Tech-Driven Philanthropy for Lasting Change

Panel Discussions and Workshop

Tuesday, 25th February 2025

10:00 AM to 01:00 PM

Capital Club, Gate Village, Dubai, UAE

The Tech-Driven Philanthropy convening successfully brought together key stakeholders, including members of the Pearl Initiative's Circle Network, to explore how emerging technologies, AI, and innovative investment can enhance philanthropic impact. The event aimed to equip social impact leaders with the tools and insights necessary to ensure resilience and adaptability in a rapidly evolving technological landscape.

Through expert-led panel discussions and interactive sessions, participants examined AI's transformative role in philanthropy, and the importance of collaboration and ethical considerations in tech-driven philanthropy.

Key Takeaways from the Panel Discussion:

1. **Panel Discussion: The Role of Technology in Philanthropy**

   Panelists: Caroline Mutepfa (Microsoft); Swapna Subramani (Structure Research)

- AI's potential in philanthropy lies in its ability to analyse vast amounts of historical data, providing deeper insights for decision-making rather than predicting the future. However, ensuring responsible use is critical.
- Ethical AI implementation requires stringent governance, data protection policies, and transparency in how algorithms operate. Misuse or unregulated deployment can lead to bias and unintended consequences.
- Mutepfa remarked that, Microsoft's commitment to AI for good is structured around three pillars: leveraging technology for social impact, developing upskilling initiatives for communities, and fostering employee-driven engagement programs that apply AI-driven solutions to real-world challenges.
- Open-source data and collaboration are key to maximizing AI's effectiveness. Organizations must proactively vet AI tools for security risks while maintaining a balance between innovation and data privacy.
- Free AI tools may compromise privacy, whereas paid models often have stronger data protection policies, offering better security and compliance with regulations.
- Human oversight is essential to ensure AI operates accurately, ethically, and responsibly, as AI systems can make errors or reinforce biases without proper monitoring.
- Using AI effectively doesn't require technical expertise, but users should focus on crafting natural, detailed prompts to get the most relevant and useful responses.

- The reliability of AI depends on the quality and biases of the data it has been trained on, making it crucial to understand its limitations and potential inaccuracies.

2. Panel Discussion: Future Proofing Strategies

Panelists: Dania Ismail (Jusoor NGO); Rami Aljundi (StartAD)

- This session focused on actionable ways in which AI and digital tools can enhance social impact, addressing both opportunities and barriers to implementation.
- Dania Ismail shared how AI-driven models have accelerated Jusoor's ability to connect with beneficiaries in a more targeted and efficient manner.
  - Jusoor's Yeti Confetti program, an AI-powered learning companion, has transformed access to education for out-of-school children in Lebanon by providing tailored lessons in English, Math, and Social-Emotional Skills.
- Rami Aljundi emphasized that AI's role in philanthropy will continue to expand, but ecosystems must be structured to absorb these changes.
  - The **AI for Good initiative** at Start AD aims to accelerate AI-driven solutions for health and well-being in the UAE and Saudi Arabia. The program fosters **collaboration between academia, industry, and social impact organizations** to drive innovation.
  - Key focus areas include **enhancing healthcare outcomes, improving resource efficiency, and supporting underserved communities** through AI applications.
- Organizations must ensure that data inputs are accurate and comprehensive, as flawed datasets can compromise the effectiveness of AI-driven programs.
- Robust governance structures are necessary to regulate AI implementation, preventing misuse and fostering trust among donors and beneficiaries.

3. Workshop: Building Resilient Philanthropic Ecosystems

This interactive segment encouraged attendees to apply their learnings to real-world challenges, exploring AI's role in philanthropy.

- The discussion highlighted the need for cross-sector collaboration to ensure AI-driven philanthropy remains ethical, inclusive, and effective.
- Capacity-building in AI literacy is key to integrating emerging technologies responsibly.
- Philanthropic models must evolve with tech while safeguarding against bias, automation errors, and lack of transparency.
- Clear reporting standards and ethical AI deployment are essential for accountability and trust.

a. AI in Philanthropy: The 2035 Thought Experiment

Attendees explored: "If AI ran philanthropy in 2035, what's one thing it would do better than humans?"

Opportunities:

- Grantmaking: Through the use of AI decision makers can streamline the process of analyzing applications, remove unconscious bias and detect fraud, inefficiencies and risks.
- Donor engagement: donor interactions need to feel more personal to build stronger connections and lasting engagement. With the use of AI, organizations can: Analyze donor behavior, automate outreach, and Match donors to causes based on their interests, ensuring their giving aligns with their passions and values.
- Impact measurement: AI can analyze historical funding data, regional needs, and social impact metrics to help organizations predict where funds will have the greatest impact. It can also help reduce inefficiencies, ensuring money isn't just going to well-established organizations but also reaching smaller, high-impact initiatives that might otherwise be overlooked.

Risks:

- Potential bias: can reinforce existing inequalities or create new ones
- Lack of contextual accuracy: leaves room for error - AI generated insights should always be reviewed critically
- Overreliance on automation: does not allow for human judgement that is essential in philanthropy

b. Case Study: The AI-Driven Grantmaking Dilemma

A hypothetical scenario challenged participants to assess an AI-driven grant system that wrongly denied funding to a high-impact community organization due to its lack of online presence.

Key discussion points:

- Should the AI's recommendation stand, or should the grant be reconsidered?
- What governance policies can prevent bias in AI-driven grantmaking?
- How can funders balance risk management with equitable funding access?

This exercise reinforced the need for human oversight, diverse data inputs, and ethical A I governance in philanthropy's future.