Bridging the Gap:
How Do We Move from Adapting to AI to Scaled Adoption of AI

WELCOME

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Director, NetHope's Center for the Digital Nonprofit

NETHOPE Bridging the Gap

HOUSEKEEPING

The webinar will be recorded and available within a few days on our website.

NetHope does not allow any other AI notetakers or recordings to be taken. No screenshots are permitted without NetHope's express permission.

Questions can be asked via the Q&A function or in the public chat. Our panellists will be monitoring both and respond as time allows. Please keep this a safe space for honest dialogue by respecting organizations and individuals. This space is designed to ensure attendees can share and participate in a dialogue in a supportive atmosphere. This meeting, according to standing NetHope policies, is a non-partisan space.

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OUR PANEL



Dan Amias
Digital Innovation Advisor
Elrha



Fernanda Sauca
Research Associate, Prof. Of Societal Computing, TUM



Elizabeth Shaughnessy
Director, Digital Programming
NetHope

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AI USE: FUNCTIONAL ROLES OF AI

1. **Capacity compensation**
   Drafting, translation, proposal writing
2. **Knowledge management**
   Retrieving institutional memory, M&E data
3. **Anticipatory intelligence**
   Flood prediction, displacement modelling

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ADOPTION DYNAMICS: HOW AND WHY AI IS SPREADING

1. **Governance formalizing unevenly**
   Enterprise AI rolling out but wide gap remains between leaders and laggards.

2. **Practices precedes policy**
   Staff experimented before institutions caught up. Legacy of shadow practices persists.

3. **Culture creates divergence**
   Risk-averse orgs paralyzed; innovation-oriented ones racing ahead of governance.

4. **Capability externalized**
   Corporate partnerships filling capacity gaps but creating dependency and value alignment risks.

5. **Austerity is the primary driver**
   AI adopted to do more with less, not from strategic ambition. Efficiency gains remain individual.

6. **ROI remains ambiguous**
   No shared metrics. Organizational-level returns unclear. Aspiration outpaces evidence.

THE RISK LANDSCAPE

Shadow AI as governance failure

Pervasive use of unapproved tools — not malicious, but rational. Confidential data in unsecured systems. Fragmented learning. A signal that governance and practice have diverged.

Bias, inequity & structural exclusion

Models trained on Global North data and underperform in low-resource languages. Skewed vulnerability assessments distort aid distribution.

Data protection & information integrity

Breaches expose vulnerable populations to physical harm. Hallucinations dangerous where information quality affects life-saving decisions. Tolerance for error fundamentally lower than in other sectors.

Ethical & environmental tensions

Energy-intensive AI conflicts with climate mandates. Corporate value alignment a growing procurement risk. Socio-economic externalities of automation inadequately assessed.

THE GOVERNANCE LANDSCAPE

Sector specific

- **SAFE AI (CDAC Network):** Most comprehensive sector effort. Normative + operational. Still in beta.
- **UNHCR AI Approach:** Agency-level model for human-centred, transparent AI with displaced populations.
- **ICRC AI Policy:** Detailed agency policy: proportionality, do no harm, transparency, accountability.
- **ICRC Data Protection Handbook:** Foundational reference for handling sensitive humanitarian data.
- **IASC Data Responsibility Guidance:** Sector-wide data governance standards; directly applies to AI-processed data.
- **Signal Code (Harvard HHI):** Rights-based framework for humanitarian information activities.

International normative architecture

- **OECD AI Principles:** Non-binding international standard for human-centric, trustworthy AI.
- **UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI:** Global standard with focus on human rights and public interest.
- **UN 'Governing AI for Humanity':** AI must be governed in alignment with international human rights law.

The problem is not absence of frameworks — it's fragmentation, specialist formatting, and the gap between principles and operational tools.

THE MISSING MIDDLE IN NONPROFIT SECTOR AI GOVERNANCE

ABOVE: TOP-LEVEL GOVERNANCE LAYERS

Global governance instruments — not designed for the NGO sector

- Binding Regulations
- Intergovernmental Principles
- National and Regional Strategies
- Technical and Professional Standards

MISSING MIDDLE: NGO AI GOVERNANCE

Thematic coverage analysis — where sector-level guidance is absent or insufficient

PARTIAL GAPS: INTERPRETATION & OPERATIONAL TOOLS NEEDED

Some guidance extractable from top-level instruments

- Algorithmic Bias in Development Contexts
- Organizational Capacity and Governance
- Accountability to Affected Populations
- Do No Harm / Conflict Sensitivity
- Digital Divide and Equitable Access
- Interoperability and Coordination

SIGNIFICANT GAPS: FRAMEWORKS & OPERATIONAL TOOLS NEEDED

Little to no guidance from top-level instruments — sector must build from scratch

- Donor and Funder Dynamics
- Humanitarian Principles Alignment
- Data Protection (Low-Infrastructure)
- Dual-Use and Mission Creep
- Environmental Sustainability
- Power Asymmetry and Consent
- Vulnerable Populations
- Localization and Cultural Context

SECTOR-LEVEL INSTRUMENTS (PARTIAL)

Existing sector guidance — incomplete, does not fully cover the 14 themes

- NetHope AI Code of Conduct
- Signpost AI
- OCHA Briefing Note
- Principles for Digital Development
- UNICEF AI for Children

BELOW: ORGANIZATION-SPECIFIC POLICIES

Individual organizational instruments — varied, independent, organization-specific

Individual Nonprofit Organization Policies

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BARRIERS TO AI ADOPTION

1. Weak evidence base & inflated success narratives
2. Principles without operational pathways
3. Financial barriers & total cost of ownership
4. Human resource & capacity constraints
5. Failure to scale beyond pilots
6. Regulatory complexity & external constraints
7. Use-case identification & problem framing gaps

5 TAKEAWAYS

1. Not a knowledge deficit, an operationalisation deficit: The sector has frameworks. What it lacks is the tooling to apply them.

2. Fragmentation is the deepest structural problem: Organizations experiment in isolation, generating learning that doesn't travel. A winner-takes-all dynamic is already visible.

3. AI mirrors unresolved tensions: Efficiency vs equity. HQ vs field. Innovation vs accountability.

4. Content is not the problem, curation and accessibility are: Existing guidance is fragmented, buried in static repositories, and formatted for specialists rather than practitioners.

5. Curation + community: The primary value lies in combining content curation with active community facilitation.

FOUR CORE FUNCTIONS

Community Infrastructure

Segmented peer exchange, working groups, practitioner matchmaking. Active orchestration, not passive hosting.

Implementation Support & Responsible AI Navigation

Readiness tools, use-case frameworks, transparent business cases, governance frameworks.

Market Intelligence & Technology Curation

Vendor-neutral tool comparisons, NGO pricing guidance, open-source alternatives, horizon scanning.

Strategic Coordination

Funding alignment, shared infrastructure, aggregating the sector's voice in AI governance. Global South integration.

SCALING AI GRANTS

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SCALING AI GRANTS

IRC / Signpost AI – Info Pa'lante Colombia

- Conversational AI agent serving Venezuelan migrants and refugees navigating services and rights, communicating accessibly without technical language, responding with empathy and adapting responses as conversations develop
- 98.75% improvement in response time; 46% of conversations appropriately escalated to humans
- Scale reached: infrastructure and documentation supporting 16 new deployments across 6 continents serving over 150,000 clients

NRC / CLEAR – Crisis Learning, Early-warning, Anticipation, and Response

- AI-powered situational analysis system aggregating fragmented humanitarian data for decision-makers
- Self-hosted, open-source RAG pipeline now API-ready and available to partner organizations
- Key learning: data availability and standards gaps (not the AI itself) are the primary scaling blocker

PUTTING THE RESEARCH INTO ACTION

AUDIENCE Q&A

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ORGANIZATIONS

Elrha is a UK-based global charity that funds and strengthens humanitarian research and innovation. Elrha's strategic aim is to enable ethical, evidence-driven, and context-appropriate AI that improves humanitarian decision-making, anticipatory action, and operational effectiveness, without exacerbating risk, bias, or inequity. For more information: www.elrha.org

NetHope is a catalyst for collective impact that advances humanitarian, conservation, and international development efforts worldwide. For more than 20 years, we've enabled international nongovernmental organizations and leading technology partners to address the world's most pressing challenges and advance global good through collaboration, collective action, and smarter use of digital technology. Over 60 nonprofit Members and 50 technology partners collaborate to leverage digital solutions for exponential impact. Collectively, NetHope Members deliver more than 60% of all annual international, non-governmental aid, serving over 1.67 billion people in 190 countries. For more information: www.nethope.org.

The **Civic Machines Lab** explores the full lifecycle of artificial intelligence, from the semiconductors powering computation to the algorithms shaping human experience. Situated within the TUM Think Tank, the lab views AI as a socio-technical system rather than a purely technical challenge. By integrating perspectives from computer science, social sciences, and public policy, the Civic Machines Lab aims to shape technologies that are democratic, sustainable, and globally inclusive. For more information: https://tumthinktank.de/en/project/civicmachineslab/

RESOURCES



[NetHope AI Lighthouse for Nonprofits]

[Elrha focus area: Artificial intelligence]



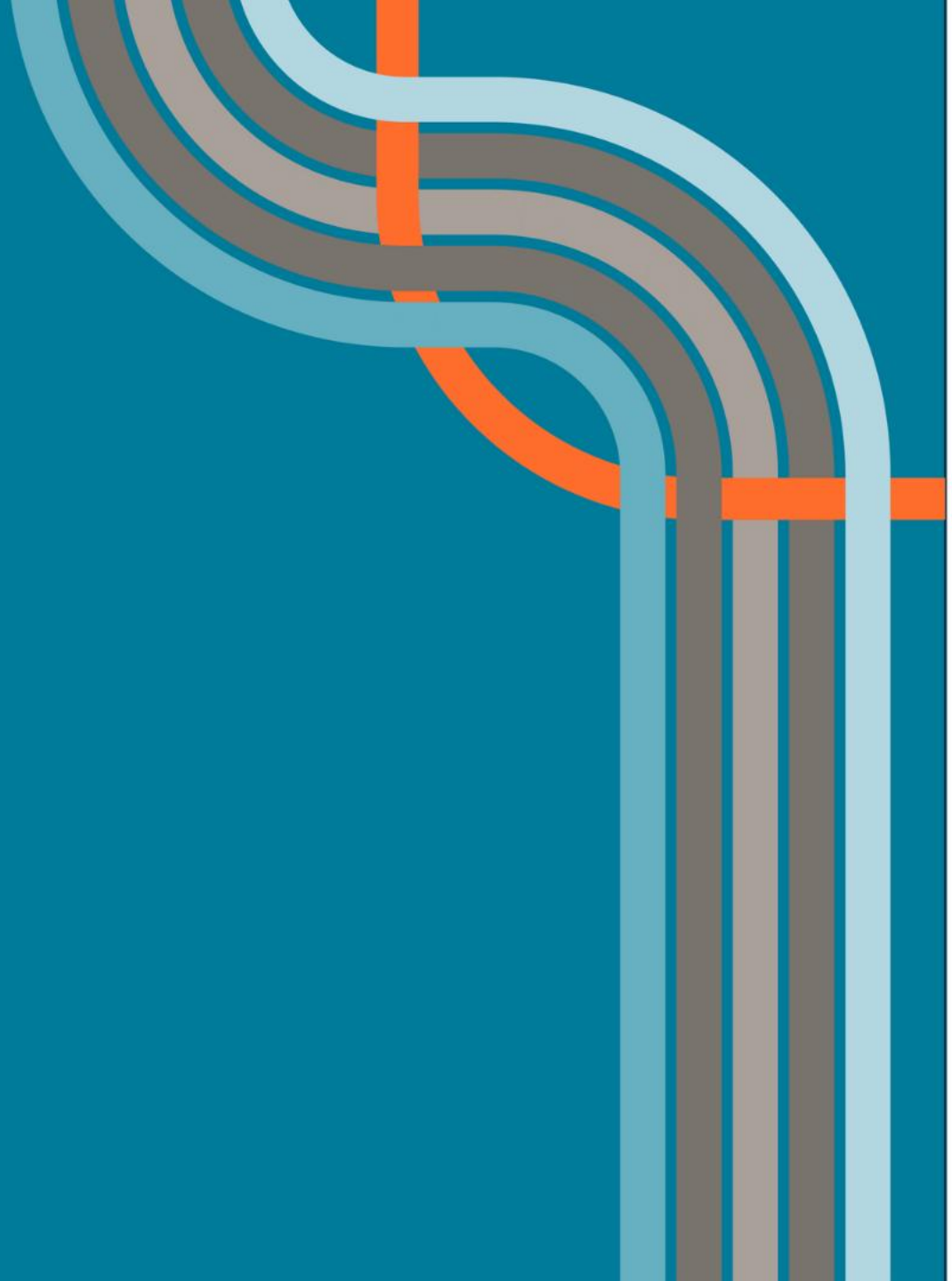
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