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IBBC Tech Forum, Webinar

Key Insights & Takeaways

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Introduction

The IBBC Tech Forum 2025 brought together leading innovators, technologists and investors to examine how artificial intelligence is reshaping economic opportunity, skills development and infrastructure planning across Iraq. As part of the wider IBBC programme, this online session explored the rapidly intensifying global AI wave, why investment interest is accelerating, and how emerging technologies are transforming labour markets, education systems and entrepreneurial activity. The conversation centred on the strategic potential of AI to support national growth, future-ready human capital, and large-scale digital and physical infrastructure.

Moderated by **Ashley Goodall, Marketing Consultant, IBBC**, the webinar featured contributions from:

- **Phil McCauley, Saibre Capital** – AI-aligned capital investment and large-scale urban and infrastructure programmes
- **Dr. Neil Cobbold, Reapit** – Future skills, labour-market disruption and AI-enabled competencies
- **Raghad Al-Abboodi, SheCodes** – Women's participation, digital skills and workforce inclusion
- **Makram Jaibaji, GCS** – AI in infrastructure design, engineering optimisation and city-scale planning

The session explored several **key themes:** AI as an accelerator for major infrastructure and housing programmes; the rapid reconfiguration of labour markets driven by automation of entry-level technical roles; the importance of inclusive talent development models—particularly for women entering the sector; and the growing need for digital sovereignty, secure national data infrastructure and modernised governance frameworks. Together, these themes illustrated how AI serves simultaneously as an economic catalyst and a structural challenge requiring coordinated national response.

Key stakeholders gain distinct set of opportunities from the **insights shared during the discussion**:

- **Iraqi Government & Public-Sector Leadership:** Gain clarity on how AI-enabled planning, sovereign data infrastructure and long-term regulation can underpin national resilience and investment readiness.
- **Infrastructure, Energy, Urban Development & Security Operators:** Receives insight into immediate AI-driven efficiency gains—such as 30–70% reductions in design time and 30–50% cost savings—and the opportunity to embed predictive resilience in critical systems.
- **Education Institutions & Talent Development Organisations:** Finds a forward-looking view on how updated curricula, domain-integrated technical pathways and AI literacy can equip graduates for a transformed labour market.
- **Iraqi Tech Workforce & Emerging Talent:** Encounters evidence of high-growth pathways through digital skills, remote work and AI-supported learning, with clear examples of successful employment outcomes.
- **Regional & International Investors and Corporate Partners:** Sees how large-scale, AI-enabled infrastructure and digital transformation projects create stable, long-horizon investment opportunities aligned with national priorities.

1. AI as a Platform for Scaled Infrastructure and Urban Transformation

Strategic Scale Enabled by Integrated Planning

AI is positioned as a foundational driver for delivering national-scale infrastructure with greater speed, accuracy and strategic coherence. Large housing and city-building programmes illustrate this shift. One initiative outlines the capability to deliver *nearly 600,000 new homes within a four-year period* by combining modern modular construction with high-tech materials such as SIP systems. Components are manufactured in controlled environments, enabling rapid assembly by semi-skilled yet effectively trained local workers. This reduces reliance on long apprenticeship cycles and allows new towns to be developed with diverse housing types, mixed-income communities and integrated amenities from the outset. Complementary urban features—such as walkability, high insulation standards, carbon-efficient systems and modular layouts—are planned holistically rather than added incrementally.

A defining insight is that *capital is not the primary constraint*. Large-scale financial institutions, pension funds and long-term investors are prepared to deploy significant funds where projects demonstrate scale, clarity of purpose and credible delivery structures. The limiting factor is the alignment of vision, technical capability and governance.

Acceleration, Accuracy and Cost Efficiency Through AI

The infusion of AI into infrastructure engineering produces measurable performance gains. Current applications yield *90–100% improvements in data quality and accuracy*. Engineering design costs fall by *30%*, while design timelines accelerate by *70%*, reducing processes that previously required six months to as little as two months. AI also enables automated value engineering, generating *up to 50% project-cost reductions in the UK* and around *30% in Dubai*.

These efficiencies extend into construction and operations. AI-enhanced monitoring—supported by drones, 4D scheduling and automated quantity assessments—provides real-time visibility of build progress, cost exposure and risk conditions. All project stakeholders can access live data rather than rely on retrospective reporting. This reduces disputes, accelerates approvals and enhances financial control across the project lifecycle.

Real-time modelling further strengthens risk mitigation by identifying design or implementation issues early. Historical, geospatial and real-time datasets converge into a single model, allowing infrastructure assets to be designed with greater resilience and future adaptability.

Future-Aligned Urban Systems for a Rapidly Changing Technological Landscape

AI is framed within a broader technological horizon shaped by fast-approaching shifts in computational power. With the expectation that *quantum computing will reach operational maturity by 2032*, urban systems will evolve toward instantaneous reconciliation of data, cloud-processed personal devices, and continuous optimisation across mobility, energy, health and education services.

Infrastructure planning therefore requires forward-compatible models. Mobility systems such as light rail, smart routing and autonomous solutions must be integrated at the design stage. Buildings and districts must be prepared for high-density digital services, continuous sensor feedback and adaptive energy

optimisation. These features are not add-ons; they form the operating logic of next-generation cities. This alignment of AI-enabled design, scalable construction methods and long-term technological readiness establishes a pathway for building modern urban environments capable of meeting population growth, economic diversification needs and national sustainability goals.

2. Shifting Skills, Workflows and Labour Markets in an AI-Driven Economy

Transforming Entry Pathways into Technology Careers

Rapid AI adoption is reshaping the structure of technical employment, particularly at the early career stage. Traditional entry-level tasks such as basic coding, debugging and data processing are already contracting at significant rates. In one major labour market, UK, these roles have declined by *20–30% since 2023*, reflecting the speed at which automation replaces routine technical functions. This pattern is not isolated; organisations with heavy AI exposure report an average *4.5% reduction in total employment*, with the contraction concentrated at the lowest experience levels.

These shifts redefine what foundational technical capability means. Competence in isolated coding tasks is no longer sufficient. Instead, the emerging baseline requires an ability to analyse problems, structure solutions and collaborate with AI systems that now perform large volumes of technical work. Future pathways into technology will be built not on repetitive execution but on the capacity to apply judgment, domain understanding and system-level reasoning.

Evolving Educational Priorities for the Next Generation

Education systems are already adjusting to this landscape. Curricula increasingly incorporate areas such as AI ethics, model supervision, prompt interaction, and human–computer interaction. These additions reflect the reality that future graduates must not only use AI tools but also manage their behaviour, limitations, and alignment with domain requirements.

Technical skill alone is no longer the differentiator. Learners must combine AI fluency with contextual expertise in domains such as finance, healthcare, construction, energy or property. This hybrid approach strengthens resilience against automation and widens the range of roles graduates can access. It also aligns with new categories of work emerging around sustainability for AI systems, legal compliance, bias mitigation, neuro-symbolic reasoning and quantum algorithmic development.

The intensity of technological acceleration leaves little room for slow adaptation. As quantum computing matures, AI capabilities will expand at speeds that require constant recalibration of what is taught and how individuals engage with intelligent tools.

Positioning People to Capture the Expanding Job Frontier

Despite displacement concerns, long-term projections indicate substantial net job creation. Global estimates indicate a *net gain of 78 million jobs by 2030* due to AI, with roles shifting toward strategic decision support, human–AI workflow design, adaptive learning management, and energy optimisation in smart buildings and infrastructure.

Preparing people to access these opportunities requires transforming how skills are developed. Problem-solving becomes the core competency. Individuals must be equipped to interpret AI outputs, structure

solutions across domains and shape technology toward productive outcomes. Even at early education stages, AI-assisted debugging and learning tools eliminate traditional barriers and accelerate technical skill acquisition.

The emerging workforce environment favours those who embrace AI as a collaborator. Individuals who build the capacity to direct, refine and augment AI outputs will command the most valuable roles across sectors. This shift creates a new model of expertise—dynamic, interdisciplinary and deeply integrated with intelligent systems.

3. Inclusion and Talent Development as Strategic Economic Infrastructure

Building a High-Impact Talent Pipeline Across Iraq

Expanding the country's digital capabilities requires widening access to technical education, particularly for groups historically underrepresented in technology. One example demonstrates the scale of progress already achievable: since 2020, more than *300 women* from across Iraq have completed intensive seven-month training programmes in web development, data analytics and related technical skills. These programmes incorporate global curricula and certifications from established partners, ensuring that learners acquire competencies aligned with contemporary industry requirements rather than outdated academic tracks.

The effectiveness of this model is evident in employment outcomes. *Seventy-five percent* of participants secure technology roles within *six months* of completing training, illustrating both the demand for digital talent in the Iraqi labour market and the effectiveness of structured pathways that bridge the gap between university education and industry expectations. This talent pool is also attractive beyond local employers, as remote work allows Iraqi women to participate in global digital job markets without geographic or cultural constraints.

Expanding Economic Mobility Through Digital Skills

Technical education plays a unique economic and social role in Iraq. For many women—particularly those in conservative or geographically constrained communities—technology careers provide access to stable income and professional autonomy without requiring relocation. Remote work eliminates the barriers that traditionally limit women's participation in the labour force, while digital skills open opportunities for international mobility.

Real-world examples illustrate this trajectory: individuals equipped with strong technical skills are able to access employment opportunities abroad, including sponsorship-based roles in advanced markets. This demonstrates that capability-building not only strengthens the domestic talent pipeline but also provides a channel for Iraqis to integrate into global technology ecosystems.

These programmes reinforce the message that technology careers offer upward mobility, international exposure and long-term stability—qualities that increase community-wide interest in pursuing AI-aligned technical fields.

Reducing Skill Gaps for an AI-Driven Future

The demand for talent extends beyond entry-level coding. Employers increasingly expect capabilities that

combine technical proficiency with adaptability to AI-enabled workflows. Training programmes therefore emphasise more than syntax or tool use; they focus on preparing learners to operate effectively in environments where AI accelerates development, assists debugging and reshapes traditional engineering tasks.

This approach reduces the mismatch between academic training and industry needs, creating graduates who learn faster, adapt to AI-enhanced productivity expectations and progress more rapidly from junior to mid-level responsibilities. The aim is not merely to place individuals into short-term roles but to build a national workforce equipped for long-term relevance as AI transforms labour markets.

By aligning training content with evolving technological demands, Iraq strengthens its ability to supply talent for major digital and infrastructure initiatives while avoiding the structural shortages experienced during earlier global technology waves. Inclusion becomes a strategic economic capability—not a social add-on—because it expands the total pool of AI-literate workers who can support national development.

4. Governance, Security and System Resilience in an AI-Integrated Nation

Strengthening National Security Through Digital Sovereignty

As AI becomes embedded across critical systems—from energy and transport to healthcare and data infrastructure—the need for sovereign control over national information becomes fundamental. A core priority emerging from the current landscape is the establishment of *national data centres* capable of retaining sensitive information within Iraq's borders. Without such infrastructure, data flows are routed externally, increasing exposure to external control and limiting the country's ability to secure foundational systems.

Concerns over cyberattacks reinforce this requirement. Multiple real-world incidents in global contexts—such as airport outages and systemic disruptions—illustrate how digital vulnerabilities are often publicly explained as technical failures, despite being linked to state-level cyber activity. This demonstrates how deeply integrated digital systems have become targets, and highlights the need for protective structures that anticipate and neutralise such risks.

Embedding AI in Risk Management and Infrastructure Protection

AI plays a dual role in national security. While heightened digital integration increases exposure to cyber threats, AI also strengthens national resilience when used for detection, pattern analysis and predictive safeguarding. Unlike earlier technologies that reacted to incidents after they occurred, AI can pre-emptively identify anomalies and maintain a lead in environments where malicious actors continuously adapt.

Risk mitigation is enhanced further through real-time modelling of infrastructure assets. By merging historical, geospatial and live data, AI maps system vulnerabilities with far greater precision. On construction sites, drones and automated models generate live updates on progress and deviations, reducing ambiguity and enabling decision-makers to act before risks materialise. This integration improves accountability and reduces disputes by providing a clear, verifiable data trail accessible to all stakeholders.

Across major infrastructure segments, AI-enabled early detection offers a pathway to safeguard energy

supply, transport networks, healthcare facilities and financial systems—sectors where failure has immediate human and economic consequences.

Adapting Economic and Regulatory Structures to Technological Acceleration

The rapid advance of AI introduces structural questions for economic and regulatory design. As intelligent systems automate increasing layers of activity, traditional labour markets face imbalances—with some sectors shrinking and others expanding. Concepts such as *minimum basic income* emerge as potential mechanisms to maintain social and economic stability in environments where automation reduces the need for large workforces in certain fields.

The concentration of power in global technology companies also raises the need for national intervention. When AI systems become gatekeepers for essential digital functions, unrestricted private control can conflict with national priorities. Instances where access to advanced AI capabilities is conditioned on paid tiers—particularly in fields such as medicine—demonstrate how information access can become fragmented. This dynamic underscores the need for national governance structures that protect public interest, regulate platform behaviour and ensure equitable deployment of frontier technologies.

By integrating protective legislation, sovereign data infrastructure and AI-driven security capabilities, Iraq can position itself to harness technological gains while safeguarding national autonomy and societal stability.

5. Key Takeaways & Priority Actions

Action Priorities for an AI-Enabled Future: Iraq's evolving technological landscape presents a rare window for national transformation, where infrastructure modernisation, workforce development and digital resilience can advance together. The stakeholder groups shaping this transition—across government, industry, education, talent and investment—share a common objective: to harness AI as a catalyst for inclusive growth, security and long-term economic opportunity. Each group holds distinct levers that, when aligned, can accelerate the adoption of intelligent systems while ensuring national stability and social impact.

Iraqi Government & Public-Sector Leadership

Public authorities hold the mandate to activate structural conditions that enable AI to enhance infrastructure, skills and national security. As AI becomes embedded in housing, transport, healthcare and energy, the opportunity lies in establishing a governance framework that ensures sovereign control, protects critical systems and channels investment into projects that deliver broad social value.

Recommended Actions:

- Establish national data centres to safeguard sensitive information and reduce exposure to external digital risks.
- Create regulatory guardrails that govern AI deployment across public infrastructure, cyber defence and essential services.
- Formalise long-term planning models for housing, mobility and sustainability that integrate AI-enabled master-planning from the outset.
- Facilitate streamlined approvals for large-scale infrastructure projects that demonstrate clear economic and social returns.
- Build economic stabilisation strategies, including future-focused income models, to prepare for shifts created by automation.

Infrastructure, Energy, Urban Development & Critical Infrastructure/Security Operators

Operators across construction, engineering, energy and critical systems benefit directly from AI's demonstrated impact on cost, speed and accuracy. The opportunity is to use these tools not only to optimise delivery but to elevate national resilience by embedding systematic risk detection, live modelling and predictive infrastructure management.

Recommended Actions:

- Adopt AI-driven design workflows that reduce engineering time by up to 70% and improve data accuracy by 90–100%.
- Integrate drones, 4D modelling and automated reporting into construction and maintenance cycles for real-time oversight.
- Use AI-enabled value engineering to capture cost savings of 30–50% depending on project type and geography.
- Incorporate risk analytics into asset planning to identify vulnerabilities before they escalate.
- Build future-ready masterplans that anticipate increases in digital load, mobility innovation and energy optimisation.

Education Institutions & Talent Development Organisations

Universities, technical institutes and specialised training programmes play a pivotal role in preparing Iraq's workforce for an AI-first economy. Their opportunity is to modernise content rapidly, ensuring that graduates enter the labour market equipped with skills relevant to emerging roles and adaptive to technological acceleration.

Recommended Actions:

- Embed AI literacy, model supervision, prompt interaction and human–computer interaction into core curricula.
- Align technical programmes with industry demand by integrating domain knowledge across finance, healthcare, energy and construction.
- Develop accelerated training models that bridge the gap between academic theory and AI-driven industry practice.
- Partner with global platforms to provide internationally recognised certifications and credentials.
- Equip learners to engage with AI as a collaborator rather than a replacement for human problem-solving.

Iraqi Tech Workforce & Emerging Talent

Individuals entering the technology workforce—especially women supported through structured programmes—are positioned to capture high-growth opportunities in AI-enabled sectors. With employment rates of 75% within six months for trained cohorts, there is clear evidence that targeted skill building leads directly to economic mobility and international opportunity.

Recommended Actions:

- Leverage remote-working models to access both domestic and global employment opportunities.
- Pursue hybrid technical-domain skills that remain resilient to automation and align with high-growth roles.
- Use AI tools for accelerated learning, debugging and workflow optimisation to advance more quickly from junior to mid-level responsibilities.
- Build capabilities in areas such as data analysis, web development and human–AI collaboration where demand is rising.
- Participate in structured bootcamps and training pathways that shorten the transition into industry roles.

Regional & International Investors and Corporate Partners

Investors and technology partners have the opportunity to shape transformative infrastructure and digital projects at a scale matched by strong capital appetite. AI-enabled initiatives—such as master-planned housing programmes, data infrastructure and energy-efficient urban systems—offer long-term, stable investment profiles aligned with national needs.

Recommended Actions:

- Prioritise large-scale projects that combine strong commercial viability with national-interest outcomes.
- Deploy capital into AI-enabled infrastructure that demonstrates measurable efficiency gains and cost reductions.
- Form partnerships that integrate engineering, technology and workforce development into unified delivery models.
- Support capacity-building that expands Iraq's ability to operate and maintain AI-driven systems.
- Engage early in master-planning phases where AI modelling shapes long-term asset performance.

Conclusion

With coordinated action, AI offers Iraq a pathway to modern infrastructure, a future-ready workforce and stronger digital sovereignty. The opportunity now lies in aligning policy, investment and talent development so that each stakeholder group reinforces the others—ushering in a technologically enabled future built on resilience, inclusion and long-term national ambition.

About IBBC & Management Partners

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The **Iraq Britain Business Council** is a charitable organisation that brings together business, trade, investment and education from the United Kingdom, Iraq and beyond — aiming to support a free, prosperous and diversified Iraq. Through its network of global corporations, Iraqi and British firms, academic institutions and trade-chambers, IBBC facilitates trade, investment, and knowledge-transfer; promotes best practices and international standards; and helps grow the private sector across multiple sectors.

IBBC is the **organiser of the conference and webinar series**, bringing together business, policy, and institutional leaders across Iraq, the UK, and international markets. As the official host, IBBC convenes a diverse community of organisations, investors, and experts to advance dialogue, collaboration, and opportunities aimed at supporting Iraq's economic and sectoral development.

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