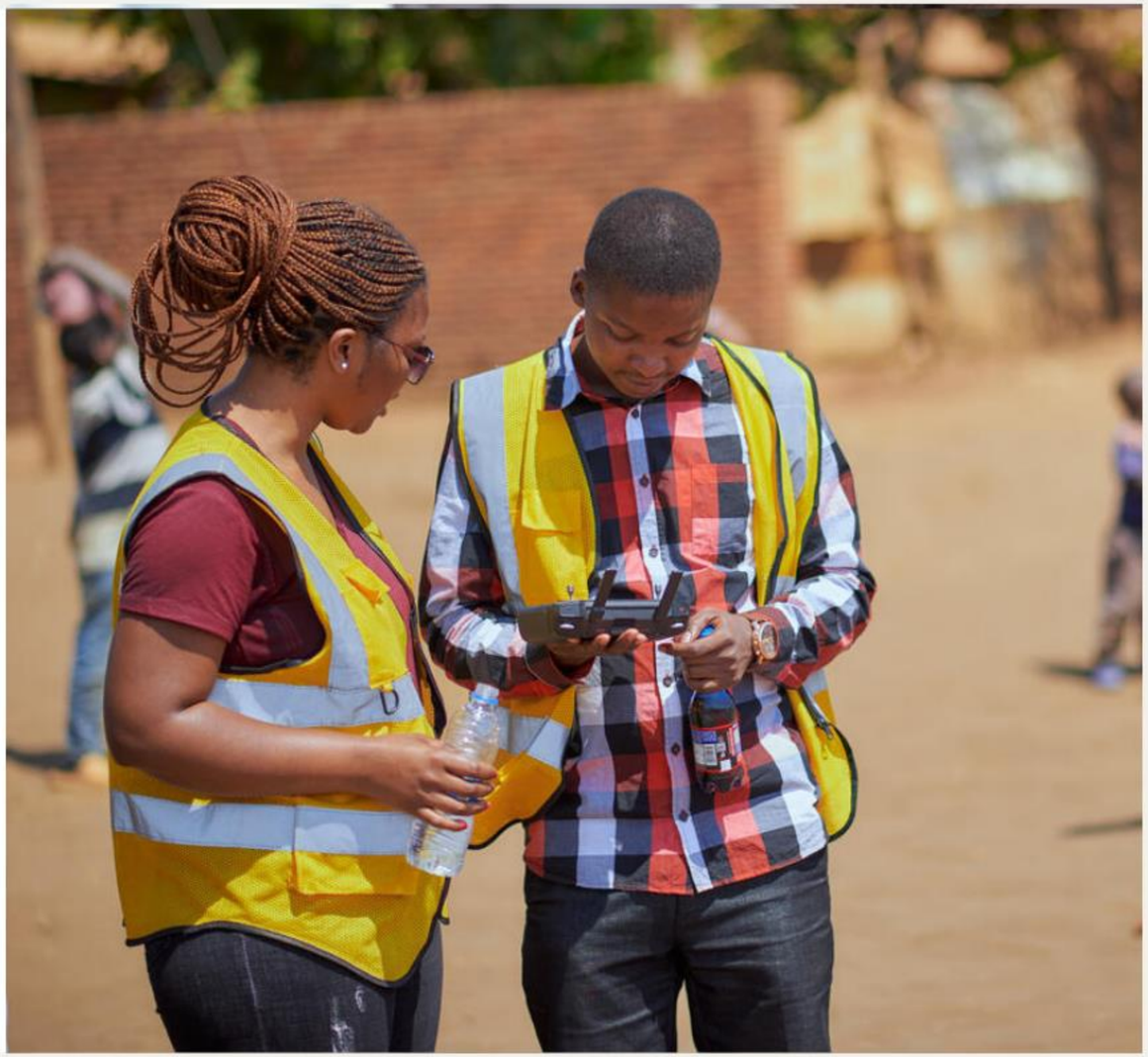
Humanitarian Leadership Academy x NETHOPE

Humanitarian tech webinar series

Collective action on localised humanitarian AI: Unlocking solutions together



Welcome to this session

Introduce yourself in the chat!

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Session format

- Welcome and introductions
- Housekeeping
- Audience poll
- Presentations
  - Setting the scene: Why localised AI?
  - Panellist presentations
- Audience Q&A

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Speakers

Deogratius Kiggudde
Programmes Manager
Upanzi Network at Carnegie Mellon University Africa

Meheret Takele Mandefro
Digital Transformation Analyst
NetHope

Tino Kreutzer
Chief Operating & Innovation Officer
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Esther Grieder
Director,
Membership Engagement
NetHope

Ka Man Parkinson
Communications & Marketing Lead
HLA

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Housekeeping

- **Session is being recorded:** Link & slide deck will be emailed
- **Zoom captions** are enabled including translations
- Use **chat** to share comments & reflections
- Submit questions via the **Zoom Q&A** function
- **Kind reminder:** Keep questions and comments respectful and on-topic
- **HPass badge:** You will receive an email next week

Audience poll

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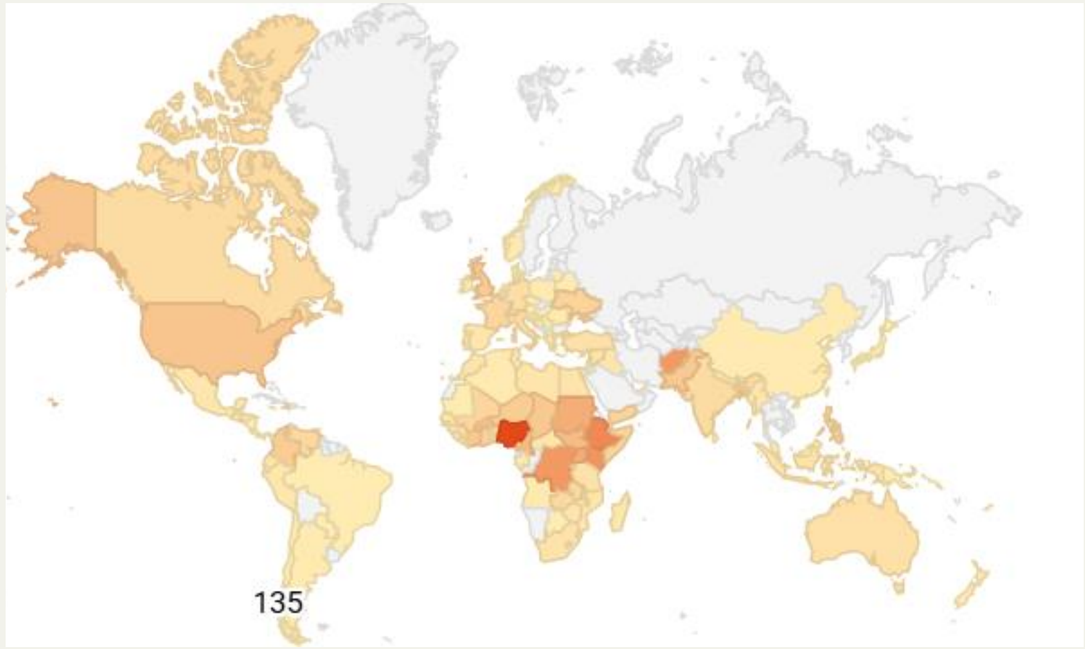
Setting the scene: Why localised AI?

- 95% of survey respondents use AI tools, driven by commercial tools e.g. ChatGPT, Claude (67.8%)
- Humanitarian AI adoption is not following a Global North-to South diffusion pattern
- At country level, the most intensive daily AI tool usage: Kenya (65%), Sudan (60%) Bangladesh (59%)



Respondents to HLA/DFS January 2026 survey
n = 1,729 / 120 countries.

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Setting the scene: Themes to emerge from community discussions

- AI literacy
- Accountability
- Local ownership / integration with local systems
- Community co-design / co-creation
- Specialist contextualised knowledge
- Cost / donor understanding of needs
- Languages
- Connectivity / offline solutions

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“The solution is not always creating something big that solves big problems. It’s building with the right people.”

- **Nour Arab, Lebanon**

“We need an artificial intelligence that speaks the language of the donor and the language of the village where I came from.”

- **Ivan Toga, Uganda**

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“AI must be built with national systems and local realities in mind. In Nepal, we already have important institutions and policy frameworks… We can use all these platforms and organisations to connect better with the people on the ground.”

- **Shudarshan Hamal, Nepal**

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Esther Grieder

Director, Membership Engagement
NetHope

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Just when we thought the terminology around localisation couldn't get any more complicated.....

Localised AI

For the purposes of this webinar, we are talking about 'Localised AI' in terms of:

- AI which is designed with the needs of local communities and actors in mind, both in terms of purpose, and in terms of accessibility
- AI which is designed, owned and governed with and by local communities and actors

Local AI or Local LLM (Large Language Model) meaning **AI that runs directly on your own personal device** or local hardware (ie not sharing your data with remote cloud data centers).

Today we are NOT specifically focused on this (though may reference it).

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2026

More localized AI use cases & tools developed in the Global South

Smaller, more agile organizations demonstrate what can be achieved when unencumbered by red tape

AI agents in the organogram?

AI in every proposal?

Increased discussion of environmental impacts, eg of data centers

Moves away from dependence on US tools?

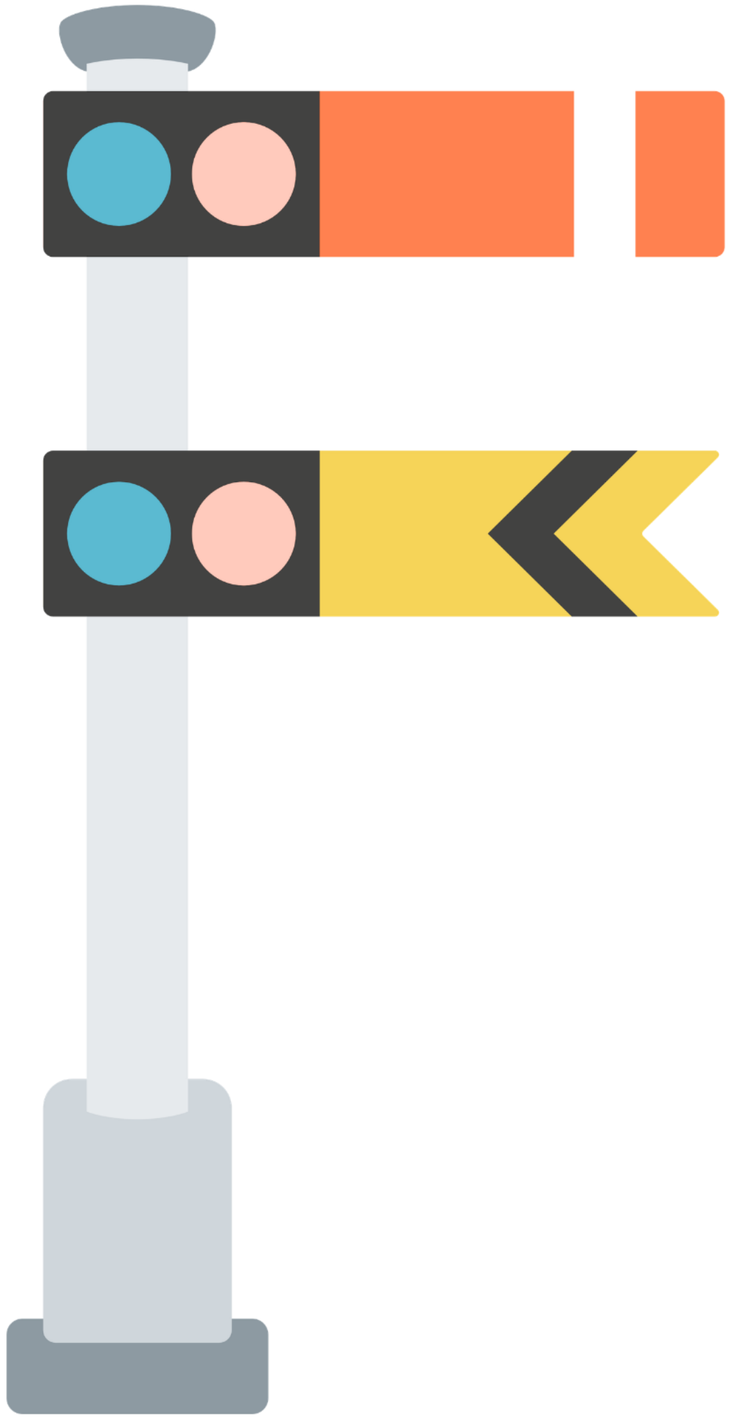
Shared standards for AI usage in the sector

Larger orgs see their AI budget lines increasing & are under pressure to demonstrate impact

Shadow AI

Beyond the hype – expectation management!

One big mistake or use case that results in harm & generates greater focus on governance



Key Signals: January – July 2026

- **Increased localized AI use cases for and by Global South.**
- Example: Ethio-ASR, released in March, is an open multilingual speech-to-text (ASR) suite purpose-built for Ethiopian languages, lowering the barrier to the development of locally relevant tools.

- **Environment:**
- By 2030, the global data centres powering artificial intelligence are projected to consume 945 terawatt-hours of electricity. This is nearly triple the combined annual electricity use of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nigeria….Their associated water footprint will equal the basic annual domestic water needs of all 1.3 billion people in Sub-Saharan Africa. **UN UNWEH Report (June 2026)**

- **Open Source AI (and reducing big tech dependence):**
- Discussions on Open Source AI are gaining traction. See ‘How AI Agents are Empowering Human Rights Defenders’(Human Rights Foundation), Open Source AI Gap Map

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How can we make sure **that the technology is working for humanity and that humanity is not working for the technology?"**

Tom Fletcher, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

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Meheret Takele Mandefro

Digital Transformation Analyst

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Localised AI: how deep does it go?

The sector already knows what localisation means

Six framings of localisation from a narrative analysis of 40 nonprofit strategy documents:

1. **Empowerment of local actors:** shifting power to those most affected · E.g. digital to deepen engagement with local partners and movements.
2. **Systems strengthening:** building local health, education & civil-society systems. E.g. data and supply systems for local health centres.
3. **Multi-stakeholder collaboration:** convening actors around local solutions. E.g. digital hubs connecting sectors.
4. **Innovation & adaptation:** local ingenuity as the driver. E.g. platforms to scale solutions built on local ingenuity.
5. **Accountability & legitimacy:** centring communities to build trust. E.g. participatory monitoring tools building local adaptive capacity.
6. **Normative commitment:** localisation as a sector-wide standard. E.g. alignment with global standards and charters.

Digital localisation isn't separate from these commitments. It is already lives inside them. AI is the newest layer of that same commitment. So the question isn't whether we believe in localisation. It is how deep localising AI actually goes.

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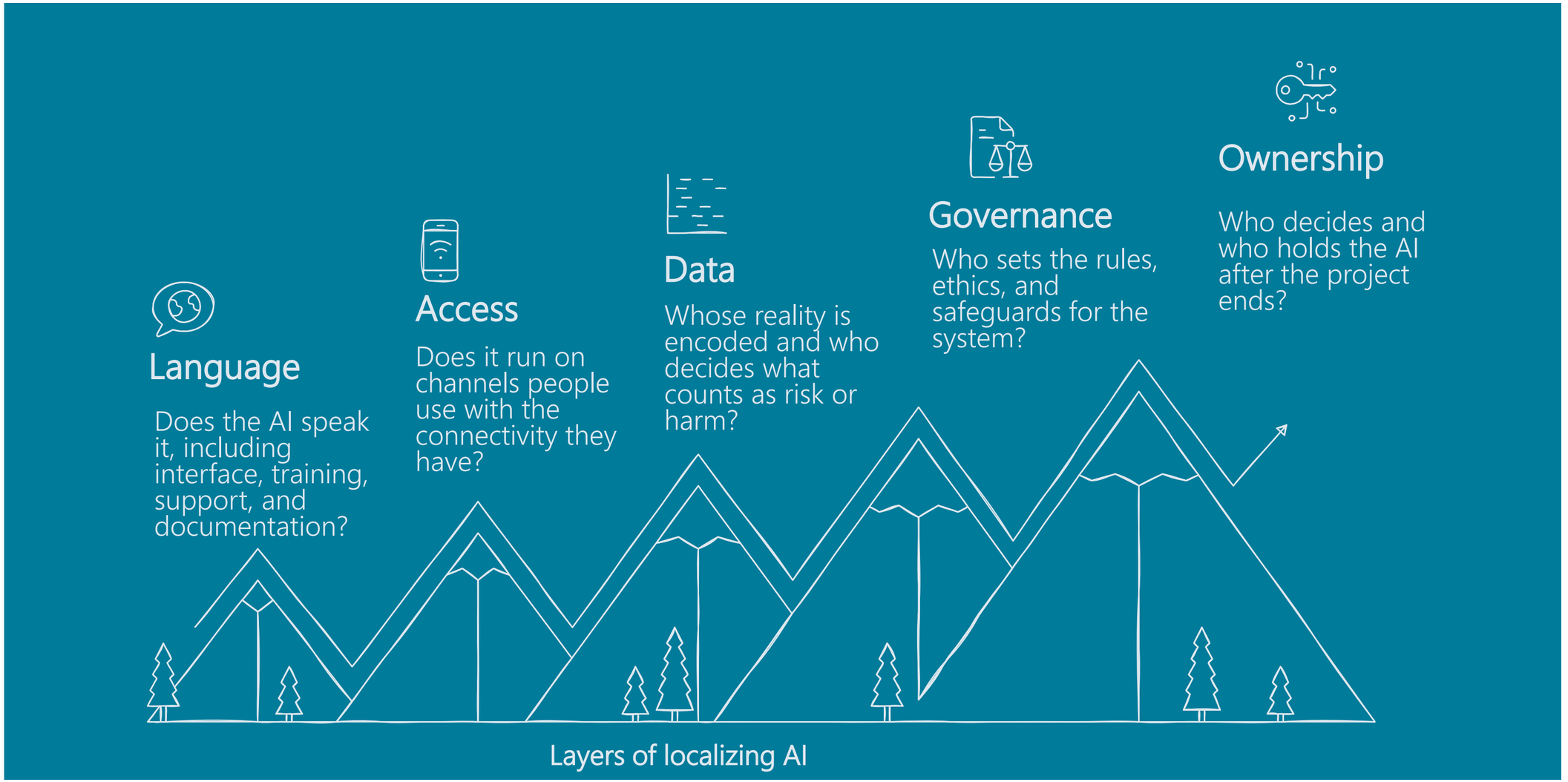
Layers of Localised AI



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Local organisations are already working at every layer

Six local organisations, six countries: three using AI to deliver the mission, three building AI readiness and governance.

Organization	What they are doing
Digital Agenda for Tanzania Initiative (DA4TI)	working to promote the ethical and responsible use of AI in journalism and civic media in Tanzania.
Educuality	strengthening the capacity of small civil society organizations in Egypt to adopt AI in practical, responsible and mission-aligned ways through the Ethical AI Readiness Lab.
Rural Smiles Foundation	piloting an AI-enhanced threat monitoring and referral tool used by civil society actors and individuals in Uganda to report threats, intimidation, and human rights violations.
Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC)	working to strengthen its institutional readiness and embed responsible AI practices in SSWC's protection programming for women and children.
SHIELD - APS	piloting an AI-assisted practitioner-powered harm intelligence system for civil society that addresses a significant gap in the organized collection of grassroots harm data related to online safety.
Women & Girls Health Empowerment Network (WGHEN),	piloting an AI-powered SafeVoice platform designed to support women and girls in reporting gender-based violence and enhancing civic engagement and access to justice in Nigeria.

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Layers of Localised AI in practice

- **Language** (Uganda): translation from Runyoro, Luganda and Swahili built before reports were usable · Tanzania: Swahili verification workflows · Egypt: readiness in Arabic
- **Access** (Nigeria): app, web, WhatsApp *and* SMS, the channel people already have · Italy: submissions prepared offline, sent when connectivity appears.
- **Data & categories** (Italy): a shared harm dictionary *plus* an organisation-specific layer that stays local and is never aggregated away.
- **Governance** (Somalia): an AI governance policy and ethical framework · Egypt: 20 NGOs each writing their own AI Ethical Canvas · Tanzania: guidelines co-developed, not handed down.
- **Ownership** (Nigeria): survivors report anonymously and are told what happened next · Uganda: every AI output is human-reviewed.

Barriers: Language, connectivity, funding, isolation

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Going deeper, together

No single organisation can build the whole stack alone and none of them should have to build it twice.

In a funding landscape this stretched, the answer isn't only more funding per organisation. It is making each effort go further. And the demand is proven: applications came from 16 countries, most across Africa and Asia, asking above all for readiness, governance, and tools in their own languages.

1. **Shared, offline-ready infrastructure:** local-language datasets and AI that works offline, built once as shared goods rather than rebuilt every project.
2. **Fund beyond the pilot:** Full implementation of AI projects need time. Back localsed AI through to sustainability.
3. **Create a space to share & amplify:** so a Swahili language AI resources built by one organisation serves many. Local actors as authors.

Localisation is the sector's stated commitment. The layers are where we find out how deep it goes.

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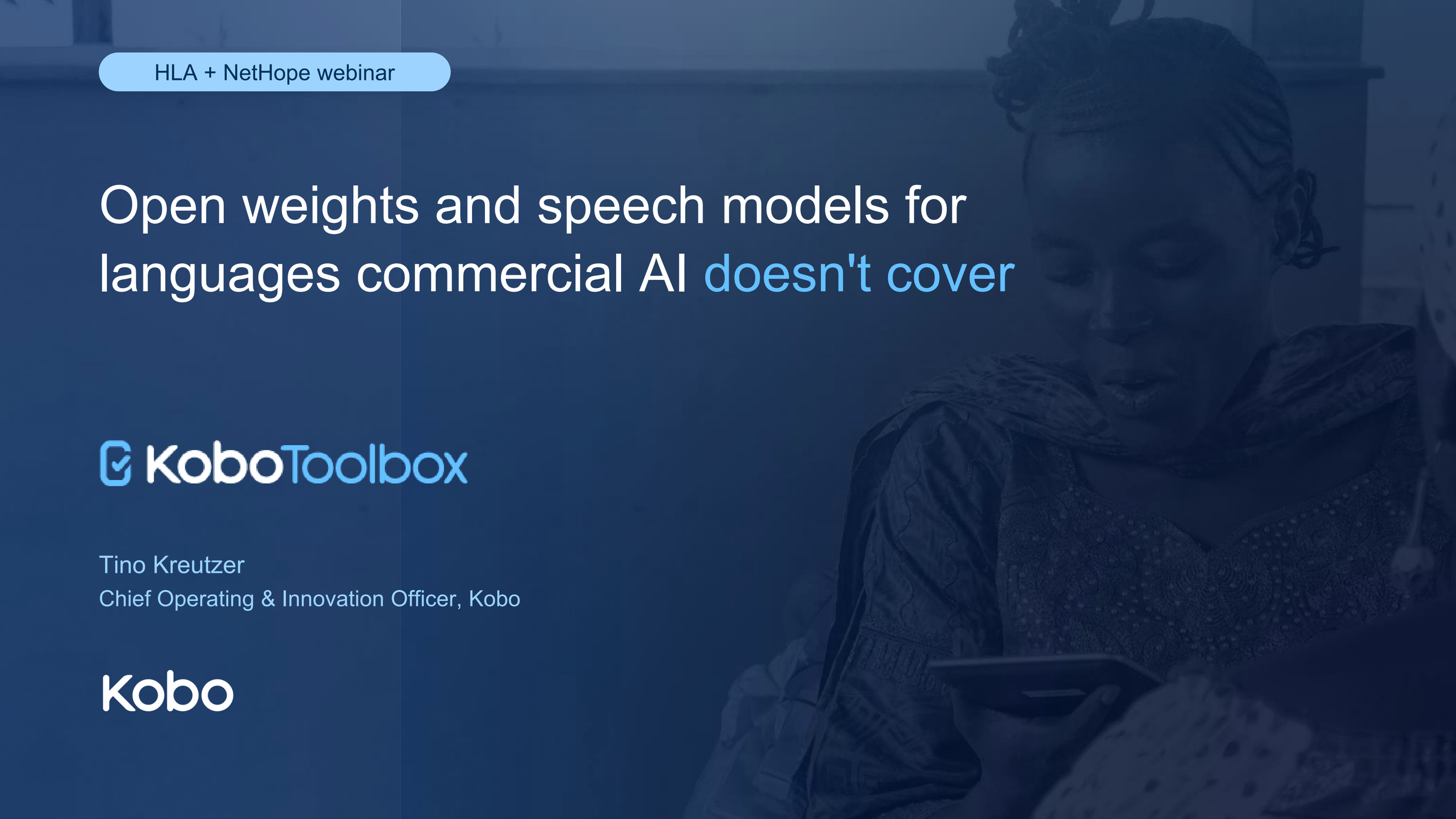
Tino Kreutzer

Chief Operating & Innovation Officer
Kobo

KoboToolbox

HLA + NetHope webinar

Open weights and speech models for languages commercial AI doesn't cover



KoboToolbox

Tino Kreutzer
Chief Operating & Innovation Officer, Kobo

Kobo

Kobo: Designed by Users, For Users

A platform forged in the field, driven by community needs

KoboToolbox

Community-led growth

Adopted in CAR, DRC, Uganda & Liberia

2010

OCHA

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

Expanded globally, in partnership with OCHA & IRC

2013

Available to users globally via our public servers

2014

UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency

WORLD BANK GROUP Academy • Development Data

Adoption by 1000+ organizations

2016

Kobo

Established as a nonprofit organization ✨

2019

Digital Public Goods Alliance

Recognized as a Digital Public Good

2022

1 Billion surveys collected 🎉

2024

30M

20M

10M

Monthly submissions

Built for nonprofits, multilateral agencies, and governments working in challenging settings

COMPLIANT · EU GDPR · COMPLIANT

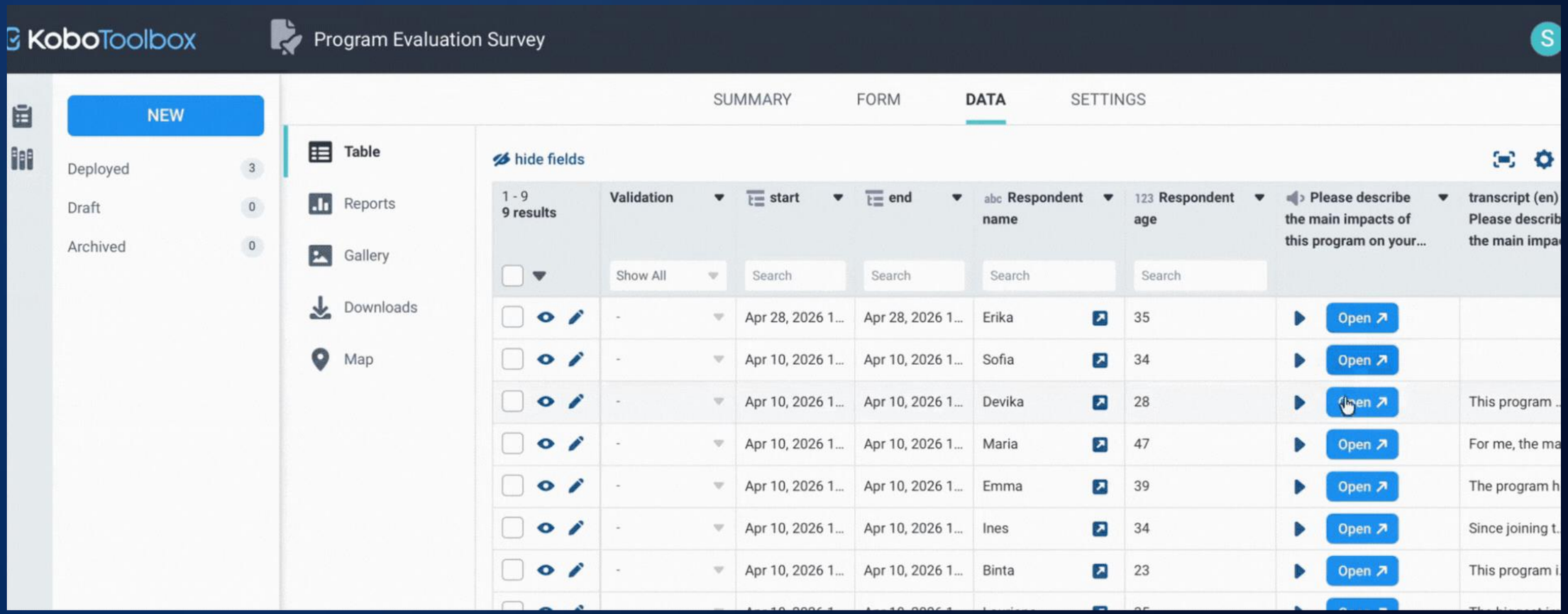
Information Security Management ISO 27001 Certified

How we build AI features: human verification is the gate

Harms assessed before we build

Synthetic data for reliability tests

Human verifies before we act on it



22 AI-related risks identified in our published scoping review · doi.org/10.1186/s12910-025-01189-2

What we self-host, and why

Running today

gpt-oss-120b

LLM features — transcript cleanup, translation, qualitative analysis

Sovereignty. Data is processed only in our environment. Never sent to a third party, never trains anyone's commercial model.

In progress

Meta Omnilingual ASR (7B)

Speech recognition for languages commercial AI skips

Adaptability. Having the weights is what lets us teach it a language it doesn't know.

You can't add a language to a closed model.

Priority languages: some examples

We support 80 languages and 145 dialects today. These are not among them.

Language	Speakers	Where it's needed
Congolese Swahili	11m+	Eastern DRC — Ituri, North & South Kivu
Lingala	32m+ (31% of DRC)	Kinshasa, northwest DRC, Congo-Brazzaville
Alur	2.5m+ (DRC & UG)	Ituri, DRC and northwest Uganda
Lendu	750k+ (DRC)	Ituri, DRC
Rohingya	3.2m+ (Myanmar/BD)	Rakhine, Myanmar & Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh
Kurdish	30m+ (Kurdistan)	Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria

Rohingya and Kurdish are built and validated with CLEAR Global, UNHCR and George Mason University; integration underway

Thank you!

Contact us at https://www.kobotoolbox.org/contact

Humanitarian Leadership Academy

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HLA × NETHOPE WEBINAR · 30 JULY 2026

Localised AI: a practitioner and network perspective

Deogratius Kigudde
Upanzi Network · Carnegie Mellon University Africa

5 nodes · ~50 partner organisations

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WHAT LOCALISED MEANS

Localised means three things

01

Language & context

AI that reads Amharic records, not just English PDFs.

02

Infrastructure

Small models that run offline, on a laptop or phone.

03

Ownership

Data local organisations can host, audit, and fix.

EVIDENCE

What this looks like in practice

EVIDENCE 01

FIDEL — Amharic OCR

Unlocks paper civil registration records feeding them straight into OpenCRVS workflows.

EVIDENCE 02

Deepfake detection & face anti-spoofing

Protecting the digital identity and other digital systems these services depend on.

- **Upanzi's role: independent engineering and testing that the sectors can rely on.**

PRECEDENT

We have run this play before

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Maps 2005

Blank commercial maps

↓

OpenStreetMap

↓

Local mappers

↓

Default response infrastructure

AI 2026

Cloud-only general tools

↓

Localised models

↓

Local builders & testers

↓

?

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WHAT COMES NEXT

Beyond pilots: four moves

01 Shared evaluation

Local-language benchmarks and independent testing.

02 Fund maintenance

Budget for year three, not just the demo.

03 Procurement that can buy local

Rules that let institutions contract local builders.

04 Share results across borders

Through networks, not one-off pilots.

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THE ASK

Build, test, own locally.

Independent testing for localised AI tools

Deogratius Kiggudde · Upanzi Network, CMU-Africa · dkiggude@andrew.cmu.edu · africa.engineering.cmu.edu/research/upanzi · cylab-africa.github.io

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Panel discussion

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Submit your questions through the Zoom Q&A function

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Thank you for joining us!

- **Feedback:** Please complete the short survey on Zoom
- **Recording:** This will be available on the HLA YouTube channel within 24 hours and emailed to you
- **HPass digital badge:** will be emailed next week

Resources

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