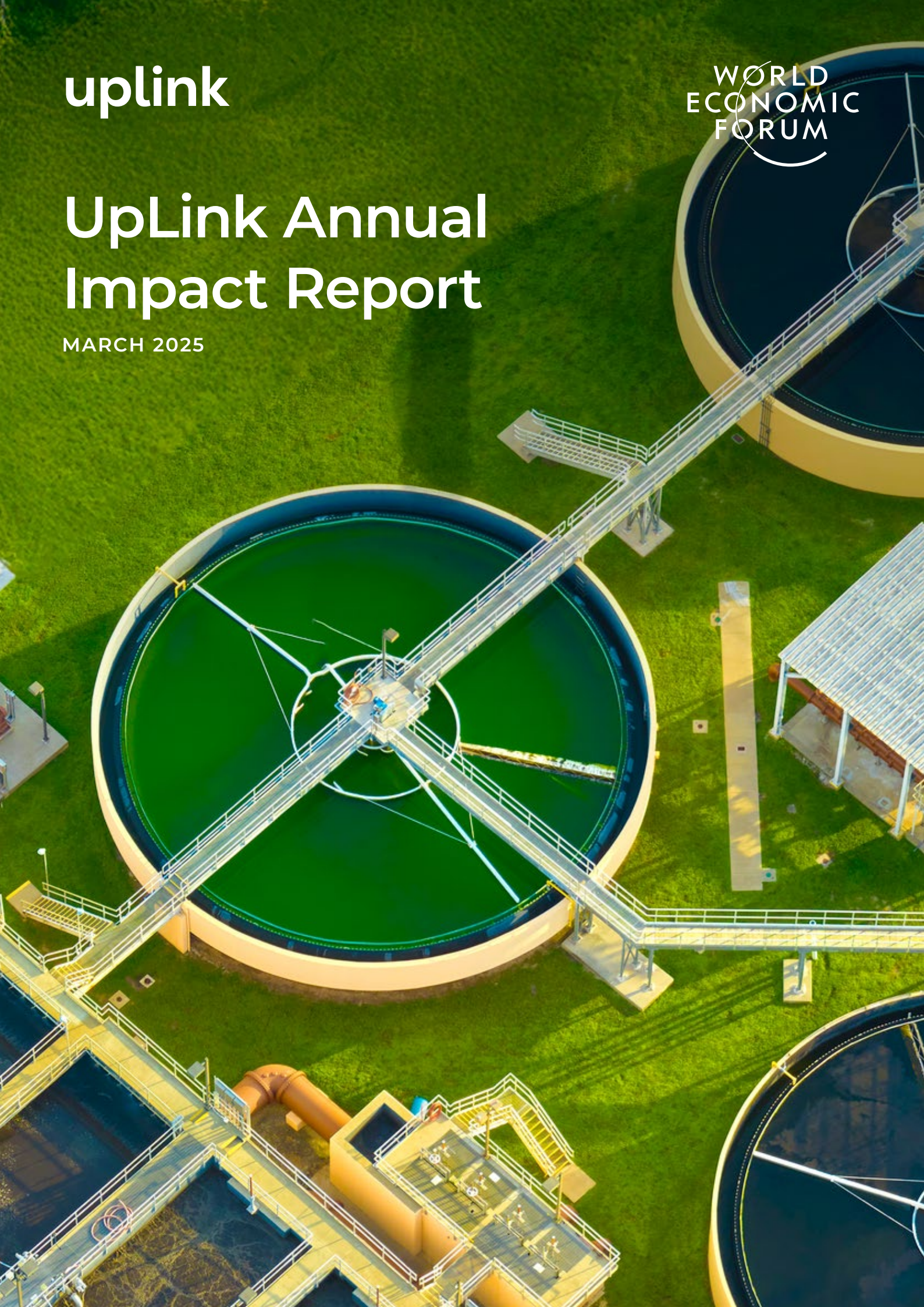


uplink

WORLD  
ECONOMIC  
FORUM

# UpLink Annual Impact Report

MARCH 2025



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**Images:** Getty Images, Unsplash

# About UpLink

UpLink is a World Economic Forum initiative, founded in collaboration with Deloitte and Salesforce, focused on impactful early-stage innovation. It builds ecosystems that enable purpose-driven, early-stage entrepreneurs to scale their businesses for the markets and economies that are essential to a net-zero, nature-positive and equitable future.

## UpLink's strategic objectives



### Accelerate impact

of early-stage innovators by providing the necessary resources and networks to support their growth, enabling them to scale and deliver impact.



### Enable Innovation Ecosystems

by facilitating collaboration between innovators and business leaders, investors, public-sector partners and domain experts.



### Influence perception

through impactful narratives to inspire collective action, mobilize capital and cultivate a conducive environment for innovation to thrive in.

## UpLink in numbers

# 11

Innovation Ecosystems

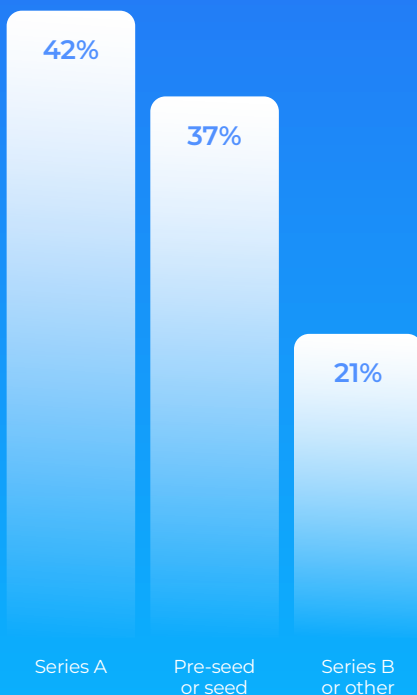


# 66

Innovation Challenges



## Funding stage



# 517

Top Innovators selected since 2020



## 66%

Male (Co-) Founder or C-suite

## 34%

Female (Co-) Founder or C-suite

## Headquarters in 75 countries

Europe and Central Asia	27%
North America	26%
Sub-Saharan Africa	15%
East Asia and Pacific	10%
Latin America and Caribbean	10%
South Asia	9%
Middle East and North Africa	3%

# Foreword

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**John Dutton**  
Head, UpLink,  
World Economic Forum



**Sadaf Hosseini**  
Head, Growth, Partnerships and  
Innovation Ecosystems, UpLink,  
World Economic Forum

At UpLink, we are driven by a clear mission: to propel innovations that will shape a sustainable, equitable and thriving global economy.

Since its launch five years ago at the World Economic Forum's 2020 Annual Meeting in Davos, UpLink has become a global change engine for scaling purpose-driven start-ups. By unlocking the power of entrepreneurship, we tackle the world's most urgent challenges outlined by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

We believe that innovation doesn't happen in isolation. By convening entrepreneurs, investors, industry leaders and enablers, we build cross-sector thematic partnerships vital for addressing systemic challenges. These partnerships champion solutions that go beyond incremental change and rewire industry models for lasting transformation. This is made possible thanks to the passion and commitment of our partners, Forum colleagues and the UpLink team.

As progress towards the SDGs continues to lag, the urgency of taking decisive action grows. UpLink is accelerating the impact of more than 500 early-stage start-ups or "Top Innovators" in areas including climate action, clean water

and energy by collaborating with visionary partners that provide catalytic funding, and over 300 ecosystem partners that offer mentorship, resources and growth opportunities to innovators. Additionally, in 2023-24, we welcomed over 50 new innovators in hard-to-abate sectors, such as sustainable mining, sustainable aviation and circular carbon use, and launched the UpLink Investors Community, uniting high-quality, early-stage investors committed to mobilizing capital for purpose-driven start-ups worldwide.

We are also committed to rigorously monitoring and measuring our impact, emphasizing our role in advancing the business growth of Top Innovators (Chapter 2) as well as the broader social and environmental outcomes driven by their solutions (Chapter 3). This commitment reflects our belief that accountability and transparency are essential in the journey towards meaningful change.

We recognize that the future is shaped by our actions today. Together, let's turn challenges into opportunities and aspirations into achievements. Let's celebrate innovation that matters.

# Executive summary

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The UpLink Innovation Ecosystem champions solutions that create lasting transformation across industries and societies, accelerating progress for people and planet.

By convening entrepreneurs, investors, industry leaders and supporters, UpLink creates ecosystems in which ideas are nurtured, collaborations are forged and solutions are scaled. These partnerships enable purpose-driven entrepreneurs to secure funding, expand their workforce, grow their customer base and scale impactful solutions, thereby driving meaningful progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In 2024 alone, UpLink Top Innovators raised \$633 million in investment capital, an increase of approximately \$196 million compared to 2023. UpLink is also celebrating the success of the first two cohorts of 20 water-focused innovators (or “aquapreneurs”) sourced through the Aquapreneur Innovation Initiative conducted in collaboration with HCL Group. Collectively, they have raised an impressive \$70 million, from

organizations such as Emerald Technology Ventures, Temasek, Rolex and the US Department of Energy, since joining the UpLink Innovation Ecosystem. Similarly, the Sustainable Aviation cohort – sourced through UpLink and the Forum's First Movers Coalition initiative – has raised more than \$260 million from funders like Breakthrough Energy Catalyst, JetBlue Ventures and others.

Investment capital empowers start-ups to scale their businesses, leading to impressive growth metrics. In 2024, 47% of the innovators who reported their data saw more than 40% growth in their customer count. This growth underscores their strength and sustainability, allowing them to amplify their social and environmental impact through measures such as wastewater filtration, CO<sub>2</sub> sequestration and forest land restoration.



**Figure 1 Overview of Top Innovators' impact**

Between 2023 and 2024, UpLink innovators' solutions have contributed to:



**28** million tonnes

Waste tracked and traced through digital platforms



**140** million hectares (ha)

Aquatic or terrestrial area protected or actively managed for protection



**2.5** billion litres

Wastewater, including hazardous wastewater, treated



**142,400** tonnes

CO<sub>2</sub> emissions avoided through clean electricity, sustainable agriculture, manufacturing and other processes

In 2025, UpLink will continue to strengthen its Innovation Ecosystem by facilitating strategic collaboration and ensuring that impact-driven innovators continue to receive the resources,

guidance and connections necessary to succeed. The organization is also committed to continuously improving its impact measurement framework in alignment with objectives.

## UpLink's impact measurement and management framework

UpLink's impact measurement and management framework employs a mixed methodology for data collection, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to

ensure a comprehensive understanding of progress towards the SDGs. This framework is explained in detail in [Appendix: A1](#).

# 01 How UpLink enables impact

UpLink acts as a catalyst, transforming visionary solutions into tangible outcomes that bend industry models to address the world's most pressing issues.

## 1.1 Engagement and networking opportunities





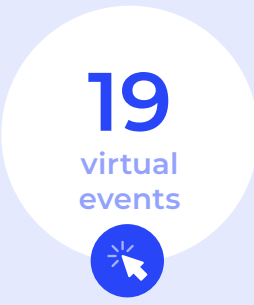


UpLink selects the most promising start-ups and cultivates a collaborative ecosystem that empowers them to grow their businesses and scale their impact. The selection process involves a rigorous evaluation of business viability and potential impact, driving positive transformation.

Once selected, these start-ups gain access to a unique engagement programme, which

includes participation in events, capacity-building workshops and support for business growth through connections with partners, decision-makers, domain-specific experts and investors. In 2024, UpLink hosted 55 events,<sup>1</sup> bringing together a community of innovators, investors, experts and funding and ecosystem partners.




**Table 1 UpLink events in 2024**

Type of events	Purpose
<div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>36</b> in-person events</p> </div>	<p>Facilitate strategic business connections, enable collaboration, enhance visibility and strengthen brand value</p> <p> <b>Examples:</b> World Economic Forum Annual Meeting, Sustainable Development Impact Meetings (SDIM), Annual Meeting of the New Champions (AMNC)</p>
	<p>Spotlight Top Innovators' impact and raise awareness to attract collaboration and investment</p> <p> <b>Examples:</b> Monaco Ocean Week, Dreamforce, 16th Conference of the Parties (COP16)</p>
	<p>Build Innovation Ecosystems and strengthen partnerships</p> <p> <b>Examples:</b> Special Meeting on Global Collaboration, Growth and Energy for Development, The Villars Institute Summit 2024, 3-SPACE</p>
<div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>19</b> virtual events</p> </div>	<p>Community development and connection</p> <p> <b>Examples:</b> Natural Capital Investor series, Blue Horizons: Pitching for a Regenerative Ocean Economy</p>
	<p>Capacity building</p> <p> <b>Examples:</b> Expert-led masterclasses on establishing credibility, perfecting the pitch and building a strong core story</p>



The Storytelling Masterclass workshop was very valuable and challenging. Every session was designed to push us to think critically and communicate with structure and precision. From delivering our pitch to giving and receiving feedback, the experience required us to be concise, clear and thoughtful in our communication. It helped simplify and sharpen our ideas, providing valuable tools to strengthen our overall presentation and pitching skills.

**Catalina Pfenniger**  
Kran Nanobubble 

Credit: Kran Nanobubble



Top Innovators have expressed a high level of satisfaction with UpLink programming. On average, nine out of 10 would recommend UpLink to other entrepreneurs. They also reported several key benefits of their engagement with UpLink, including enhanced organizational reputation and brand recognition, improved connections

with potential stakeholders in both current and new operating markets, and the development of partnerships with other organizations. Notably, among all respondents, 39 indicated that their participation has enabled access to investment funding from other investors.

**Figure 2** The business value Top Innovators gained from their engagement with UpLink



## 1.2 Global visibility and thought leadership

UpLink collaborates with its Innovation Ecosystem members and the Forum's public-private initiatives to deliver industry-relevant analyses and insights. These efforts aim to shape public perception about the importance of early-stage innovation in meeting the Global Goals 2030, and inspire collective action

to facilitate funding, policy change and industry support for them. By strategically harnessing communication channels and diverse content formats, UpLink amplifies these key messages, enhancing the visibility, market positioning and stakeholder engagement of Top Innovators.

### Figure 3 Strategic reports



#### Investing in Natural Capital: Innovations Supporting Much-Needed Financing for Nature

This initiative was created in collaboration with the Forum's Nature Action Agenda and It.org, and UpLink's funding partner, Mercuria. Launched during the Forum's Sustainable Development Impact Meetings 2024 (SDIM24) in New York, it showcased the impact and investment potential of several nature and biodiversity innovators.

**Source:** World Economic Forum. (2024). *Investing in Natural Capital: Innovations Supporting Much-Needed Financing for Nature*; World Economic Forum & UpLink. (2024). *Investing in Water: A Practical Guide*.



#### Investing in Water: A Practical Guide

This community paper, part of the "Aquapreneur Innovation Initiative", was created in collaboration with HCL Group and alongside the European Water Tech Accelerator. Launched at the BlueTech Forum in 2024, it offered insights from impact investors and experts on water market potential, and showcased opportunities for investing in water-focused innovators.

In the reporting period, UpLink published over 1,737 social posts, generating 1.48 million impressions and maintaining an impressive 5.79% average engagement rate, well above industry standards. Top Innovator solutions were showcased in 114 videos. The long-format series,

An Innovator Explains, is particularly noteworthy. It was launched in this period, with seven episodes featuring UpLink innovators across themes such as clean water, sustainable mining, urban transformation, circular economy and nature innovation.



UpLink is more than a platform – it's a force multiplier for entrepreneurs! The exposure, connections and networking opportunities it provides have accelerated our journey, showcased our impact across industries and borders. It has amplified our brand recognition and visibility, positioning us on a global stage, which will be helpful in attracting investors and fostering valuable connections.

**Tarun Katoch**  
Co-Founder, Dvara E-Registry

An additional four videos highlighted impactful solutions and promoted investment reports showcasing successful examples of innovators scaling social and environmental impact. These efforts resulted in 760,000 video views across

UpLink channels. Content was also published on the Forum's digital media channels, reaching an audience of 50 million followers. Additionally, UpLink promoted 64 blogs across Forum Stories and the UpLink website, generating a total of 88,500 views.

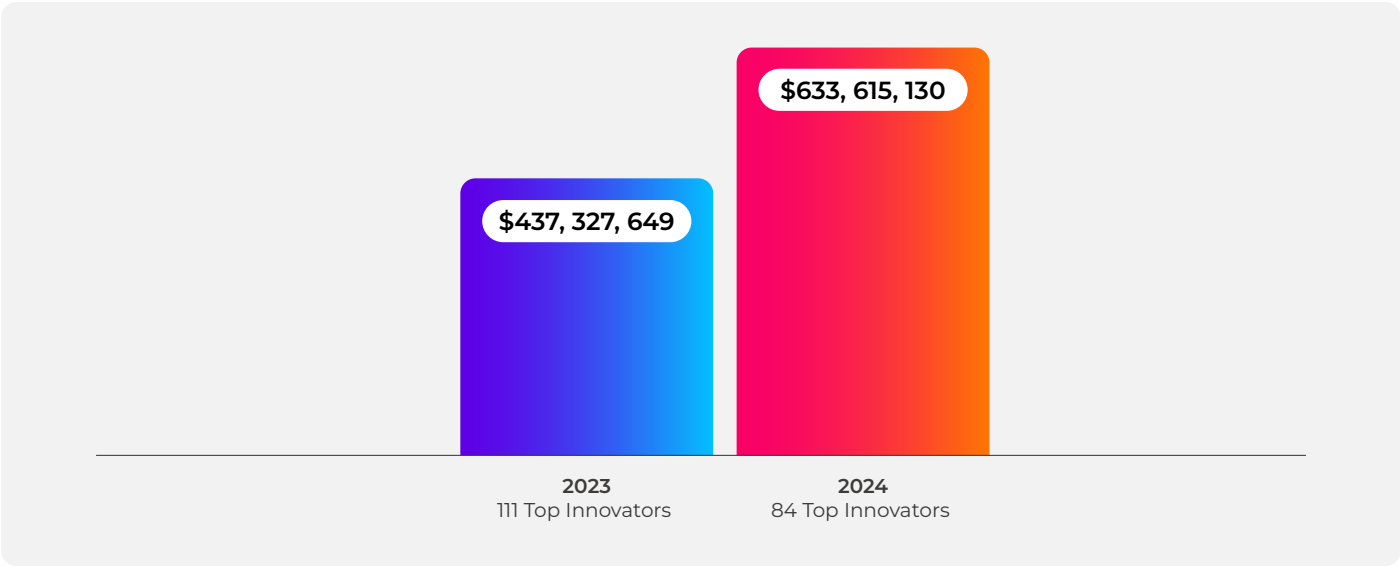


### 1.3 Business growth acceleration

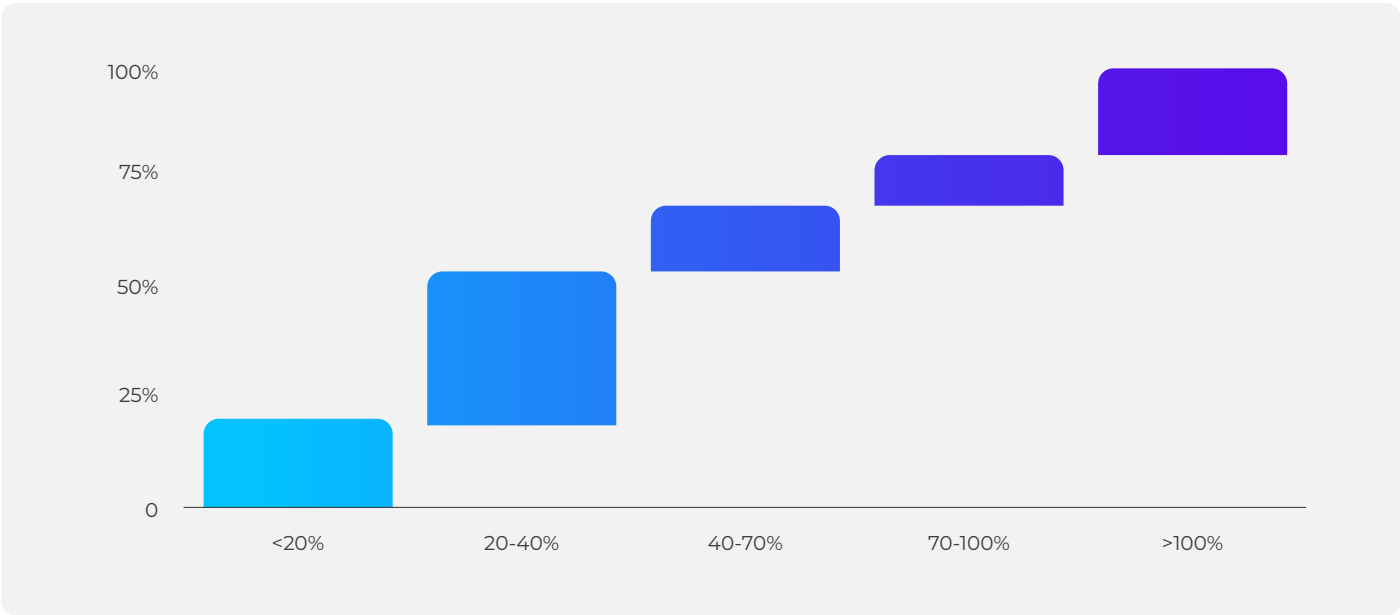
UpLink aims to empower Top Innovators by providing access to global market opportunities and funding, enabling them to amplify their social impact. Through its initiatives, networks and global reach – particularly its collaboration with the Forum's public-private initiatives – UpLink is enabling networking, brand exposure and partnership opportunities, positioning them for success in a competitive landscape.

We are beginning to see the results of this approach: in 2024, the total capital raised by Top Innovators increased by a remarkable 45%, mainly through equity, debt or grants from organizations such as Emerald Technology Ventures, Temasek, Rolex, the US Department of Energy, Breakthrough Energy Catalyst, JetBlue Ventures and others. On a per-innovator basis, the average capital secured rose by \$3.6 million compared to 2023.

**Figure 4** Investment capital raised by Top Innovators, 2023 versus 2024



**Figure 5** Top Innovators' customer growth in 2023-24



Being recognized as a Top Innovator has opened doors for Membrion to prestigious collaborations and partnerships. A prime example was the invitation to participate at AMNC in Dalian, China, which was a step change for us, laying the foundation for enduring relationships that continue to fuel our growth and innovation. Uplink facilitated connections to influential technology leaders, prospective customers and valuable funding partners, supporting our journey towards a sustainable, circular future.

**Thomas Mitchel**  
 Chief Operating Officer, Membrion

This increased access to capital empowers early-stage ventures to strive for sustainability, as evidenced by significant growth in their customer base. Nearly half of the Top Innovators experienced more than 40% growth in their customer count compared to the previous year.

In driving these efforts, they are seeking strategic partnerships with companies in their respective sectors to cultivate collaboration and attract co-investment. A significant share is prioritizing equity investment as their primary funding source, with a particular emphasis on venture capital. Within the equity space, they are targeting a diverse range of investors, including venture capitalists, impact investors, family offices, angel investors and corporate venture capitalists.

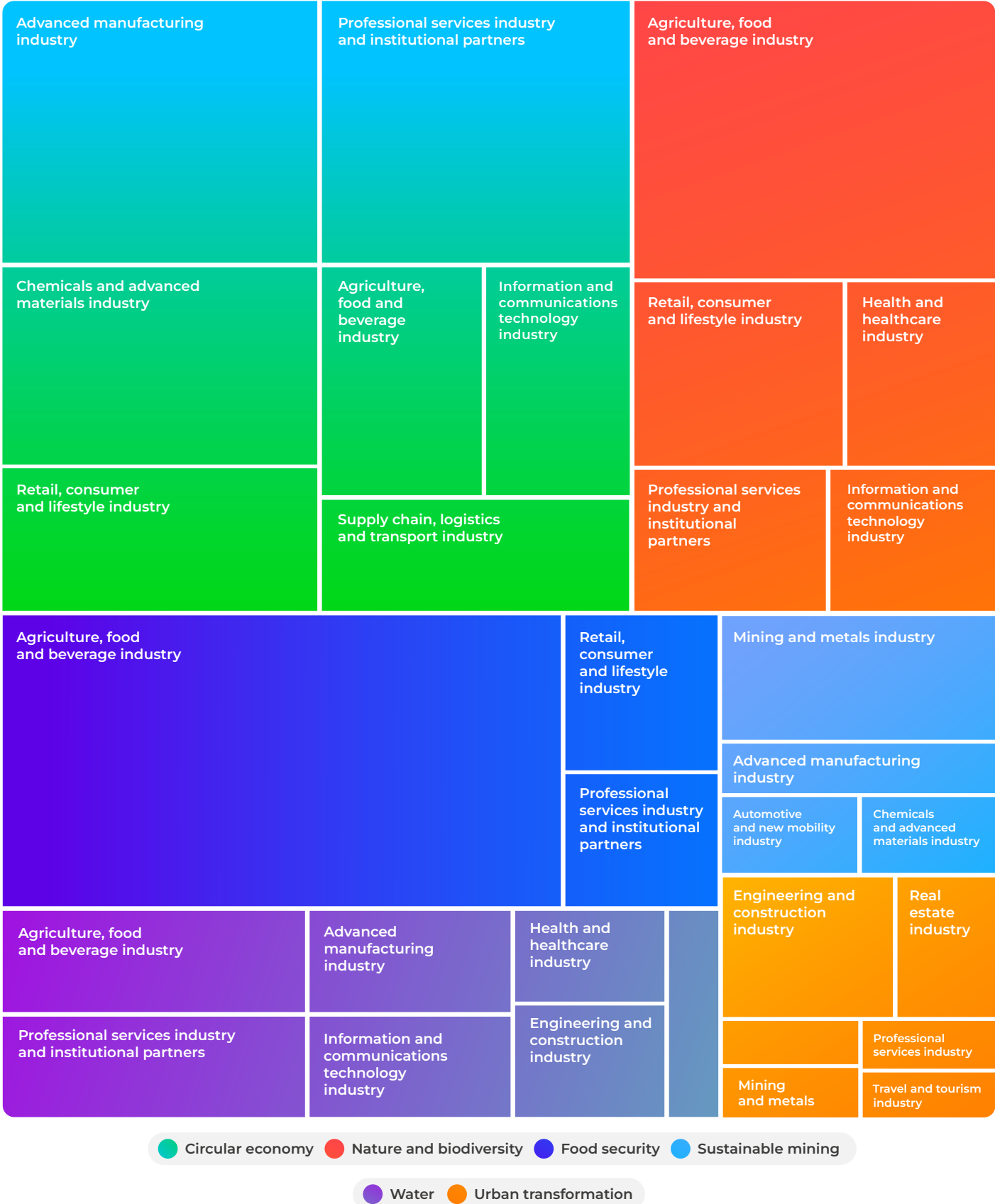
In addition to seeking private investors, a growing number of innovators are pursuing partnerships with government agencies and development organizations to obtain regulatory support and access to public funding, such as grants. These collaborations are viewed as

vital for scaling their solutions and amplifying their impact.<sup>2</sup>

This strategic approach to funding and partnerships aligns closely with their focus areas and sectors, based on their thematic priorities. For instance, urban transformation innovators are exploring partnerships with industries such as engineering and construction, underscoring the critical need for investment in transformative innovations within this sector. On the other hand, new cross-sectoral collaborations are emerging – for example, urban transformation innovators are also looking to connect with the mining and metals industry. Similarly, nature and biodiversity innovators are seeking collaboration with the information and communication technology sector, harnessing technology and AI to address challenges more quickly and sustainably. Additionally, along with food innovators, they are extending their reach into the professional services sector, highlighting the growing fluidity of sectoral boundaries.



**Figure 6** Type of sectors Top Innovators are looking to cooperate with within the next 18 months



**Note:** The sectors identified by Top Innovators in the survey were mapped to World Economic Forum industries. Innovators could specify multiple sectors they aim to target over the next 18 months. The size of each rectangle in the heatmap reflects how frequently an industry was mentioned, categorized by thematic focus.

# 02 Top Innovators' impact

Top Innovators' solutions have boosted economic growth through jobs and income generation while driving significant social and environmental benefits.

## 2.1 Spotlight: Economic impact

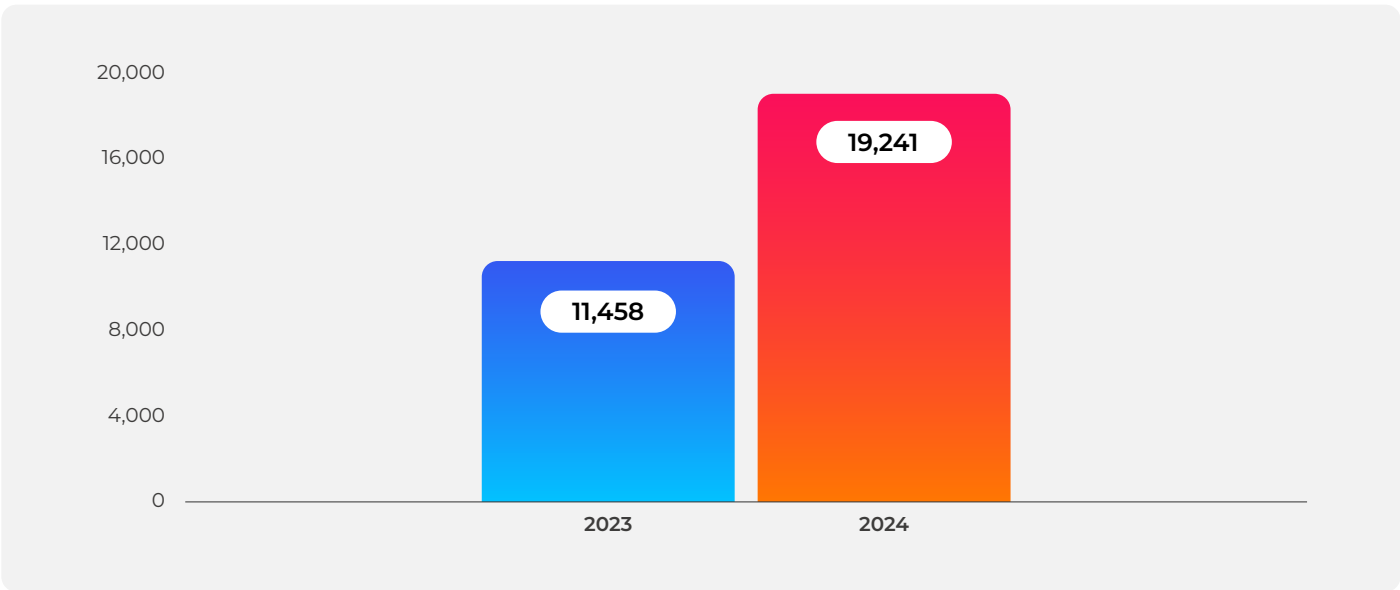
Among the impact metrics shared by Top Innovators, it is unsurprising to see those aligned with the themes and focus areas of the respective challenges. However, there is a second set of metrics – reported with near-equal frequency – that highlights a different value created by them. Of the 108 metrics collected, 27 are market- and jobs-related. The number of jobs created by the deployment of these innovators' solutions, along with the increased income of both direct

and indirect beneficiaries of these solutions, rank among the top five metrics reported, even though UpLink has never launched a challenge specifically targeting these outcomes.

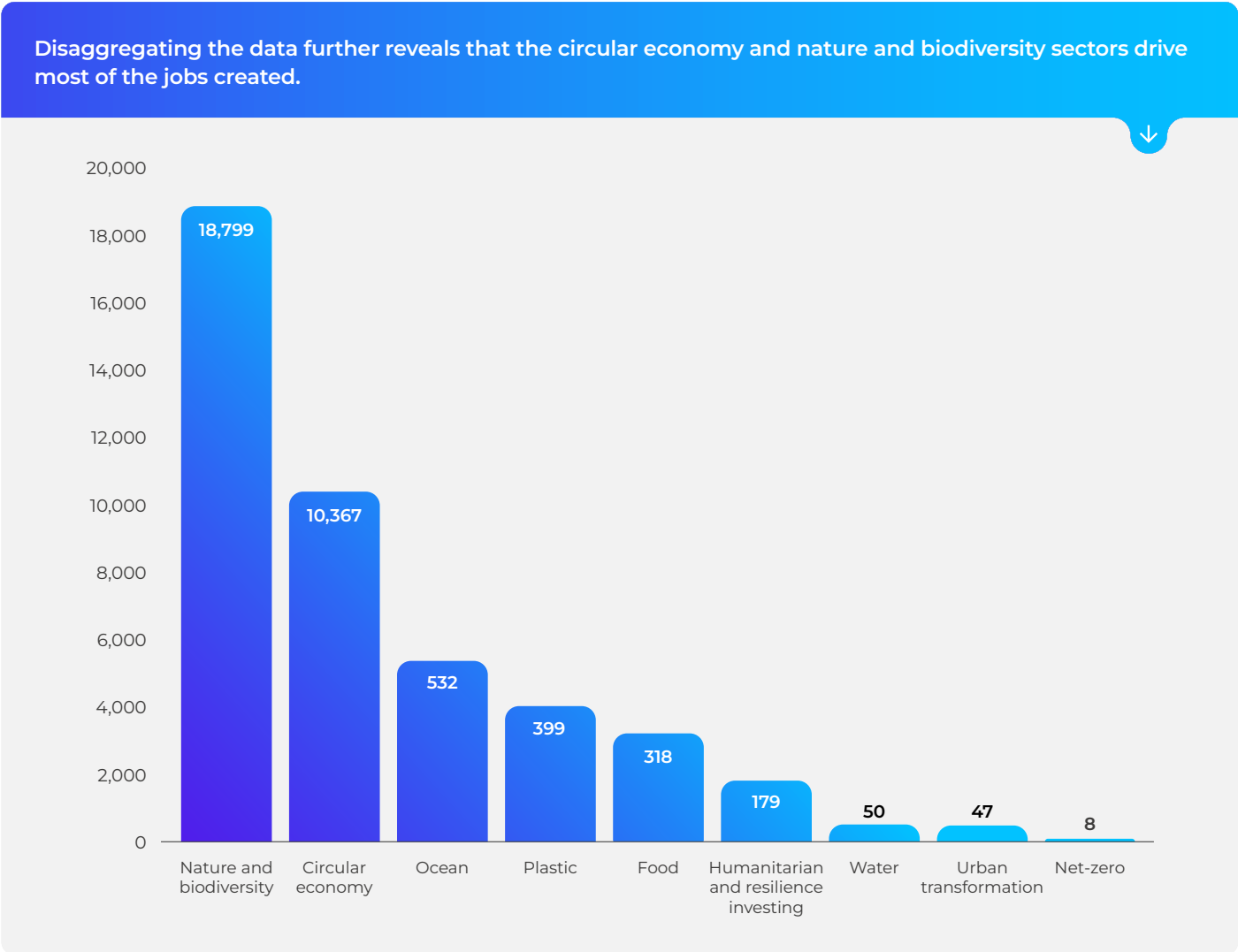
Top Innovators have reported over 19,000 jobs created in the latest reporting year, a 68% increase from the previous year. Those who reported for both years collectively experienced a 47% growth in jobs created.



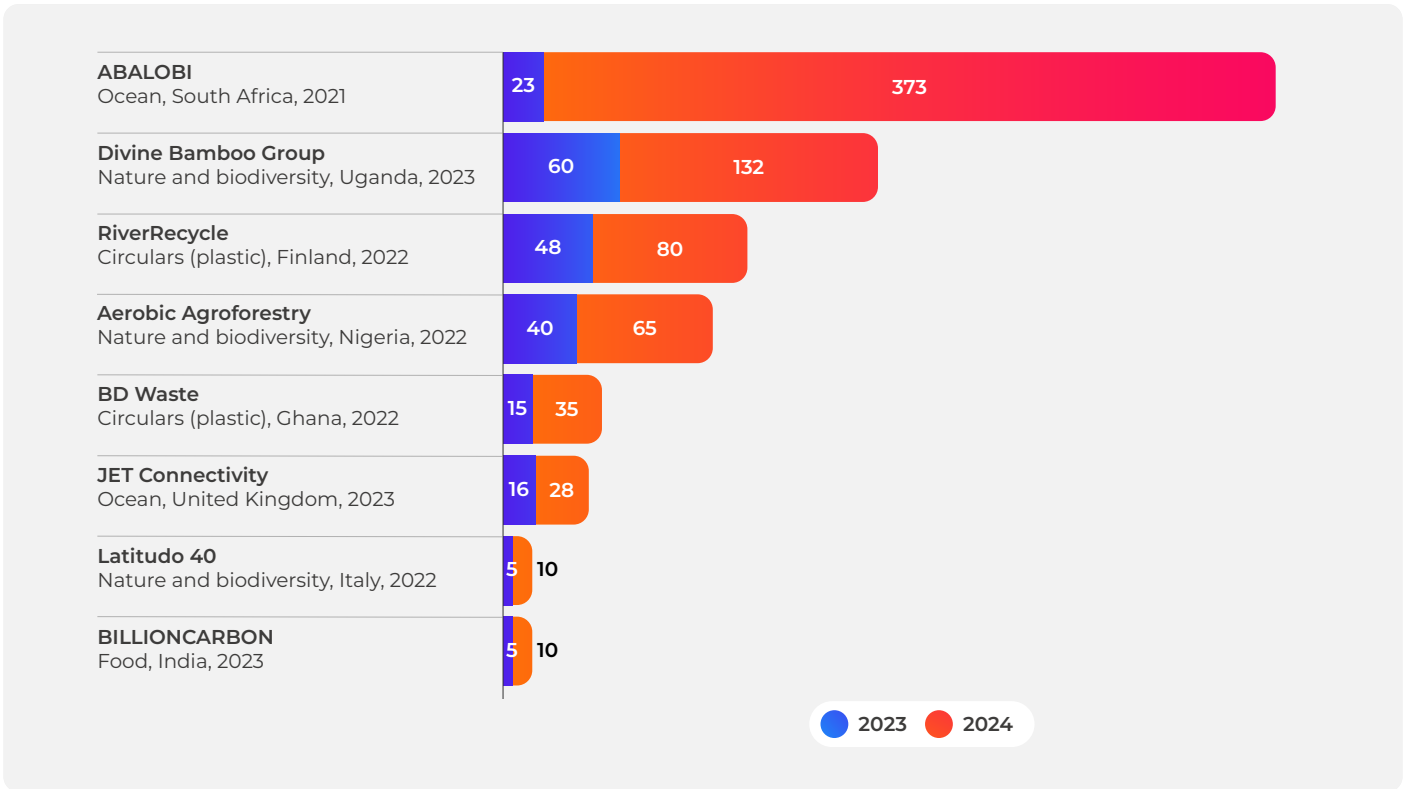
**Figure 7** Number of jobs created by Top Innovators in 2024 compared with 2023



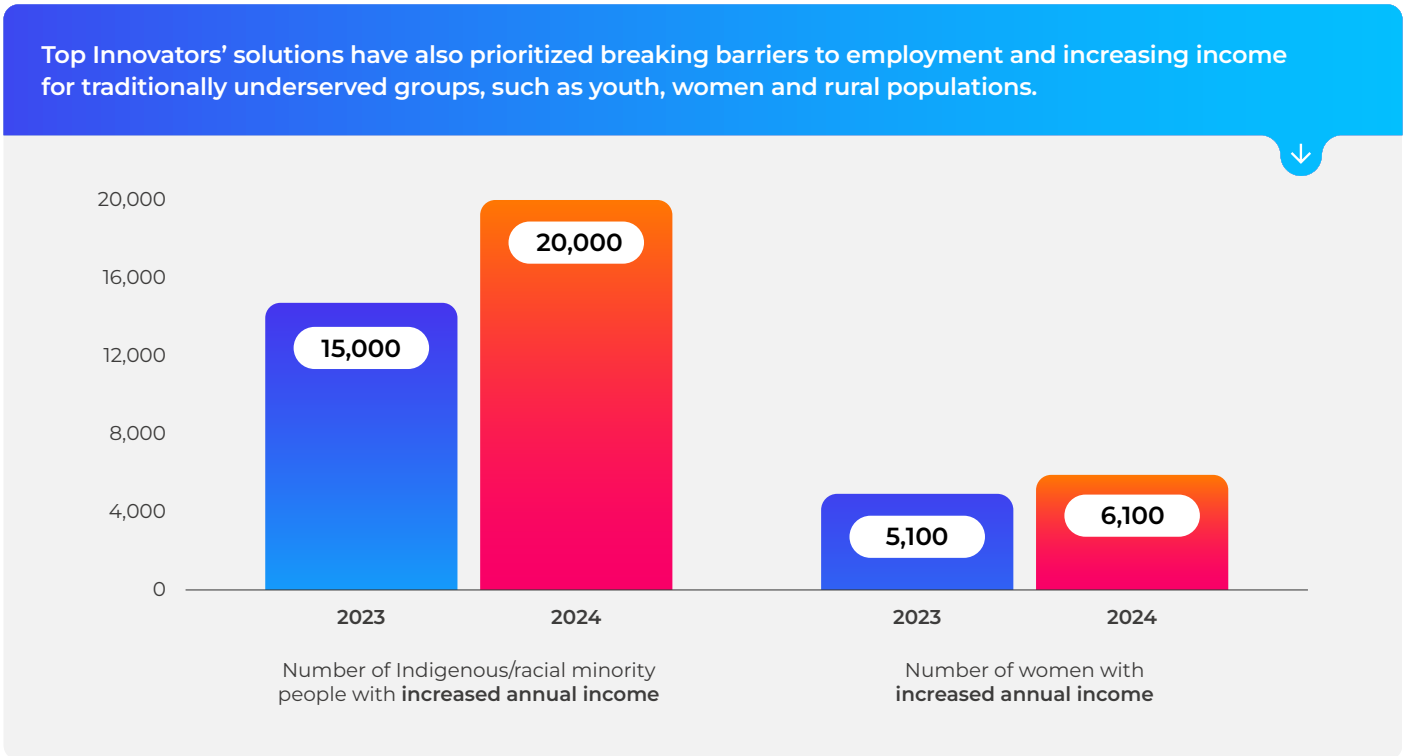
**Figure 8** Total number of jobs created by thematic area in 2023-24



**Figure 9** Number of jobs created by Top Innovators by year



**Figure 10** Increased income of underrepresented groups



These outcomes are particularly meaningful as they illustrate the powerful ripple effects of innovation. UpLink remains committed to not only expanding these opportunities but also

ensuring the long-term quality and sustainability of the jobs created, thereby cultivating impact and resilience.

## 2.2 Thematic impact

### Water

The [Aquapreneur Innovation Initiative](#) is a pioneering collaboration between global conglomerate HCL Group and UpLink, supported by the Forum's Food and Water Initiative and aimed at building a leading water-focused Innovation Ecosystem to accelerate early-stage innovators or "aquapreneurs". The first cohort of aquapreneurs was announced in 2023, while the second cohort, alongside a CHF 1.9 million (Swiss francs) investment from HCL Group, was announced during the Forum's Annual Meeting in Davos in January 2024.

Over these two years, UpLink has focused on helping aquapreneurs attract investment and scale their impact. To date, the first two cohorts have collectively raised \$70 million in funding. The

third Aquapreneur Challenge, launched at the World Water Forum in Bali in May 2024, focuses on establishing new partnerships with various public-sector entities.

Harnessing support from UpLink's Engagement Programme, aquapreneurs have already demonstrated significant impact. For instance, using an anomaly detection system called Autonomous Dynamic Flow Analytics (ADFA), [SHAYP](#) saved an impressive 7 billion litres of water in 2024, 3 billion more than in 2023. The increase in savings is primarily attributed to the addition of 2,273 metering points, and the goal is to save 100 billion litres of water by 2027 by expanding into new geographies.

Between 2023 and 2024, UpLink Top Innovators' solutions have resulted in the following impacts:

**Table 2 Top Innovators' social and environmental impact**

Impact	Top Innovator example
<b>2.5 billion litres</b> of wastewater (including hazardous wastewater) was treated. This is enough to meet the water needs of approximately 25,000 households for a year in a developing country.	<a href="#">Indra Water</a> treated 243% more wastewater in 2024 compared to 2022, scaling up from 350 million litres to 1.2 billion litres per year through its innovative energy efficient solution.
<b>153 million litres</b> of wastewater was reused, which is enough to supply an elementary school of 5,000 students with water for drinking, sanitation and cooking for approximately 4.5 years.	<a href="#">Epic Cleantec</a> nearly doubled the amount of wastewater converted into treated water, increasing from 28 million litres in 2023 to 45 million litres in 2024.
<b>2.7 million</b> people received improved access to and use of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) solutions in both developed and developing countries. Studies show that access to improved water and sanitation is associated with a 24.5% reduction of diarrhoeal disease among children under five. <sup>3</sup>	<a href="#">SmartTerra</a> improved access to WASH solutions for 120,000 people in Pune, India; Depok, Indonesia; and Dumaguete, Philippines in 2024.
<b>7,980</b> people were trained to reduce impact from aquaculture and improve water use efficiency.	<a href="#">NatureDots' solution, AquaNurch Digital Twin</a> , has de-risked fish farmers and supported 4,200 freshwater fish farmers in adopting sustainable fisheries practices and achieving optimum production in 2024, up from 1,095 in 2023.
<b>915</b> people were trained to protect freshwater ecosystems.	In only one year, <a href="#">Naireeta Services</a> has trained 645 individuals, particularly youth and women, on freshwater ecosystem protection.

## Case study 1

### Kilimo



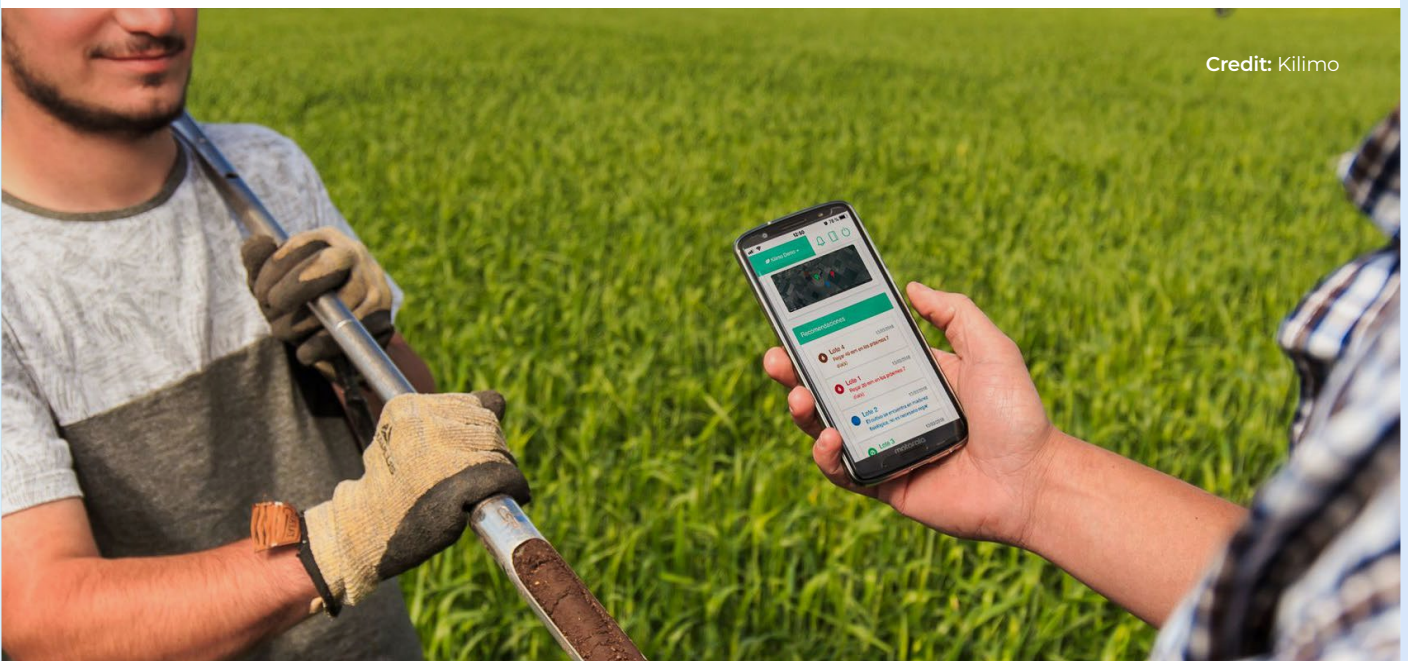
[Kilimo](#) is revolutionizing water conservation in food production with its innovative approach. By establishing a unique business model, the organization connects farmers looking to optimize their irrigation practices with companies committed to achieving water security goals. This enables farmers worldwide to reduce water use by an impressive 30%, addressing the global water crisis.

In 2022, Kilimo captured the attention of venture capital pioneer and UpLink ecosystem partner, Emerald Technology Ventures, after being selected for the inaugural aquapreneur cohort. In June 2023, Emerald led a \$7.5 million investment round, joined by notable investors such as The Yield Lab Latam, Salkantay Ventures, Kamay Ventures and iThink. This funding is a game-changer for Kilimo, enhancing its efforts to expand and solidify its leadership. It supports the company's mission to connect corporations with farmers committed to sustainable water use,

offering solutions that help multinational and regional companies achieve their water stewardship goals.

Kilimo's work has attracted major global players like Microsoft, Intel, Amazon, Google and Coca-Cola, all of which are actively pursuing ambitious water commitments.

With water demand projected to exceed supply by 40% by 2030, Kilimo's mission is increasingly critical. The organization supports over 2,000 farmers across seven Latin American countries and aims to restore 350 million metres cubed (m<sup>3</sup>) of water by 2030. These efforts in Latin America have been significantly bolstered through UpLink's Engagement Programme. By providing access to global partners and increasing visibility, UpLink has enabled Kilimo to amplify its impact, promoting sustainable water use in agriculture and empowering communities to create tangible positive change in the global hydrosphere.



UpLink has been a pivotal partner for Kilimo, opening doors to key opportunities that have fuelled our growth. Being part of Davos and UN Water Week allowed us to amplify our mission and connect with the right stakeholders. Through UpLink, we secured our Series A with Emerald Technology Ventures and gained major customers like Amazon and PepsiCo.

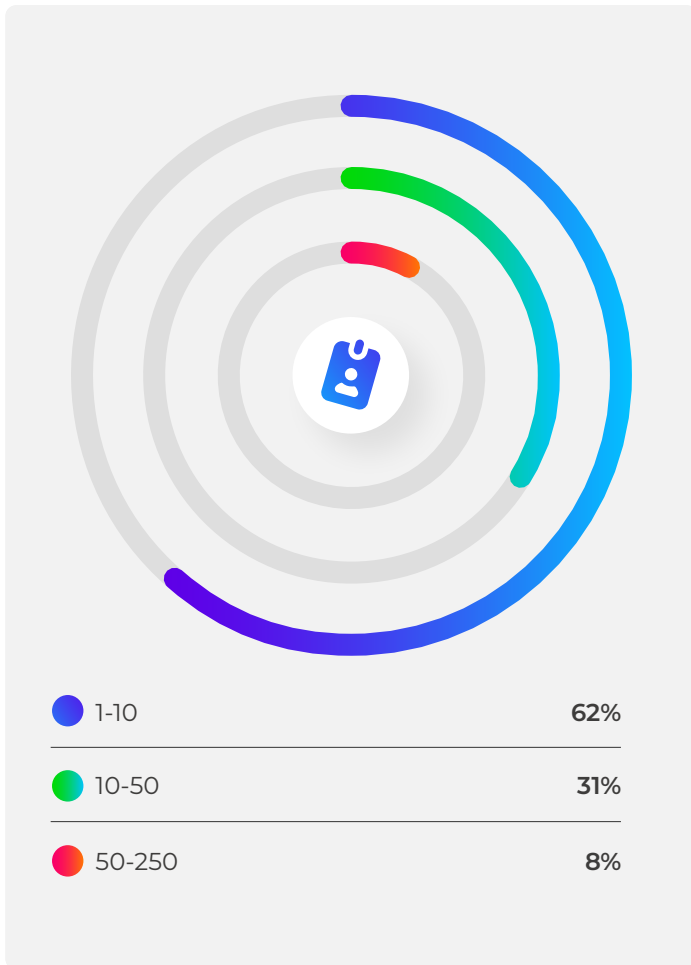
**Jairo Trad**  
Chief Executive Officer, Kilimo

## Urban transformation

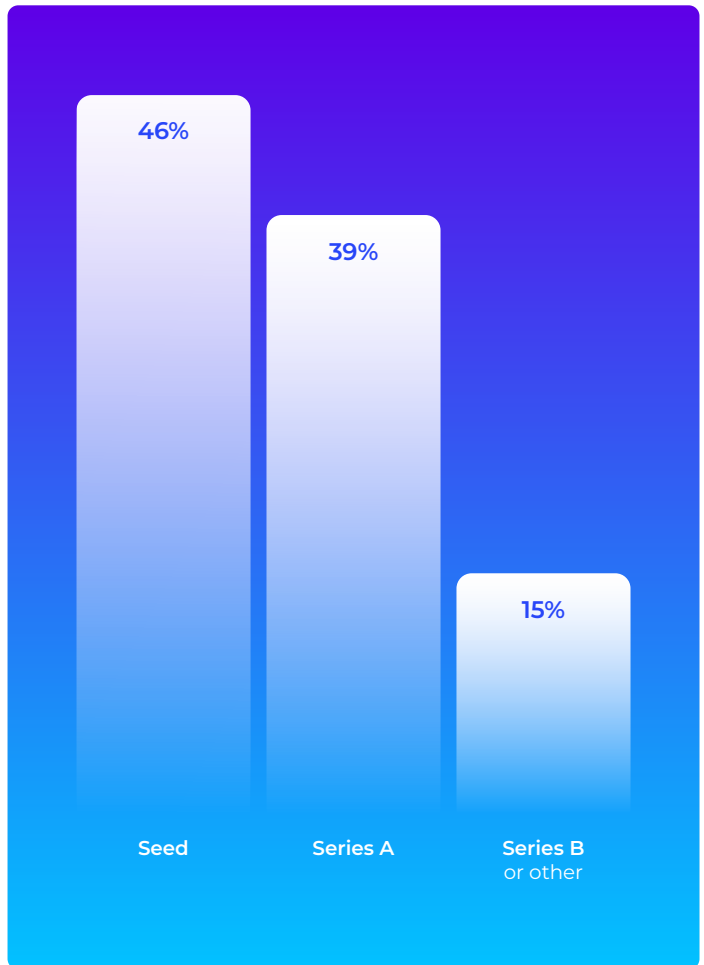
In 2023, UpLink, in collaboration with the Forum’s Centre for Urban Transformation, joined with Deloitte, Salesforce, San Francisco Chamber of Commerce and Citi to pilot a [place-based Innovation Ecosystem](#)<sup>4</sup> through the Yes San Francisco Urban Sustainability Challenge. In total, 14 Top Innovators were

selected to provide solutions for reimagining and transforming the city, focusing on infrastructure and urban green and blue spaces. Most of the Top Innovators are in the early stages of development, with half currently in the pilot phase, employing up to 10 staff members. Since 2023, they have collectively raised more than \$60 million in funding and investment.

**Figure 11** Number of employees



**Figure 12** Stage of development



Although still in its early stages, Top Innovator [Zauben](#) has made a significant impact. In 2023-24, the company sustainably harvested 11,820 tonnes of natural products – equivalent to the annual sugarcane yield from about 150 hectares (ha) – demonstrating their commitment to environmentally friendly production. Building on this momentum, another Top Innovator [Butlr](#) aims to save 18,000 megawatt hours (MWh) in energy in the coming year by optimizing office space use and enabling space-sharing among teams.

Urban Transformation innovators are also enhancing livelihoods and essential services for communities in need. Zauben and [Flower Turbines](#)

created employment opportunities for 31 people, promoting economic empowerment and skill development. Meanwhile, [Washbox Global](#) improved access to WASH solutions for 1,141 individuals in minority groups in 2024, while Zauben provided clean energy access for 1,000 individuals, addressing critical health and hygiene needs.

The second Urban Innovation Challenge in 2025 will focus on renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable transport, resource management, sustainable construction and AI applications for sustainability, aligning with San Francisco’s Climate Action Plan and Roadmap to a Sustainable Future.

## Case study 2

### itselectric

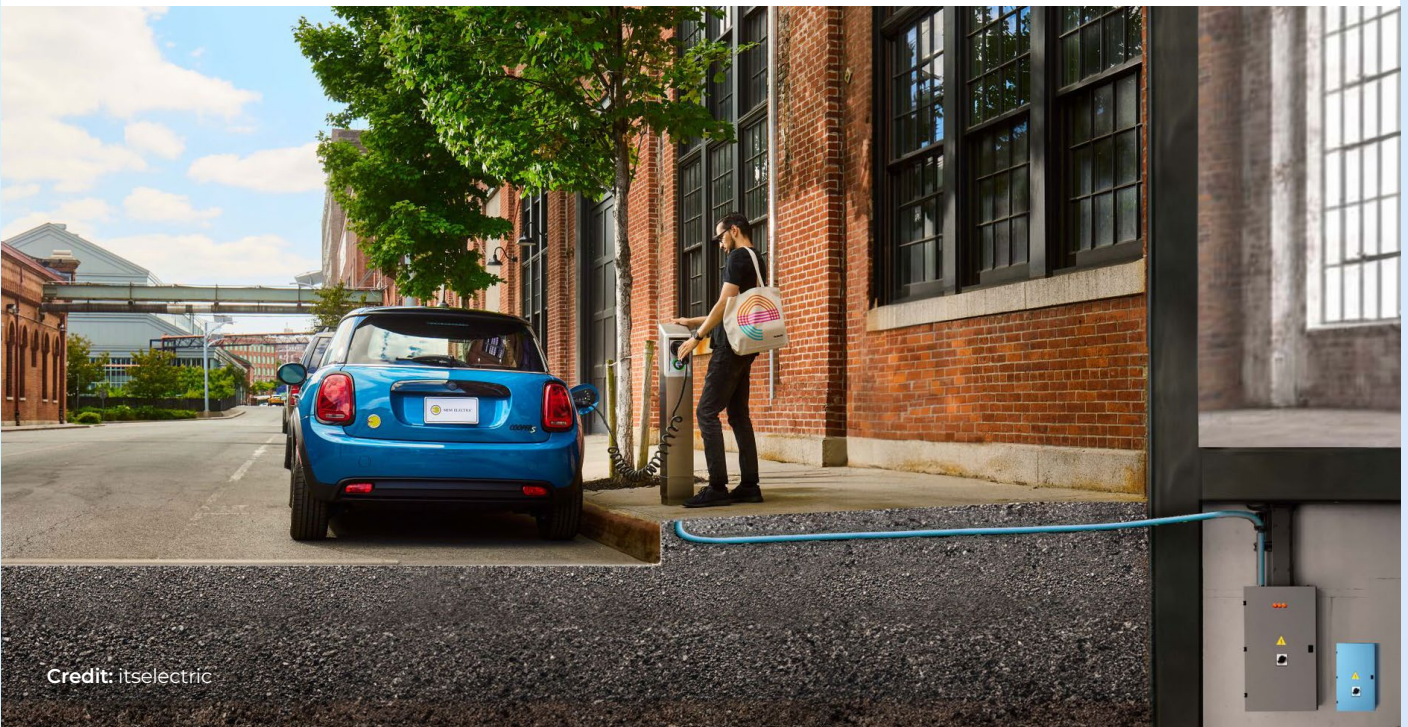


In the push towards greener cities, public electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure is vital for transitioning from gas-powered to electric vehicles. Addressing this need, [itselectric](#) has emerged as a key player, recently securing \$6.5 million in seed funding, bringing their total funding to \$11.8 million and paving the way for significant deployments in eight US cities in 2025, including San Francisco, Boston, Los Angeles and Jersey City. This funding round, led by Failup Ventures and Uber Technologies, reflects strong industry confidence in itselectric's vision.

Founded in 2021, the start-up aims to tackle a significant urban challenge: the lack of scalable and convenient EV charging solutions for city drivers who park on the street. The company has piloted its low-footprint, easily installable charging stations in New York City, partnering with Hyundai and the New York

City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC). This successful pilot showcased the company's capability to forge strong public-private partnerships, which is essential for its expansion plans. Their innovative business model and design has gained recognition in outlets like Forbes and Grist, along with awards such as the 2023 Next Big Thing in Tech by Fast Company and grant funding from the Earthshot Prize.

Currently, itselectric is expanding across the East and West Coasts, including in Boston and San Francisco. They have used their participation in the Forum's 2024 Annual Meeting in Davos to establish valuable connections, emphasizing the importance of shared infrastructure for a sustainable urban future. This engagement has amplified their mission, driving collaboration and support for widespread EV charging adoption.



Credit: itselectric



Our collaboration with UpLink and the Yes San Francisco project exemplifies a true partnership and serves as a model for how organizations can convene climate start-ups to work seamlessly with municipalities and private companies. Together, we're enabling a collective effort to tackle ambitious climate goals with a hyper-local focus, fostering an ecosystem that could very well help save our planet.

**Tiya Gordon**  
Co-Founder, itselectric

## Circular economy

In 2024, UpLink strengthened its collaboration with Accenture and the Resource Systems and Resilience programme, part of the Forum’s Centre for Nature and Climate, to launch dedicated clusters – action-driven pilot projects – to support diverse ecosystems. The first cluster, focused on data centre cooling solutions, convened UpLink ecosystem partner Ecolab, a global leader in water, hygiene and infection prevention, with Top Innovator [bNovate](#)

[Technologies](#) to develop a cutting-edge direct-to-chip cooling solution. In parallel, UpLink and Accenture expanded the [circular Innovation Ecosystem](#) and its impact by announcing the winning cohort of the Traceability for Circularity Challenge in August 2024. This cohort includes 13 pioneering start-ups redefining sustainability by creating transparent, circular value chains that minimize waste and promote ethical practices.

Between 2023 and 2024, UpLink Top Innovators’ solutions have resulted in the following impacts:

**Table 3 Top innovators’ social and environmental impact**

Impact	Top Innovator example
<b>28 million tonnes</b> of waste were tracked and traced through digital platforms. This is equivalent to two years’ worth of waste generated by New York City.	<b>GreenPlat Data Management</b> tracked and traced 12.3 million more tonnes of waste in 2024 than in 2023.
<b>123,000 tonnes</b> of food waste/losses were reduced at the retail, consumer or supply-chain level – enough to provide food for 2.7 million adults for a month.	<b>S4S Technologies</b> reduced 60,000 tonnes of food waste in 2024, a 50% increase compared to 2023.
<b>67,700 tonnes</b> of general and hazardous waste were treated and collected for segregation. This is equivalent to the waste generated by 307,700 individuals in a year.	<b>Eco Panplas</b> recycled 660 tonnes of lubricant-oil-contaminated plastic packaging in 2024, an increase of 110 tonnes from 2023.
<b>17,621</b> waste collectors gained access to markets, empowering them economically and reducing landfill waste, thereby increasing recycling rates. In Jakarta, waste pickers are estimated to reduce waste volume by 30%, saving the municipality on fuel, equipment and labour costs. <sup>5</sup>	<b>Green Mining</b> provided market access to 2,226 waste collectors in 2024, an increase of 310 individuals as compared to 2023.
<b>142,400 tonnes</b> of CO <sub>2</sub> emissions were avoided through clean electricity and heat production, and sustainable agriculture, manufacturing and other processes. This is equivalent to the emissions of 30,220 cars for a year.	<b>Agrotechplus</b> has prevented 212% more CO <sub>2</sub> emissions through sustainable agriculture in 2024 than in 2023, from 1,041 to 3,250 tonnes.
<b>24,600</b> people were educated about waste management.	In 2024 alone, <b>Soapbox South Africa – Captain Fanplastic</b> reached 4,500 primary school teachers through their activities.



### Case study 3

## EnviCore



[EnviCore](#) is at the forefront of the fight against climate change, targeting emissions from Portland cement, a major contributor to industrial pollution. Their innovative approach involves repurposing waste minerals from mining operations as supplementary cementitious material, promoting a circular economy and significantly reducing emissions. By processing these minerals at much lower temperatures than with conventional methods, EnviCore's solution reduces CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by over 90% and can replace up to 20% of cement in concrete mixes. This addresses waste management challenges for mining companies and assists construction firms in achieving their net-zero goals.

In April 2024, UpLink invited EnviCore to participate in the Forum's Special Meeting on Global Collaboration, Growth and Energy for Development

in Saudi Arabia, where they connected with a leading cement group. This connection led to a partnership granting EnviCore free access to facilities for piloting their technology. The collaboration allowed EnviCore to significantly scale up production without heavy investment in new plants. The financial relief from this partnership, valued at around \$1 million per month, has greatly boosted EnviCore's growth and commercialization efforts.

Shahrukh Shamim, Chief Executive Officer of EnviCore, credits UpLink for facilitating this crucial connection, which has been instrumental in accelerating their progress. He believes that participating in UpLink events and engaging with its community has opened doors to influential industry players, helping to drive their mission forward.



The biggest impact that we can have is by talking to the right individuals. UpLink made that possible by introducing me directly to the CEO of Siam Cement Group. And there are not a lot of platforms out there that can actually provide this.

**Shahrukh Shamim**  
Chief Executive Officer and Co-founder, EnviCore



## Food

Funded by the Ministry of Economy and Planning, UpLink, alongside the Forum's Food and Water Initiative and in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, has led two challenges on innovative solutions to achieve [food security](#) and climate-smart agricultural approaches and improve lives. In 2024, this

focused on engaging food innovators in the Forum's Food Innovators Network national hubs and facilitating connections with investors to unlock funding opportunities. Earlier this year, Top Innovator [Vivent Biosignals](#) secured the coveted [Salesforce Dreampitch](#) victory, earning well-deserved funding for their technology.

Between 2023 and 2024, UpLink Top Innovators' solutions have resulted in the following impacts:

**Table 4** Top innovators' social and environmental impact

Impact	Top Innovator example
<b>493,250</b> smallholder farmers and fishers have increased annual income.	In 2024, <a href="#">UpTrade</a> boosted the income of 97,230 farmers by using livestock as currency and tracking every transaction to ensure transparency and fairness.
<b>9,564</b> farmers have increased access to qualitative agricultural inputs. Studies show that access to agricultural quality inputs can raise farmers' income by 20-30%. <sup>6</sup>	<a href="#">Dvara E-Registry</a> increased access to quality agricultural inputs for more than 5,000 farmers in 2024, and for 1,400 farmers in 2023.
<b>20,012</b> people were trained in producing food through sustainable practices.	<a href="#">Amini Corp</a> , in collaboration with local partners, will provide training to 10,000 individuals in 2024 and early 2025, with plans to significantly expand this initiative by the end of 2025.

## Case study 4 Desert Control



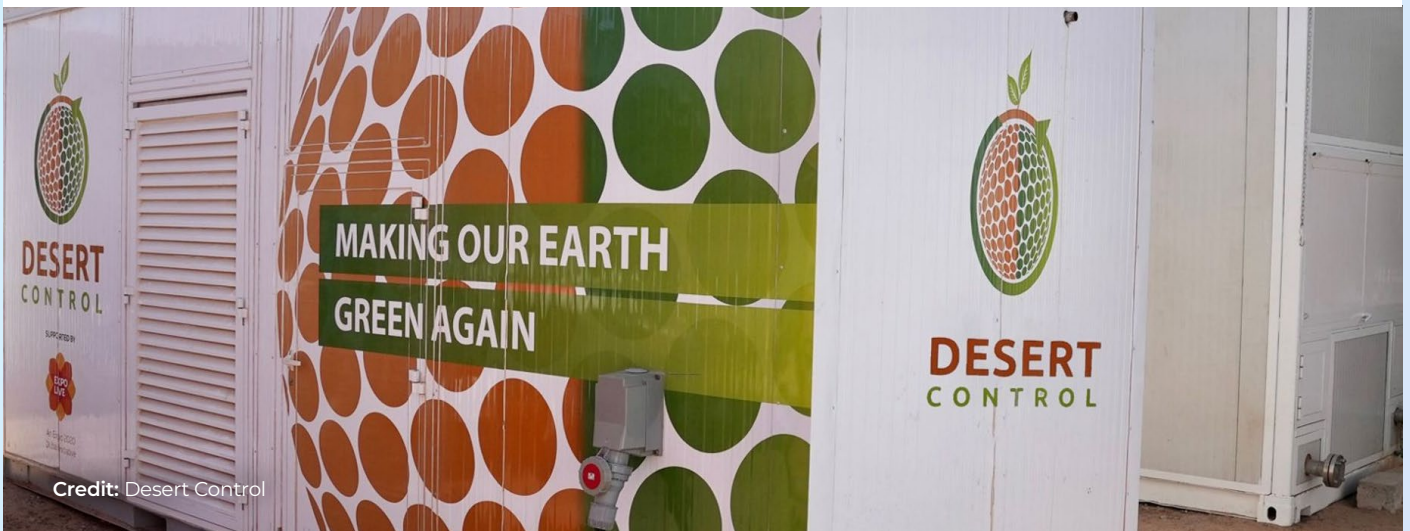
[Desert Control](#) is revolutionizing the fight against desertification and water scarcity with their groundbreaking liquid natural clay (LNC) technology, which enhances soil health, conserving water and revitalizing ecosystems.

Through UpLink's Engagement Programme, Chief Executive Officer Ole Kristian Sivertsen represented the company at the Forum's Annual Meeting of the New Champions 2023 (AMNC23) in Tianjin, China. During a live-streamed issue briefing titled "Soil Matters", Sivertsen presented the LNC technology, gaining global visibility and credibility. Reflecting on the experience, he stated, "UpLink's support has been instrumental in Desert Control's journey, offering unmatched visibility, credibility and connections that have propelled our innovation forward. UpLink remains dedicated to accelerating our success, from forging partnerships to unlocking opportunities for high-impact projects."

Building on this momentum, the company achieved remarkable financial and operational milestones in 2024. They more than doubled their LNC deployment and revenue, closing the year's final

quarter with a 114% increase in their cash balance compared to 2023. Operating without interest-bearing debt, their approach reflects their commitment to long-term sustainability.

Desert Control's innovative solutions are yielding impressive results globally. In California, landscaping pilots achieved over 25% irrigation savings, with some clients reporting reductions exceeding 50%. In Arizona, an LNC-treated date farm nearly doubled its yield, highlighting the technology's potential for high-value crops. These successes culminated in Desert Control's first full-scale golf course deployment at Berkeley Country Club under an outcome-based business model, yielding monthly recurring revenue and a total contract value with the potential to exceed \$500,000. Desert Control also secured its first licensing royalties in the Middle East and signed a contract for 1.8 million litres of LNC for a United Arab Emirates real estate project, laying the foundation for a scalable, royalty-based revenue model. Recently, the company joined the United Nations World Food Programme's Innovation Accelerator SPRINT Programme to pilot its technology in Iraq.



UpLink's support has been instrumental in Desert Control's journey, offering unmatched visibility, credibility and connections that have propelled our innovation forward. UpLink remains dedicated to accelerating our success, from forging partnerships to unlocking opportunities for high-impact projects.

**Ole Kristian Sivertsen**  
Chief Executive Officer, Desert Control

## Nature-based solutions

Our [nature and biodiversity](#) and [ocean](#) Innovation Ecosystems, the largest collaborative network cultivated by UpLink alongside the Forum's It.org and Friends of Ocean Action initiatives, bring together entrepreneurs with nature-based solutions. These ecosystems focus on tackling critical environmental challenges such as biodiversity loss, climate change and marine ecosystem degradation.

In 2024, UpLink announced the first cohort of Top Innovators from China at the Forum's Annual

Meeting of New Champions, highlighting four leaders from a total of 17 selected through the Mercuria-funded Biodiversity Challenge. Later in 2024, The Nature Innovation event, held as part of the Economies for Biodiversity Day at the United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP16) in Colombia, further reinforced UpLink's efforts to support the global commitment to protecting and restoring nature.

Between 2023 and 2024, UpLink Top Innovators' solutions have resulted in the following impacts:

**Table 5 Top Innovators' social and environmental impact**

Impact	Top Innovator example
<b>140 million ha</b> of aquatic or terrestrial area were protected or actively managed for protection. This area is equivalent to approximately one-fifth of the Amazon Rainforest.	Over 2023-24, <b>Origens Brasil</b> supported the protection of 61 million ha in the Brazilian Amazon, carried out by indigenous people and communities.
<b>17 million ha</b> of aquatic or terrestrial area were managed for restoration, which is equivalent to restoring twice the size of Poland's total forested land (around 9 million ha).	In 2024, using their satellite imagery, <b>Umgrauemeio</b> managed 6.7 million ha of natural reserves, forests and restoration areas.
<b>6.8 million tonnes</b> of CO <sub>2</sub> equivalent (CO <sub>2</sub> e) were removed or sold through regulated or voluntary carbon markets. Forestation initiatives estimate that 310 million mature trees growing over a year would be needed to capture this amount of CO <sub>2</sub> .	In 2024, <b>Taking Root</b> collected data through their mobile application across 15,000 ha being restored. This effort is generating 4.3 million tonnes of carbon removals through Plan-Vivo-approved methodologies.
<b>181,685 farmers</b> received access to agricultural training. Studies have shown that training programmes can boost crop yields by 25-30%. <sup>7</sup>	By 2024, <b>Boomitra</b> onboarded and trained 88,136 farmers, ranchers and growers whose farms have actively sequestered carbon.
<b>3,448 tonnes</b> of ocean-based seaweed and bivalves were produced or sold. Assuming nitrogen content of 2%, <sup>8</sup> this amount would assimilate 69 tonnes of nitrogen from seawater, helping combat issues like eutrophication and dead zones.	<b>Coast 4C</b> sold 2,934 tonnes of fresh seaweed in 2024, six times more than in 2023.
<b>25,473 people</b> received support to adapt to climate change.	<b>Healthy Seaweed</b> supported 470 people around 2023-24 through their climate adaptation workshops and trainings.

Credit: Land Life



## Case study 5

### Land Life



Globally, 2 billion ha of land are degraded, making restoration a key focus for Top Innovator [Land Life](#). This 10-year-old company embarked on a transformative journey through UpLink's 2022 Trillion Trees Challenge, gaining valuable insights, networking opportunities and expert guidance. Between 2023 and 2024, they received three grants totalling \$695,000<sup>9</sup> in co-financing and staff support from the EU Horizon 2020 and LIFE Terra programmes. These funds are aimed at advancing ecosystem restoration solutions that enhance forest biodiversity and services while developing market-based instruments to incentivize forest owners to provide valuable forest ecosystem services.

Land Life's impact has been profound. Their advanced carbon capture projection model, FastTrack, has improved carbon sequestration and enhanced the accuracy of estimates and forecasts. In just one year, Land Life sequestered 561,365 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>,

equivalent to the annual emissions of about 120,000 passenger vehicles. A peer-reviewed study published in *Forests* validated FastTrack's forecasting model through an Australian experiment, demonstrating 10 times the accuracy of the national model. In 2024, Land Life plans to restore 2,900 ha of degraded land, further supporting biodiversity and resilience.

In partnership with Continental Engineering Services (CES), Land Life has also launched the Tree Seeding Robot, designed to tackle tough terrains, enhance biodiversity and simplify logistics.

As part of UpLink's Engagement Programme, Land Life was invited to the Forum's 2024 Annual Meeting in Davos and other networking events, accelerating their progress in addressing the reforestation crisis. The company has consistently highlighted UpLink's role in increasing their visibility, enhancing recognition and connecting them with investors.



Participating in Davos was incredibly exciting, but also incredibly productive for Land Life. It put us on a global stage, put us in the room with leading financial institutions looking to make their first investments into nature. Five months after Davos, we closed \$20 million in project financing to restore over 3000 ha of nature.

**Rebekah Braswell**  
Chief Executive Officer, Land Life

## Case study 6

### Distant Imagery



[Distant Imagery](#), a United Arab Emirates-based start-up, is redefining environmental restoration with cutting-edge drone technology and community-driven solutions. Since its inception, the company has grown exponentially, increasing the number of seeds planted by drones from just 2,000 in 2020 to an impressive 5.5 million in 2024. Concurrently, project-based investments surged from \$150,000 to \$2.8 million over the same period.

Jane Glavan, Co-Founder of Distant Imagery, actively participated in the UpLink Engagement Programme, where she had the opportunity to build valuable connections with community-based government leaders from Tonga and Seychelles. These collaborations have been pivotal in accelerating the company's plans for 2025-26, which include four large-scale community restoration projects

in Brazil, Tonga, Kenya and Indonesia, addressing specific ecological and community needs in each region. Jane reflects, "UpLink helped us connect with other innovators and experts, such as Brian Takeda (Founder of another Top Innovator, Urchinomics), who supported us in developing our investment data room and is now joining our board."

Distant Imagery's impact has garnered significant recognition. In 2024, the start-up entered the Hatch Blue Innovation Studio and the C3 Companies for Change Accelerator and received the prestigious PwC Net Zero Future50 award. Partnerships with major clients such as ADNOC, Mubadala Energy and Engie have further validated their model, supporting projects like the deployment of 2.5 million mangrove seeds and engaging over 4,000 volunteers in hands-on restoration activities.



Credit: Distant Imagery



UpLink has been instrumental to our growth, providing a platform to share knowledge and exchange best practices with peers in the environmental tech space. The visibility we gained in Davos, Oceans G50 and the Villars Summit has elevated our reputation, helping us build brand recognition and attract partnerships. It's given our work the credibility and respect needed to thrive in this space.

**Jane Glavan**  
Co-Founder, Distant Imagery

## Sustainable mining: a new thematic Innovation Ecosystem

The mining sector has been a cornerstone of human progress, supplying essential materials for infrastructure, energy and technology. However, the increasing population, growing reliance on technology and transition towards renewable energy are continuously driving up

the demand for minerals and metals. Meeting this demand sustainably requires approaches that are energy-efficient, economically viable and socially and environmentally responsible. Accelerating innovation in [sustainable mining](#) is vital to ensure a steady mineral supply for the energy transition, decarbonize mining operations and improve the sector's socio-environmental performance.

**Figure 13** Estimated demand based on net-zero emissions scenario

**80%**

Increase in the combined market value of key energy transition minerals by 2030

**40** million tonnes

Estimated demand for refined copper by 2050, an increase of 54% compared to 2023

**3** times

Increase in critical minerals demand for clean energy technologies in 2030

**10** times

Growth in Lithium demand by 2050 due to its role in batteries and electric vehicles

Source: International Energy Agency. (2024). Global Critical Minerals Outlook 2024.



One of the challenges start-ups face in the industry is achieving adoption and scaling of disruptive innovations within larger companies.

**Ricardo Sprocati**  
Co-Founder, Ekion



The future of mining should focus on disruptive technologies that unlock new, sustainable mineral sources such as seawater and brines, low-grade ores and tailings to enable faster, cheaper and decarbonized production.

**Howard Yuh**  
Co-Founder, Tidal Metals

UpLink, Prospect Innovation<sup>10</sup> and the Mining and Metals Industry Community of the World Economic Forum<sup>11</sup> have come together to drive sustainable innovation in the mining and metals sector.<sup>12</sup>

The initiative seeks to drive groundbreaking technological innovations in the mining and metals industry and related industries that could significantly impact the entire mining life cycle – for instance, by promoting exploration of new deposits and processing and refining materials for end use. This will be achieved by accelerating the growth of innovative ventures, cultivating collaboration across industries – spanning

mining, clean energy and advanced materials – and creating an ecosystem where solutions can be adapted and scaled beyond the mining sector, amplifying global impact.

The collaboration prioritizes the identification of innovative technologies within the mining and metals industry, facilitating the growth of start-ups through strategic investments and reinforcing the industry's role in achieving global decarbonization and energy transition goals sustainably and responsibly. By deploying these solutions at scale, this partnership aims to create a significant and lasting impact on the industry.

# Looking ahead

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Looking ahead, UpLink is focused on strengthening multi-year projects by deepening engagement with partners and ecosystem members. Harnessing their expertise and support, the goal is to elevate key thematic areas in global dialogue on innovation and sustainability. UpLink is also excited to expand its impact in new thematic areas, including sustainable mining, longevity, carbon capture and use, and quantum technology for good.

UpLink will continue to prioritize the growth of its innovator community by tailoring its Engagement Programme and offerings. Combining the insights from this impact reporting cycle, learnings about Top Innovators' evolving business needs and growth aspirations, as well as the market landscape, UpLink will

ensure that innovators can access the right resources, guidance and connections to thrive.

Finally, UpLink remains committed to improving its impact measurement approach by refining primary data collection, developing a standardized impact measurement method and enhancing its model with additional metrics aligned with Top Innovator solutions.

Gratitude is extended to all partners, including funding and ecosystem partners and the various World Economic Forum initiatives that collaborate with UpLink. Together, this collaboration will continue to bridge the gap between vision and impact, accelerating market-changing innovations and creating a future that is not just sustainable but thriving.



# Appendices

## A1 Impact management and measurement framework

UpLink's Impact Measurement and Management Framework harnesses a robust, data-driven approach that combines quantitative metrics with qualitative insights, ensuring a comprehensive evaluation of impact. The framework focuses on three core pillars: assessing the business needs of Top Innovators, measuring their business and financial growth, and evaluating social and environmental impact achieved through the deployment of their innovative solutions.

UpLink uses quantitative data to assess the business needs and financial growth of Top Innovators, applying methods such as multiple-choice questions, Likert scales, ratings and numeric inputs to evaluate aspects like business expansion, networking effectiveness and the impact of UpLink support on venture growth. Meanwhile, the quantitative section is aimed at validating quantitative findings and

providing additional context on innovators' social and community impact.

In assessing the social and environmental impact, UpLink has integrated and customized over 110 impact metrics from the Global Impact Indicators Library, aligning with respected industry frameworks such as the UN SDGs and the Global Impact Investing Network (GIIN)'s IRIS+ methodology for consistent and comparable measurement. The framework is continually enriched with new metrics reflecting the themes and needs of the innovator community.

Compared to last year, UpLink has streamlined its approach by consolidating two surveys into one, developing a focused set of questions that assess the business and financial growth of Top Innovators. In addition, UpLink has implemented an automated analytical process to ensure real-time data updates and accuracy checks.





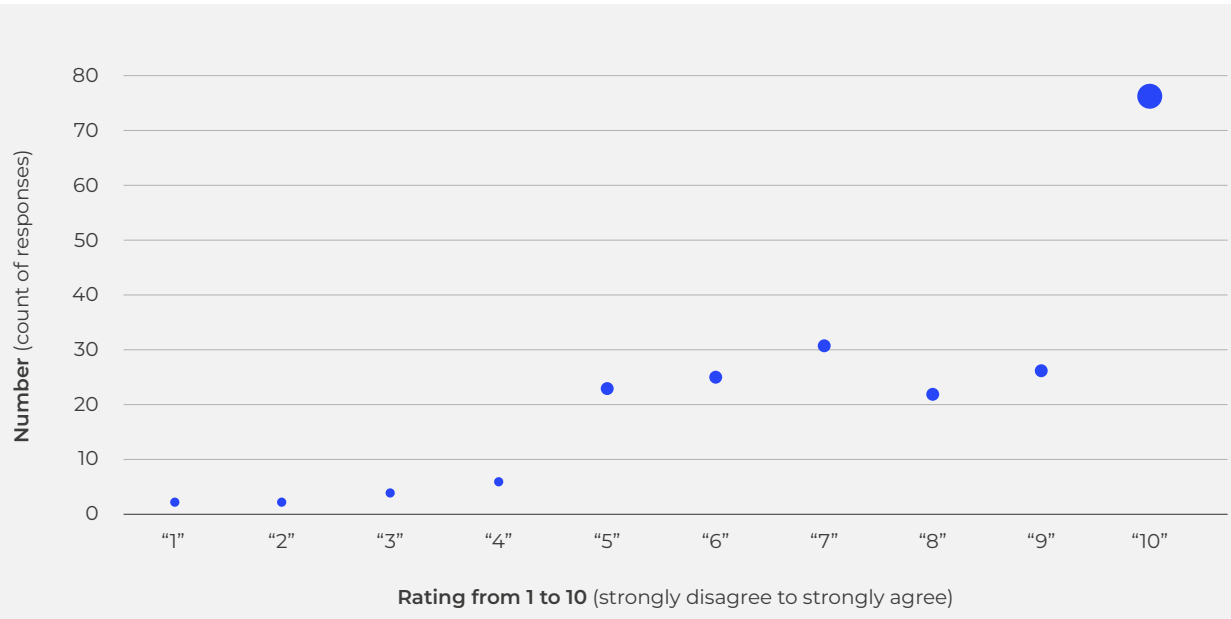
A2

## UpLink’s role in facilitating connections with key stakeholders

An average of 7.9 out of 10 Top Innovators agree that their engagement with UpLink and the World Economic Forum has facilitated connections with essential stakeholders. On a related note, 71.5% of Top Innovators agree,

at a level 7 or higher, that their engagement with UpLink has enabled them to connect with new or prospective key stakeholders essential to their venture’s growth.

**Figure 14** Evaluation of UpLink by Top Innovators

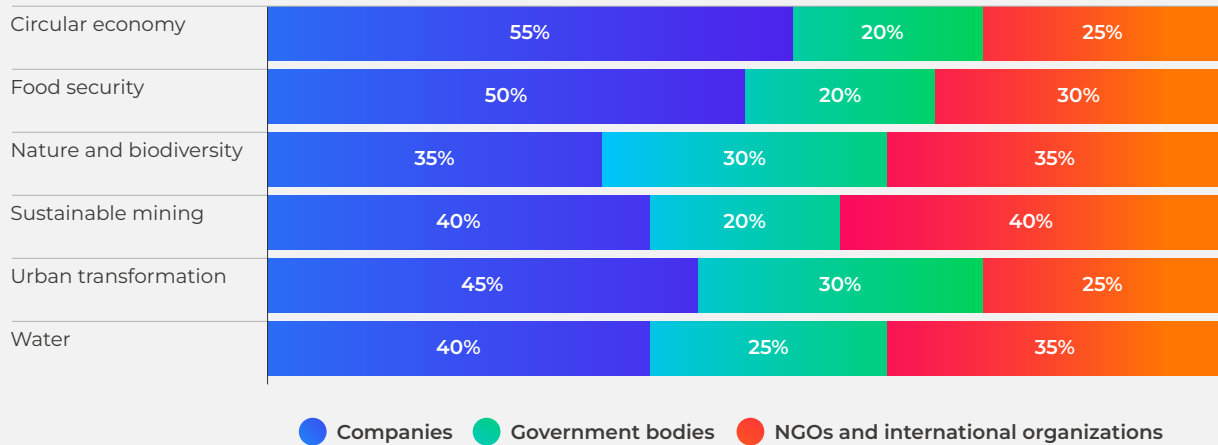


**Note:** Results are based on a Likert-scale question on statement agreement, from 1 to 10, with 1 = strongly disagree and 10 = strongly agree. Bubble sizes show the number of people per each number rating.

## A3 Top Innovators' growth plans in the next 18 months

**Figure 15 Stakeholder connections**

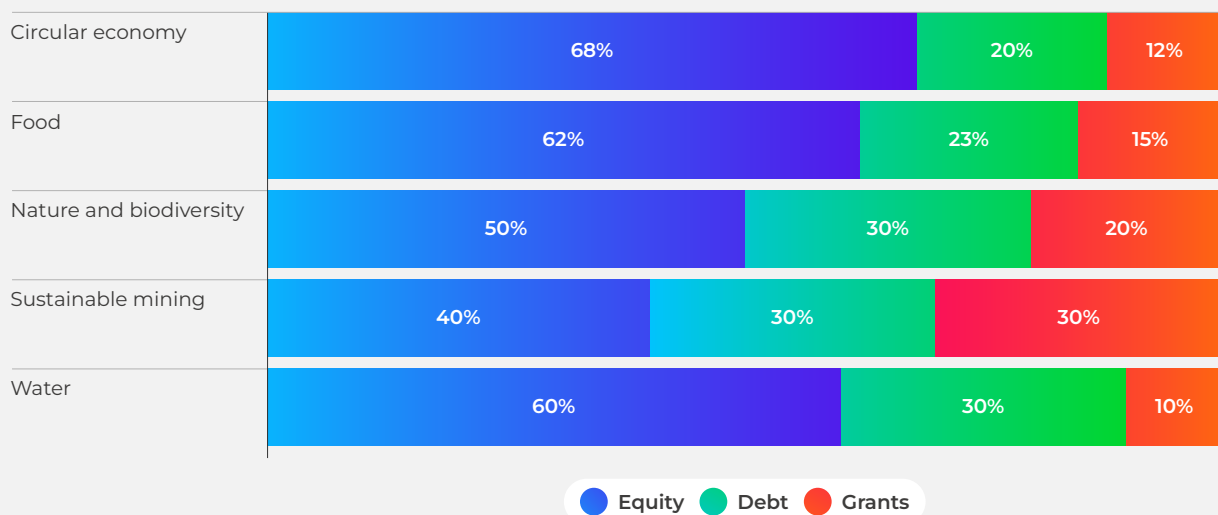
Stakeholders that Top Innovators are looking forward to connecting with in the next 18 months



**Note:** Top Innovators could specify more than one stakeholder with which they want to cooperate in the next 18 months.

**Figure 16 Funding**

Type of funding Top Innovators are looking forward to securing in the next 18 months



**Note:** Top Innovators could specify more than one type of funding they seek to secure in the next 18 months.

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### Accenture

Circular economy



### Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Quantum computing



### Deloitte

Urban transformation



### HCL Group

Water



### IKEA

Humanitarian impact and resilience



### Manulife

Longevity and forest economy



### Mercuria

Nature and biodiversity



### Ministry of Economy and Planning, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Circular carbon economy, ocean and food



### Prospect Innovation

Sustainable mining



### Salesforce

Net-zero and early-stage Investor Network

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# Endnotes

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