



AI With Purpose: Partnerships for Impact in the Year of Community

Roundtable Discussion

Tuesday 17th June 2025

09:00 am - 01:00 PM

Ernst Biergarten, 25hours Hotel, One Central, Dubai, UAE

The ongoing tech revolution is reshaping the way societies operate, govern, and serve their communities. As AI becomes increasingly embedded in daily life and decision-making, the Gulf region is positioning itself at the forefront of this transformation. Abu Dhabi, for example, has launched a bold new Digital Strategy, committing AED 13 billion over three years (2025–2027) to accelerate technology adoption and establish itself as a global hub for AI-powered governance. Yet while global private investment in AI has surpassed \$539.9 billion since 2016, only 0.41% has gone toward impact-driven initiatives, highlighting a critical gap and a timely opportunity for more inclusive, purpose-led innovation (World Economic Forum, 2024).

Co-hosted by the Pearl Initiative and the Tony Blair Institute, this roundtable convened cross-sector leaders from the philanthropic and private sectors to address the growing gap in AI adoption, the discussion explored how collaborations between the public sector, private sector, and philanthropy could drive innovation and move beyond regulations to co-create scalable solutions that deliver better, faster, and more affordable services to communities. Participants examined real-world case studies and shared insights to lead responsibly in the age of AI.

Key Takeaways from the Roundtable:

The current landscape:

- Countries across the globe are grappling with how to gain a competitive advantage. Tech innovation has outpaced governments, especially in regulation and infrastructure. Governments need to catch up to match the speed of private AI advancement.
- AI is reshaping both systems-level infrastructure and day-to-day user interactions, transforming how services are designed, delivered, and experienced.
- The conversation around AI sits at the intersection of geopolitics, ethics, infrastructure, and community readiness, making it both a strategic and societal concern.
- At a macro level, AI is becoming a critical driver of economic productivity, national resilience, and global competitiveness.
- At a micro level, AI enhances the efficiency and quality of service delivery, with applications in health, agriculture, education, and more.
- At a meta level, beyond functionality, AI must be guided by human-centred design and ethical purpose, not developed as “tech for tech’s sake.” There’s a shift from a demand for technical coders to a need for strategic, adaptive thinkers who can interact, interpret, and lead in a tech-integrated world.

Global vs. Local Approaches

- Governments around the world are seeking global tech relevance while maintaining a strong national grounding. Today, deep tech is no longer just a fascination; it is a strategic tool for national development.
- The Gulf region is positioning itself as a leader in leveraging AI to bridge the digital divide across the Global South while also fostering cross-sector conversations to define shared norms and ethical principles around AI use.

Governance, Policy & Ethics

- The rapid pace of technological advancement has outpaced current policy and regulatory frameworks, creating a pressing need for what some are calling “self-democracy” in AI governance, where actors take initiative in ethical self-regulation.
- Innovation in policymaking is critical to keep pace with the speed and complexity of emerging technologies.
- There is growing concern around “runaway tech” that lacks grounding in human purpose. AI systems must be designed to be human-centric, ethically guided, and purpose-driven.
- Developing AI capabilities must go hand-in-hand with cultivating soft skills such as empathy, adaptability, and critical thinking to ensure future leadership remains human-centred.
- Silos are no longer sustainable. Effective governance requires cross-sector collaboration across governments, the private sector, civil society, and philanthropy to co-create meaningful, inclusive frameworks.
- Ethics in AI must not only be codified but also normalised, becoming a standard expectation rather than an afterthought.

Data Sovereignty vs Transparency

- As data becomes one of the most valuable assets of the digital age, the question is no longer if we need governance, but how we balance control with openness.
- While data sovereignty is essential, ensuring that data is governed and protected within national frameworks, there is also a growing imperative for transparency and accessibility to drive innovation and public trust.
- AI has the unique ability to connect seemingly unrelated data sets, generating real-time insights that can inform smarter decision-making across sectors.
- As technology increasingly underpins critical infrastructure, services, and daily interactions, AI is no longer a peripheral tool; it is embedded in the core of how societies function.

Cross-Sector Dialogue: Unlocking AI’s Full Potential

- As AI becomes more embedded in national development agendas, it’s clear that no single sector can unlock its full potential alone. Governments, businesses, and civil society must work together to align priorities, share insights, and co-create solutions.
- A representative from Visa shared how the company has been applying AI techniques well before the term became mainstream, particularly in fraud detection, intelligence, and global payments. Their ability to analyse large datasets and identify correlations enabled them to support the Ministry of Tourism with insights that informed national strategy. It’s a small but



powerful example of how private sector data, when shared through cross-sector collaboration, can drive broader public value.

- A participant from Oracle spoke about the company's partnership with the Tony Blair Institute to develop an Agri-Intelligence Platform. This platform integrates satellite and real-time data to generate predictive insights that support better decision-making for both governments and farmers. For instance, it can map land use, track crop progress, and assess input needs to optimise yields. In countries where agriculture contributes nearly 50% of GDP but has seen limited innovation, access to this kind of cross-sector data can help conserve resources, reduce waste, and inform more strategic agricultural planning.

AI for Social Good: Local Relevance, Ethical Use, and Real-World Impact

- AI solutions in social sectors such as education and service delivery must be adapted to local realities. Generic, plug-and-play models—especially those developed externally—often overlook regional nuances, limiting their effectiveness and impact.
- NGOs are well-positioned to identify community vulnerabilities and advocate for the ethical use of AI. Their proximity to on-the-ground realities allows them to act as safeguards, ensuring AI is deployed in ways that are inclusive, responsible, and aligned with local needs.
- The World Food Programme (WFP) uses AI-driven tools to address food insecurity, malnutrition, and disaster response. During the 2023 Turkey–Syria earthquake, AI enabled a small team to assess around 600,000 buildings with over 81% accuracy, aiding over 5 million people. The technology supported real-time monitoring, damage assessment, and improved situational awareness, empowering decision-makers to deliver targeted relief effectively.
- In 2023, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) used AI-powered image analysis to detect two seabird species believed to be locally extinct since World War II. Leveraging the Rapid Automatic Image Classification (RAIC) tool developed by Synthetica, TNC and its partners have been working since 2020 to restore seabird populations at Palmyra Atoll, demonstrating how AI can support ecological discovery and conservation impact.

For philanthropy, the AI era presents both a challenge and an opportunity. As technology advances rapidly, philanthropists and social impact actors have a critical role to play in ensuring that innovation serves communities equitably and ethically. This roundtable highlighted the importance of cross-sector partnerships in unlocking AI's potential for public good, whether through smarter service delivery, data-sharing for resilience, or ethical frameworks that protect the most vulnerable. By embracing AI with purpose, the philanthropic sector can help shape a future where technology is not just a tool for efficiency but a force for inclusive, community-driven change.