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The Missing Link: Operationalising National M&E Infrastructure for Impact Capital Through AI-Assist

Summary

Sigma IMS presented an impact measurement platform with AI-driven methodology to unify investment reporting and sustainable goals.

Addressing Impact Silos
Fragmentation in impact investing and national monitoring systems causes data inefficiencies and hinders investment outcomes. The proposed intelligence platform aims to integrate these systems by consolidating frameworks and automating routine data processes.

AI Workflow Integration
The platform utilizes artificial intelligence to automate workflows and accelerate analysis by up to 70 percent. Core functions include data cleanup, document drafting, and large-scale portfolio comparison.

Human-in-the-Loop Implementation
Reliability is maintained through strict human sign-off procedures and a refusal to use client data for model training. This ensures that artificial intelligence serves as a tool for acceleration rather than decision-making.

Details

- **Introduction to Sigma IMS and Objectives**: Sigma IMS (represented by Suleman) introduced the company as a business consulting firm based in the Netherlands that functions as a "methodology as a service" provider. The firm specializes in creating sector-agnostic measurement infrastructure for impact-aligned capital and has a strong presence in the blue economy sector. The presentation served to showcase their developed intelligence platform, which aims to address challenges in impact measurement and management.
- **Core Methodology Pillars**: Sigma IMS operates on three distinct pillars: consolidating competing frameworks, operationalizing these frameworks through AI-assisted tools, and utilizing a "zero disruption" principle that avoids data migration by meeting clients where their data currently resides. The core problem identified is the siloed nature of the impact investing space and national Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems. With approximately $4 trillion required to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 83% of SDG targets currently off track, there is a critical need to bridge these systems to improve outcome tracking.
- **Challenges in Impact Investing and National M&E Systems**: Research shows that within the impact investing sector, 73% of organizations rely on Excel for management, and 60% to 80% of time is spent on data cleanup rather than decision-making. Simultaneously, national M&E systems face delays of 3 to 12 months per country to conduct analysis, and only 35% of governments are effectively able to track their own strategies. Both sectors require credible, comparable evidence and accountability; however, the current disconnection leads to inefficient capital allocation and missed opportunities to maximize impact.
- **The Intelligence Platform Bridge**: To connect these two worlds, Sigma IMS developed an intelligence platform that incorporates data from the UN SDG Investor Platform and the IFC (International Finance Corporation) AIMM (Impact Management) platforms. By leveraging these tools, they assist investors in identifying investment opportunities and using backcasting variance analysis to monitor how outcomes progress across both the impact investing and national M&E systems.

- **AI-Driven Workflow and Capability**: Sigma IMS utilizes AI to achieve 50% to 70% timeline compression in workflows by automating routine tasks, such as data cleanup, code matching, and output formatting. They categorize AI usage into four functions: automation (routine work), augmentation (drafting documents like theory of change), enabling (large-scale portfolio comparison), and discovery (identifying patterns and correlations). The system also assesses organizational readiness and measurement infrastructure to fix deficiencies before scaling.
- **Implementation Guidelines and Human-in-the-Loop**: To ensure reliability, Sigma IMS enforces a "human-in-the-loop" discipline, requiring human sign-off on all AI-generated outputs. They explicitly avoid using client data for training their AI models to maintain security. Furthermore, they warn against "automation bias," where users might accept AI outputs without scrutiny, and emphasize that AI should be used as a drafting and triangulation tool rather than as an authoritative decision-maker.
- **Managing AI Pitfalls**: When deploying AI, Sigma IMS warns against unclear prompts and the lack of reproducibility, recommending the use of codified templates and decision artifacts to guide AI behavior. They emphasize that while AI accelerates drafting and computation, it does not replace the need for human judgment, verification, or trust. Credible impact claims depend on the methodology behind the system, rather than the speed of the tooling itself.
- **Demonstration of System Integration**: In a live demonstration, Sigma IMS showed how their platform connects impact capital with national M&E systems. The process involves identifying national development plans, mapping investment opportunities through the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) and SDG investor maps, and then tracking outcomes from the enterprise level up to the portfolio and national aggregation levels.
- **Data Aggregation and Reporting Capabilities**: The platform supports aggregation across portfolios, tracking metrics such as beneficiaries, jobs created, and gender-disaggregated data without double counting. The system allows for reporting to multiple frameworks—such as IRIS+ metrics and the IMP (Impact Management Project) five dimensions—using a single data source. A key feature includes a mandatory human "sign-off" gate that requires validation before any report is exported to formats like PDF, PowerPoint, or Excel.
- **Conclusion and Future Outlook**: Sigma IMS concluded by stating that the evaluation profession should respond to AI by building systems that make AI serve the evaluation's purpose, ensuring human validation, and treating data as a

strategic decision-making asset. They reiterated that AI without a robust methodology is merely "speed without direction," and the focus remains on continuing to develop the platform to help achieve SDG goals by 2030 and beyond.

- **Closing and Technical Difficulties**: Following the presentation, Sigma IMS invited questions from the audience. Ahmed Youssef attempted to speak but experienced technical issues that prevented communication, at which point Sigma IMS directed attendees to the website (sigmaims.io) for further information and concluded the webinar .