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Last fall, I had the opportunity to participate in the inaugural Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi, Kenya, where world leaders discussed the role of sustainability investment, technology, and innovation in Africa. If there was one central theme that emerged from that week, it was that innovation abounds and there is a strong desire among the people of Africa to address the climate crisis, but they also need strong partners to help make African-led solutions a reality. I left Nairobi with optimism and a sense of possibility about the role a company like Microsoft can play in advancing this important work, including the role AI can play as an accelerant for these solutions.

Today, we are turning these possibilities into reality in several ways, whether that is expanding the AI for Good Lab to the continent or investing in innovative solutions through our Climate Innovation Fund.

Just this spring, together with G42, we [announced](#) a comprehensive package of digital investments in Kenya, including working with local partners to build a state-of-the-art datacenter campus in Olkaria, Kenya. The datacenter is designed to run entirely on renewable geothermal energy and use state-of-the-art water conservation technology. It serves as a strong example of the power of collaboration paired with a commitment to climate action.

Leveraging AI to accelerate sustainability solutions in Africa

Microsoft firmly believes that AI has tremendous potential to accelerate solutions to the various challenges societies are facing, including the climate crisis. My colleague Juan Lavista Ferres, CVP, Chief Data Scientist and head of our AI for Good Lab, has been leading the charge to unlock AI innovation opportunities with a strong focus on climate solutions across the continent in several ways:

Expansion of AI for Good Labs in Africa

In 2022, Juan and his team [announced](#) an expansion of our **AI for Good Lab in Africa**, building a new team of data scientists working to improve climate resilience. The work of these data labs has facilitated the inauguration of an **Africa AI Innovation Council**, which aims to bring together diverse stakeholders such as the Africa Development Bank Group, Africa Climate Foundation, Africa Risk Capacity, and Planet Labs, who are working on the fundamental problems of climate impact and sustainability.

Food and water security

The AI for Good Lab has also partnered with CETRAD, a Nairobi-based nonprofit, and the Nature Conservancy to improve water management in Northern Kenya. Leveraging our expertise in geospatial machine learning, we mapped irrigated and rainfed croplands to help local authorities manage water supplies from snowmelt on Mt. Kenya. This will ensure more efficient water usage for agriculture in that region by providing insights that help balance the extension of irrigated farmlands (increased yield) and the related consumption of water.

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Conservation

In collaboration with Princeton University, the AI for Good Lab is working to understand long-term environmental changes in Namibia with the aim of unlocking new potential with historical aerial photos (>80 years old) to understand decades-long environmental changes. Such capabilities also open up a new ability to evaluate historical events and learn from them.

Investing in innovation through the Climate Innovation Fund

Another key theme from last fall's summit was the importance of investment.

In 2020, Microsoft created the [Climate Innovation Fund](#) – a \$1B investment initiative to accelerate technology development and deployment of new climate innovations through equity and debt capital. Over the past four years, we've allocated over \$760M in capital to a global portfolio of more than 50 investments. These investments have focused on projects and companies that have the potential for clear climate impact, are largely underfunded by traditional capital sources, align with our core business, and ensure that developing economies and underserved communities benefit from climate solutions.

One of the early investments the fund made was in a company called KOKO Networks. KOKO provides a drop-in, clean-cooking solution for low- and medium-income households in Africa. Replacing charcoal as a cooking heat will mitigate carbon emissions, stop deforestation, and reduce indoor air pollution – building a more sustainable and healthier life for millions. Since the initial investment in 2022, we've made a follow-on investment in 2023, and look forward to KOKO's continued effort to bring healthier and renewable clean cooking fuel to people in Africa.

Microsoft's Climate Innovation Fund not only looks to invest directly in companies, but also provides project financing to bring existing climate solutions to scale. Earlier this year, we announced that Microsoft's Climate Innovation Fund and Climate Fund Managers are investing in a project by Konexa to transport renewable energy from the Gurara Hydro Power Plant in Nigeria to two Nigerian Breweries facilities in Kaduna state.

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This is a great example of the role that investment can play in our work to help the world make the clean energy transition.

Collaborating on water action

At Microsoft, we have a responsibility to manage water impacts within our own operations – and we know we must also look beyond our four walls to help our customers and the world move toward a more sustainable future. That's why we've set out to become a water positive company by 2030.

As part of our water access and replenishment work, we're regularly evaluating project proposals in Africa. In March, we announced that we would be working with WaterAid on a water access project to rehabilitate four non-functional water systems and a sanitation facility, and strengthen hygiene practices and water access, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) governance at selected communities in Lagos, Nigeria. Through this project, Microsoft aims to provide over 19,000 people with water supply services and over 1,400 people with sanitation services. We're also working with the Nature Conservancy on a water replenishment project in Cape Town, South Africa, to increase the amount of water collected in the region's water supply by removing water-guzzling invasive plant species on 150 hectares in priority sub-catchments of the Theewaterskloof Dam in the Western Cape Water Supply System. These two projects represent our continued focus on water in Africa and we're excited to build on this foundation with more projects on the way.

More opportunity ahead

[Microsoft's commitment](#) to innovation on the African continent runs deep and I continue to reflect on the many learnings and insights gained from my visit. For example, [Africa is home to 60% of the best solar resources globally](#), millions of talented professionals, a youthful population that is committed to addressing climate change and environmental degradation, and significant biodiversity and carbon sinks. This adds up to enormous potential for African-created solutions to address the climate crisis, and Microsoft stands as a strong partner with governments, customers, and partners to enable the skilling, investments and technology that will help accelerate it.

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