The Importance of Impact in Getting Investment and Improving Returns

Panel Session Learning

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Impact + Returns

Insights from leading investors, fund managers, and impact practitioners

Panel overview

Moderator

Christine Maina, CEO of the East Africa Venture Capital Association (EAVCA)

Christine is the CEO of the East Africa Venture Capital Association (EAVCA), who has over 16 years of experience in business, trade, and investment across East Africa.

Panellist

Michelle Wanjiru (ESG Advisor - ESS)

Michelle specialises in ESG standards and reporting with nearly 10 years of experience. She leads ESG integration in the Manufacturing Africa program.

Panellist

Linda Capwell (Marketing, Communications & Investor Relations Head - Kentegra LLC)

With over 15 years of experience, Linda has driven business growth through brand development and market expansion for major brands like Blue Band and Brookside Dairy.

Panellist

Sheena Raikundalia (Chief Growth Officer - Kuza Biashara)

Sheena brings over 18 years of experience in legal, financial services, and impact investment across Europe and Africa. She is the former Country Director of the UK-Kenya Tech Hub and serves on the Kenya National Innovation Agency Board.

Panellist

Elisha Bwatuti (Expert - Strathmore University)

Elisha has over 13 years of experience across agriculture, ICT, and healthcare, delivering AI-powered solutions and building strategic partnerships with governments and financial institutions.

Panellist

Zipporah Gakuu (Investor - Gatsby Africa)

Zipporah is an investment professional with experience in investment management and financial analysis, currently focusing on impact-driven investment strategies as a Portfolio Manager at Gatsby Africa.

Learning 01

Impact is a sourcing edge

Funds with credible impact theses see deal flow that pure-financial peers miss — especially in early-stage and frontier markets.

Why this matters

Founders increasingly self-select investors on values alignment — not just cheque size.

Founder selection

Mission-led founders in Africa increasingly choose investors based on shared impact values, not valuation alone.

Proprietary pipeline

Impact networks (TA providers, DFIs, ecosystem builders) surface deals before they hit broader markets.

Trust acceleration

Impact track record cuts diligence time — founders share data faster with investors they trust.

Panel insight

"Best founders choose us, not the other way round"

Impact thesis converts pitch meetings into partnerships — measurably shortening time to term sheet.

Learning 02

Impact data uncovers operational alpha

Tracking ESG, GESI and climate metrics surfaces the same operational signals that drive financial outperformance — retention, productivity, supply-chain resilience.

Talent

Lower attrition

Companies measuring GESI report materially better retention — especially in middle management.

Productivity

Higher output per worker

Inclusive workplaces and training programmes correlate with measurable productivity gains in MA portfolio.

Resilience

Stronger supply chains

Climate & ESG diligence flags physical and transition risks that purely-financial diligence misses.

Takeaway: impact KPIs are leading indicators of financial performance — not a separate report.

Learning 03

LPs are raising the bar on impact

Allocators now expect verified, decision-grade impact data — and are increasingly willing to walk from funds that can't deliver it.

How LP expectations have shifted

From annual reporting box-tick to ongoing diligence input

PREVIOUSLY

Impact as add-on

- Annual impact report, retrospective
- Narrative-led case studies
- Self-reported, unverified data
- Separate from financial reporting
- GP-defined metrics

TODAY

Impact as diligence input

- Real-time, decision-grade KPIs
- Third-party verified data
- Aligned to SDGs / IFC PS / IMP
- Integrated in financial returns
- LP-aligned, comparable metrics

Learning 04

Impact and returns are not a trade-off — when designed right

Panel consensus: the false dichotomy is the biggest blocker to mainstream capital. Evidence is mounting.

1

Thesis alignment

Impact is the thesis, not a layer on top. Best returns happen when the impact pathway IS the business model — e.g., financial inclusion, climate solutions, productive jobs.

2

Honest measurement

Use credible frameworks (IMP, IRIS+, SDGs). Avoid impact-washing. Investors who measure honestly find the levers that actually move both impact and returns.

3

Right-sized capital

Match capital structure to impact horizon — patient equity for systems change, blended capital for catalytic markets, traditional equity for proven scale-ups.

4

Operator partnership

GPs that work as operators — not just allocators — drive both impact and financial outcomes. ESG and impact are operational disciplines.

Thank you

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