

uplink

WORLD
ECONOMIC
FORUM

UpLink Annual Impact Report

FEBRUARY 2024



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Images: Belterra Agroflorestas, Oneka Technologies, Wsense, Getty Images

Foreword



John Dutton
Head, UpLink,
World Economic Forum

UpLink's Annual Impact Report is a testament to the power of innovation and value-based collaboration to drive positive systemic change for people and the planet. At the heart of our mission is a commitment to accelerating the "Decade of Delivery" by identifying and empowering breakthrough solutions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

In collaboration with our founding partners, the World Economic Forum, Deloitte and Salesforce, UpLink has emerged as a global catalyst for change. In just three years, we've transformed from a digital platform sourcing impact-driven entrepreneurs into a dynamic ecosystem with 442 Top Innovators and 46 Top Investors, three founding partners and seven funding partners offering unique opportunities for connection, collaboration and visibility. In this reporting period (2022-2023), we've joined forces with renowned organizations such as Accenture, HCL Technologies, IKEA Foundation, Manulife, Mercuria Energy Group, Ministry of Economy and Planning of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Prospect Innovation. Thanks to these multi-year

collaborations, we are strengthening our work and impact across SDG-related thematic areas.

In addition, more than 250 ecosystem partners from across sectors have contributed to UpLink's Innovation Ecosystem to support entrepreneurs in their growth and expansion efforts through catalytic funding, expertise and other acceleration opportunities.

Our partnerships with World Economic Forum initiatives such as It.org, Friends of Ocean Action, the First Movers Coalition, the Centre for Urban Transformation and the Resource System and Resilience Initiative have led to the creation of innovation ecosystems in crucial thematic areas such as nature-based solutions, ocean, water, circular economy, decarbonization, urban transformation and more. In the past year alone, we hosted 20 Innovation Challenges and doubled the number of Top Innovators in our Innovation Ecosystem. Through a thoughtfully curated engagement programme and the integration of an influential investor network, corporate partners, policy-makers and philanthropic organizations, we support these innovators on their journey of professional and personal growth.



This report is a celebration of their impact on the economy, society and the natural world.

As we enter the next phase, UpLink will continue to elevate entrepreneurship and strengthen innovation ecosystems as the main drivers of a sustainable and equitable future.

This report offers a snapshot of our collective impact and invites you to join us on this exciting journey towards positive change.

Uplink's impact strategy



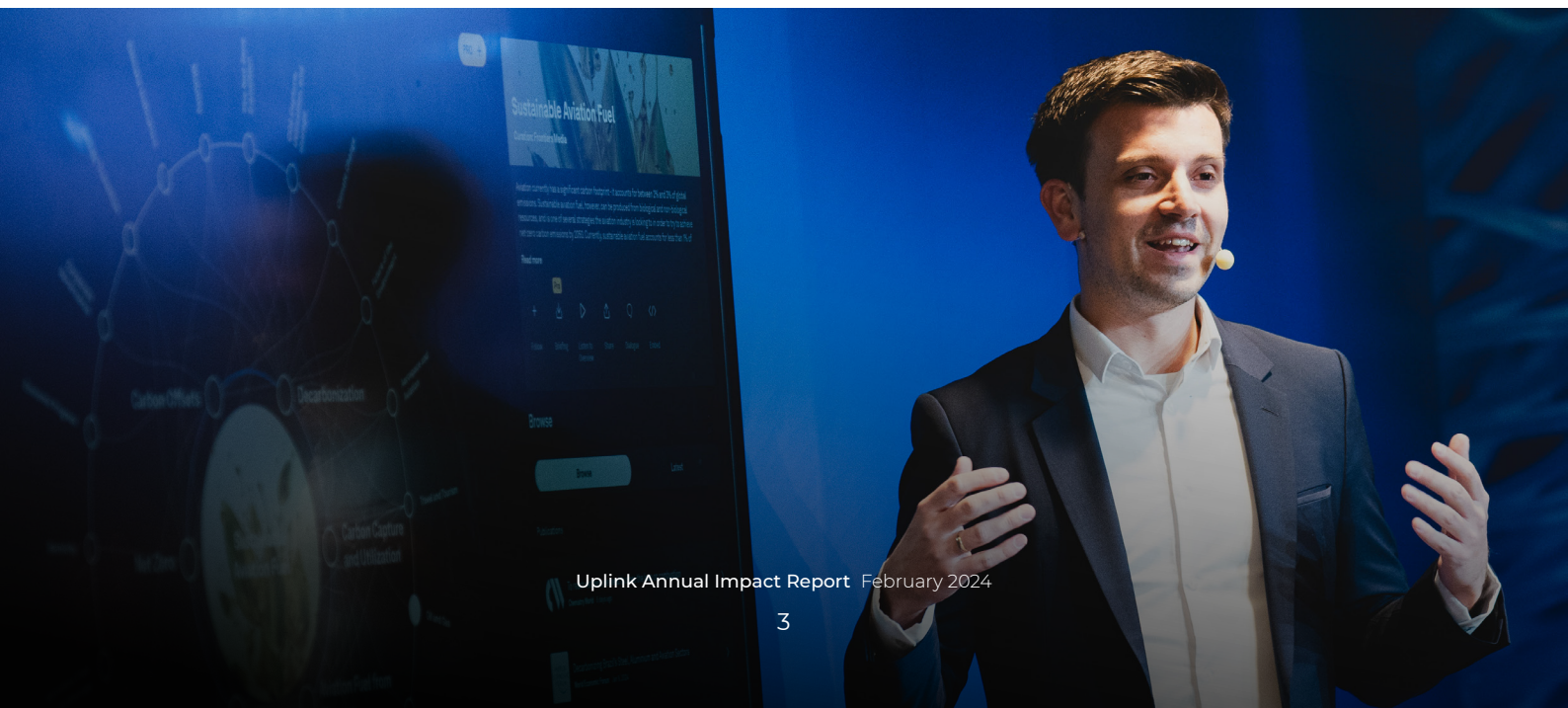
Sadaf Hosseini
Head of Growth,
Partnerships & Innovation
Ecosystems, UpLink,
World Economic Forum

At UpLink, we believe that measuring and assessing impact is crucial to the attainment of the SDGs and provides insights that enable us to effectively support our Top Innovators. UpLink's impact strategy is underpinned by a Theory of Change (see Figure 6), which aims to drive positive transformation through innovation. This ambition translates into three strategic outcomes:

1. **Accelerating impact** of early-stage entrepreneurs and investors by mobilizing essential capital, resources and networks.
2. **Enabling ecosystems** of diverse stakeholders (see Figure 7), facilitating dialogue and fostering collaboration around key sustainability issues.
3. **Shifting perceptions** about the role of innovation in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by showcasing the success stories and impact of innovative ventures.

To achieve these strategic outcomes, we run Innovation Challenges in SDG-related thematic areas and select the most promising innovative solutions as Top Innovators. All submissions are assessed on three main criteria, namely, innovation, impact and business performance. In line with our Theory of Change, this selection process is designed to be a holistic measure of real impact and long-term business sustainability.

Once selected, we help these Top Innovators scale their ventures by embedding them into a collaborative Innovation Ecosystem. This ecosystem comprises experts, investors, philanthropists and visionary partners of the Forum and beyond who are committed to achieving the SDGs. In addition, we offer year-round programming focused on capacity building, knowledge sharing and networking to support their growth. Finally, we leverage our digital platforms to tell inspiring stories about their work and impact, giving global visibility to their ventures (see Appendix 2).



A crucial aspect of our engagement is supporting Top Innovators to achieve their impact strategy by emphasizing a comprehensive understanding of both positive and potential negative impact. We encourage the implementation of a complete impact management strategy from the early stages, highlighting the importance of good governance as their ventures scale.

To strengthen our own accountability for impact, since the beginning of 2023, UpLink has started to implement a comprehensive impact management and measurement (IMM) strategy (see Appendix 3 and 4). Following industry best practices like Impact Frontier, our approach encompasses various stages (see Figure 8), from exploring SDG-related thematic areas to designing Innovation Challenges; sourcing, evaluating and selecting solutions: onboarding and engaging Top Innovators; and measuring and reporting impact on over 90 metrics in our

Global Impact Indicators Library, which draws from the United Nations SDGs and Global Impact Investing Network's (GIIN) IRIS+ methodology.

The application of the Global Impact Indicators involves both quantitative and qualitative reporting, and we work closely with Top Innovators to select indicators aligned with their business development and impact goals and report their impact year-on-year. This framework is continuously enriched with new indicators.

Executing the IMM strategy throughout the Innovation Challenge life cycle ensures the delivery of the impact results outlined in our Theory of Change. This iterative process aligns with our commitment to continuous improvement, with transparency in adapting and updating our processes over time.

These efforts will not only strengthen our IMM strategy but also guide us towards a sustainable future by supporting and showcasing the positive transformation led by our Top Innovators.



01

Year in review (2022-2023)

Expanding UpLink's Innovation Ecosystem through mission-aligned partnerships, thematic Innovation Challenges and high-impact solutions tackling the SDGs.

UpLink is on a mission to unlock an entrepreneur revolution for people and the planet. At the heart of this mission is our unique ability to select high-impact start-ups or Top Innovators, embed them into the Forum and UpLink's collaborative Innovation Ecosystem and empower them to scale their impact. These Top Innovators play a crucial role in accelerating impact towards the SDGs, enabling innovation ecosystems and inspiring global change through compelling stories.

A notable achievement for UpLink in the past year was sustaining and expanding our existing partnerships with founding and funding partners and securing new multi-year partnerships with visionary funders. These partnerships not only facilitated the growth of the UpLink Innovation Ecosystem but also highlighted UpLink's potential as a catalyst for positive change through innovative solutions.

Between 2022 and 2023, UpLink ran 20 Innovative Challenges across different topic areas, including but not limited to nature, ocean, water, circular economy, food systems, plastic pollution, humanitarian response and urban transformation. We received a total of 2,679 applications, selecting 201 new Top

Innovators from 66 countries, with 37% having at least one female co-founder. Through the Yes San Francisco Urban Sustainability Challenge, which was launched with the support of founding partners Deloitte and Salesforce, we've also piloted a local urban transformation ecosystem, which can be replicated in other major cities of the world. This initiative not only deepens our partnership but also reflects our shared commitment to advancing progress on the SDGs.

UpLink's Top Innovators are pioneering new technologies, identifying market gaps and delivering impact across all SDG domains. While biodiversity protection holds the top spot, Top Innovators typically work on multiple issues, such as climate action, increased income, workforce development and financial inclusion. It is worth noting that even though our Innovation Challenges primarily focused on the environment and society, Top Innovators' ventures also generated positive impact on the economy, including increased income, formal job creation and improved market access, demonstrating the cross-cutting nature of their solutions in addressing core issues such as environmental conservation.

Figure 1 Innovation ecosystem

3 co-founders

7 thematic and challenge funders

253 ecosystem partners

68,500+
platform users/**21,400** new users

51 Innovation Challenges across
SDG areas/**20** new challenges

6,046 solutions
submitted/**2,679** new solutions

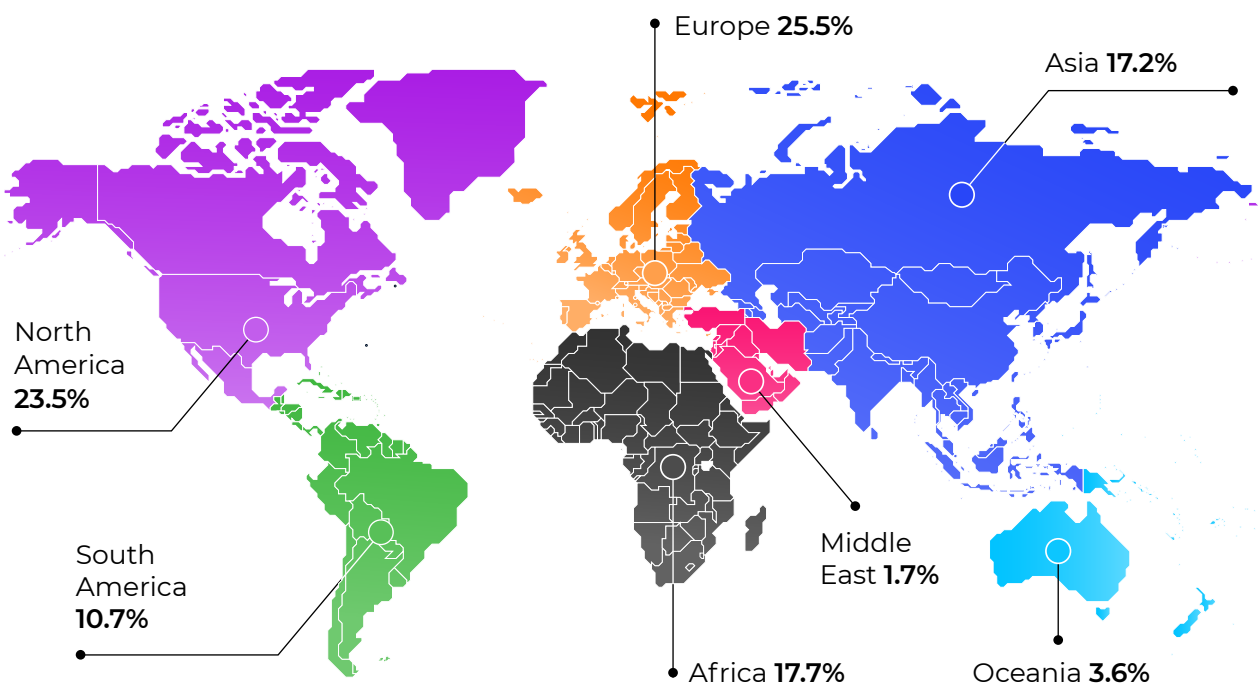
442 Top Innovators selected
/**201** new Top Innovators

37% women

63% men

66 countries host the
headquarters of Top Innovators

By region



Operating model



1. Business to business	49.5%
2. Business to customer	10.4%
3. Non-profit	15.8%
4. Business to government	2.2%
5. For profit	2.4%
6. Social enterprise	11.2%
7. Other	7.8%

46 Top Investors selected who support early-stage start-ups

\$2.3 billion in equity, grant and debt funding raised by Top Innovators since 2021

Note: This amount is calculated using a combination of self-reported and third-party data (Crunchbase).

Figure 2 Engagement and visibility



13 high-profile, global, in-person events

with
173
Top Innovators

and
30
Top Investors



90k

subscribers across Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram



75m

views of videos on UpLink and Forum's social channels



194
Forum Agenda articles

with
300k
views

02 How UpLink enables impact

A unique engagement programme driving business, brand and personal value for Top Innovators.

Since its launch, UpLink has enabled 442 Top Innovators from 66 different countries. These Top Innovators are inducted into the UpLink Innovation Ecosystem and undergo a 12-month programme, which includes participation in high-profile events, capacity-building workshops led by industry and

topic experts, connections with UpLink partners, and visibility on UpLink and World Economic Forum's digital channels. Top Innovators expressed high satisfaction with UpLink programming, giving it an average score of 8.9 out of 10, which attests to the effectiveness of our engagement strategy.



As highlighted by the participants, this engagement has led to profound gains, with the top three identified by Top Innovators being:

Table 1 Benefits of the UpLink Innovation Ecosystem

1. Business value

UpLink partners with the Forum initiatives to develop targeted programming, connecting Top Innovators with communities and events. This collaboration enhances their global visibility, fostering strategic connections that drive business growth. Surveyed Top Innovators credit UpLink for increased business value, citing support in generating inbound leads for current and new markets.

Furthermore, UpLink played a key role in their funding growth, with one in two participants who attended an event acknowledging UpLink's support in establishing new customer relationships. Additionally, 30% secured new investments, and 18% received follow-on funding through participation in UpLink and Forum events and visibility on their digital channels.



Archireef

The surge in inbound leads from new markets represents a remarkable expansion of our business horizons. This influx of leads signifies that our brand and offerings are resonating with audiences outside our traditional customer base (e.g. land developers and commodities). It indicates a successful entry or expansion into previously untapped markets.

Vriko Yu
Chief Executive Officer, Archireef



Distant Imagery Solutions

UpLink has provided us the gravitas of external validation whilst securing further project funding of over \$4 million.

Jane Glavan
Co-Founder, Distant Imagery

2. Brand value

Top Innovators shared that joining UpLink's Innovation Ecosystem has strengthened their credibility and recognition. UpLink's creative storytelling through social videos, interviews and blogs has not only enabled them to drive global attention to their solutions, but also widened their impact, accelerating progress towards the SDGs.



It's Learnable

Being recognized as a Top Innovator has catapulted It's Learnable with a mark of excellence within the education technology sector. This recognition has opened doors to prestigious collaborations and partnerships. A testament to this was the invitation to participate in a panel discussion on educational innovation at the Annual Meeting in Davos, which further positioned It's Learnable as a thought leader in the field.

Shoriwa Shaun Benjamin
Founder, It's Learnable

3. Personal value

Top Innovators highlighted the substantial personal benefits of being part of UpLink's Innovation Ecosystem. These include expanding their network of contacts, gaining valuable knowledge, engaging with other innovators and accessing experts to advance the development of their products, services and overall business operations.



Cercos Verde

The activities organized by UpLink have allowed us to build a network and establish a joint working strategy with other Top Innovators and thought leaders from our region. Its newsletters have provided our team with relevant information to expand our knowledge and identify opportunities for new collaborations.

Carola Capra
Chief Executive Officer, Cercos Verde

03 Thematic progress

Scaling thematic Innovation Ecosystems and empowering purpose-driven entrepreneurs to drive positive impact for people and the planet.

UpLink's Innovation Ecosystem functions as a catalyst for mission-driven and impact-oriented entrepreneurs. It empowers these start-up leaders to scale their efforts in addressing global challenges. By strategically integrating world-class technology, leveraging unique partner capabilities and utilizing the Forum's convening power, UpLink provides a supportive environment for entrepreneurs, visionary leaders, corporates, governments, foundations, philanthropists, impact investors and experts. This community is united by a common mission: creating widespread positive change by empowering impact-driven start-ups to scale and succeed. By enabling Innovation Ecosystems around key thematic focus areas such as circular economy, nature, ocean and water, UpLink ensures that entrepreneurs can

access the resources, expertise and networks essential for scaling the impact of their solutions.

We collect the impact data of Top Innovators in these thematic areas based on intentional, quantifiable and positive environmental, social, or economic outcomes resulting from their products or services. This impact data, linked to the SDGs and their targets, is self-claimed and reported directly by the Innovators. The collective impact of Top Innovators spans various areas, demonstrating the potential for cross-sector solutions to address global challenges. While the reported impact data by thematic areas offer a sense of scale, the diverse nature of innovation and contexts emphasizes the broader impact rather than precise aggregation of impact statistics.

3.1 Water

The Aquapreneur Innovation Initiative is a partnership between global conglomerate HCL and UpLink to source leading water entrepreneurs globally and help them scale their impact by fostering a Water Innovation Ecosystem.

In January 2023, we announced the first cohort of ten water-focused innovators or

"aquapreneurs" during the Forum's Annual Meeting in Davos. In March, the cohort convened in New York for the UN Water Conference (the first in 46 years) as part of the UpLink delegation and had the opportunity to build ties across the Water Innovation Ecosystem, creating new partnerships, investment opportunities and high-level visibility.



In continuation of our efforts, during World Water Week this summer, we launched the second aquapreneur Innovation Challenge on Zero Water Waste focused on water reuse, capturing and irrigation, which received 192 high-quality solutions from around the globe. To further expand the Water Innovation Ecosystem, we ran a Water Investment Series for non-water investors, with the intention of making water more accessible and attracting new investment and stakeholders into the sector.

The Aquapreneur Innovation Initiative is made possible with the active support of HCL and strong collaboration with a broad group of partners, including private sector partners, investors, think tanks, policy-makers and accelerators programmes.¹

Collective impact²

Since the announcement at the Davos Annual Meeting in 2023, 10 Top Innovators operating in seven countries have been selected for the Aquapreneur Innovation Initiative.

Collectively, over 350 million litres of wastewater have been treated, 46 million litres of water have been saved and 7.3 million litres of rainwater have been captured and reused through their organizations.

As a result of their work, more than 45,000 people have improved access to and use of WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) solutions, and over 1,000 smallholder farmers/fishers (102 of which are women) have increased their annual income.

1. Ecosystem partners include ACWA Power, ARUP, Auctionomics, Bain and Company, Bayer, DCVC and LG Sonic, Grundfos, Incofin Investment Management, International Financial Corporation – World Bank Group, Jacobs, Kingdom of Netherlands Special Envoy for International Water Affairs, PA Consulting, The Nature Conservancy, Xylem and 2030 Water Resources Group.

2. See Appendix 5 for more details on Uplink's report methodology.

Figure 3 Impact reported by Top Innovators working on water

Environmental and social impact (2022-2023)

350M+

Litres of wastewater treated



46M+

Litres of water saved



7.3M+

Litres of rainwater captured and reused



7.3M+

Litres of wastewater re-used



45,180

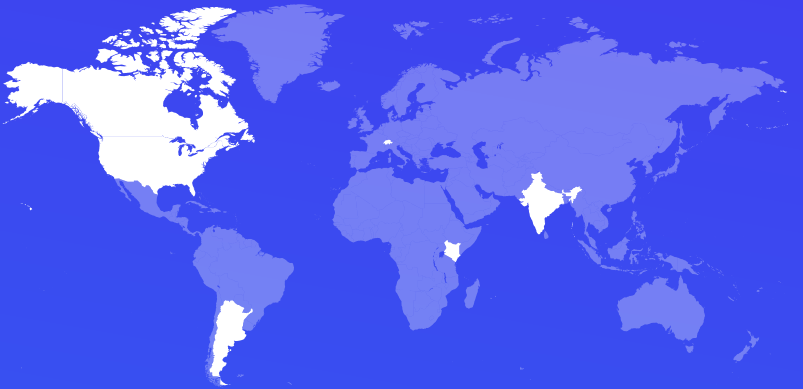
People with improved access to and use of WASH solutions

1,197

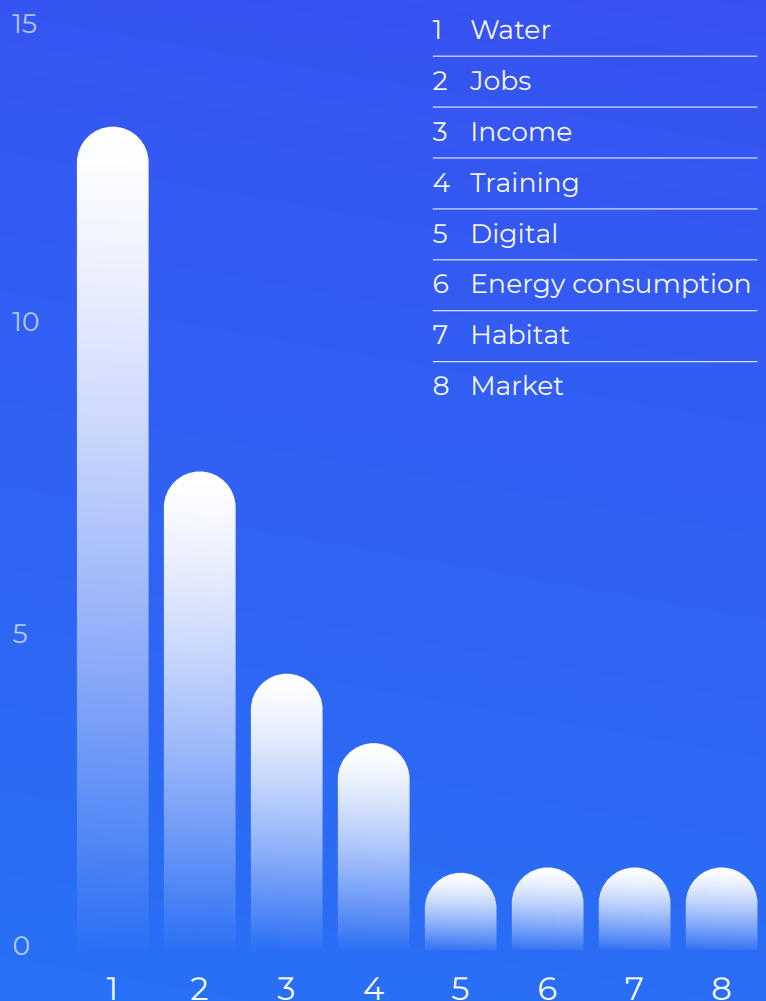
Smallholder farmers/fishers with increased annual income, of which

120 are women

Top innovator country coverage



Top innovator by impact area



Disclaimer: This data is the self-declared impact of Top Innovators reported as either measured and/or certified.



Case study 1

HCL's strategic investment in water innovation: a win-win for business and the environment

When Sundar Mahalingam talks about the beginning of HCL's partnership with UpLink, you can see his excitement about the possibilities of this collaboration. "We asked ourselves, what can we do to have an impact that can go further beyond just doing a project – and that is where we started thinking about supporting innovation," said Mahalingam, President of Strategy at HCL. This ambition has turned into a profound commitment that will help grow dozens of cutting-edge ventures and ensure freshwater access for millions around the world.

In 2022, HCL, a global conglomerate, embarked on a transformative journey with UpLink, committing CHF 15 million (Swiss francs) over five years to drive the freshwater conservation and management agenda. In less than a year, HCL's commitment saw a 10-fold return on its investment as the first cohort of aquapreneurs collectively raised \$54.5 million after joining the UpLink Innovation Ecosystem.

"That ability to leverage our investment and unlock so much additional capital is really a testament to the effectiveness of the UpLink platform and its place in the ecosystem," said Mahalingam on stage during the UpLink Day during the Forum's Sustainable Development Impact meetings in New York in September 2023.

"Fostering groundbreaking solutions for one of the planet's most pressing issues but also positioning HCL at the forefront of sustainable innovation."

In August 2023, HCL and UpLink launched their second challenge on Zero Water Waste, focusing on water harvesting, water reuse and smart irrigation. HCL played an active role in selecting and supporting the new cohort of aquapreneurs. "HCL's commitment to environmental sustainability goes hand in hand with our business objectives," Mahalingam shared, noting that the entrepreneurs they've engaged through the UpLink partnership have "opened doors to new business opportunities and partnerships with start-ups at the cutting edge of technology and sustainability."

As HCL continues its partnership with UpLink, the company is setting a precedent for how businesses can contribute to global challenges while reaping tangible business benefits. The collaboration is a testament to the power of strategic investment in sustainability, proving that environmental responsibility and business success can go hand in hand. "Investing in these challenges is about creating a sustainable future where business growth and environmental conservation are mutually reinforcing," said Mahalingam.



Aaron Tartakovsky
Co-Founder, Epic
Cleantec



Being part of UpLink and HCLTech's Aquapreneur Innovation Initiative has helped elevate our brand and bring more inbound requests for information. I cannot stress enough how valuable this partnership has been for Epic Cleantec. In a highly regulated space like water, collaboration between public and private entities is critical. Epic prioritizes working with regulators and public officials to help inform new policy frameworks that allow for the deployment of novel technological solutions and through this initiative, we've had the opportunity to meet these decision-makers. We are now a member of the 50L Home Coalition through our participation in the UN Water Conference. In Davos last year, I had the privilege of participating in several high-level discussions on how the intersection of technology, regulation and business model innovation can help solve many of our most vexing climate challenges. These conversations were led by executives from influential companies including HCLTech, Suez, Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Deloitte, Unilever, Microsoft and Salesforce, who revealed a growing recognition that water and climate change are inextricably linked.

3.2 Circular economy

Over the last three years, UpLink has worked in close collaboration with Accenture to build an interconnected community of entrepreneurs in circularity, both on a global scale and across diverse industries, and to facilitate knowledge and skill exchange within this community. The Circulars Accelerator programme has served as the cornerstone of this thematic area, empowering over 50 start-ups through mentorship and business support.

Building on this experience, we are now poised to expand our efforts and build a broader and more comprehensive Circular Economy Innovation Ecosystem. We aspire to catalyse and scale circular innovation by fostering a multistakeholder community that actively engages in building a more sustainable and circular future. A focal point of our work will be the implementation and testing of a new corporate-start-up partnership model to scale circular innovations.

This approach underscores our dedication to testing new paradigms and facilitating meaningful collaborations that contribute to the evolution of circular practices and principles.

Accenture stands as a highly esteemed partner in our work, providing crucial support as a funder and catalyst within the Circular Economy Innovation Ecosystem. Their enduring commitment and efforts in advancing this topic demonstrate the significance and expansive growth potential inherent in a circular economy.

Collective impact³

Since 2022, Top Innovators from the Circular Economy Innovation Ecosystem operate in 19 countries driving positive impact in the areas of waste management, water saving/reuse, climate action, increase in annual income, market access and formal employment opportunities, among others.

In total, over 10,000 tonnes of general waste was collected by Top Innovator organizations for segregation and 2,920 tonnes of materials were received for reuse/recycling.

More than 17 million litres of water were saved through the Top Innovators solutions, and 850 tonnes of food waste/losses were reduced at the retail, consumer or supply chain level.

3. See Appendix 5 for more details on UpLink's report methodology.

Figure 4 Impact reported by Top Innovators working on the circular economy

Environmental and social impact (2022-2023)

10,458



Tonnes of general waste collected for segregation

5,761



Tonnes of waste tracked through digital platforms

2,920



Tonnes of materials recovered for reuse/recycling

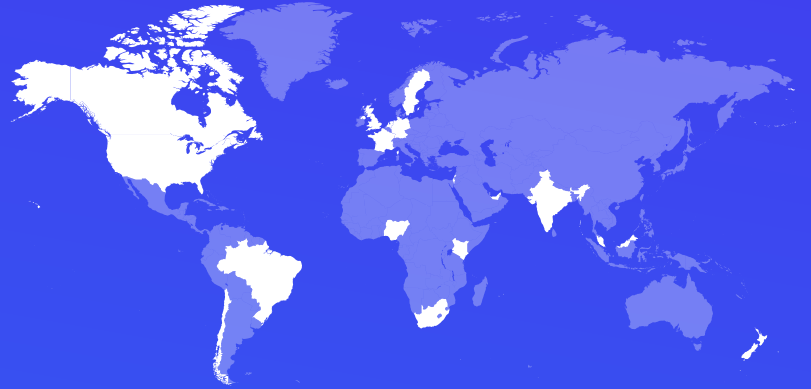
17M

Litres of water saved

850

Tonnes of food waste/losses reduced at retail, consumer or supply chain

Top innovator country coverage



Top innovator by impact area



Disclaimer: This data is the self-declared impact of Top Innovators reported as either measured and/or certified.



Case study 2

Aquacycl's growth journey: scaling innovations to drive circularity

Aquacycl, a pioneer in sustainable wastewater management, embarked on a transformative journey through the Circularity Accelerator 2022 programme, which was run in collaboration with Accenture. Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer Orianna Bretschger actively participated in the programme, gaining valuable insights, networking opportunities and expert guidance. As a part of UpLink's Ecosystem Engagement programme, Orianna was invited to join UpLink's delegation at the UN Water Conference (the first in 46 years), showcasing Aquacycl's innovative Bio Electrochemical Treatment Technology (BETT®) and attending networking events to accelerate progress towards solving the global water crisis.

These types of engagements opened doors to global visibility and a robust investor network, resulting in a significant milestone. Orianna reflects, "UpLink helped connect us with Ecolab, who became our co-lead investor for our \$10 million Series B round."

Aquacycl's impact has been profound. Trusted by major consumer packaged goods companies worldwide, the BETT® system has, in a single year at a PepsiCo plant, mitigated over 800 tonnes

of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) – equivalent to the emissions of over 10 tanker trucks of gasoline.⁴ Treating 2,600,000 litres of wastewater, Aquacycl is making strides in addressing the global water crisis.

Orianna's vision goes beyond innovation; she aspires to positively impact the lives of millions of people lacking access to safe sanitation. In the next five years, Aquacycl aims to provide safe, reliable wastewater treatment facilities, substantially reducing atmospheric carbon emissions and safeguarding the climate for all.

Speaking on UpLink's role in Aquacycl's growth journey, Orianna emphasizes, "UpLink has contributed to our success in many ways – increasing our visibility, expanding our network and connecting us with investors. The most important contribution has been increasing our visibility through the Forum UpLink's social media audience and participation in high-level events." Aquacycl's journey is a testament to the power of platforms like UpLink in amplifying the reach of groundbreaking solutions and connecting them with influential networks and investors to propel their mission forward.

4. Supplemented with data from The Earthshot Prize's profile on [Aquacycl's 2023 nomination](#).

3.3

Nature-based solutions

Uplink's Nature-based Solutions (NbS) Innovation Ecosystem is a dynamic and collaborative network aimed at addressing key environmental challenges including biodiversity loss, climate change and ecosystem degradation. The World Economic Forum has been instrumental in fostering this ecosystem, bringing together diverse stakeholders from governments, businesses, investors, academia and civil society. Through collaboration with 1t.org (the Forum's initiative to conserve, restore and grow 1 trillion trees by 2030), we have facilitated knowledge sharing and collaborative action, leading to greater ambition, transparency and momentum for conservation and restoration efforts globally.

In September 2023, we convened key members of this ecosystem through a flagship event. The World Economic Forum, in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank, under the framework of its Amazonia Forever Regional Program, hosted the "Accelerating the Amazon's Ecopreneurship Ecosystem" event in Manaus, Brazil. This event brought together stakeholders from diverse sectors, countries and initiatives who are shaping the innovation and bioeconomy ecosystem of the Amazon region. It was an opportunity to feature inspiring innovations from the NbS Innovation Ecosystem, foster fruitful collaborations and exchange knowledge and experiences to accelerate ecopreneurship. Participating in this event were over 70 stakeholders from six different Amazonia countries (Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela, Brazil and Bolivia), who

were looking to develop new and sustainable economic pathways through NbS in the region.

Salesforce, as a funder of this thematic area, has played a crucial role in this ecosystem. Their financial support not only accelerates the development and implementation of innovative NbS, but also signals to potential investors the viability and importance of investing in nature.

Collective impact⁵

Since 2022, Top Innovators from the NbS Innovation Ecosystem operate in 34 countries, driving impact in areas of habitat protection and preservation, biodiversity conservation and restoration, climate action, increase in annual income, formal job creation, training in forest/ecosystem conservation and restoration, among others.

More than 12 million smallholder farmers and fishers have been directly aided by the activities and outputs of the Top Innovator organizations. More than 5,900 farmers and producers have gained access to new markets through avenues such as e-commerce.

More than 56 million hectares of habitat has been protected or actively managed for protection and over 400,000 hectares of habit has been managed for restoration through the Top Innovators' solutions.

On climate action, more than 4 million tonnes of CO₂e were sold in the regulatory or voluntary carbon market and over 119,000 tonnes of emissions were sequestered by the Top Innovator organizations.

5. See Appendix 5 for more details on Uplink's report methodology.



Figure 5 Impact reported by Top Innovators working on nature-based solutions

Environmental and social impact (2022-2023)

56M+

Hectares of habitat protected or actively managed for protection



458,464

Hectares of habitat managed for restoration



4M+

Tonnes of CO₂e sold (regulated or voluntary carbon market)



119,706

Tonnes of emission sequestered

5,910

Farmers/producers gaining access to new markets (e-commerce)

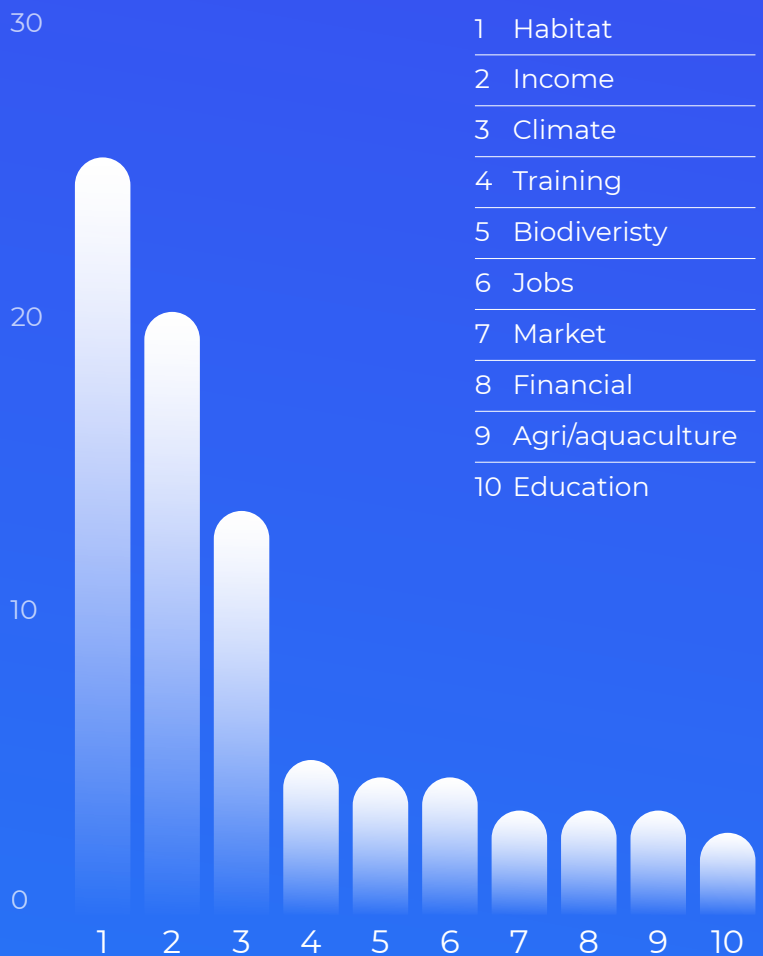
12M+

Smallholder farmers/fishers with increased annual income

Top innovator country coverage



Top innovator by impact area



Disclaimer: This data is the self-declared impact of Top Innovators reported as either measured and/or certified.

Case study 3

Belterra Agroflorestas' growth journey: bolstering the Amazon's innovation ecosystem



Covering approximately 40% of Brazil, the Amazon stands as the world's largest tropical forest. However, since 1970, deforestation in the Amazon has surpassed the size of France. Brazil's second-largest forest, the Atlantic Forest, once the size of South Africa, now faces over 85% clearance due to intensive farming and cattle raising. Regenerative agriculture, vital for preserving regions like the Amazon and Atlantic Forests, enhances soil, biodiversity and crop quality. Yet, in Brazil, sustainable farming encounters obstacles as smallholder farmers struggle against agribusiness dominance, adhering to profitable but harmful practices. Over three million Brazilian farmers lack resources and guidance for sustainable land management, resulting in the degradation of 70 million hectares of land.

Belterra Agroflorestas, an UpLink Top Innovator of the 2022 Trillion Trees: Amazon Bioeconomy Challenge, tackles this problem by working with small and medium-sized rural farmers in Brazil to restore forests through regenerative agricultural practices and to create market incentives for sustainably grown crops. Its agroforestry systems are scalable and adaptable to market demands and producers' interests, which promotes high-value generation for producers, society and the environment.

Belterra is a B-Corp-certified climate food tech and, based on the B Impact Assessment, has earned an overall score of 80.6 (the median score for ordinary businesses who complete the assessment is 50.9). In the two years since it was founded, Belterra has established 1,800 hectares of biodiverse agroforestry areas and protected

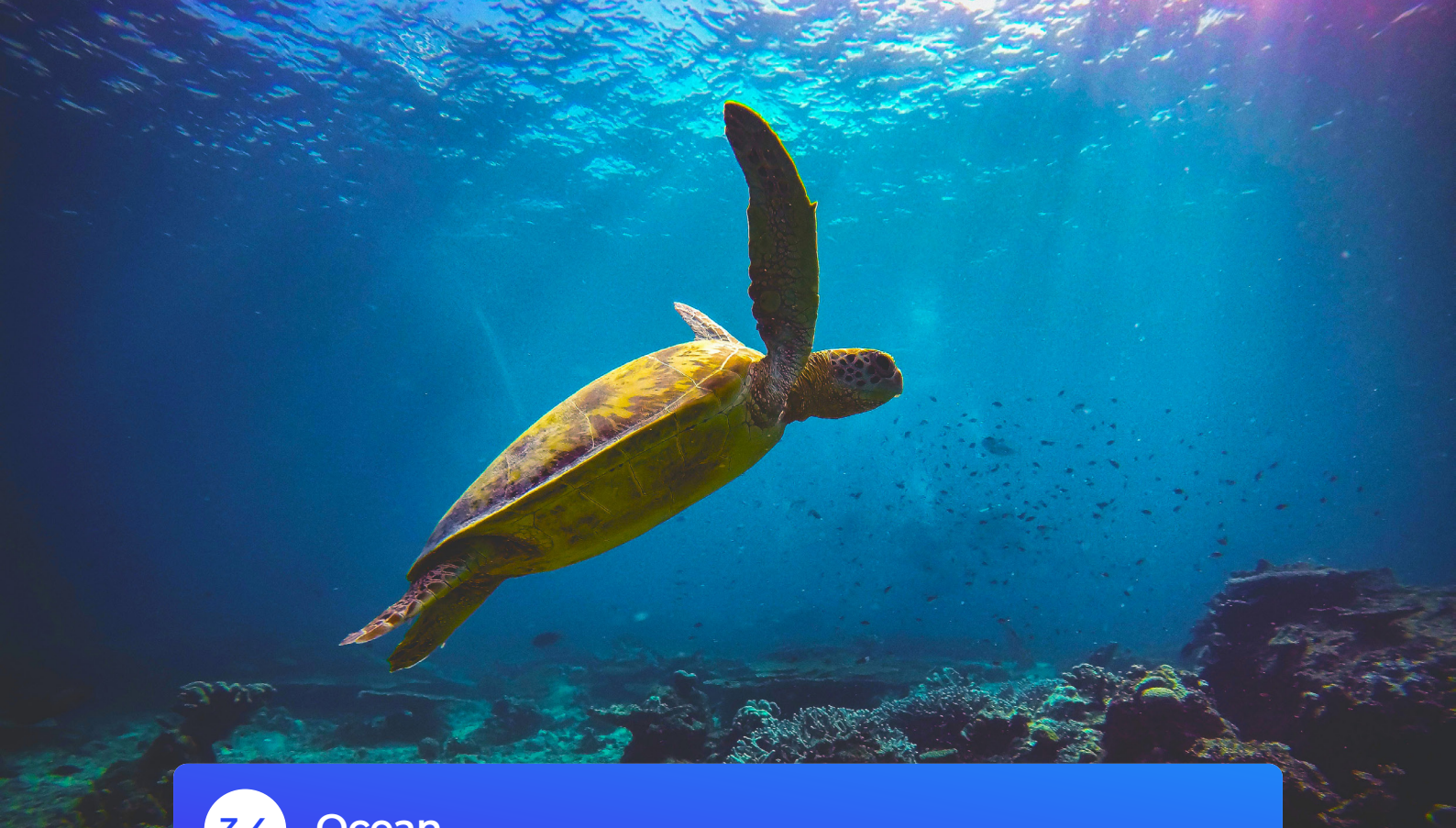
18,000 hectares of land – an area equivalent to around one and half times the size of San Francisco and has created market access for over 80 farmers and producers. By 2030, Belterra plans to restore 40,000 hectares of Brazilian forest, which will not only bring better livelihoods to thousands of farmers but also provide a vital carbon sink to store CO₂.⁶

In the fall of 2023, Belterra was invited to participate in Accelerating the Amazon's Ecopreneurship Ecosystem, a regional ecosystem event hosted by World Economic Forum in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank event in Manaus, Brazil. This multi-stakeholder event aimed to address the barriers and opportunities to further Amazon's innovation and ecopreneurship ecosystem and forge connections and collaborations across the ecosystem.

Chief Executive Officer Valmir Ortega, reflecting on this and other engagement opportunities offered by UpLink, says, "UpLink has provided several opportunities to connect with relevant partners, who have enormous potential to boost our business. Our participation in events and recommendations through UpLink have facilitated connection with partnerships with high impact potential." In 2023, Belterra raised more than \$20 million. Ortega adds, "The exposure generated by UpLink accelerated negotiations and strengthened our credibility with investors."

Furthering sustainability and innovation, Belterra exemplifies how UpLink strengthens regional ecosystems, fostering collaboration and impactful solutions for the Amazon's protection and the well-being of local communities.

6. Supplemented with data from The Earthshot Prize's profile on Belterra's 2023 nomination: "Belterra", *The Earthshot Prize*, n.d., <https://earthshotprize.org/winners-finalists/belterra/>.



3.4

Ocean

There is a rising tide of ocean innovators working to harness the ocean's sustainability potential. Over the last three years, UpLink has built an Ocean Innovation Ecosystem to bring these innovators together with key stakeholders committed to protecting and restoring the ocean. We have run 11 ocean-related challenges to source breakthrough solutions to the most pressing ocean challenges, including ocean data, coastal tourism, ocean plastic and most recently, the Great Blue Wall in East Africa. In total, these challenges have received 419 submissions leading to a total of 75 top innovators at the forefront of ocean innovation.

Through its partnership with Friends of Ocean Action and 1000 Ocean Startups, a global ocean innovation ecosystem hosted at the World Economic Forum, UpLink has played an active role in accelerating innovation for ocean health and mainstreaming the Ocean Innovation Ecosystem.

This coalition unites leading incubators, accelerators, competitions, matching platforms and venture capital and corporate venture capital firms supporting start-ups for ocean impact and health. Including UpLink, the coalition counts 37 members of entrepreneur-supporting organizations, which have collectively mobilized nearly \$1.5 billion in assets under management.

By embedding ocean innovators within this coalition, UpLink has supported the incubation and acceleration of their solutions, connecting them with the right stakeholders to elevate their work and scale their impact.

Collective impact⁷

Since 2022, Top Innovators from the Ocean Innovation Ecosystem have operated in 33 countries, delivering impact in areas such as waste management, habitat protection and preservation, income generation, formal job creation, climate action and biodiversity conservation, among others.

Over the course of last year, more than 17 million hectares of habitat have been protected or actively managed for protection by the Top Innovator organizations, and over 23,000 tonnes of waste was collected from the ocean for segregation. Moreover, approximately 2,000 tonnes of sustainably produced or harvested natural products have been produced or made possible by the Ocean Innovation Ecosystem.

Environmental awareness-raising campaigns have reached more than 118 million people, and more than 4,500 people have been trained in ecosystem conservation and restoration.

⁷ See Appendix 5 for more details on UpLink's report methodology.

Figure 6 Impact reported by Top Innovators working on the ocean

Environmental and social impact (2022-2023)

17M+



Hectares of habitat protected or actively managed for protection

23,910



Tonnes of waste collected for segregation

2,272



Tonnes of sustainably produced or harvested natural products

190

Jobs created (receiving a living wage or higher)

4,698

Number of people trained in ecosystem conservation and restoration

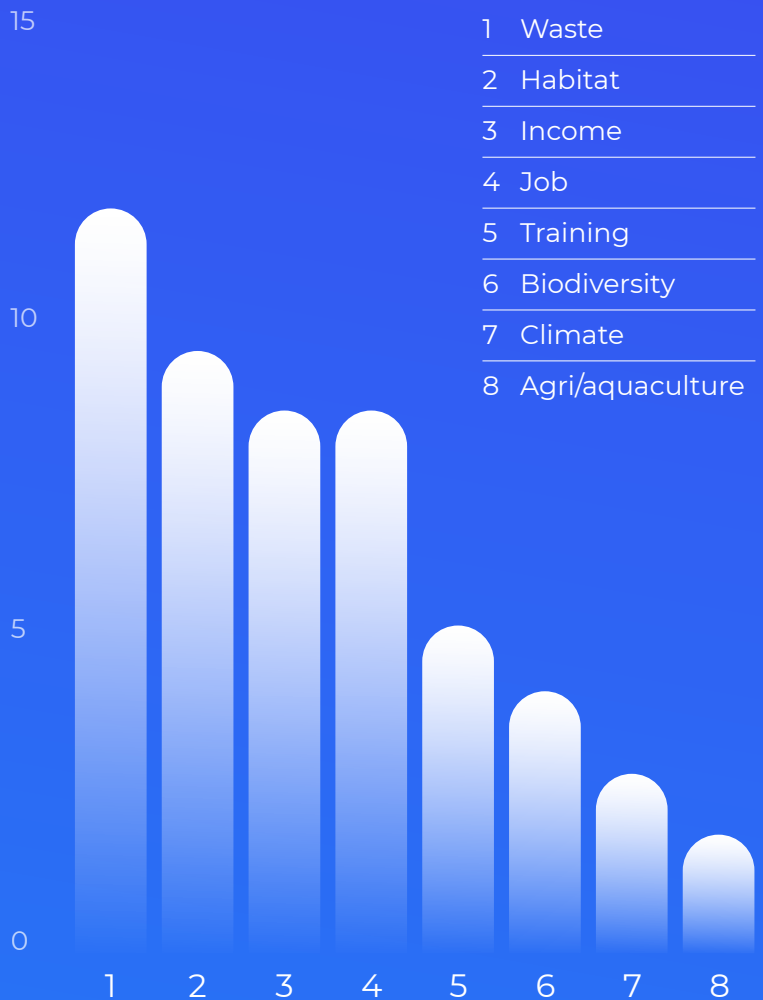
118M+

People reached for environmental awareness campaign

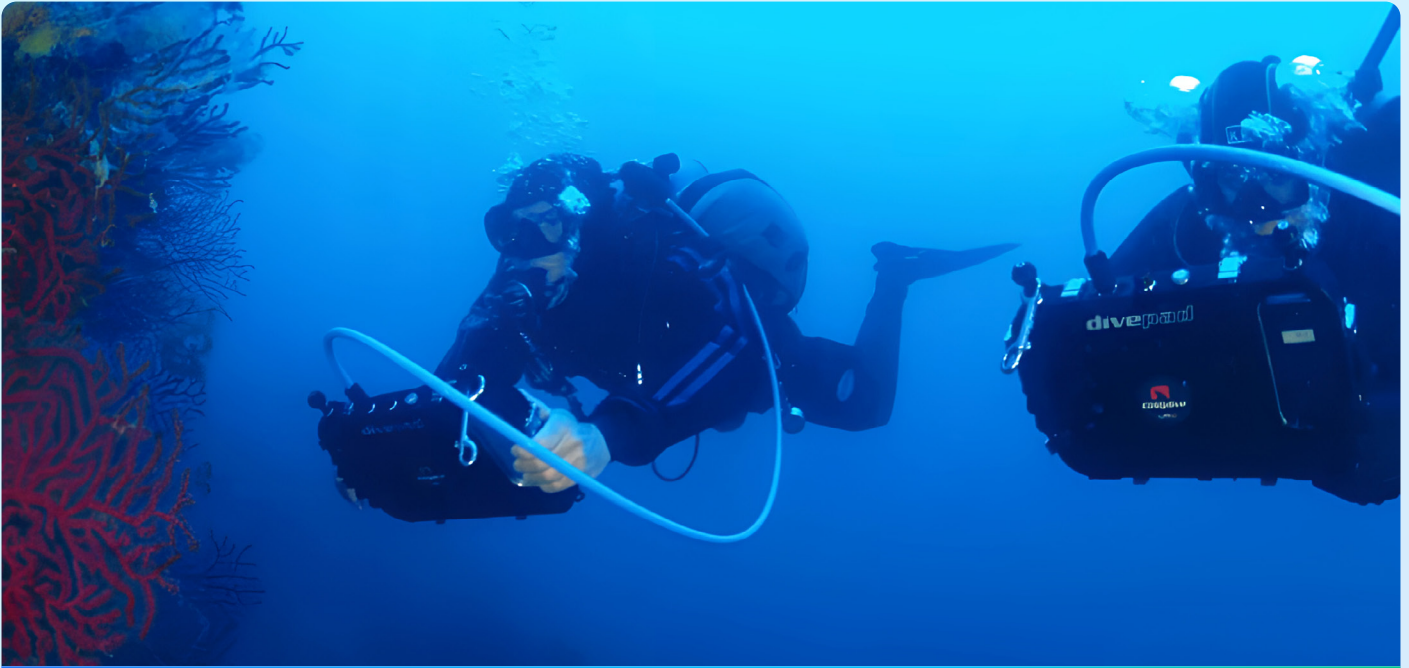
Top innovator country coverage



Top innovator by impact area



Disclaimer: This data is the self-declared impact of Top Innovators reported as either measured and/or certified.



Case study 4

W-Sense's Growth Journey: catalysing strategic investment in impactful ocean solutions

Ahead of the Villars Summit, Chiara Petrioli, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of WSense (Top Innovator of the Ocean Data Challenge), faced a mixture of confidence and uncertainty. Her company, a pioneer in the internet of underwater things (IoUT), was at a crucial juncture, seeking investment to grow. Chiara, a scientist at heart, was venturing into the unfamiliar territory of venture capital. "As a scientist and innovator, my expertise lay in technology and research, not in navigating the complex waters of venture capital and investment," she reflected.

It was at the Villars Summit, an UpLink event, where Chiara's path crossed with Christian Lim, Managing Director of SWEN Blue Oceans Partners, an UpLink Top Investor. Christian, already aware of WSense's pioneering work, was eager to use this opportunity to delve deeper into the company's vision. Through UpLink programming, Chiara was also introduced to another Top Investor, Katapult Ocean, which found alignment between its investment strategy and Chiara's vision.

These engagements proved to be pivotal. Six months later, WSense announced a successful \$9 million Series A funding round, led by investors

Chiara had met through UpLink, including SWEN Blue Oceans Partners and Katapult Ocean. This investment was a significant milestone for WSense, enabling it to expand its innovative approach to underwater communication and monitoring, which is crucial for environmental research and ocean resource management.

As part of its Ecosystem Engagement Programme, UpLink designs unique opportunities to bring together diverse leaders who are playing a critical role in solving our planet's biggest challenges. This includes innovators meeting investors and one another and sharing insights and best practices from their unique experiences, as well as investors meeting peers, forging relationships that can lead to shared learning, insights, and – like in this case – co-investment in exciting young companies.

The story of WSense is more than a business success; it's a demonstration of the power of innovation and strategic partnerships. The collaboration forged at Villars between WSense, SWEN Blue Oceans Partners and Katapult Ocean is a beacon of hope for ocean conservation and demonstration of the impact of platforms like UpLink in bringing together innovators and investors.

3.5

Urban transformation: a new place-based thematic Innovation Ecosystem

In 2023, UpLink and Deloitte joined forces to pilot a place-based innovation ecosystem through the Yes San Francisco Urban Sustainability Challenge. This initiative commenced with a fall 2022 gathering of local private, public and non-profit partners across the city of San Francisco. Over 20 local collaborators participated in challenge design workshops in Spring 2023, seeding the ecosystem, and the challenge officially launched in June 2023.

The challenge aimed to introduce sustainable building technologies and blue/green infrastructure to revitalize San Francisco and diversify its economic base. It received more than

140 solutions, from which we selected a cohort of 14 Top Innovators. This unique, geographically centred challenge facilitated multiple cohort programmes in San Francisco during the fall of 2023, offering visibility, networking, support and pitching opportunities.

This invitation was made possible by a partnership with Deloitte, Salesforce and Citi, and collaboration with the City of San Francisco and the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce. Deloitte has committed to replicating and scaling this model over the coming years, generously funding this initiative alongside UpLink and the Forum's Centre for Urban Transformation.



04 The year ahead

Refining UpLink's Theory of Change, streamlining data collection and enhancing capacity building.

Improvements to our impact framework

In 2022-2023, UpLink made significant enhancements for long-term benefits, including updating our Theory of Change, key performance indicators (KPIs) to track performance metrics of UpLink and the global impact indicators framework that allows Top Innovators to report impact across social, environmental and economic dimensions. In the coming year, we aim to build and operationalize systems and tools

to enhance the efficiency of data collection and monitoring, which will enable smoother reporting of UpLink's activity, output and outcome indicators, as outlined in our Theory of Change. Moreover, we are committed to the continual expansion of our global impact indicators library to encompass theme-specific indicators aligned with the SDGs and GIIN's IRIS+ database. We also plan to strengthen the Innovation Ecosystem Programme by providing dedicated capacity building to support the impact measurement and reporting efforts of UpLink Top Innovators.



Aligning our impact journey to the three strategic outcomes



Accelerating impact

- We are empowering early-stage SDG investors by enhancing the UpLink digital platform with features tailored to their needs. Planned technology releases in 2024 will enable UpLink to offer investors advanced functionalities for aggregated impact reporting and visualization, attracting higher-quality entrepreneurs and expanding the UpLink Innovation Ecosystem.
- By leveraging sophisticated automation and making strategic investments in virtual and in-person ecosystem programming, we aim to connect entrepreneurs with the stakeholders crucial for scaling their impact, including investors, corporate executives, family offices, philanthropists, peers and experts.
- By integrating impact management and measurement into our programming, we plan to educate our entrepreneurs about the fundamentals of impact and foster increased commitment to their impact goals. We are also committed to strengthening the credibility of our entrepreneurs' impact performance data by exploring verification options through existing assurance, certification and benchmarking methods in sustainability and impact.



Enabling ecosystems

- In 2024, UpLink is poised to expand thematic innovation ecosystems in collaboration with Forum initiatives to unlock innovation and entrepreneurship in new areas such as sustainable mining and decarbonization in other hard-to-abate sectors. These initiatives will be supported by a series of multi-year, thematic collaborations with purpose-driven funders and visionary leaders.
- Further to the place-based innovation ecosystem piloted through the Yes San Francisco Urban Sustainability Challenge, UpLink will expand its collaboration with Deloitte to replicate this model in other major cities of the world.
- UpLink will also continue to source and select early-stage impact investors aligned with our thematic areas who can support our Top Innovators' growth, thereby creating a network of early-stage investors ready to champion and catalyse an entrepreneur revolution.



Shifting perceptions

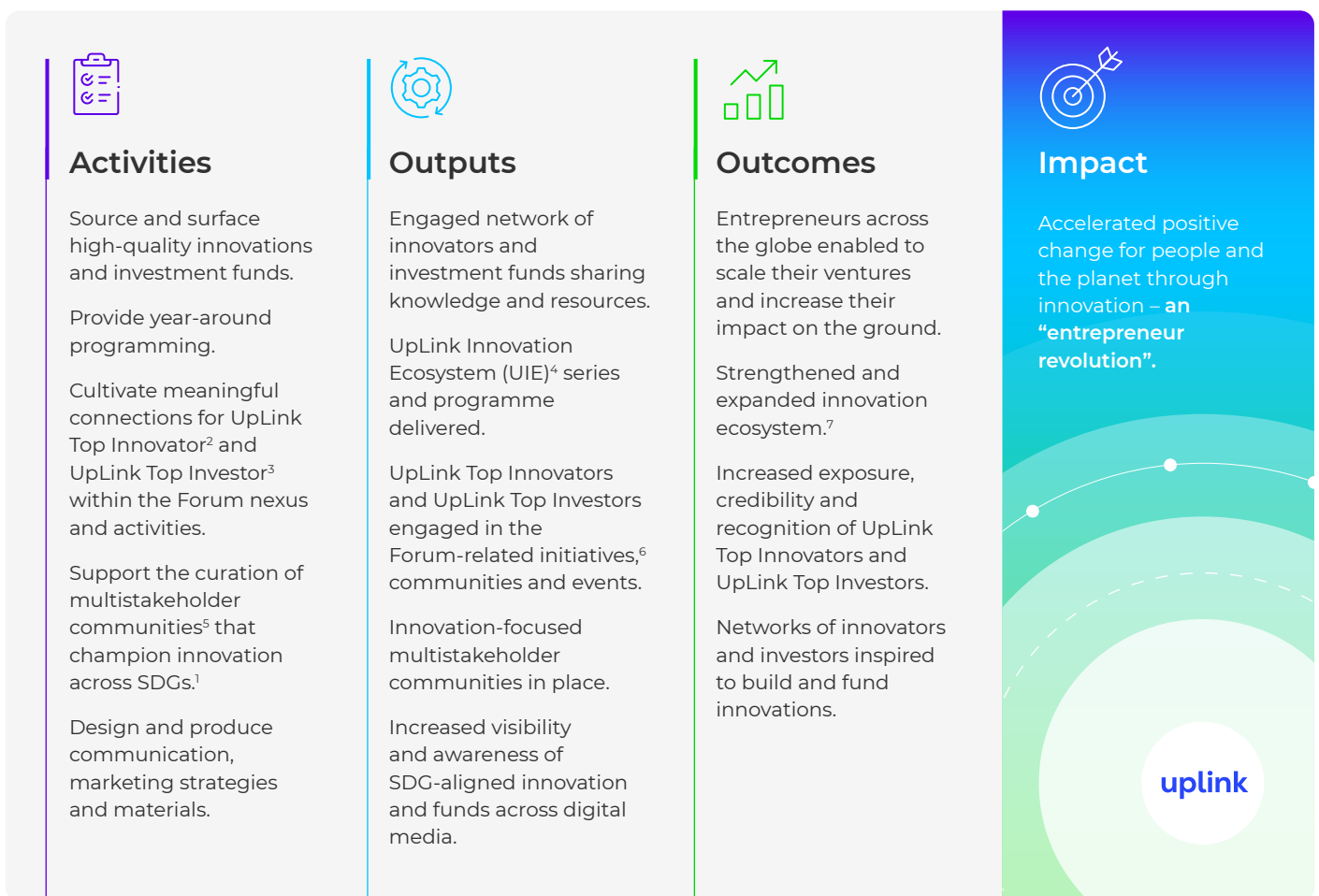
- Building on its distinctive storytelling capabilities, UpLink will continue to showcase the positive impact achieved by early-stage ventures by investing in the impact reporting functionalities and processes of the platform. Through this, UpLink aims to not only inspire, but also actively engage stakeholders, fostering a sense of purpose and urgency around the SDGs.



Appendices

A1 | UpLink’s Theory of Change, partnerships and impact approach

Figure 7 UpLink’s Theory of Change



1. SDGs = Sustainable Development Goals.
2. UpLink Top Innovator = high-quality, high-impact start-ups selected by UpLink.
3. UpLink Top Investor = high-quality, innovative and SDG-focused investment fund selected by UpLink.
4. UpLink Innovation Ecosystem = Network of UpLink stakeholders including selected UpLink Top Innovators and UpLink Top Investors, experts, partners and supporting partners.
5. Multistakeholder communities = informal community of stakeholders (including corporate alliance, experts, international organizations and other partners) across sectors within and beyond the Forum nexus.
6. Forum initiatives = Forum coalition with members coming from business, civil society, international organizations and research institutes fast-tracking solutions to the most pressing challenges facing people and planet. Forum initiatives build multistakeholder communities.
7. Innovation ecosystem = Network of UpLink stakeholders (i.e. UpLink Top Innovators, UpLink Top Investors, partners, etc.) and Forum stakeholders (i.e. corporations, experts, philanthropists, governments involved in the Forum nexus).

Figure 8 Ecosystem partners

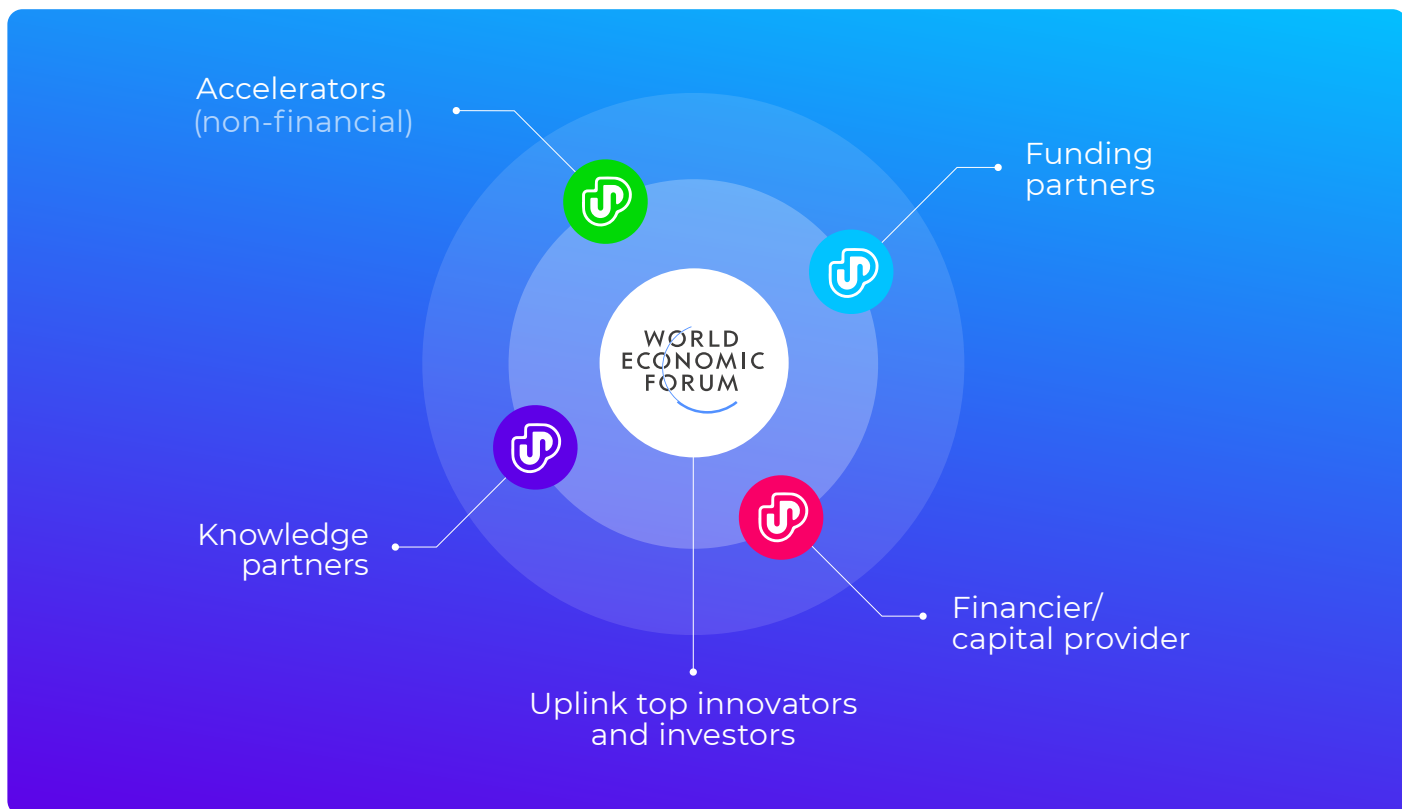
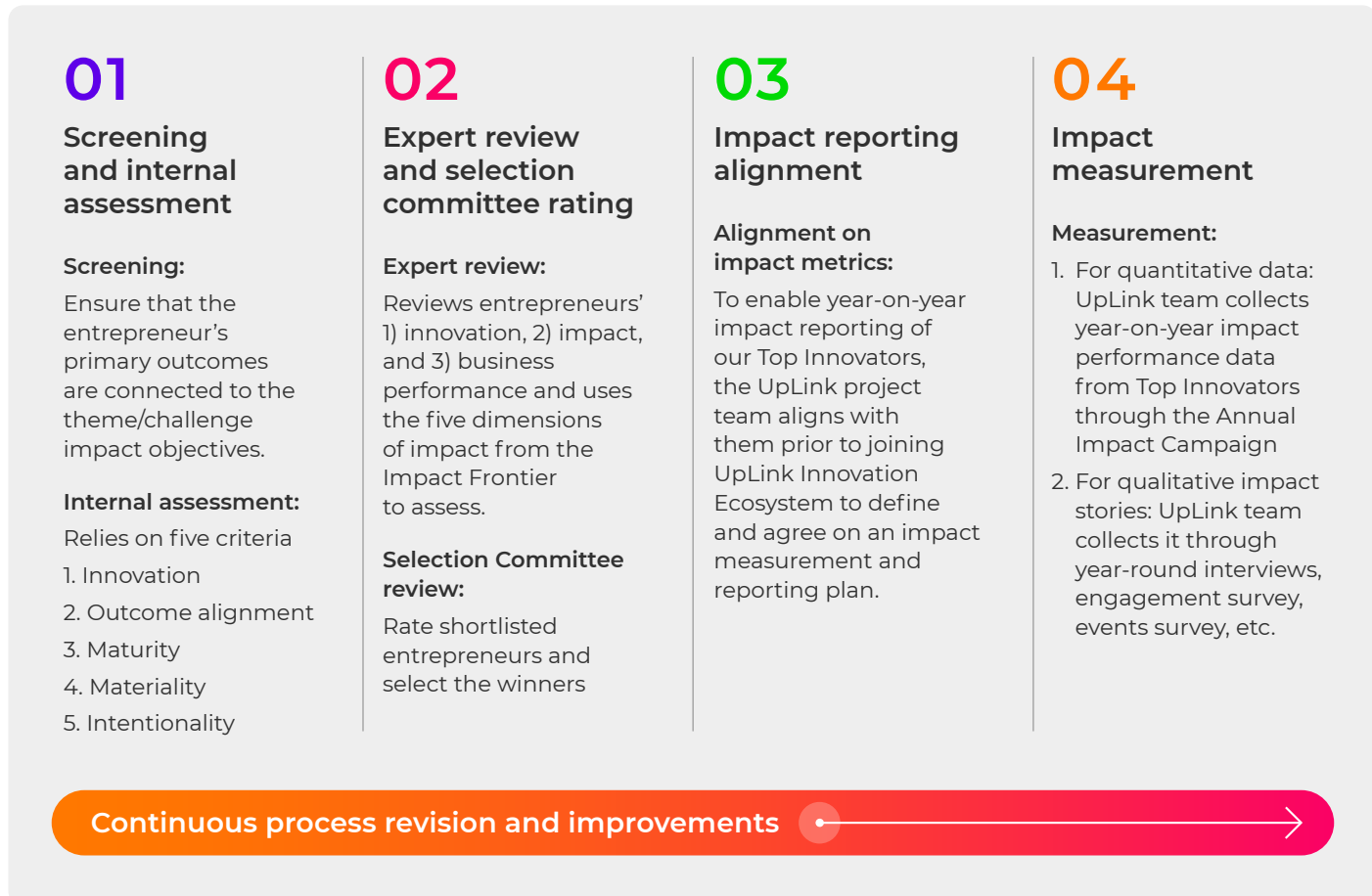


Figure 9 Integration of impact in UpLink’s challenge assessment



A2 | UpLink's support to Top Innovators

UpLink accelerates progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by bringing together entrepreneurs, experts, corporations and partner organizations. Key activities include:

1 Enabling innovation ecosystems

UpLink mobilizes innovative action for the SDGs by enabling a collaborative global ecosystem, the **UpLink Innovation Ecosystem**, comprising:

- Top Innovators: purpose-driven entrepreneurs
- Top Investors: funds with a portfolio focus on ventures across key SDG areas
- Financiers/capital providers: early-stage investment, philanthropic and corporate venture funds
- Visionary partners of the World Economic Forum: governments, corporations, accelerators, philanthropists and experts who champion innovative solutions from entrepreneurs across the globe tackling key sustainability issues

2 Programming, events and capacity building

To ensure that entrepreneurs can grow and scale their impact, UpLink provides year-round programming in collaboration with Forum initiatives, including:

- Curated sessions during major events such as the Annual Meeting in Davos, Sustainable Development Impact Summit, and others, and offering Top Innovators opportunities to increase their visibility and connect with relevant stakeholders.
- Capacity building and knowledge sharing facilitated by topic experts.
- Connecting Top Innovators and Top Innovative Funds with Forum initiatives, communities, events and corporate coalitions, showcasing the power of early-stage innovation.

3 Content creation and storytelling

Through UpLink and the Forum's digital platforms, we leverage our creative production and reach to position Top Innovators and Top Innovation Funds as content creators, enhancing their visibility and widening their impact.



A3 | Impact management

Our impact management plan is integrated into UpLink's end-to-end project (or innovation challenge) life cycle. Our approach is anchored in industry best practices, such as Impact Frontier, and adapted to UpLink's business model.

The life cycle of UpLink challenge includes the following:

1. **Exploration:** We begin by identifying SDG-related thematic areas that are of interest to UpLink and its thematic funders. Then we explore opportunities to run an innovation challenge with the right combination of ecosystem partners that can empower and support the selected entrepreneurs in their growth and scale journey through avenues such as funding expertise and acceleration opportunities.
2. **Design:** When designing a challenge, we define the objectives, types of solutions linked to relevant impact categories, possible outcomes and relevant indicators to measure these outcomes. We also define theme-specific questions and criteria to assess the entrepreneurs' applications.
3. **Sourcing, evaluation and selection:** We have multiple review stages to assess and evaluate a solution, focusing on three areas, namely, innovation, impact and business performance, to determine if the company fits into UpLink's Theory of Change and impact mandate.
4. **Onboarding and measurement:** We measure Top Innovators' achievement by the impact performance data that they report back to us, along with their financial figures on growth and fundraising.
5. **Engagement:** Top Innovators are added to the UpLink Innovation Network, where they can engage with peers across industries, investors and experts through a series of virtual and in-person sessions, events, workshops and other networking opportunities.
6. **Reporting:** We are committed to reporting on the over 90 metrics developed under UpLink's Global Impact Indicators Library to show the year-on-year impact of our Top Innovator community.

Our challenge assessment process is detailed in Figure 3 (see Appendix 1). To further our commitment to continuous improvement, we also recognize the need to adapt and revise this process over time transparently.





A4 | Impact measurement

It is our mandate to guide and support Top Innovators to achieve their impact strategy and manage as well as measure their impact. We believe that it is important for our entrepreneurs to have a good understanding of both their positive and potential negative impact so they can dedicate their efforts to maximize positive impact on the environment, economy and society. It is also important that companies have good governance as they scale, which is why we encourage the implementation of a complete strategy for managing impact from the early stages of a start-up that is enabled through quality measurement frequencies.

Our impact measurement framework

1 Key principles for impact measurement

- Collected data reflects tangible, material and evidence-based direct impact on communities.
- Impact is measured across dimensions, focusing on meaningful outcomes for beneficiaries' life quality rather than simple outputs.
- Metrics align with industry standards such as the SDGs and the Global Impact Investing Network's (GIIN) IRIS+ methodology, a globally recognized system for impact measurement, management and optimization.

- The framework facilitates the measurement of Top Innovators' impact across sectors, enabling UpLink to aggregate global impact data.

2 Application of the global impact indicators

- Our framework supports both quantitative and qualitative reporting.
- Top Innovators work with UpLink to select indicators rooted in their business data and impact goals.
- We will continue to expand and enrich this with new indicators over time.

A5 Report methodology

The impact report was prepared by the UpLink team with two primary aims: to share the self-reported, measured and certified impact of UpLink's Top Innovators revolving around environmental, economic and social impact and to better understand the contribution of UpLink to our Innovation Ecosystem's growth.

Qualitative and quantitative impact data and narratives were collected from three sources:

1 Annual impact data collection campaign

Top Innovators shared their annual performance impact data measured across three dimensions (environmental, social and economic), focusing on meaningful outcomes for beneficiaries' life quality rather than simple outputs. Impact data were self-reported and measured or verified by the organization themselves.

2 UpLink engagement survey

Top Innovators completed a 10-question online engagement survey and shared feedback on UpLink's contribution to their success.

3 In-depth interviews

We have also conducted in-person and Zoom interviews with approximately 56% of Top Innovators to date, who are working across thematic areas and operating in diverse regions, to gain a deeper understanding of their impact, including key achievements and their reflections on their engagement with the UpLink Innovation Ecosystem.

Disclaimer: *All numbers presented throughout this report come from publicly available data, self-reported impact performance and measurement by Top Innovator organizations, or third-party external verification companies (e.g. B-Corp) and have not been verified by UpLink.*

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