Improving AI Readiness at Save Somali Women and Children

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ABOUT NETHOPE CONNECTED

NetHope Connected is a global community and digital program designed by, for and with nonprofits, to help small to mid-sized organizations strengthen digital capacity at their own pace. It does this through learning resources, peer connection and practical guidance for adopting AI and technology responsibly.

This case study focuses on NetHope Connected's AI grant work, supporting Connectors to explore responsible, purpose-driven AI.

As in many other organizations in the sector, staff at Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC) were using AI in their daily work before the organization had any rule about how it should be used, who approves it or what information must never be entered into a public tool. With support from the NetHope Connected AI grant, SSWC developed its first organizational AI policy and took its staff through training on how to apply it. The policy sets risk levels, approval pathways and safeguarding rules, and it was written in plain language for everyone who might use AI rather than for the ICT team alone. The aim was to govern its own use of AI before those tools reach the communities SSWC serves.



SSWC staff during a training session on the organization's new AI policy

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

Save Somali Women and Children is a Somali women-led nonprofit founded in Mogadishu in 1992 by a group of Somali women from across the community. It is registered nationally, with offices in South and Central Somalia, and works across protection and gender-based violence, child protection, health and nutrition, water and sanitation, peacebuilding, food security and livelihoods. Its core purpose is supporting vulnerable Somali women to overcome marginalization, violence and poverty.

SHARED SSWC'S EXPERIENCE FOR THIS CASE STUDY

Abdirizak Abdille
Monitoring and Evaluation Manager

sswc-som.org
SSWC

The problem: the tools arrived before the rules

01

By the time SSWC began developing a policy, generative AI tools were already part of its staff's daily work, used to draft and paraphrase reports, write emails and donor materials, summarize field notes and analyze community feedback, with no internal rules to guide them. The main reason staff turned to these tools was language: schooling in Somalia is conducted in Somali, while organizations report in English. The tools help staff draft and translate in English, a second language they work in every day.

> ***"The risk was not simply whether AI could produce good text or save time. The deeper question was whether AI could be used without weakening confidentiality, safeguarding, protection standards, data security, humanitarian judgment and accountability to affected communities."***
>
> Abdirizak Abdille, Monitoring and Evaluation Manager, SSWC

Much of what staff handle is sensitive, including protection reports, safeguarding information and community complaints. If a staff member entered that information into a public AI tool without safeguards, the organization could expose vulnerable people to harm, damage trust and undermine the very standards it exists to uphold.

Five gaps SSWC set out to close

SSWC identified the gap as both practical and institutional, and named it across five dimensions.

AREA	WHAT SSWC FOUND
Policy	There was no dedicated organizational AI policy for staff to refer to.
Skills	Staff had very different levels of confidence, and most knew only ChatGPT, unaware of the wider range of tools.
Risk	Sensitive data and internal documents could be exposed if AI were used carelessly.
Governance	The board and senior management had no practical framework for oversight and accountability.
Context	Most AI guidance written for NGOs is generic. SSWC needed guidance grounded in the Somali context and written in simple, understandable terms.



Participants at the SSWC staff training on AI

Designing the policy and the training

02

The NetHope Connected AI grant supported SSWC in improving its AI readiness. The work centered on one main output, a comprehensive organizational AI policy, backed by practical training and capacity strengthening for staff and board members. The policy was written as an institutional governance document. It covers ethics, risk management, data protection, human oversight, procurement, communications, resource mobilization and organizational accountability, reflecting a deliberate judgment that AI risk is not held only by the ICT team.

Who it is for

The policy is written for everyone who might use AI in their work, from program officers and safeguarding focal points to MEAL, finance and communications staff, while board members and senior management are addressed as the people responsible for overseeing it. It is written in English, the organization's working language, in deliberately clear and accessible terms, so that staff with and without a technical background can understand and apply it.

Because staff work under time pressure across different locations, the policy pairs formal governance with practical examples, risk levels and approval pathways, so readers can quickly find what applies to them.

What shaped it

SSWC began by strengthening its internal understanding of AI. Before drafting the policy, the Monitoring and Evaluation Manager, Abdirizak Abdille, and the Resource Mobilization and Business Development Lead, Noordin Abdi, completed NetHope's AI Basics and AI Fundamentals courses. The team then searched for relevant guidance in Somalia but found little to draw on, as the country has no AI-specific regulation and few established policies. SSWC therefore reviewed AI and data protection policies from other organizations, used established data protection principles as its foundation and developed the remaining provisions around the risks identified in its own work.

> ***"AI must be used with discipline, verification and respect for human dignity."***
>
> Abdirizak Abdille, Monitoring and Evaluation Manager, SSWC

Guiding principles of the policy

SSWC set out to write a policy that was neither fearful nor careless. It allows learning and experimentation while setting firm boundaries around high-risk use. Four principles hold that balance in place.

01	AI supports human judgment and does not replace it. Humanitarian decisions remain human-led, and staff stay accountable for anything produced with AI.
02	AI-generated content can sound confident and still be wrong, so every output must be checked by a staff member before it is used or shared.
03	Protection of sensitive data takes priority over efficiency. Protection, safeguarding and personal information must never be entered into public AI tools.
04	Bias is described in concrete terms rather than as a general risk. In Somalia, identity, displacement, gender, poverty, disability and local power dynamics are all sensitive, and careless use of AI could reinforce exclusion or produce language that is technically polished and socially wrong. The policy answers that by requiring review from someone with the local knowledge to judge how a text will read in that community and whether it could deepen existing tensions.

Where the policy supports AI use

Alongside its limits, the policy identifies where AI can add value. Resource mobilization is the clearest case, where AI can support donor research, concept notes, proposal editing and aligning language with donor requirements. It can also help with reporting, translation, meeting notes and preparing training materials, and in monitoring and evaluation it can assist with cleaning data, summarizing results and synthesizing findings. In each case the policy treats AI as support for staff work, with review and professional judgment still applied before anything is used.

Putting it into practice

03

How the work is being rolled out

SSWC is rolling the work out in three stages, moving from writing the rules to applying them. The first stage produced the policy itself. The second built the training program that explains it and took staff through it. The third turns the policy into practice, with each department working out how it applies to their work and checking real examples of AI use against what the policy requires.

The training was built for mixed levels of digital literacy, because some staff already use AI tools for drafting and analysis while others were meeting the subject for the first time. It moved through four steps.



The facilitator during a session of the SSWC staff training on AI

01

Awareness

What AI is, why SSWC has developed a policy and how AI is already entering humanitarian and development work.

02

Risk

Worked examples of safe, risky and prohibited use in an SSWC context.

03

Policy understanding

The principles, responsibilities and approval requirements the policy sets out.

04

Application

Each department identifies immediate actions to apply the policy in its daily work.

Emerging outcomes

SSWC notes that it is too early to measure results, but the team has already seen some early changes in the quality and timeliness of staff reporting. Some reports that used to run late are now arriving on time, and some staff are writing to international donors with more confidence.

> *"People who were unable to write three lines are now able to write paragraphs."*
>
> Abdirizak Abdille, Monitoring and Evaluation Manager, SSWC

The questions staff and board members ask are changing as well. Some staff have started coming to the Monitoring and Evaluation Manager to ask how particular tools work. Board members who had not encountered AI before are asking whether it is safe, whether the information being entered into these tools is sensitive and who verifies the outputs. These are the questions the policy was designed to answer.

CHALLENGES IN ROLLOUT

Time and competing priorities

Getting staff together for training was difficult when everyone is carrying operational work in a fast-moving humanitarian environment, and the same pressure applies to the departmental sessions still to come.

Willingness to change

Some staff prefer the way they have always worked. A policy can set expectations, but it cannot create an interest in new tools, so SSWC expects adoption to be gradual.

No funding for tools

SSWC has no budget for AI tool subscriptions. Staff rely on free versions of tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, DeepSeek and others, and some pay for access themselves. What the organization can control is how these tools are used, and that is the focus of the policy and the training.

What the team learned

> *"Start with your own organization's real risks. What information staff handle, what decisions they make, where harm could occur."*
>
> Abdirizak Abdille, Monitoring and Evaluation Manager, SSWC

What went well

Writing for real readers. Treating plain language as a requirement, not a matter of style, made the policy easier for staff to understand and apply. Grounding it in what SSWC can realistically deliver today, instead of an ideal it cannot yet reach, also made it credible to the people expected to follow it.

Starting from organizational values. Grounding responsible AI use in commitments SSWC already holds, such as protection, community trust, localization and accountability, made the policy feel like an extension of existing practice, not a new set of rules imposed from outside.

Connecting AI to familiar work. Presenting AI as part of how SSWC already writes reports, raises funds and manages data, not as a separate technology topic, made the training more relevant to staff and easier to apply in their daily work.

Involving leadership early. Bringing the executive director and the senior management team into the work from the start, instead of only at the approval stage, gave the policy the backing it needed to be applied across the organization.

What comes next

EMBEDDING THE POLICY

- Orient board members on the policy and their role in overseeing AI use.
- Set up departmental AI working groups to apply the policy to their own work and review whether AI use is meeting real needs.
- Move staff from general awareness to role-specific use, so that staff in HR and finance can contribute to narrative reporting that previously sat only with the programs team.
- Translate the policy into Somali, the first language of most staff, if funding allows.

SUSTAINING THE WORK

- Build peer learning with other NetHope Connected AI grantees and keep those peer groups going after the grant period ends.
- Review and update the policy as AI tools and practice change.
- Prepare for donor due diligence, which already asks for financial and data protection policies and may soon include AI policies.

Learn more about NetHope Connected

NetHope Connected is a global community and digital program designed by, for and with nonprofits, to help small to mid-sized organizations strengthen digital capacity at their own pace.

The NetHope Connected AI grant program is one of the programs in the community, where we support grantees like SSWC to design, test and run AI responsibly, and publish the results as case studies like this one.

GET IN TOUCH

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Join NetHope Connected

SCAN TO JOIN

With thanks to Abdirizak Abdille, who shared SSWC's experience for this case study. Developed with support from the NetHope Connected AI grant program. October 2026.