldwide.[20] We must prioritize tackling bias from the beginning and continue to mitigate as we go, including through the digitization of more languages.

> **"I think of data as a mirror. If you look at a dataset, you should ask yourself, does it look like me? Does it look like the world, the community I'm working with? What is missing? How did that dataset come to fruition? And ethically, if you know something is off, people aren't represented, the scales aren't right–it's on you to address that."**
>
> **DR. AMY YEBOAH QUARKUME**
> **Howard University**

18. McKinsey, AI for Social Good: Improving Lives and Protecting the Planet,

19. Project Evident, Inspiring Action: Identifying the Social Sector AI Opportunity Gap, 14

20. Devex, Opinion: Localizing AI through languages is a 2025 imperative

DEVELOP COMMUNITY-LED SOLUTIONS

This is where leading with localism comes into play, and at data.org, we have consistently found this approach to be critical to driving progress. It starts with the problem statement. Empower communities to lead the way on what they need, and co-design and co-develop solutions that are applicable to and scalable in the local context. This is true through the lifecycle of data and AI development, including how tools should be rolled out and how training should be designed to increase adoption. Developing solutions in a lab or a classroom and parachuting them into communities never works. In order for a solution to work and be used, the community needs to trust it and that trust comes more easily when they see people who understand their challenges around the decision-making table. Trust can be lost and solutions made unusable regardless of good intentions.

> **"With the introduction of AI being so exciting, and such a shift in what's possible, it doesn't change that the paradigm of trust and accountability and power dynamics still matters. It probably matters even more. It's important to do the work to build trust and accountability into AI tools and how they are implemented."**
>
> **HILARY HEISHMAN**
> **Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

These risks are not insignificant. And when you're working with under-represented communities—people whose lives have been negatively impacted by climate disasters, public health threats, and economic inequities—we can't afford to exacerbate the challenges they face. As Suhani Jalota, founder of the Myna Mahila Foundation, aptly said, "These people can't wait. The responsibility and onus is on us as social impact leaders to make sure that we're minimizing the risk, but not depriving communities of the benefit."

The best insurance against risk is people. We need the right people with the skills, training, and cross-sector understanding necessary to harness the power of data and AI for the good of all.

THE TAKEAWAY

A summary of key considerations for making AI for impact more equitable

1. Close the digital divide
2. Increase data access
3. Tackle embedded bias
4. Develop community-led solutions

AI2AI CHALLENGE AWARDEE
PRESENTED BY DATA .ORG AND MASTERCARD CENTER FOR INCLUSIVE GROWTH

Case Study: Link Health

Leveraging AI to increase access to federal assistance programs in housing, hunger, heating, and beyond

Link Health

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

$4.3 million put back into households

Link Health

AI IN ACTION

The Link Health initiative leverages AI to tackle the challenge of underutilized federal assistance programs. The platform enables more eligible individuals to receive financial assistance to alleviate poverty, reduce financial stress, and improve well-being. With healthcare settings as the access point to reach low-income and marginalized communities, Link Health aims to unlock $10 million in state and federal benefits through an AI-powered enrollment platform and chatbot. Through these efforts, the Link Health AI implementation addresses immediate economic needs, fosters long-term financial stability, and accelerates inclusive growth.

> **AI has the ability to really accelerate our work in directions that I might have thought were possible in 10 years and now we can get it done in 10 months. That's not to say that AI is a magic wand—and it's certainly not a silver bullet for us—but I think that, just like with any creative energy, if it can be harnessed correctly in a disciplined way, you can make some incredible leaps."**
>
> **DR. ALISTER MARTIN**
> **Link Health**

NEXT5: TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO WATCH

Bring it all together

AI is a powerful tool, but it's just that—a tool. Stay anchored in your mission statement. Capacity building programs should likewise ensure that purpose-driven data and AI practitioners are well integrated into and communicating with the overall team and the communities you are serving.

Myna Mahila Foundation

Getting Ahead

It is important to recognize the challenges, but just as important to stay open to the opportunities. If we act now and build on what we've learned from the last five years, we can position the social sector to be better informed, better staffed, and better prepared to leverage data and AI.

Alex Díaz is the head of AI for social good at Google.org. From his vantage point, he has witnessed the evolution of the tech and the progress of the field, and how the two are starting to sync up.

> **Previously, discussions about AI were largely theoretical, detached from the realities of the nonprofit and technology sectors. However, through collaborative efforts and practical experiments, a shift is occurring towards focusing on what is possible, grounded in tangible applications."**
>
> **ALEX DÍAZ**
> **Google.org**

Díaz used Google Maps as an example. It's now considered a mundane tool—part of everyday life. No one calls it AI. Generative AI can also make data more conversational, expanding its reach and engaging new audiences in important data-driven work and decisions. As this community integration takes place with tools that are new and novel, AI is increasingly viewed as a general purpose technology, improving the opportunity for building trust and adoption.

> **You can't let perfect be the enemy of good. Too often, organizations think they need to have an AI expert in house before they start to think about adoption. The truth is that there are simple best practices that can get you started, and beginners can partner with organizations that are more advanced to learn and build from what works."**
>
> **ALEX NAWAR**
> **OpenAI**

In the social sector, we need practical, tangible support to facilitate that process, which is where data.org continues to lead. AI for impact can't be an afterthought. It must be thoughtfully prioritized. We need to move forward while learning from the earlier mistakes of the *move fast and break things* approach of Silicon Valley, which often left the most vulnerable in our communities to shoulder the cost of new technologies. At the same time, we cannot afford to be slow, since inaction and delay also cause harms. We need to develop a new culture of thoughtful innovation that prioritizes trust, brings communities along, mitigates risks, ensures fairness, and accelerates change for the good of the world.


Bridges to Prosperity

Recommendations to Accelerate the Field

Over the past five years, data and AI for social impact have truly evolved from a moment to a movement. And data.org hasn't just witnessed the evolution—we have shaped, informed, and accelerated it.

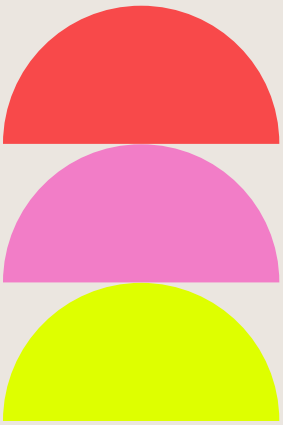
Together with the community we serve, we ***are*** the movement.

As we look ahead to the next five years, here are three key recommendations for how we can collectively build momentum for this critically-important work:

1

Stay focused on how AI can assist you and your mission.

"Stay disciplined about your problem statement," says Korey Klein, director of technology and data at the Ballmer Group. "You need to decipher early on how AI can be useful in addressing the problem and advancing your mission. Without that exercise, AI can be a distraction that pulls you off course." AI can save you countless hours of time consuming work so you can focus on what matters. Incorporating data and AI in ways that fuel both operational excellence and mission achievement must stay front of mind—and then the opportunities are exponential. For example, "Approaches like 'co-botting,' which involves using AI tools to augment rather than replace human jobs, can bring out the best in both bots and people and yield the dividend of time."[21] Embed data, AI, and new technologies into your impact strategies, not as an entirely separate workstream.



21. Stanford Social Innovation Review, 8 Steps Nonprofits Can Take to Adopt AI Responsibly

2

Harness the power of partnerships.

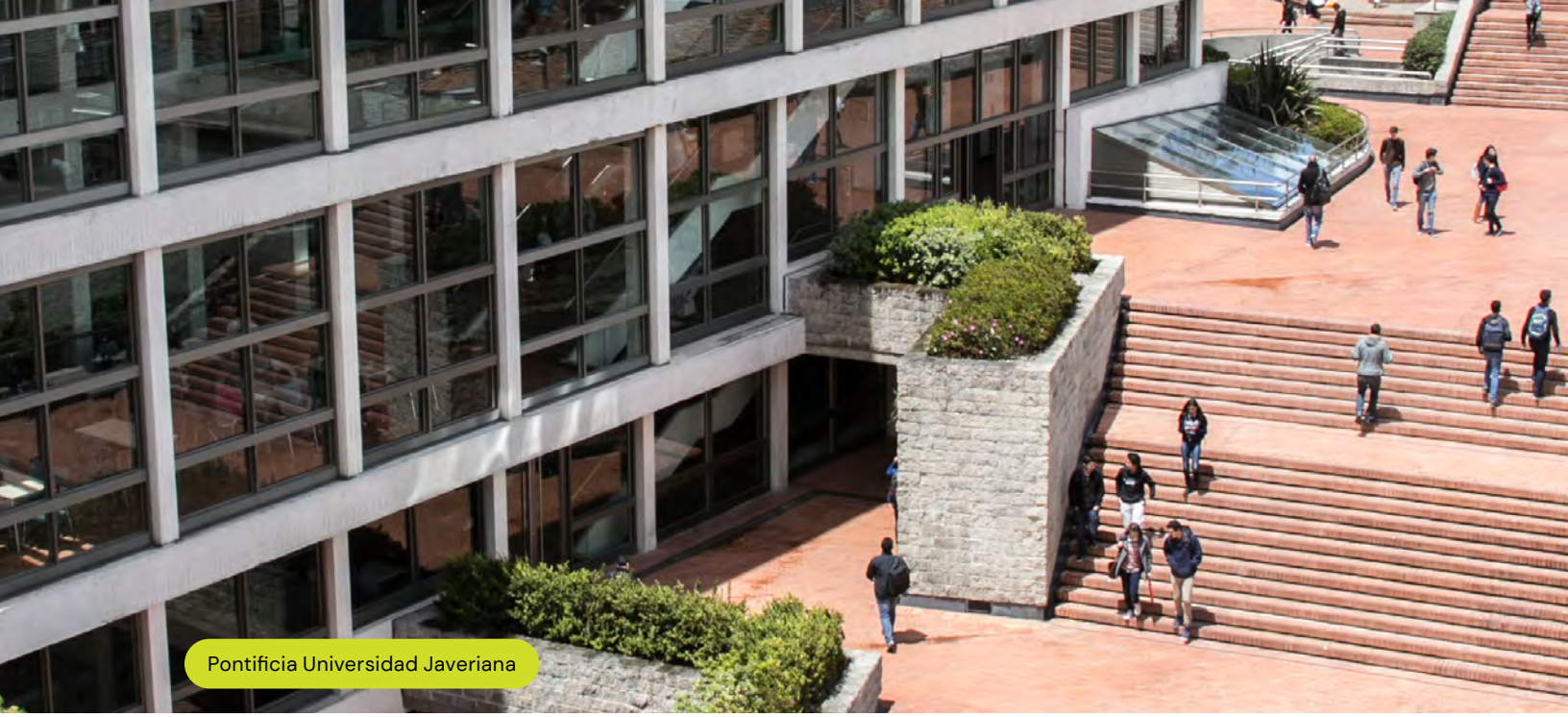
At the speed that technology is moving, it's impossible to keep up on every new advancement or build bespoke tools at every turn. Partnerships help us all to move faster and go farther by sharing best practices, curating important information, and facilitating sharing of data, talent, and infrastructure where appropriate. Bring your strengths to the table, whether it's research and development that create systems, or expertise on local program deployment and outreach.

3

Remember who you're serving.

If you've lost trust, it's over. Trust is foundational for social impact work to be meaningful, sustainable, and scalable. That is why you have to lead with localism and ensure that the tools, technology, and systems you're building are grounded in the local context. It all comes back to the people behind the tech and ensuring that—from data collection to tool development to user engagement—they have the skills and insights necessary to use data and AI responsibly, inclusively, and sustainably. Only then is impact achievable.

data.org is committed to our role in advancing these recommendations. We will continue to facilitate training and fellowships that build organizational capacity to address big challenges. We will continue to grow our partnerships through Capacity Accelerator Network and our global innovation challenges. And we will continue to foster locally led solutions that put the needs of communities at the center.



Pontificia Universidad Javeriana

Conclusion

The applications of AI are as diverse as the social impact organizations utilizing them. The number of tools, apps, platforms, and programs continues to grow, but our study of and participation in the data and AI for social impact ecosystem underscores that the core tenets of this work are shared across borders and sectors. They are tool agnostic. They boil down to whom we engage in this work and how we prepare them for what's to come. What we do with the opportunity before us—an opportunity that will never stop shifting and evolving alongside the tech—is up to us.

Historically, the social sector has followed the private sector.
Today, we are increasingly leading the way.

Around the world, incredible and inspiring examples exist of SIOs communicating more effectively, streamlining processes, and uncovering deeper insights all in service of a better, more resilient, more inclusive world. In so many cases, we are proud to say that we played a critical role. We have identified promising practices through our challenges. We have helped scale solutions and trained the necessary workforce with more than 100 cross-sector partners in our Capacity Accelerator Network. We have brought cross-sector partners together as a trusted convener, and we continue to ground the work in ethics and responsibility in all of the resources we create.

We have driven the field forward.

Five years in, we now understand excellence in the field, and we keep finding it, nurturing it, and scaling it. As we look ahead to the next five years and beyond, we will remain steadfast in our pursuit of that excellence. Because if we foster the best of data and AI for impact, the social sector can match the pace of technology and meet the most urgent needs of people and communities around the world.

Annexes

GLOSSARY

CAN: Capacity Accelerator Network is data.org's global initiative, which creates locally-led knowledge hubs that share a common vision, resources, and learning materials, yet set their own priorities, partners, and projects, ensuring effective, locally led training and experiential learning.

Data ecosystem designer: A new role that is needed for the social sector that is charged with creating the data ecosystem that allows digital public goods to thrive and scale in the social sector.

Digital divide: The gap between those who have access to technology, the internet, and digital literacy training and those who do not

Digital public goods (DPGs): Open-source software, open data, open artificial intelligence models, open standards and open content that are of high relevance for attainment of the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

DMA: Data Maturity Assessment offers social impact organizations (SIOs) a snapshot view of their data and AI maturity journey today, and relevant tools and resources to move forward.

Financial inclusion: Individuals and businesses have access to and use affordable financial products and services that meet their needs.

Generative AI: A system of algorithms or computer processes that can create novel output in text, images or other media based on user prompts.

Health Extension Workers (HEWs): Community-based primary care officers that promote health, including education, screening, prevention, and selective clinical interventions.

Large Language Model (LLM): An AI model that is trained on massive amounts of text data to understand, generate, and manipulate human language.

Localism: Practice of prioritizing local leadership, decision making, knowledge for solution ideation and implementation within a city or community.

Low code, no code: Platforms and solutions that allow users to develop applications with minimal coding or no coding expertisel

Low- and middle-income countries (LMICs): A classification used by the World Bank to categorize countries based on their Gross National Income (GNI) per capita.

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs): Based on scale, investment limit, and turnover, businesses are classified as micro, small, or medium enterprises (MSMEs). Each country has different thresholds for these criteria.

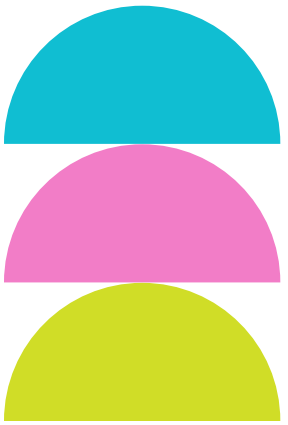
Ministry of Health (MoH): Government department responsible for public health.

Process debt: Inefficiencies, waste, and redundancies that have accumulated in workflows over time.

Purpose-driven data practitioner: Data professionals who work either as paid employees or volunteers at an organization, institution, or company that is oriented toward social impact.

SDGs: The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are 17 integrated goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030, all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

SIO: Social Impact Organization is an organization (for-profit or nonprofit) working consciously, systematically, and sustainably to address social, environmental, economic, health, or related challenges to drive positive and desired change. Typically, an SIO works to serve marginalized groups. For the purposes of the report, SIO will refer only to organizations that are registered as nonprofits.



OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY

As we publish *Accelerate What's Possible*, data.org proudly marks five years of data-driven social impact. Since our launch at the World Economic Forum in 2020, we have collaborated with global cross-sector partners, invested in innovative applications of data and AI for good, fueled workforce development of purpose-driven data practitioners, and supported digital public goods in collaboration with a global community of domain experts.

This report is the result of a research effort that launched in January 2025 to gather deep insights and uncover emerging trends from civil society organizations, academia, philanthropy and the private sector. To develop this report we were fortunate to be able to learn from the following sources:

- Stakeholder interviews with ecosystem actors. We interviewed over 20 stakeholders across several categories, including social impact leaders, academics, and funders across the field of data and AI for social impact.
- Insights from more than 2,400 applications across four data.org challenges, uncovering common risks and best practices in using data and AI for social impact worldwide.
- Analysis and review of more than 3,500 Data Maturity Assessment (DMA) results from SIOs, philanthropies, private sector organizations, and academic institutions. The DMA offers organizations a snapshot view of their data maturity journey today, and relevant tools and resources required to move forward.
- A literature review of more than 50 studies, articles, and research reports to understand the existing data on, analysis of, characteristics of, knowledge of, and discourse about the AI for social impact space.

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

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Alex Díaz	Head of AI for Social Good	Google.org
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