

AI literacy for humanitarianians

Event report



Location: Microsoft, Dunhill Towers, Parklands, Nairobi, Kenya

Time: 10 February 2025 (0900 to 1500)

Participants

All participants were based in Nairobi.

Name	Org
Stella Suge	FilmAid
Monica Nthiga	Consultant
Prof Patrick McSharry	Carnegie Mellon
Ibrahim Hatibu	Consultant
Samuel Kevin	Consultant
John O Ogangah	CWS Africa
Stephen Omware	ChildFund

Name	Org
Sharon Kibor	CPD Africa
Aydrus Daar	WASDA
Benjamin Negus	UN
Matthew Cousins	Oxfam
Nishant Das	World Vision
Naomi Ng'ang'a	Kenya Red Cross
Ahmed Abdi Ibrahim	ALDEF

Event team

All event team members were based in Nairobi except Tristan who was in town already for another event.

Role	Name	Org
Co-facilitator	Andrew Nzimbi	Consultant / Sphere trainer
Co-facilitator	Sarah W Spencer	Consultant / EthicAI
Presenter, host	Girmaw Tadesse	Microsoft
Presenter, host	Najeib Abdulhamid	Microsoft
Presenter	Tristan Hale	Sphere

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Agenda

Time	Description
09:30 to 10:00	Registration and coffee
10:00 to 11:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Framing the workshop and initial reactions to AI for humanitarians (Tristan)• AI at Microsoft, humanitarian partnership case studies (Girmaw, Najeeb)
11:00 to 12:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why do we need AI literacy training? (Sarah)• Skills and knowledge (Sarah)
12:30 to 13:30	Lunch (Existing resources)
13:30 to 15:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Methods, tools and approaches (Andrew)• Training rollout (Andrew)

Framing the workshop

Tristan briefly presented Sphere, and the sequence of events and discoveries that led to the organisation of this workshop.

The principle of 'Do no harm' (or perhaps 'minimise harm' is more realistic) is central to Sphere philosophy, so when a new thing comes along with the potential to cause harm to people affected by crisis, Sphere has a moral obligation to react.

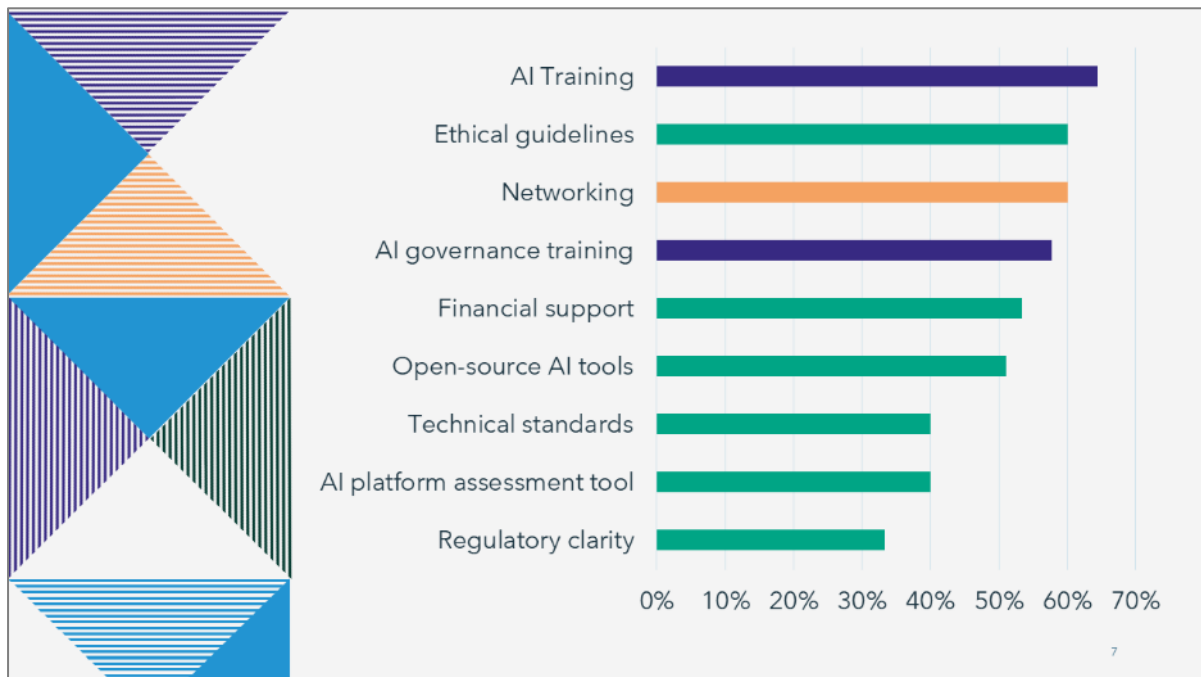


This led Sphere to work with DFS, Nesta and CDAC on a project regarding AI safety – ending February 2025.

We explored the idea of an AI Safety Label¹ which would help people in humanitarian organisations who are procuring safety-critical AI systems make good choices.

¹ Read more about the AI Safety Label project here: [How can humanitarian organisations use AI safely?](#)

We designed a three-step process. The first being a technical assessment of the platform, the second an organisational readiness assessment, and the third a community assessment.



As part of the AI Safety Label project, Sphere led a survey of network constituents. One question asked what support people would most like in terms of AI. Training was the top result – supported by 64% of respondents. Also note networking in joint 2nd place with the need for ethical guidelines – supported by 60% of respondents.

One of Sphere’s greatest assets is its [focal point network](#), consisting of almost 100 organisations around the world that between them organise around 200 Sphere workshops per year. Participants in these workshops include NGO staff, government officials, civil protection agencies, UN agencies, community members, and others. By partnering with humanitarian training organisations such as RedR and the Humanitarian Leadership Academy (HLA), Sphere is in a strong position to roll-out AI literacy training for humanitarians using its existing partners and ways of working.

But what does it mean to be AI literate in the humanitarian sector? That’s what we organised this workshop to discover...

Microsoft presentations



Girmaw and Najeeb presented what 'AI for Good' means to Microsoft, including several examples of projects that their AI for Good Lab is currently undertaking in Africa.

Initial reactions to AI for humanitarians

Participants were asked for their initial reactions to "AI for humanitarians" in no more than three words.

Positive reactions	Concerns
Adaptability	Privacy
Interesting	Data protection
Excited x 4	Confusing
Effective	Job losses
Efficiency x 2	Challenging
Intrigued	Risks
About time!	Scary
Curious	Uncertainty
Relieved	
Untapped potential	
Opportunity	
Good	
Timely	
Working innovatively	
Scalability	

Uses	Other
Modelling Prediction Anticipatory action Contextualisation Automation	Futuristic 'Chaotic good'

Analysis

The group is more optimistic than pessimistic.

Why do we need AI literacy training?

This appears to be a loaded question, but as shown above the appetite for such training had been established before the workshop, and it was assumed that participants in this workshop broadly recognise the demand.

Response	Category
For logistics planning	Applications
Anticipatory Action	Applications
To apply AI in improving our response	Applications
For fundraising	Applications
To enable response in contexts of limited or no access, e.g., information sharing, monitoring, cash	Applications
To form collaborative impactful partnerships	Collaboration
Cooperation (less duplication)	Collaboration
Coordination	Collaboration
Maximise systems efficiencies	Efficiency
Need for quick, accurate data to make decisions	Efficiency
Timeliness	Efficiency
To enhance our efficiency and accuracy in humanitarian response	Efficiency
Effectiveness in implementation (fast and relevant)	Efficiency
Maximise efficiencies AI can bring on board	Efficiency
Deploy resources more efficiently	Efficiency
Make response more efficient particularly if you can anticipate what may happen	Efficiency
We (humanitarians) are still spending tons of dollars on creating/understanding problems	Efficiency
Shorten the 'action curve'	Efficiency
Concerns	Ethical use
Ethical use of AI	Ethical use
Ethical responsibility	Ethical use
Safeguarding	Ethical use
AI deployment in ethical ways	Ethical use

Potential	Realise potential
Explore AI use cases	Realise potential
To create roadmaps and strategy	Realise potential
To enhance evidence-based interventions	Realise potential
For strategic decision-making	Realise potential
Identify key humanitarian areas for AI	Realise potential
Challenges	Realise potential
Risks	Risk management
Risk mitigation	Risk management
The sector is already using AI in some ways	Risk management
For harmonised social impact	Social good/reduce inequalities
To bridge the digital gap	Social good/reduce inequalities
Promote localisation (how others, i.e., communities could be empowered)	Social good/reduce inequalities
Adaptation	Survive/adapt
To adapt to growing tech needs	Survive/adapt
Because it is new and ever evolving	Survive/adapt
To set realistic expectations	Other

Analysis

The group believes that humanitarians should be AI literate for the following reasons:

- **Realise potential / Explore applications** (12 responses): AI holds potential for humanitarians through various applications. Humanitarians should therefore be aware of different current and potential uses of AI in the sector.
- **Efficiency** (10 responses): AI can make individuals and organisations more efficient. If humanitarians can use AI to work more efficiently – without causing harm, sacrificing accuracy, etc. – then they should be aware of different ways to achieve this.
- **Ethical use / Risk management** (8 responses): If humanitarians are going to use AI, they should understand how to do so ethically, legally and responsibly – recognising that risk appetite varies between organisations. Before using AI, humanitarians should understand the costs, risks and other negative impacts.
- **Social good / Reduce inequalities / Survive / Adapt** (6 responses): Sphere has always been an influence for reducing power imbalances – by attempting to make its Handbooks and other resources and services as accessible as possible. AI is already increasing digital inequality in the sector. By promoting AI literacy for all humanitarians, Sphere hopes to contribute to reducing this inequality.

There is a current cliché along the lines of ‘AI will not take your job, but someone who knows how to use AI will’. Depending on what your job is, there is some truth in this, in which case being AI literate may be necessary for an individual to keep their job or for an organisation to survive.

- **Collaboration** (3 responses): AI literacy will be useful for concluding partnerships with other AI literate people and organisations.
- **Set expectations** (1 response): Although this was suggested by just one person, it seems important. If you're relatively new to AI, you may have misconceptions about how good or useful it is.

Skills and knowledge

Participants, in three groups, were asked to discuss and record what skills and knowledge humanitarians would need regarding AI. There were some differences in interpretation between and among groups. Some skills appear to refer to the skills required by the facilitators of AI literacy training. Also, some skills and knowledge may be what should be expected of AI literacy training participants *before* attendance, and others what they should know *by the end* the workshop.

Once teams had listed their ideas, each participant was given five votes and asked to focus on the priority learning needs for someone wishing to be AI literate. (One vote is awarded for the original idea. Some similar concepts were merged.)

Skills	Votes
Multi-disciplinary skills/collaboration (between IT, research, M&E, finance, supply chains, programmes, etc.)	14
Facilitation skills	6
Cost-benefit analysis	4
Digital literacy	4
Critical thinking skills	3
Data analysis	3
Contextualisation skills	2
Tool utilisation and selection	2
Advocacy skills (on AI)	1
Communication skills	1
Data generation	1
People skills (different audiences)	1
Problem solving skills	1
Prompt engineering	1
What minimum standards to look for in partnering and procurement	1

Knowledge	Votes
Fundamentals of AI / Demystification of AI (what it is and what it isn't)	13
Governance, policies, regulations, standards (including data protection laws)	12
Knowledge of various AI tools that are available / Knowledge hub / Mapping/marketplace of solutions (including off-the-shelf and custom builds)	12
End user needs	8
Governance, safety, ethics, limitations, risks	7
Humanitarian principles and standards	6
Knowledge of AI processes	4
Sectors: what is being used where? / Use cases & applications / uses (evaluation, prediction, maintenance, systems, etc.)	4
Contexts and culture / How to contextualise solutions (culture, language)	4
Available resources (money, solutions, data, partners)	3
Knowledge hub	3
Balancing risks and rewards / Risks vs opportunities	2
Defining success	2
Ethics (beneficiary selection, privacy & data sharing, personal identifiable information)	2
Knowledge about target populations	2
Knowledge of datasets	2
Knowledge transfer	2
Stakeholder mapping of potential AI needs and impact	2
Opportunities for coordination, collaboration, and synergies	1
Partners/actors: Tech providers and others	1
Terminology	1

Analysis

Top voted items which are candidate learning objectives for AI literacy training are:

- **Multi-disciplinary collaboration** (skill, 14 votes): The most prominent idea arising from this activity is that collaboration between a wide range of stakeholders – including technical resources, programme managers, M&E, finance, procurement, etc. – is going to be critical for implementing many applications of AI.
- **Fundamentals of AI / Demystification of AI** (knowledge, 13 votes): This needs to be defined – but should include a definition of AI including what it is and what it isn't.
- **Governance, policies, regulations and standards** (knowledge, 12 votes): People need to know what they can and can't do (legally, or according to organisational policies or best practices).
- **Available AI tools** (knowledge, 12 votes): Given the dynamic nature of AI, keeping a list of available tools up to date is difficult. However, there is a clear demand that people would like to at least know where to look.

- **Governance, safety, ethics, limitations, risks** (knowledge, 7 votes): People need to know what they *should* and *shouldn't* do.
- **Cost-benefit analysis** (skill, 4 votes): This should make for a good practical exercise, considering all the costs (environmental, societal, etc.)
- **Uses and use cases** (knowledge, 4 votes): Considering AI applications was the top result in the previous exercise, we may have expected this to be voted up more here.
- **Culture and contextualisation** (skill/knowledge, 4 votes): To be AI literate may require an appreciation of cultural differences. An AI platform that performs well in one context may perform badly in another. And perceptions (and therefore acceptability) of AI will also vary from one context to another.
- **Resources** (knowledge, 3 votes): Integrating AI into programmes/operations requires resources including money, platforms, expertise/contacts, etc. Is part of AI literacy knowing where to look for these resources?



Other items

- **Critical thinking** (skill, 3 votes): To what extent do people need critical thinking skills to be AI literate? (There is some good quality evidence to suggest that people's critical thinking skills are damaged by use of AI.)
- **Data analysis** (skill, 3 votes): A communality of all artificial – and indeed human – intelligence systems is that they need input data, and that the quality of outputs depends on the quality of the inputs. Determining the quality of inputs and outputs may require strong data analysis skills.

- Having good **facilitation skills** and understanding **end user needs** probably relate to the skills and knowledge of the facilitator offering AI literacy training.
- **Digital literacy** may be interpreted as part of the baseline knowledge required for participants before they join an AI literacy workshop/course, or it could be a requirement to use AI (but not necessarily for AI literacy training).
- **Knowledge hub** and **knowledge of AI processes** are not defined.

Existing resources

During lunch, participants were asked to suggest relevant AI learning and other AI tools/resources that may be relevant to humanitarians.

AI Learning resources

Unless otherwise specified, these resources are not designed for humanitarians, though they may be relevant.

- AI Skills Navigator (Microsoft):
<https://aiskillsnavigator.microsoft.com/en-us>
- AI Fluency Content on GitHub (Microsoft)
<https://github.com/microsoft/AIFluency>
- Responsible AI Learn Module (Microsoft)
Includes sections on identifying, measuring and mitigating potential harms: Responsible generative AI - Training | Microsoft Learn
<https://learn.microsoft.com/en-us/training/modules/responsible-ai-studio/?culture=en-us&country=us>
- AI nonprofit skills collection (Microsoft)
<https://aka.ms/AI-for-nonprofits-collection>
- Copilot learning paths (Microsoft)
 - Programme management: <https://learn.microsoft.com/de-de/training/modules/streamline-nonprofit-program-management-with-microsoft-copilot/>
 - Managing volunteers: <https://learn.microsoft.com/de-de/training/modules/enhance-nonprofit-volunteer-management-microsoft-copilot/>
 - Fundraising: <https://learn.microsoft.com/de-de/training/modules/accelerate-nonprofit-funding-solutions-microsoft-copilot/>
- Kaya Connect
<https://kayaconnect.org/> (no relevant search results for 'AI')
(Humanitarian learning platform)

- Community Crisis Intelligence course (CDAC, Nesta, DFS, HLA):
<https://kayaconnect.org/course/info.php?id=9112>
(Designed for humanitarians)
- TEDx talks (<https://www.ted.com/topics/ai>)
- Udemy (<https://www.udemy.com/courses/search/?q=ai>)
- Coursera (<https://www.coursera.org/search?query=ai>)

Other AI resources

- ChatGPT (OpenAI)
<https://chatgpt.com/>
- GANNET Virtual Assistant (DFS)
<https://www.datafriendlyspace.org/our-work/gannet>
Transforming humanitarian data into actionable insights.
- WASH AI (Baobab Tech)
<https://www.washai.org/>
- HumBERT: The Language Expert (DFS)
<https://huggingface.co/nlp-thedeep>
- HumSet (DFS)
<https://blog.thedeep.io/humset/>
A set of humanitarian documents
- OCHA Financial Tracking Service
<https://fts.unocha.org/>
- DeepL Translator
<https://www.deepl.com/en/translator>
- HDX (OCHA)
<https://data.humdata.org/hapi>
The HDX Humanitarian API (HAPI) is a way to access standardised indicators from multiple sources to automate workflows and visualisations
- Primary Care International (AI voice over technology)
- AIMon
<https://www.aimon.ai/>
For increasing accuracy (detecting hallucinations) in RAG based LLMs
- Various Microsoft pages, tools and guidelines:
 - Responsible AI site: Empowering responsible AI practices | Microsoft AI
<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/ai/responsible-ai>
 - Guidelines for human AI interaction: Guidelines for Human-AI Interaction | Microsoft HAX Toolkit
<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/haxtoolkit/ai-guidelines/>

- Responsible AI Dashboard: Microsoft Responsible AI Toolbox - Microsoft Responsible AI
<https://responsibleaitoolbox.ai/?culture=en-us&country=us>
- Also suggested: Python, Colab, World Bank Indicators, Case studies (use cases), Forecasting, Segmentation, Classification, Scenarios

Analysis

Participants identified just one AI learning resource specifically designed for humanitarians: the Collective Crisis Intelligence course on Kaya; a self-paced online course.

Participants identified tools/services/resources designed for the humanitarian sector that use AI provided by Data Friendly Space (DFS), OCHA and Baobab Tech. Some of these (e.g., GANNET) are AI services which can be used by anyone (with or without a fee). Certain resources (e.g., AIMon, HDX, FTS, HumSet, HumBERT) may be useful for people developing AI models, but would require a certain level of digital literacy to engage with.

Methods, tools and approaches

Having prioritised skills and knowledge for AI literacy training, and identified some possible supporting resources, participants were invited to suggest methods, tools and approaches for teaching/learning AI literacy. This was a quick exercise to get people thinking beyond a single modality such as a live workshop.

Area/context-based in-person workshops
Blended learning gamification
Community learning platform (https://fabo.org/)
Face-to-face experiential learning
Facilitated training
Groups
Lead training (e.g., 'becko')
Learning by doing
Multimedia content
Online
Open engagement with learners
Peer learning
Peer mentoring
Self-paced online
Simulation
Structured/modular training (starting with basic)
Use case approval

Training rollout

For this exercise, participants worked in three groups, each considering a different target audience: community, NGO and government. Groups were asked to discuss which training modalities (from the above list or others) would be most appropriate for their target audience; identify strategic partners for rollout; where training should occur; how training could be promoted/incentivised; and who could be responsible for taking the initiative forward.

All workshop participants are based in Kenya, and were asked to consider this national context.

Communities

This group considered what it would mean to provide AI literacy training for people affected by crisis/host communities.

Modalities	In-person, participative, hands-on; high-level, quick, and to the point; relatable community use cases; community-led Training of Trainers (ToT)
Strategic partners	Local CBOs; leaders, gatekeepers, elders, religious leaders; women groups; youth groups; government
Where	Integrate into existing humanitarian programmes; existing local structures
Promotion/incentives	Dramas; radio/TV; social media; WhatsApp groups
Responsible parties	Humanitarian actors; national government; local government; donors; private sector; communities

Government (departments)

The group noted that government actors would generally be interested in accessing datasets which will allow them to do their jobs/carry out their duties better. This may involve visiting government actors in-person to help set up APIs. These actors may have a distrust of using AI. They would need to be assured of the purpose of the AI approach and what is in it for them.

Modalities	In-person; case studies; assessments; 'jolly's (with conditions)
Strategic partners	UN system; ethics experts; legal people; tech partners
Where	Kenya
Promotion/incentives	Certificates; refreshments; competitions; link to ISO standards
Responsible parties	Government, OCHA

National/local organisations (including NGOs)

Within these organisations, the group identified programme managers, project officers, senior management, MEARL (Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, Research and Learning), communications, ICT, and support as the likely targets of AI literacy training.

The group noted that frontline uptake of AI would be based on tools that can be shown to facilitate better decision making at field level.

Modalities	In-person learning; e-learning; webinar – clustered / extensive / structure – focused to sectoral niches / contextualised; LinkedIn learning / digital platforms; mentors, champions, consultants, coaches
Strategic partners	Tech companies; government ICT ministry; peers; donors/philanthropists; academia; like-minded partners
Where	Global South; urban slums; coastal; lakeside; refugee settings; hotspots; country HQs (of LNNGOs)
Promotion/incentives	AI training/certification; PR of staff (incentive for new learners); case studies/stories; visibility of LNNGOs; Study leave; costs covered; promotion of skills
Responsible parties	LNNGO management; funders

Workshop evaluation

Participants and event team members were asked to answer three questions during the two weeks following the workshop.

What did you appreciate most about the workshop?
Diversity of ideas and perceptions by different participants.
Hearing from all the humanitarian stakeholders about their aspirations for AI.
The time, venue, exercises, flow of discussions and participatory approach to the workshop were good and relevant in adult learning.

What could we do differently next time to improve the workshop?
Allocate more time for group activities and information sharing.
An opportunity to brainstorm on use cases and to prioritise.

Any other comments?
The mix of participants was interesting; ranging from those with little to no experience using AI in their work, to those with extensive knowledge. It was interesting sharing how progression in AI appreciation and literacy can be achieved – most of these discussions happened during the breaks.
Participants mentioned it would have been great if provided with a library of AI tools, resources or learning platforms that would support their work. Evidently none was accessible

from any of the participants hence the need to develop one. This calls for close coordination and information sharing amongst actors regarding their AI experiences.

It was noted that AI literacy building would be most meaningful if targeted to respective audiences and an interesting comment was made regarding ensuring deliberate efforts around 'passing power and agency to communities on matters of AI'.

There was a discussion on the need to reduce AI lingo and acronyms especially when conducting trainings/workshops with non-technical people in attendance. Also, it was noted that it may be helpful to explain that when speaking about Humanitarian AI, this goes beyond sectors: Health, Food security, Nutrition, Shelter, etc. to also include finance, logistics, etc. within humanitarian settings. Some participants weren't sure how logistics examples used applied to humanitarian work because of fixation to sectors.

This was a great initiative that has laid a good foundation for future learning on AI.

I'll email Tristan about AI courses and potential AI use cases.

Appendix: Sphere network learning objectives

Sphere asked – via its online forum – its members, trainers and focal points what their learning objectives would be for a 90-minute AI literacy workshop. Naturally many commented that 90 minutes would not be enough. Items in bold are objectives which the respondent identified as the most important.

Learning objective
Opportunities and potential for using AI for bigger, better, and faster response
Opportunities and potential for using AI more inclusive, accountable, and coordinated response
Risks and threats of AI in humanitarian sector: What are the current weaknesses, ethical concerns, failures and its implications?
Strategic discussion: Increasing use of AI is inevitable so how must/should we react strategically to this?
I would start the session by focusing on opportunities, using real-world examples or case studies
"Map is not territory": How can we consciously utilise AI without alienating communities; without reducing community engagement and meaningful participation?
environmental and ethical implications of using AI
Generalities of AI in the humanitarian field
advantages and disadvantages of applying AI in the humanitarian field
Explain the applications of AI for development, evolution, transparency and accountability in the humanitarian field.
Experiences already applied (case studies); progress of AI in the field.