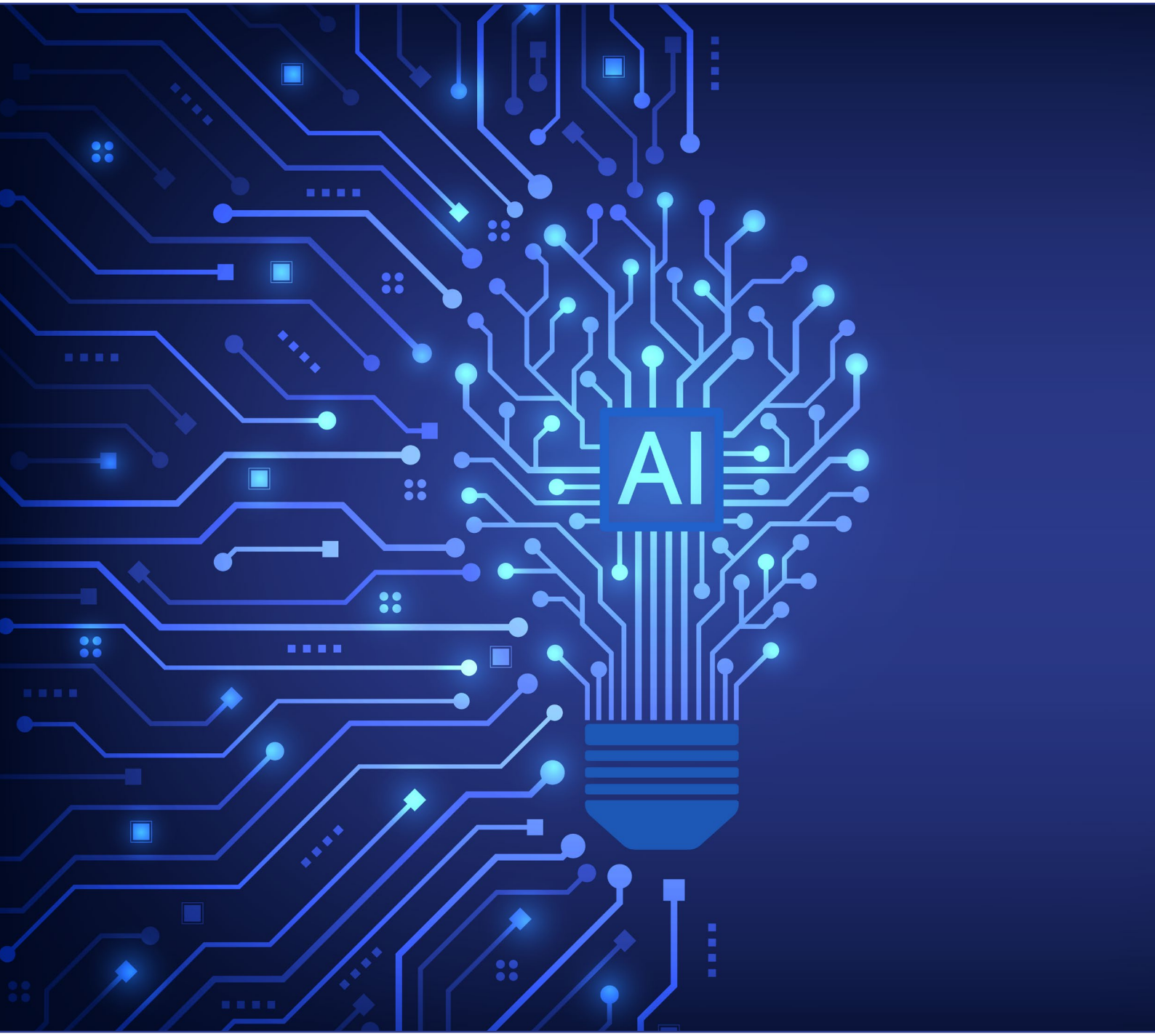
LOCAL LEADERSHIP IN THE AGE OF AI: How Artificial Intelligence is Transforming Locally Led Humanitarian Action



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HUMANITARIAN ADVISORY GROUP

Broad Reach Foundation

GLOW CONSULTANTS

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ALLIES

Local and national research organisations generate critical evidence for humanitarian action, but often face restrictive funding, administrative burden, and limited opportunities to shape research agendas and influence policy. ALLIES responds by providing flexible, trust-based funding, reduced bureaucracy, and optional technical support, giving partners greater control over what they research, how they work, and how their findings are used.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Artificial Intelligence
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
CNIC	Computerized National Identity Card
HAG	Humanitarian Advisory Group
HR	Human Resources
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
KII	Key Informant Interview
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PIANGO	Pacific Island Association of Non-Government Organisations
RQ	Research Question
SAFE AI	Standards and Assurance Framework for Ethical AI in Humanitarian Action

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly becoming part of routine humanitarian work in Pakistan. This report describes research into how local humanitarian actors are using AI, the value and risks associated with its growing adoption, and whether these changes are contributing to more locally led humanitarian action. The research found that while AI is helping local actors participate on stronger terms within the existing humanitarian system, it is not redistributing the power, resources and decision-making authority that are central to localisation.

Methodology

The research drew on a mixed-methods approach comprising 42 organisational survey responses, 23 key informant interviews with local and international humanitarian actors and AI experts, and a review of relevant humanitarian and AI literature. Analysis was informed by the Humanitarian Advisory Group and Pacific Island Association of Non-Government Organisations localisation measurement framework, adapted to examine five dimensions particularly relevant to this research: partnerships, leadership, policy influence and advocacy, funding, and capacity. This framework was used to assess whether improvements associated with AI use are contributing to changes in the participation, influence and power of local humanitarian actors. AI tools and organisational practices are evolving rapidly, so the findings represent a snapshot of the situation during the research period.

Key Findings

AI Use is already widespread, with **93% of surveyed respondents (local organisations staff) reporting its use in official work.** Usage is shaped primarily by organisational roles and the nature of assigned tasks and is concentrated among programme, monitoring and evaluation, communications and other staff responsible for writing, analysis, documentation and external engagement.

Reporting is the most common application, with AI used mainly to improve language, structure, analysis and presentation. It is also supporting email communication by reducing language barriers and improving the clarity and professionalism of exchanges with donors and international partners. In proposal development, AI is helping local actors interpret donor requirements, structure applications, strengthen technical language and respond to complex funding opportunities more rapidly. It is also increasingly being used to develop presentations, learning products and social-media content, helping organisations improve the visibility and dissemination of their work and, in some cases, reduce reliance on external consultants.

By contrast, **AI use remains comparatively low in community feedback, accountability and aid targeting processes**, where organisations continue to rely primarily on human-led systems, field verification and contextual judgement. AI may support limited back-end functions in these areas, such as organising anonymised information or identifying broad themes in non-sensitive feedback, but it is not independently assessing vulnerability, interpreting sensitive community concerns or determining access to assistance. In all of these uses, AI is predominantly being used as an assistive rather than autonomous tool, and human review remains essential to verify accuracy, preserve local context and ensure that outputs and decisions remain grounded in field realities.

Implications for Localisation. Across the five localisation dimensions examined, AI is making a meaningful but partial contribution to locally led humanitarian action. **In partnerships**, improved reports, emails and translation are enabling local actors to communicate more clearly and confidently with international partners, but have not substantially changed who determines project parameters, compliance requirements, risk allocation or final decisions.

In leadership, 77% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that AI has made it easier for local actors to participate in policy, coordination and learning forums by improving their presentations and ability to communicate evidence. However, they also asserted that greater participation and visibility have not translated into comparable authority over agendas, resources or decision-making.

In **policy influence and advocacy**, AI is increasing the production and reach of locally generated knowledge, with 72% of respondents reporting an increase in reports authored or co-authored by local actors and 85% reporting increased social media communication. Greater visibility, however, has not necessarily resulted in stronger influence over humanitarian policy and advocacy priorities, and wider biases within AI systems may reinforce the underrepresentation of local knowledge.

In **funding**, AI is lowering technical and resource barriers to proposal development and enabling local actors to pursue more complex opportunities, but there is little evidence that this has increased successful awards, direct funding or local control over financial resources.

Finally, AI is strengthening organisational **capacity** by improving efficiency, broadening access to writing and analytical functions and reducing some dependence on external technical support, although these gains remain largely individual and ad hoc rather than institutionally embedded.



Responsible AI Use and Governance. The research identified important considerations around where and how AI should be used, and that its benefits are accompanied by significant governance and ethical risks. AI adoption is progressing faster than the systems needed to manage it responsibly: 72% of respondents reported relying entirely on freely available AI tools, largely because of their accessibility and the financial constraints facing local organisations, while only 3% reported formal AI training and 69% said their organisation did not have a documented AI use policy. Existing safeguards are also uneven and largely informal.

Respondents identified privacy and confidentiality breaches, inaccurate or fabricated information, loss of local context, bias, overreliance on AI and unclear accountability as key risks. They argued that these concerns become particularly serious when AI is used to process information from crisis-affected communities, protection-related data or other sensitive humanitarian information. The findings also highlight an equity issue, in that local organisations may increasingly be expected to manage AI-related risks without having access to the secure tools, specialised expertise, training and financial resources available to larger international actors. Responsible AI use should therefore be treated not only as an organisational compliance issue but as part of equitable partnership and capacity strengthening.

Recommendations

The research identified five priority actions for strengthening the responsible use of AI in locally led humanitarian action.

1. **AI guidance**. Humanitarian coordination bodies should develop sector-specific AI guidance and minimum standards covering governance, data protection, acceptable use, accountability and human oversight. Individual organisations can use this guidance as a starting point to formulate, and regularly update, their own respective AI use policies. Together, these measures would help move AI use from largely informal adoption towards a more deliberate, risk-proportionate and institutionally supported approach.

2. **Provide practical and role-based AI training.** Organisations should provide practical and role-based training on responsible AI use, including effective prompting, verification of AI-generated outputs and protection of sensitive data, with regular refresher training as tools and risks evolve.

3. **Fund responsible access to AI.** Donors and international partners should provide dedicated financial support for responsible AI access, including safer or paid tools, staff training, technical support and data-protection measures.

4. **Assess AI use risk.** Organisations should introduce risk assessment procedures that classify AI applications according to their level of risk, with stronger safeguards and documented human review for uses involving sensitive data, safeguarding or access to assistance.

5. **Integrate AI into partnership processes.** AI guidance should be integrated into partnership agreements, partner orientations, safeguarding discussions and capacity-strengthening processes so that responsibilities for acceptable use, data protection and oversight are jointly understood.

1. INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly used across the humanitarian sector to support routine tasks such as report drafting, data formatting, summarisation, translation and large-scale analysis. At the same time, its use raises risks related to misinformation, bias, transparency, cybersecurity, privacy and confidentiality, particularly when sensitive humanitarian data are involved.[1]

Global evidence suggests that AI use is already widespread among humanitarian practitioners. A 2025 survey of 2,539 respondents across 144 countries and territories found that 93% had used or experimented with AI, while 70% used it daily or weekly. However, only 8% reported that AI was broadly integrated within their organisations and only 22% indicated that formal AI policies were in place.[2] This suggests that individual adoption is progressing faster than organisational policies, training and governance arrangements. However, there is little evidence about how local humanitarian actors[3] independently adopt and use these tools, particularly within resource-constrained and compliance-heavy environments.

Local Actors

This research used the Grand Bargain's definition of local actors, namely "organisations engaged in relief that are headquartered and operating in their own aid recipient country and which are not affiliated to an international NGO".[4]

1.1 Purpose and Scope

The research described in this report examined how AI is transforming locally led humanitarian action, using a case study of Pakistan. It centred on the experiences of local humanitarian organisations, while also drawing on perspectives from international partners and AI experts for triangulation. It focused primarily on widely accessible generative AI tools, including ChatGPT, Google Gemini, DeepSeek, Grok, Claude and Microsoft Copilot.[5] The study explored the use of AI in routine organisational work and humanitarian responses, including communication and reporting, dissemination and public engagement, proposal development and fundraising, planning and data analysis, community feedback and aid targeting and responsible-use practices and organisational governance.

Pakistan was a useful setting for this research due to its diverse humanitarian ecosystem, comprising local organisations and humanitarian networks. Pakistan's humanitarian actors engage regularly with international organisations through funding, reporting, coordination and partnership arrangements. This made Pakistan an appropriate context for examining whether AI is influencing communication, reporting, proposal development, knowledge production, participation in humanitarian forums and wider power dynamics.

1 https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/world/briefing-note-artificial-intelligence-and-humanitarian-sector

2 https://www.humanitarianleadershipacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Initial-insights-report-How-are-humanitarians-using-artificial-intelligence-in-2025-Mapping-current-practice-and-future-potential.pdf

3 Local actors are defined as per the Grand Bargain for this research https://devinit.org/files/system/files/hftt_localisation_marker_definitions_paper_24_january_2018.pdf

4 Ibid.

5 Generative AI identifies patterns in existing data and produces new outputs such as text, images, audio or video. Although AI applications such as chatbots and disaster mapping have been used in humanitarian work for several years, increased public access to generative AI has accelerated experimentation across the sector.

The overall aim of this research was:

To examine how local humanitarian actors are using AI across the humanitarian programme cycle, what value and risks this creates, and what ethical and governance arrangements exist or are needed.

The research questions were as follows.

Overarching Research Question: How is AI transforming locally led humanitarian action?

- **Research Question 1:** Extent of AI use: What are the common AI use practices of local humanitarian actors?
- **Research Question 2:** Effects of AI usage on locally led humanitarian action: What changes can be seen in the key dimensions of localisation and power dynamics between local and international actors?
- **Research Question 3:** Ethics, risk, and governance: How can AI be used responsibly in locally led contexts?

The research findings are intended for local organisations, donors, intermediaries, international agencies and other humanitarian stakeholders in Pakistan and globally.

1.2 Analytical Framework

This research examined how AI tools are changing locally led humanitarian action by applying the localisation measurement framework developed by Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) and Pacific Island Association of Non-Government Organisations (PIANGO).[6] This framework summarises seven core areas of localisation through which progress can be assessed: partnerships, leadership, coordination and complementarity, participation, policy influence and advocacy, capacity and funding. These core areas must be tailored to research specific contexts, because not all components are relevant or applicable in every case. Therefore, the analysis involved only those aspects of localisation measurement with high relevance to AI use, as shown in Figure 1 on the following page. Potential causal links between AI use and areas of the localisation measurement framework are also identified.

6 https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Measuring-Localisation-Framework-and-Tools-Final_2019.pdf



Figure 1: Analytical Framework: Localisation Impact Framework

Research Questions	Relevant Localisation Framework Analytical Indicator	Relevance to this Research
RQ1.1: How is AI being used by local actors in communication and reporting? **RQ1.2:** How is AI being used by local actors in dissemination and public engagement? **RQ1.3:** How is AI being used by local actors in proposal development and fundraising? **RQ3:** How can AI be used responsibly in locally led contexts?	**Capacity** **Impact Indicator:** Local and national organisations can respond effectively and efficiently and have targeted and relevant support from international actors **Progress Indicator:** Contextualised humanitarian standards, tools and policies are available	**High**
RQ2.1: How is AI shaping the power dynamics between international and local actors in their partnerships?	**Partnerships** **Impact Indicator:** Equitable and complementary partnerships between local, national and international actors **Progress Indicator:** Increased power and decision-making of local and national actors within partnerships	**High**
RQ2.3: How is AI shaping the inclusion of local actors in humanitarian forums, policy discussions and learning platforms?	**Leadership** **Impact Indicator:** National actors define and lead on humanitarian action **Progress Indicator:** Local and national actors lead response and dominate decision-making	**High**
RQ2.2: How is AI shaping the humanitarian sector's knowledge base (e.g., by increasing the number of learning products authored or co-authored by local actors)? **RQ1.1:** How is AI being used by local actors in communication and reporting? **RQ1.2:** How is AI being used by local actors in dissemination and public engagement?	**Policy Influence and Advocacy** **Impact Indicator:** Humanitarian action reflects the priorities of affected communities and national actors **Progress Indicator:** National actors are recognised as key stakeholders in national debates about policies and standards that may have significant impact on them	**High**
RQ1.3: How is AI being used by local actors in proposal development and fundraising?	**Funding** **Impact Indicator:** Increased number of national and local organisations that, in the judgement of interviewees, have achieved a level of financial independence that allows them to respond more efficiently **Progress Indicator:** Local and national actors have access to direct funding with limited or no barriers.	**High**

2. METHODOLOGY

This research used a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative evidence to examine how local humanitarian actors in Pakistan use AI and how this may affect locally led humanitarian action.The research was conducted in six phases: inception, data collection, analysis, validation, report writing, and impact and communications. During the inception phase, the research team reviewed relevant literature, refined the analytical framework and research questions, developed the data collection tools, and mapped key stakeholders. The methodology and tools were agreed in consultation with HAG.

2.1 Data Collection

Primary data were collected through an online survey and key informant interviews (KIIs), supported by a desk review of relevant humanitarian and AI literature. The desk review covered recent publications on AI adoption, humanitarian applications, governance, training and risk. An online survey was circulated among local humanitarian organisations across Pakistan on the use of AI in routine organisational tasks, including email communication, reporting, analysis and proposal development. The survey was shared directly with relevant organisations known to the research team and through the National Humanitarian Network's online platform,[7]. Forty-two valid organisational-level responses were received. The survey generated quantitative evidence on patterns of AI use. It also enabled respondents to comment on sector-wide practices without disclosing sensitive organisational information.

Twenty-three KIIs were conducted with representatives of three stakeholder groups:

- Local humanitarian actors
- International humanitarian actors working with local partners in Pakistan
- AI experts working within the humanitarian sector

The interviewees comprised organisational leaders, programme managers and monitoring and evaluation staff from local and international actors. Fifteen interviews were conducted with local humanitarian actors. They explored how AI is used in routine work, reporting, proposal development, communication, analysis and dissemination, as well as its implications for funding, partnerships, organisational capacity and local leadership. Six interviews were conducted with international humanitarian actors. These focused on how AI use by local partners was affecting communication, reporting, proposal quality, partnership dynamics and ethical concerns such as confidentiality. Two interviews with AI experts working within the humanitarian sector examined the functionality of commonly available AI tools, data confidentiality, differences between free and paid versions, and potential risk-mitigation measures.

Participants were selected purposively on the basis of prior mapping of relevant organisations and stakeholders. The mapping was used to identify organisations, as well as individuals within those organisations, whose roles, geographic coverage, level of outreach and organisational capacity would ensure a diverse range of perspectives. Organisations and individuals were therefore approached directly based on these characteristics. The sample included organisations working across Pakistan – based in Sindh, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan – as well as actors involved in recent humanitarian responses such as floods.

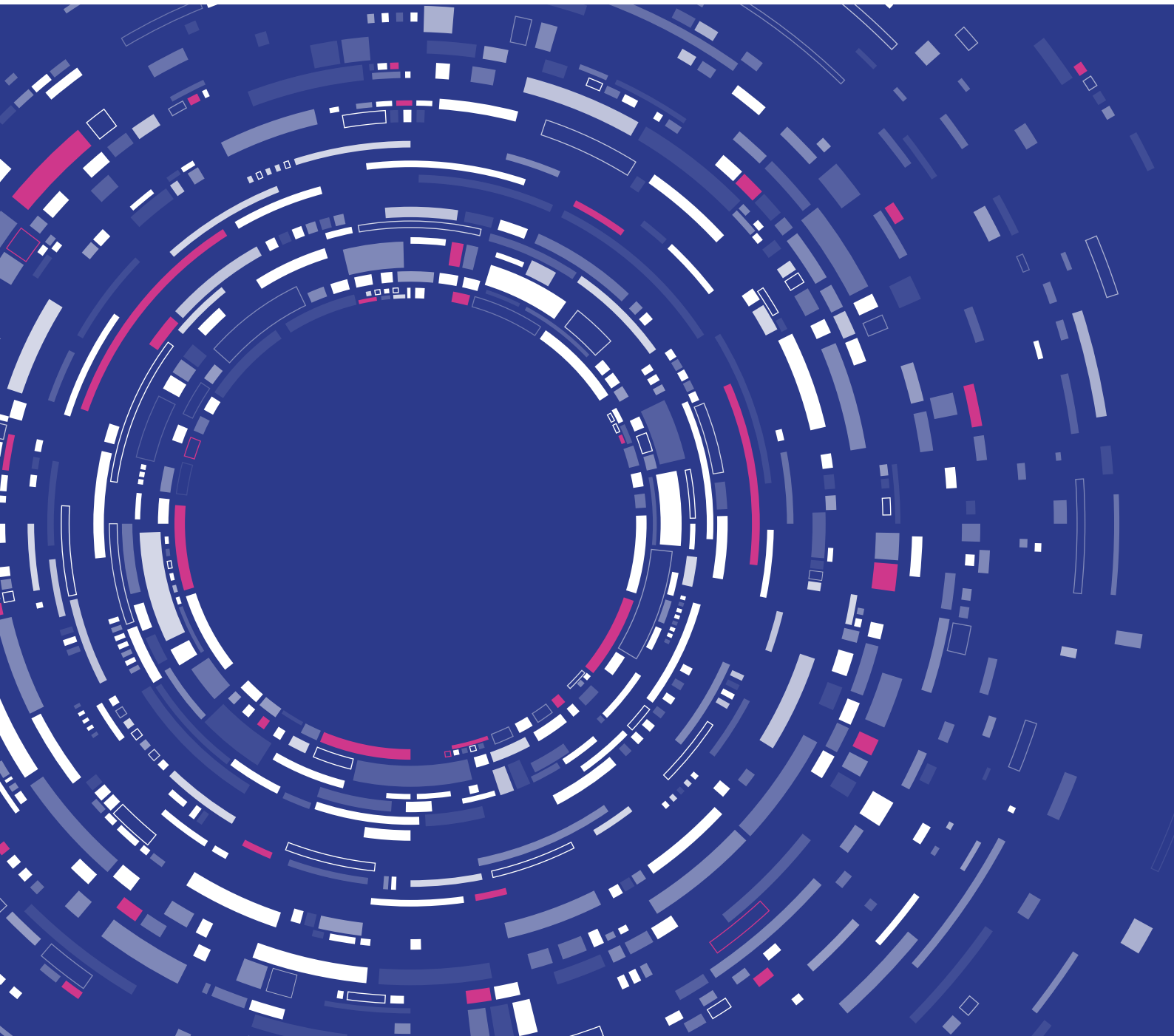
7 The National Humanitarian Network is the largest network of local humanitarian actors in Pakistan.

2.2 Data Analysis

The analysis was guided by an analytical matrix that was developed iteratively around themes emerging from the data and their relevance to the research question. Qualitative findings from the KIIs and review of secondary literature were triangulated with the quantitative findings from the survey. Preliminary findings were shared with research participants for validation; their feedback was used to refine and strengthen the final analysis. AI was used selectively to support tasks such as language refinement and structuring of key findings. All AI use was carried out under strict human oversight and without compromising respondent privacy.

2.3 Study Limitations

Given the ongoing and rapid evolution of AI tools, policies and practices, the findings represent a snapshot of the situation during the research period. Patterns of AI use, its associated risks and organisational policies may continue to evolve over time. Moreover, the literature examined was small, reflecting that AI is an emerging area of study within the humanitarian sector, with little published research available on its use by local humanitarian organisations.



3. FINDINGS

The findings of this research are organised around three themes, each corresponding to a specific research question.

- Section 3.1 presents findings on AI use practices
- Section 3.2 describes how AI affects local leadership and power dynamics in humanitarian action in Pakistan
- Section 3.3 explores issues related to the ethical and responsible use of AI

3.1 AI as a Companion to Local Humanitarian Actors

According to the Humanitarian Leadership Academy's 2025 report on AI use by humanitarians, **AI adoption is not just a Global North phenomenon but is actively pursued by humanitarians working closest to affected communities**.[8] This was reflected in the high level of AI adoption reported in the current research's Pakistan survey, with 93% of the surveyed local actors' confirming use of AI in their official work.

The survey findings show that of respondents using AI in their work, 72% use freely available versions of AI tools, while 28% use a mixture of free and paid versions. No respondents reported exclusive use of paid AI tools for official work. ChatGPT was the most widely used AI tool, followed by DeepSeek, Claude, Gemini and Grok. Respondents also reported using AI-powered meeting assistants, note-taking and translation applications, as well as specialised platforms for presentations, graphic design and visual communication.

Local actors reported using AI for diverse tasks, such as the development of reports and proposals, professional communication, translation and email writing. The following subsections present detailed findings on AI use practices.

3.1.1 Staff Roles and Patterns of AI Use

In the KIIs, respondents shared that **AI use among staff is being shaped more by their respective designation or organisational role and the nature of assigned tasks than by other factors such as gender**. AI use appeared to be most concentrated among staff whose roles directly involve report writing, analysis, documentation and external communication. Programme, monitoring & evaluation (M&E) and communications staff were most frequently identified as the main users of AI tools.[9] This was largely attributed to these teams being responsible for concept note preparation, proposal development, report writing, case study generation, presentations, donor communication, visibility products and learning materials. An international actor respondent said:

> "Staff tend to use AI in relation to the nature of their work. I would say that programme-related staff use AI more frequently. In M&E, for example, we use it for data analysis, interpretation and different types of analytical tasks.[10]

Support departments such as human resources (HR), finance, procurement and logistics were also reported to use AI, although their use was characterised as less frequent than for the staff mentioned above. HR teams used AI to draft job descriptions, contracts, agreements, interview questions and routine correspondence, as well as to support attendance-related systems. Finance teams used it for Excel formatting, summaries and budgeting support. Procurement teams were mentioned in relation to comparing products and preparing bid documentation. As one respondent from a local organisation stated:

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8 Humanitarian Leadership Academy & Data Friendly Space. (2025). Artificial intelligence in the humanitarian sector in 2025: mapping current practice and future potential. https://www.humanitarianleadershipacademy.org/resources/report-artificial-intelligence-in-the-humanitarian-sector-mapping-current-practice-and-future-potential/

9 Based on KIIs conducted with organisation leaders and M&E and programme staff.

10 International Actor KII 01

> Even checklists are made through AI, templates are also made through it for departments like the finance and even HR take support from it. Even in auditing AI is asked what kind of audit should be there.[11]

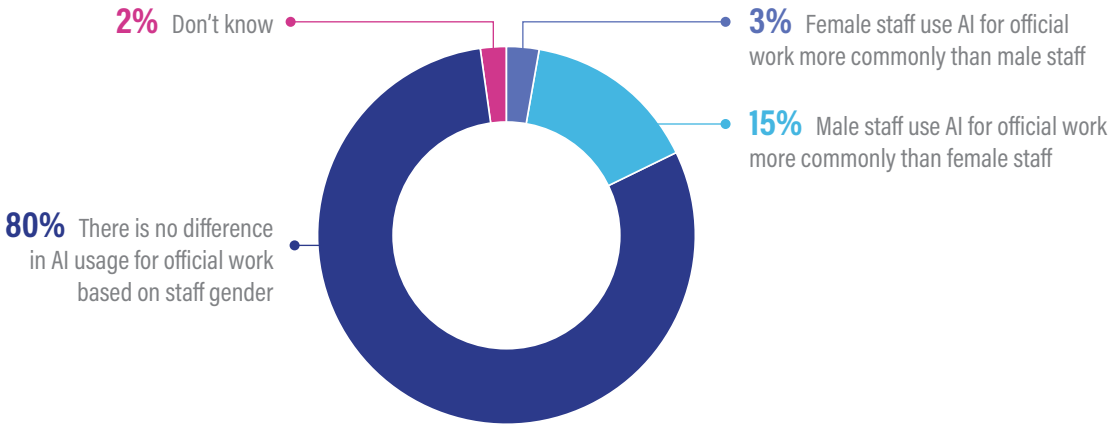
Similarly, the interviews suggest that field-level staff use AI relatively infrequently, not necessarily because of lower ability or interest but because their work is more verbal and focused on active community engagement. One respondent from a local organisation noted that social mobilisers often submit short, bullet-pointed field reports rather than detailed analytical documents, meaning that they may have fewer opportunities to use AI than staff working in proposal development, reporting, communications or management roles.

Respondents emphasised that AI use is primarily role-driven rather than gender-driven. Male and female staff occupying similar positions in programme, M&E, communications, finance or management teams are generally expected to produce the same kinds of outputs and therefore use AI in comparable ways. One local actor respondent said:

> There is no difference [in AI use] on the basis of gender. It depends on the role and responsibility. I do not think anyone has an issue with access these days. Everyone has enough access.[12]

The survey findings support this view. As shown in Figure 2, most respondents reported that there was no difference between male and female staff in their use of AI for official work.

Figure 2: Gender Aspect of AI Tools – Extent of Usage



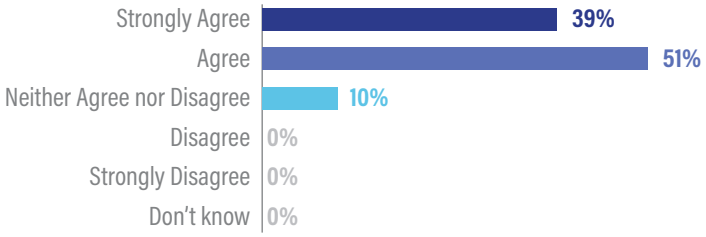
However, although AI use appears to be shaped more directly by organisational role than by gender, respondents noted that organisational roles may be gendered. Respondents shared individual observations linking gendered patterns in AI use to the types of roles women and men occupy within organisations, rather than to differences in ability or skill. For example, one respondent suggested that women are often underrepresented in roles related to proposal development, reporting, communications and M&E, the areas in which AI is most commonly used. In contrast, women may be more prevalent in field-based roles such as social mobilisation, where the work is more verbal and involves concise reporting rather than detailed written products. From this perspective, women may have fewer opportunities to use AI because they have less access to AI-relevant roles and tasks, rather than because they have less capacity or interest.

11 Local Actor KII 10
12 Local Actor KII 04

3.1.2 AI Use in Reporting

Reporting was the most commonly reported application for AI, with almost all respondents (of the total confirming use of AI) using AI for report writing or refinement. Most survey respondents highlighted perceived improvements in report quality due to AI use (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Local Actors' Perceptions of Quality Improvement due to AI Use

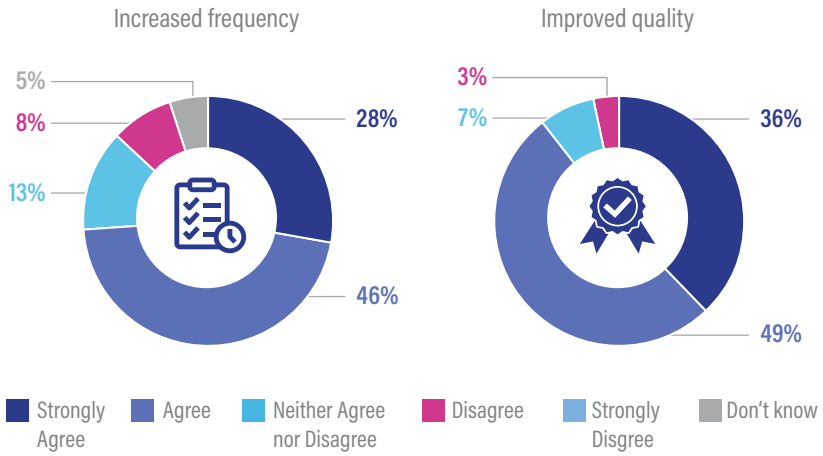


The KIIs further clarify that the **most common use of AI in reporting is at the level of refinement, structuring and turning field information into donor-required language rather than fully automated report production.** These findings are consistent with the wider humanitarian literature, which suggests that generative AI is primarily used for back-end and administrative tasks, including drafting and editing reports.

3.1.3 AI Use in Email Communication

Survey findings show that 64% of respondents use AI to draft or refine emails, especially when communicating with donors, contracting organisations and other international partners. As shown in Figure 4, most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that AI improved the frequency and quality of email communication between local and international actors. Respondents characterised these improvements as clearer structure, use of more professional language, stronger grammar and a greater ability to communicate technical or operational issues effectively.

Figure 4: Perceptions of Effect of AI Use on Email Communication between Local and International Actors



The KIIs reinforced this finding. Local actors described **AI as reducing language barriers and helping them communicate field-level concerns, progress and recommendations to international partners in greater detail and with improved clarity.** As one local actor explained:

> "I feel that communication has become easier after AI. Even through email, we can communicate in detail with our partners where you can tell them how things can or cannot be done with justification.[13]

13 Local Actor KII 02

The use of AI in email communication helped staff feel more confident in communicating with donors and international partners because they felt less exposed to criticism over English language quality or weak drafting rather than the substance of their work. One respondent noted that smaller local organisations often avoided writing to donors in ways that could raise questions about their technical capacity, but AI assistance has reduced this barrier by helping them prepare more professional emails.

AI-supported drafting is strengthening the confidence of local actors by enabling them to express their concerns more clearly and professionally. This is important for staff with strong technical or field knowledge but less confidence in writing in English or communicating through formal donor-facing formats.

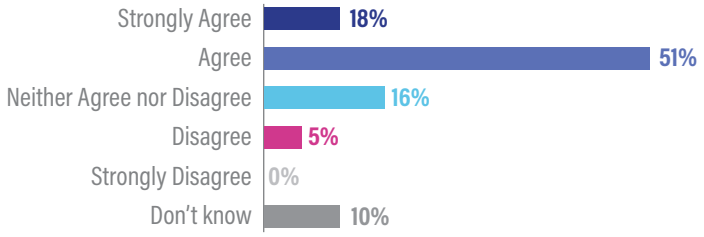
International actors similarly observed improvements in the clarity of emails received from local partners. However, without efficient prompts, AI often produces longer emails, including unnecessary and sometimes repeated information, reducing readability. One international actor respondent noted:

> "Yes, email communication has definitely improved. It is well-organised, it is clear, the language is fine, the grammar is fine but sometimes those emails get a little lengthy.[14]

3.1.4 AI Use in Proposal Development

Artificial intelligence is increasingly supporting local humanitarian actors to apply for funding. Survey findings show that 69% of respondents confirmed that AI has enabled local actors to take advantage of more complex funding opportunities, as detailed in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Perceptions of Whether AI Enables Local Actors to Apply for Complex Funding Opportunities



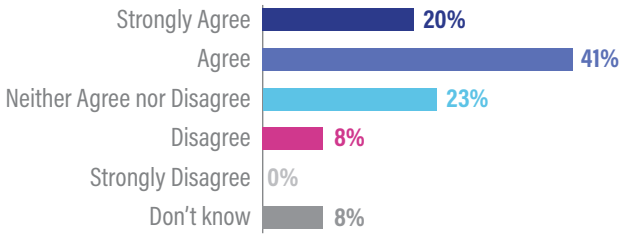
This suggests that **AI is not only being used as a writing tool but helping local organisations engage with funding opportunities that they may previously have avoided because of tight proposal submission deadlines, complex proposal templates, low proposal-writing capacity or the cost of hiring external consultants.** The KII results support this contention, with respondents describing using AI to understand donor guidelines, interpret expression of interest requirements, structure concept notes, draft proposal sections, improve technical language, generate activity ideas, develop indicators and refine needs analysis. Respondents also claimed that for smaller organisations with few staff, this was especially important because proposal development often requires fast turnaround and specialised writing skills. A local actor respondent said:

> "Before we used to develop a proposal in five to six days, we can do it in two to three days now. If there is an emergency, we can prepare a proposal and can submit it on time.[15]

In addition to expanding the range of funding opportunities that local actors can pursue, as seen in Figure 6, most survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that AI has improved the quality of local actors' funding proposals.

14 International Actor KII 01
15 Local Actor KII 11

Figure 6: Local Actors' Perceptions of Funding Proposal Quality Improvement Due to AI Use



The KIIs indicated that this AI-generated improvement in funding proposal quality is most visible in proposal structure, clarity and professional presentation. One international actor explained that local partners were using AI to revise proposals and strengthen theories of change and that this had increased their confidence when opportunities became available. However, respondents consistently emphasised that AI-supported proposals still require human review and contextualisation. AI does not possess field-level knowledge, cannot independently assess local realities and often generates generic, repetitive or inaccurate material if users provide weak prompts or submit outputs without verification. Local organisations therefore remain responsible for supplying credible field data and checking donor requirements and validating the realism of proposed activities. As one local actor reflected,

> "AI does not have field-level information and facts. It does not understand these issues and challenges, so we have to review it [proposals] and make corrections and contextualise it.[16]

3.1.5 AI Use in Presentations and Social Media Content

Artificial intelligence use is becoming visible in the way local humanitarian actors present and disseminate their work. In this regard, 54% of survey respondents confirmed using AI for PowerPoint presentation development, while 44% reported using AI to develop learning content for dissemination. These findings suggest that AI is supporting a wide range of public-facing communication, including presentations, social media content, case studies, lessons learned documents, newsletters, IEC[17] materials and other visibility products. Other uses, such as preparing social media documentaries with voiceovers, were also reported in the KIIs.

Many respondents linked AI use directly to improved visibility of local organisations. One respondent noted that **smaller local organisations often have strong field data and experience but insufficient skills or resources to present their work effectively**. AI is seen as helping fill this gap by improving presentation quality and making social media profiles stronger and more active (discussed further in section 3.2). The respondents explained that tasks that previously required external support, such as graphic design, translation or media products development, can now be completed internally with AI.

3.1.6 AI Use in Community Feedback and Aid Targeting

Survey findings show **that, comparatively, AI is being used far less in community accountability and targeting processes than in internal functions such as reporting, proposal development and communication.** Approximately 38% of respondents indicated that AI is being used for aid targeting for drafting selection criteria or cleaning and organising data, while 33% reported its use in community feedback analysis.[18] These figures suggest that local actors remain cautious about applying AI to decisions and processes that affect crisis-affected people directly. AI use for aid targeting and community feedback analysis remains similarly low.

16 Local Actor KII 16

17 Information, Education and Communication.

18 These percentages are significant with respect to the ethical use of AI.

The qualitative interview data strongly support these findings, with **local actor respondents consistently describing aid targeting and feedback mechanisms as areas where local actors continue to rely primarily on established, human-led systems such as surveys, Excel-based shortlisting, phone calls, WhatsApp, in-person feedback channels and community meetings.** However, even though AI use within community accountability mechanisms appears uncommon, data generated through those mechanisms may sometimes be processed using AI. For example, after field-level information has been collected, AI can be used to organise data, support analysis, prepare reports and present findings. One local actor respondent explained that AI could not conduct a field assessment itself, but that staff provided it with field-level information, which it then organised before staff reviewed and finalised the results. Another local actor staff described using AI as a supporting tool in relation to surveys, baseline assessments and aid targeting, while checking its outputs against ground realities. She explained:

> "AI is not able to make field assessments. So, we provide field-level information to AI and it sets and organises it for us. Then we review it, then we finalise it.[19]

Modest use of AI in these areas appears to be shaped by both practical and ethical considerations. Many local actors lack the systems, technical capacity, licensed tools or organisational guidance required to use AI safely for such sensitive tasks. In addition, many respondents emphasised that aid targeting and community feedback involve personal, sensitive and often protection-related information. As a result, several organisations were reportedly cautious about entering community data, feedback records, Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) details, phone numbers or other personally identifiable information into AI tools. One local actor respondent explained this as follows:

> "We do not use AI for beneficiary-related information because our data-protection policies do not allow us to produce such summaries using AI. We are particularly strict regarding beneficiary information and instead prepare these summaries without AI assistance.[20]

Interviewees also stressed that **decisions affecting access to assistance should remain grounded in human judgement informed by community knowledge and field verification. AI was generally seen as unable to fully understand field realities, vulnerability criteria, social dynamics or the local context required for fair aid targeting. This suggests that AI should have a minor support role in formatting or organising non-sensitive information but not be used to independently determine who should receive assistance or how community concerns should be interpreted.**

International actors and partners also reported scant evidence of local organisations using AI for aid targeting or for community feedback analysis. One international respondent said they had not observed any notable use of AI in local organisations' aid targeting or community feedback systems. Another international respondent similarly observed that aid targeting and feedback mechanisms are still taking place "conventionally" through surveys, community meetings and other established processes, with no significant AI use for this task among their local partners. Respondents also raised concerns that data entered into open AI systems may be stored or accessed by third parties, creating risks for crisis-affected communities and for organisations responsible for protecting their data. As an international actor explained:

19 Local Actor KII 16
20 Local Actor KII 02

> We should have minimum data principles, secure platforms, and establish data handling protocols with some system or mechanism. And one more thing I would recommend is that there should be strong human oversight. Everything should be reviewed and validated, whether it's the Senior Management Personnel or any senior [manager].[21]

At the same time, the findings do not suggest that AI has no possible role in this area. Some respondents indicated that **AI could support some back-end tasks, such as organising anonymised field information, identifying broad themes in non-sensitive feedback or improving the presentation of aggregated findings.** However, this would require clear safeguards. Respondents identified some safeguards that would be needed for such use, including minimising the amount of data shared, removing names, CNIC numbers and other personal identifiers, obtaining appropriate approval before sharing sensitive information, using secure platforms and data-handling protocols, and ensuring that AI-generated outputs are reviewed and validated by authorised staff. Some respondents also emphasised the need for community awareness and consent, as well as clear organisational policies defining acceptable and unacceptable uses of AI. However, these were primarily presented as recommended safeguards rather than practices consistently implemented across local organisations.

3.2 AI Impact on Localisation

The findings in this section are organised around the five dimensions of the localisation impact framework developed by HAG and PIANGO: partnerships, leadership, policy influence and advocacy, funding and capacity. Across these dimensions, the evidence shows that AI is helping local actors overcome technical, communication and resource barriers. However, improvements in local actors' skills, efficiency, visibility and confidence have still not resulted in equitable decision-making power, control over funding or influence over humanitarian policies.

3.2.1 Partnerships

The strongest partnership-level change can be observed in the quality of communication between local and international actors via reports and emails. As discussed in section 3.1, almost all survey respondents agreed that AI use has improved the quality of local actors' reports and emails, and increased email communication between local and international actors. Smaller organisations reported that AI reduces the fear that poorly written emails, proposals or reports will be interpreted as evidence of weak institutional capacity. Respondents also described real-time translation as helping local actors communicate in multilingual partnerships and provide more detailed explanations of what is or is not feasible in the field.

However, a similar shift in decision-making power has not been observed. Several respondents shared that AI had not changed the underlying dynamics of their partnerships. International actors continue to determine funding conditions, reporting formats, compliance requirements and the parameters within which local partners operate. This appears to be because AI primarily addresses practical capability gaps such as language, drafting, presentation and access to information, rather than the structural factors that determine partnership dynamics. International actors continue to control financial resources and define partnership frameworks and compliance expectations; AI does not enhance local actors' ability to negotiate or challenge these parameters.

Key Takeaway for Partnerships:

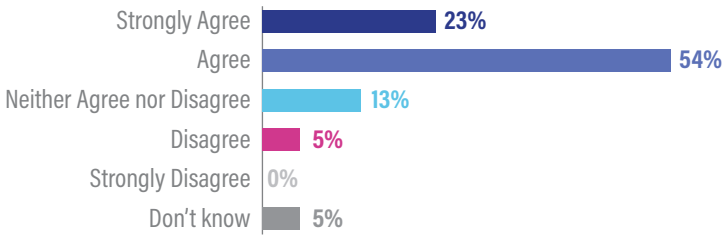
Partial progress is observed via AI making participation within partnerships more effective, but it is not making those partnerships more structurally equitable.

21 International Actor KII 18

3.2.2 Leadership

Approximately 77% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that AI has made it easier for local actors to participate in policy, coordination or learning forums (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Local Actors' Perceptions of AI's Ability to Improve Participation in Policy, Coordination or Learning Forums



The KII results point to several reasons for this improvement. AI helps local actors prepare briefs, presentations and talking points, helps improves the visual presentation of their work, and reduces language barriers through translation and interpretation. Respondents from local organisations noted that people previously reliant on verbal contributions can now enter meetings with well-developed presentations, visual material and better organised evidence. This can make their contributions more visible and easier for other participants to engage with. Furthermore, AI-supported communication allows for local actors to participate in multilingual forums with greater confidence.

However, the survey and interview findings showed **little evidence that AI is enabling local actors to define and lead humanitarian action or exercise greater influence over decision-making. Respondents stressed that leadership in meetings still depends on mandate and control over resources.**

Interviews also raised a concern that some participants may rely on AI during meetings instead of contributing insights from their own field experience. This can weaken rather than strengthen local leadership if generic AI-generated points displace the distinctive value that local actors bring on ground realities, community relationships, contextual judgement as well as operational experience. Leadership gains therefore depend on AI being used to prepare and amplify local expertise, not substitute for it.

Key Takeaway for Leadership:

Partial progress in AI supporting local leadership was observed. While AI is amplifying local expertise by improving local actors' preparedness, confidence and visibility in coordination and policy spaces, it has not significantly increased local actor's authority over agendas, resources or decisions relating to humanitarian action.

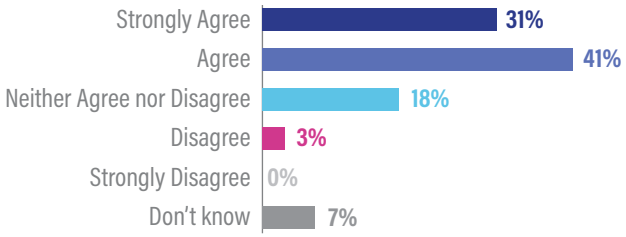
3.2.3 Policy Influence and Advocacy

The 2022 report *Needles in a Haystack: An Analysis of Global South Roles in Humanitarian Knowledge Production* concludes that local actors remain underrepresented in authorship, citations and other visible aspects of knowledge production.[22] AI appears to be strengthening the visibility and reach of locally generated evidence by helping local organisations produce reports, social media content, learning products and other communication materials. In the survey, 72% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the number of reports authored or co-authored by local actors has increased due to AI use (Figure 8).[23]

22 HAG, CoLAB, GLOW and inSights. (2022). ***Needles in a Haystack: An Analysis of Global South Roles in Humanitarian Knowledge Production***. Humanitarian Horizons. Melbourne: Humanitarian Advisory Group. https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/HAG-HH2-PPLL-Needles-in-the-HaystackFINAL.pdf

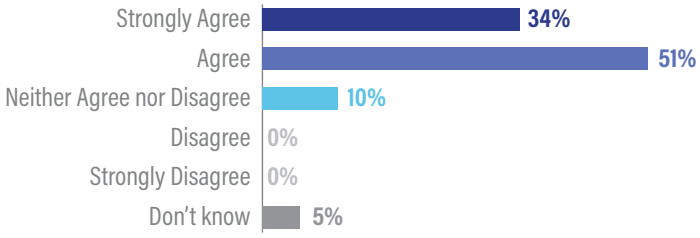
23 This figure is based on survey data; the change in the publicly available reports authored or co-authored by local actors was not measured.

Figure 8: Local Actors' Perceptions that Authored or Co-authored Reports Have Increased Due to AI Use



The effect is even more pronounced in public-facing communication: over 80% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that local actors' social media communication has increased due to AI use (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Perceptions That AI Has Increased Local Actors' Social Media Communication



At the same time, wider debates on AI raise concerns about whose knowledge is represented in these systems. In a Humanitarian Leadership Academy podcast (2025), Hoffman argued that Indigenous and local knowledge are largely missing from training data, so when AI is used for needs assessments, report generation or chatbots, it only showcases dominant narratives and overlooks local perspectives. Hoffman highlighted that people from the Global South are suffering a "double colonial" experience due to AI, because it makes their lived realities invisible or misrepresented.[24] The ALNAP (2025) briefing validates this, noting that AI tools are predominantly trained in data-rich languages like English, which leaves many humanitarian contexts underrepresented. This disparity is far from neutral because it shifts interpretive authority away from local actors towards the centralised entities that control and curate the training data.[25]

Key Takeaway for Policy Influence and Advocacy:

AI is increasing the production, visibility and reach of locally generated evidence. However, for local actors, greater output has not yet translated into stronger influence over policy or advocacy agendas. AI's impact is further limited by internal biases that can marginalise local knowledge and reinforce external control over what is recognised as credible evidence.

3.2.4 Funding

The funding dimension of the localisation framework was used to examine whether local actors gain greater access to funding due to AI use. Viewed against this indicator, the findings show meaningful improvements in local actors' proposal-development capacity, but considerably less evidence of increased funding to local actors. As detailed

24 Humanitarian Leadership Academy. (2025). ***Fresh Humanitarian Perspectives*** [Podcast]. Episode 4: Interview with Wakanyi Hoffman. https://www.humanitarianleadershipacademy.org/resources/humanitarian-ai-podcast-series-guest-spotlight-wakanyi-hoffman/

25 ALNAP. (2025). ***Explain: AI in the humanitarian sector***. London: ALNAP. https://alnap.org/help-library/resources/explain-ai/

in Section 3.1, AI is reducing several practical barriers that have historically constrained local organisations from entering competitive funding processes, including the need for hiring external consultants. These gains are especially important for smaller organisations that may not have dedicated proposal development teams or the funds to hire external consultants. From a localisation perspective, this means that AI is helping overcome technical hurdles to participation in funding processes. AI can therefore narrow part of the operational advantage held by larger national or international organisations with dedicated grants, communications and proposal-development teams.

However, improved proposal capacity is not equivalent to increased access to funding. The KIIs suggested that there is no direct link between AI-supported proposal applications and successful awards. International respondents also cautioned that it was difficult to assess AI's effect on award rates in a context where other factors (like overall humanitarian funding contracting sharply) were also at play.



Key Takeaway for Funding:

AI is lowering technical and financial barriers to participating in funding processes and improving local actors' ability to prepare timely, professionally presented applications. However, the findings provide no evidence that this has increased successful awards, direct funding or local decision-making over financial resources. AI is improving access to the funding process, but it is not redistributing financial power.

3.2.5 Capacity

The findings suggest that AI is strengthening aspects of local actors' functional capacity, particularly in writing-intensive and analytical tasks. However, access to appropriate tools (such as paid versions of the AI tools), AI operating skills (such as prompting skills) and institutional support (such as AI use policies) are constraints. As discussed in Section 3.3, only 3% of survey participants reported that their organisations offered formal staff training in AI and 69% lacked a documented AI use policy. Support from international partners for training, specialised tools, policy development and continuing mentoring was described as occasional. Much of the present capacity gain is therefore individual and ad hoc rather than embedded in organisational systems.

From a localisation perspective**, international support would contribute most to capacity when it is defined by local partners and includes access to secure AI tools, training and organisational policies for responsible AI use.**



Key Takeaway for Capacity:

AI is making a meaningful but partial contribution. It is improving operational efficiency, broadening access to specialised functions and reducing some dependence on external consultants. However, these gains are not yet consistently institutionalised or supported by equitable access to secure tools, training, policies and locally defined capacity support.

Overall, the evidence across all five dimensions of the analytical framework suggests that AI usage strengthens local actors' functional capabilities, organisational efficiency, confidence and visibility without automatically transferring decision-making power or resources, making AI usage more of a means to the wider end of achieving localisation. Similarly, Spencer (2024) cautioned that reliance on AI systems developed predominantly by Global North technology firms may reproduce existing inequalities and shift control over data and decision-making away from local actors and crisis-affected communities.[26]

26 Spencer, S. W. (2024). ***Humanitarian AI revisited***. HPN/ODI. https://odihpn.org/content/uploads/2024/05/HPN_Network-Paper89_humanitarianAI.pdf

3.3 Navigating Responsible AI Use

Under the overall theme of responsible use of AI, this section of the report discusses the key risks related to AI use, safeguarding measures and governance gaps. The findings indicate that **the main risks are insufficient organisational guidance and staff training, reliance on freely available AI tools, privacy and confidentiality concerns, inaccurate or misleading outputs, loss of local context, overreliance on AI and unclear accountability when errors occur.** These risks become more significant when AI is used with community information, protection-related data or other sensitive humanitarian information. The findings also point to an important **equity concern**, because local organisations may be expected to manage these risks without the secure tools, technical expertise, training and financial resources available to international actors. At the same time, the findings highlight the existence of **safeguards such as clear organisational policies, practical staff training, strong data protection measures, human review of AI-generated outputs, risk assessments and appropriate controls over the tools and data to ensure responsible use of AI.**

3.3.1 Key Risks Related to AI Use

Formal governance around AI usage remains uncommon. Survey findings show that 69% of local organisations lack a documented AI use policy. However, most local organisations that mentioned AI policies referred to guidance contained within HR or information technology policies, rather than dedicated, documented AI policies.

KIIs indicated that AI use generally occurs outside formal organisational frameworks. Resource pressure and tight deadlines encourage staff to use readily available tools, while some users fear being seen to be taking shortcuts or lacking competence. Attitudes to AI vary: in some organisations, AI use is normalised and staff openly acknowledge using it, while in others, **staff remain reluctant to disclose AI use because they fear it will raise questions about competence**. The AI expert interviewees characterised this phenomenon as ad hoc or "shadow" AI use. Staff may rely on personal free AI accounts to translate reports, summarise field notes or draft correspondence because doing so saves time, while organisational leadership may be unaware of the practice or may tolerate it in the absence of clear rules. They explained:

> "Right now, across the board, it's overwhelmingly ad hoc. You have individual staff members, program officers, report writers, field managers who are using their personal free ChatGPT or Claude accounts on their phones or personal laptops. The organisation's leadership often either doesn't know about it or chooses to turn a blind eye because there's no clear policy in place.[27]

Paid or premium AI tool subscriptions are available only to some organisations or individual staff members. The KIIs further indicated that **paid subscriptions are often considered expensive, payment systems can be difficult for smaller organisations to access, and project budgets rarely include dedicated funding for AI licences.** Thus, free access therefore plays an important enabling role by allowing resource-constrained local organisations to use AI tools that might otherwise be unavailable to them. As one local actor respondent explained:

> "Free versions are being used more because they are easier to use. You don't have to pay any cost for them and everyone can use them easily. Those organisations who cannot afford [the paid version] automatically use the free version.[28]

However, respondents identified major **limitations of free versions, including weaker privacy protections.** While free versions allows smaller organisations to benefit from AI despite resource constraints, they can also deepen inequality between organisations that can afford licensed, safer or more specialised tools and those that cannot.

27 AI Expert KII 21
28 Local Actor KII 9

One respondent stated:

> When you put data into open source, that is a very strong breach of protection. You are sharing someone's data without their permission, so data theft can become a huge issue.[29]

The AI experts added nuance to the distinction between free and paid tools. One expert stressed that **it is also important to consider whether the organisation has informed consent to process the information**, where the data are being sent and whether an organisational or enterprise agreement prevents the provider from accessing or training on uploaded data. Free personal accounts may not offer the same assurances. A second expert reported a widespread misconception that information is automatically protected, noting that most participants in their trainings had not enabled relevant privacy settings, saying:

> I usually begin my training by asking, "Have you changed your privacy settings when using AI?" Of the more than seven hundred people I have trained, around ninety-five per cent respond, "But I thought it did not save my data."[30]

Therefore, if AI use remains hidden, outputs may go unchecked, sensitive data may be shared without oversight and accountability for errors becomes unclear. A related governance concern is community control over data. The literature warns that stories, communications and behavioural data from crisis-affected communities can flow into commercial systems without meaningful consent or influence over how the information is reused. This shifts control from local contexts to external technology providers.[31]

On the operational level, respondents consistently identified data privacy, confidentiality, fabricated or inaccurate information, loss of local context and over-reliance on AI as the most salient risks associated with AI use in local humanitarian organisations, as shown in Figure 10.

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29 International Actor KII 17

30 AI Expert KII 21

31 Humanitarian Leadership Academy. (2025). ***Fresh Humanitarian Perspectives*** [Podcast]. Episode 4: Interview with Wakanyi Hoffman. https://www.humanitarianleadershipacademy.org/resources/humanitarian-ai-podcast-series-guest-spotlight-wakanyi-hoffman/

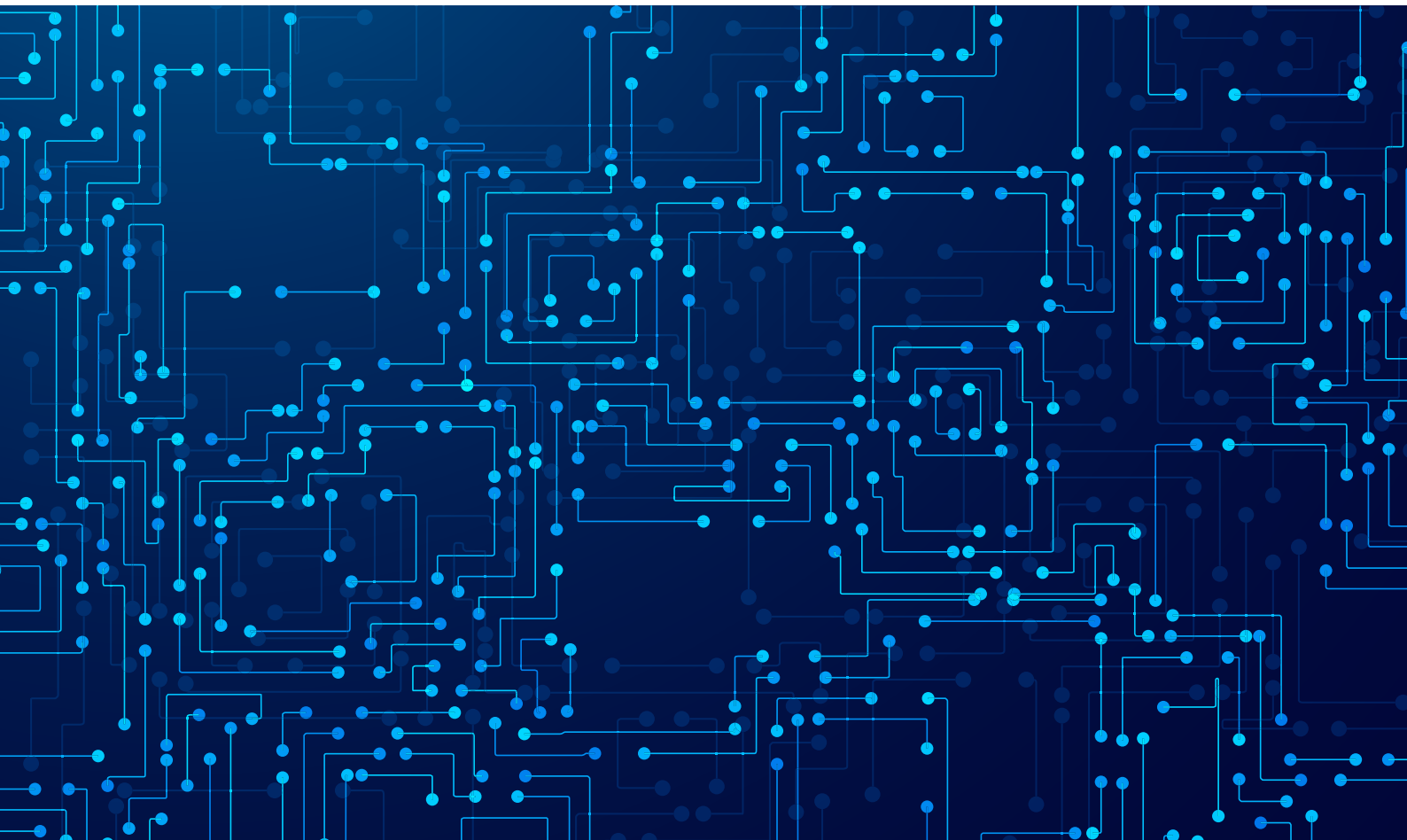
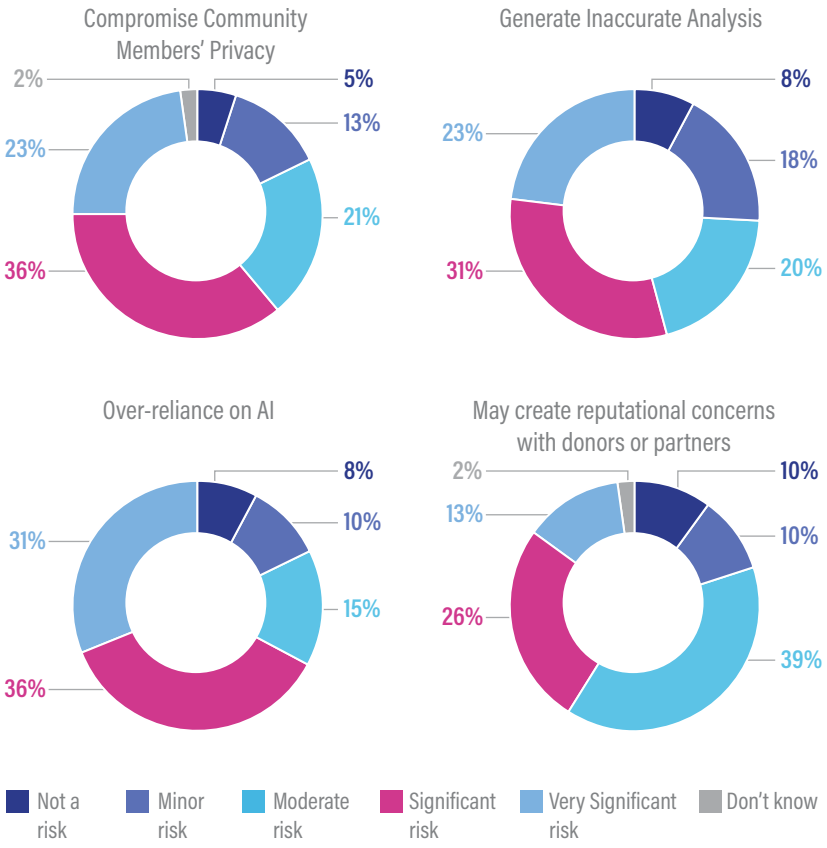
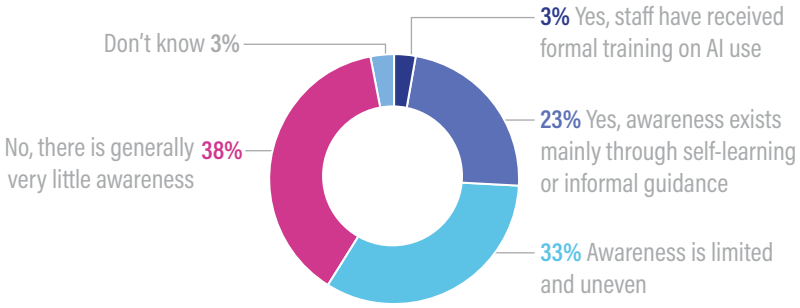


Figure 10: Local Actors' Perceived Risks Related to AI Use



Survey findings shown in Figure 11 indicate that very few staff have received formal training on AI use, while awareness is largely informal, uneven or absent. This points to a broader gap in structured learning opportunities for local humanitarian actors on the ethical and responsible use of AI in official work.

Figure 11: Local Actors' Awareness of AI Use Risks



Similarly, participants said AI sometimes produces false, overly general, outdated, or geographically incorrect information. The AI expert interviews highlighted that inaccuracies in AI-generated summaries can distort humanitarian decision-making and affect whether communities receive assistance. One expert explained:

> "Take a flood response. Field teams assess fifteen villages and find that all fifteen need assistance. The risk arrives when those notes go into an AI system to produce a synthesis or a report. The system can drop a village that needs help, or add one that does not. The dropped village never receives assistance. Without careful verification against the original notes, that kind of error decides whether help reaches the right communities.[32]

32 AI Expert KII 22

Another AI expert noted:

> Data is people, so do not look at them as numbers. Even if it's anonymised, it's people at the end of the day.[33]

One respondent described receiving an AI-generated report that did not respond to the task or reflect the intended meaning, illustrating how unreviewed outputs can undermine rather than improve the quality of humanitarian reporting:

> I was reading a report, and from the first two paragraphs itself I could tell that it was completely AI-generated. It was not related at all to what was actually asked for, there was no alignment with it. You can tell easily because no effort is made to read through it or adjust it and because of that the meaning of it gets lost.[34]

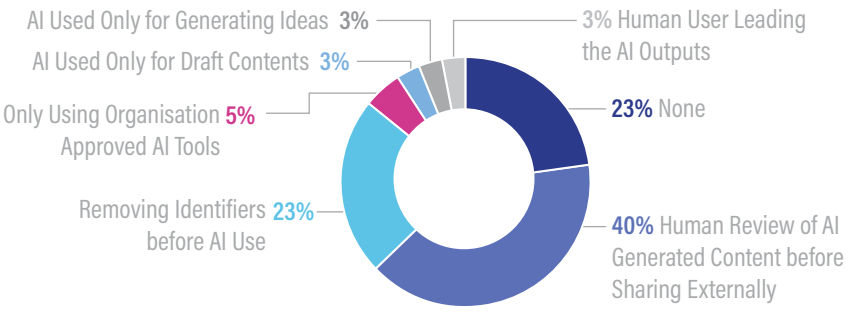
This reliance on AI tools without adequate human oversight or institutional safeguards creates a significant governance gap. Local actors may be expected to manage AI-related risks without access to the paid tools, technical expertise, legal capacity or institutional guidance available to larger international agencies. Mitigating the risks associated with free AI tools therefore requires not only stronger organisational policies but greater financial, technical and governance support from donors and international partners.

3.3.2 Safeguards

Despite the risks detailed above, the study participants did not support avoiding AI use completely. Instead, they said AI should be used under an organisational policy and human oversight. This includes checking AI-generated information, protecting sensitive data, preserving local knowledge, and creating clear organisational policies. These safeguards should ensure that AI supports rather than weakens locally led humanitarian action.

Existing safeguards are uneven and mostly informal. Survey findings show that a large minority of respondents practise human review before external sharing and about a quarter remove identifiers before using AI, but another quarter reported no safeguards, as Figure 12 shows.

Figure 12: AI-Related Safeguards in Local Organisations



33 AI Expert KII 21
34 International Actor KII 17

An organisational policy on AI use is a fundamental safeguard. However, rather than relying only on lengthy policies that may quickly become outdated, one expert recommended a short, regularly updated guideline that explains what information staff may enter into public AI tools, which tools and accounts are approved and who remains responsible for the final output. One respondent argued that AI use should be included in codes of conduct because it can be misused not only in reporting but in editing images, harassment and other harmful practices. Another recommended that international organisations include AI guidance during partner orientations, just as they discuss policies, safeguarding and compliance requirements.

Several respondents emphasised that international actors are responsible for helping local partners use AI ethically. This includes providing guidance, safe tools, mentoring, training and budget lines for responsible AI use. An AI expert respondent shared that international actors should not be upset when local partners use AI or when proposals become similar, rather, they should support the local partner and show them how to use AI effectively and how to make their proposals stand out. The international actors must also support local actors to overcome the structural factors that encourage reliance on free tools, including the absence of AI licensing costs in donor budgets, poor access to appropriate payment mechanisms and the lack of affordable, sector-specific tools designed for local humanitarian partners. Some respondents reported receiving support, but this was described as rare. A local actor respondent said:

> "They [international partner] provided guidance on many related issues. In fact, we even received continuous mentoring on topics such as how to use AI data. However, these kinds of donors are very few and limited.[35]

More commonly, respondents noted that AI was not discussed or included in their partnership agreements, project orientations or broader donor guidance. This suggests that **responsible AI use should be treated as part of capacity strengthening and equitable partnership, not only as a compliance issue.**

Spencer (2024) cautioned that free or inexpensive AI products may not be designed for humanitarian purposes and may reduce local actors' control over their data and operational processes.[36] Furthermore, the SAFE AI Framework (2026) recommends that organisations secure contractual provisions covering the right to audit a system during and after its use, ownership of data and outputs, liability for harm, notification of changes to the model, the ability to withdraw data and terminate the service, and penalties for breaches of agreed governance standards. **When a humanitarian organisation seeks to acquire an AI system from an external provider, its best opportunity to demand safeguards is before the system is adopted and integrated into its operations.** These protections are particularly important for local organisations that may have limited legal or technical capacity to renegotiate terms after a system has been adopted.[37] However, many of these procurement protections may not be available when organisations rely on publicly accessible free tools. Responsible AI governance should therefore not simply instruct local actors to purchase paid versions.

The AI expert KIIs provided additional detail on how these safeguards could be operationalised. Suggested measures included undertaking a risk assessment before use, developing mitigation measures, reviewing them regularly as tools change, sensitising staff, consulting information management specialists, and prohibiting the entry of complete datasets containing names and locations into public tools.

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35 Local Actor KII 11

36 Spencer, S. W. (2024). ***Humanitarian AI revisited.*** HPN/ODI. https://odihpn.org/content/uploads/2024/05/HPN_Network-Paper89_humanitarianAI.pdf

37 CDAC Network, The Alan Turing Institute, & Humanitarian AI Advisory. (2026). S***tandards and Assurance Framework for Ethical AI (SAFE AI): A Governance Framework for Humanitarians using AI*** (Version 1.1). London: CDAC Network. https://www.cdacnetwork.org/resources/safe-ai-framework

> We start with assessing the risk, build mitigation measures around it and sensitising your staff always, all the time on ethical use of AI, so they do not put entire data sets with names and location of people there.[38]

The literature and KII results **strongly emphasise the fact that AI may support human judgement but must not replace it**. Responsibility remains with the organisation and staff using the tool, who must be able to question and correct outputs. In this regard, KII respondents described the main safeguarding measures as not uploading names, CNIC numbers, community records or gender-based violence/protection case details, only using AI for help with language, structure and ideas rather than decision-making, verifying facts and adding references manually, and relying on staff and supervisors for final approval. Outputs should also be checked against local knowledge and direct community evidence, with human review described as substantive rather than procedural. One interviewee elaborated:

> AI should never be generating a final document on autopilot. It's an assistant that gives you a draft. The human field expert must do the final twenty per cent to inject the local reality, double-check names and make sure the contextual nuances haven't been flattened.[39]

As emphasised in the desk review, to ensure responsible AI use, **humanitarian organisations should use AI only when it is the right tool for a clearly defined problem.**[40] **The first step is therefore to determine whether AI is necessary and appropriate for the task and whether it offers a meaningful advantage over simpler, non-AI alternatives.** The SAFE AI Framework (2026) cautions that introducing AI where it is not needed may increase operational complexity, reinforce existing inequalities or create new risks. In such circumstances, simpler approaches may offer faster, less costly and more accountable solutions.

The findings from the desk review reinforce the contention that a uniform governance model is unlikely to work effectively across organisations with different mandates, capacities and forms of AI use. Accordingly, the SAFE AI Framework (2026) proposes a risk-proportionate model comprising three tiers.[41] Tier 1, or baseline risk, covers low-risk internal uses such as drafting assistance and requires only minimal documentation. Tier 2, or enhanced risk, applies to systems that influence operational decisions and require measures such as community co-design and technical quality assurance. Tier 3 covers high-risk, community-facing systems that directly influence access to assistance and therefore requires independent specialist review and continuous monitoring. The framework states that "the tiering logic scales requirements to risk, not to organisational capacity." This principle is particularly relevant to locally led humanitarian action because it avoids overburdening a small local organisation using AI for a low-risk internal task while ensuring that a larger organisation operating a high-risk, community-facing system remains subject to rigorous oversight. The International Committee of the Red Cross's (ICRC) AI policy (2025) adopts a comparable approach by categorising AI systems as low, medium or high risk and requiring additional safeguards as the potential consequences increase.[42]

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38 AI Expert KII 21

39 AI Expert KII 22

40 CDAC Network, The Alan Turing Institute, & Humanitarian AI Advisory. (2026). ***Standards and Assurance Framework for Ethical AI (SAFE AI): A Governance Framework for Humanitarians using AI*** (Version 1.1). London: CDAC Network. https://www.cdacnetwork.org/resources/safe-ai-framework

41 CDAC Network, The Alan Turing Institute, & Humanitarian AI Advisory. (2026). ***Standards and Assurance Framework for Ethical AI (SAFE AI): A Governance Framework for Humanitarians using AI*** (Version 1.1). London: CDAC Network. https://www.cdacnetwork.org/resources/safe-ai-framework

42 ICRC. (2025). ***Building a responsible humanitarian approach: The ICRC's policy on artificial intelligence***. Geneva. https://shop.icrc.org/building-a-responsible-humanitarian-approach-the-icrc-s-policy-on-artificial-intelligence-pdf-en.html

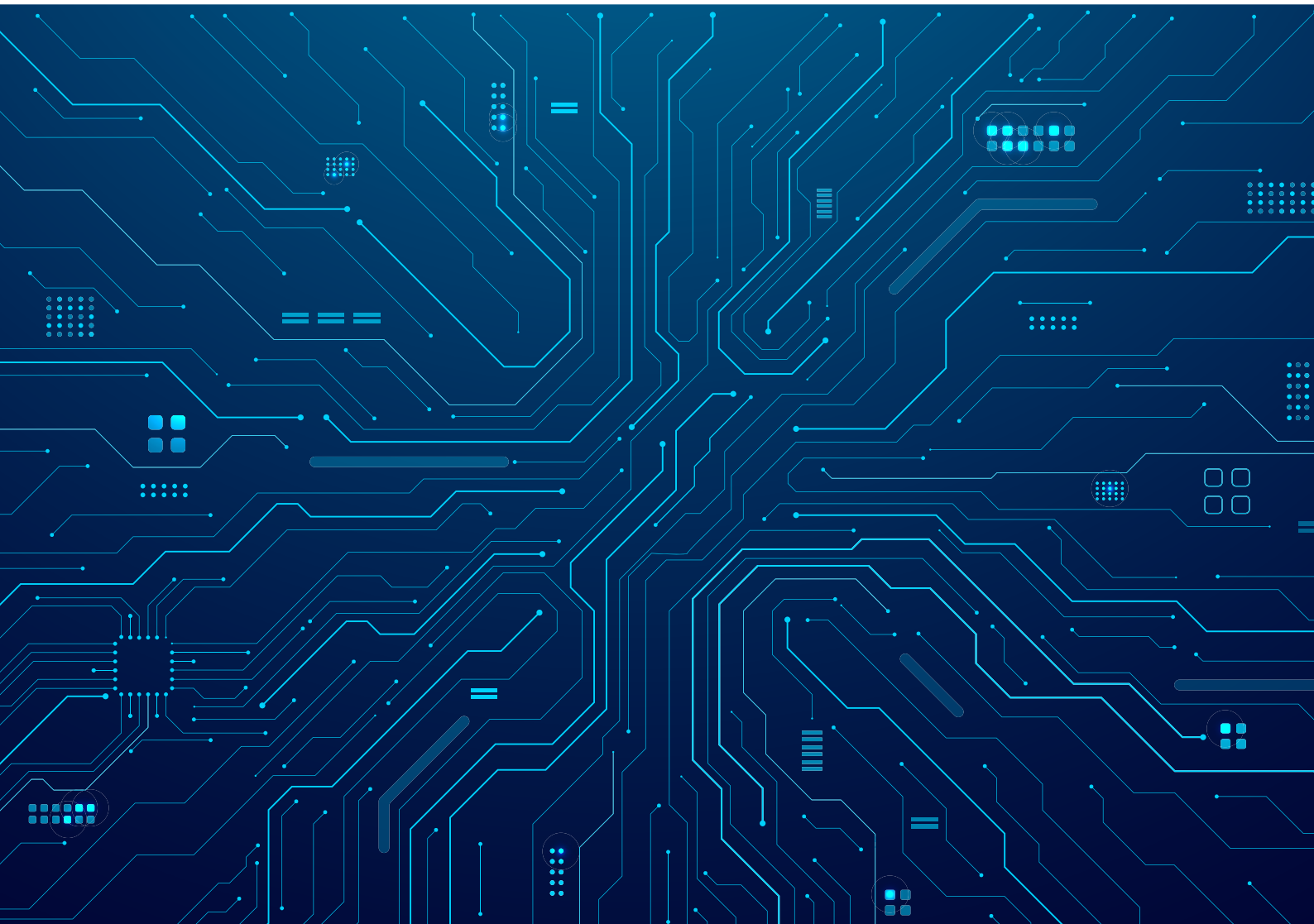
Findings from the KIIs support **a tiered AI risk approach for local humanitarian actors. Most reported AI being used for comparatively low-risk functions such as improving language, drafting emails, developing reports, summarising documents, creating social media posts and preparing proposals. However, respondents noted that the risk level increases substantially when staff enter organisational data, community members' details, protection information, financial details or community feedback into open AI tools. This suggests that governance should distinguish between low-risk drafting support and higher-risk use involving sensitive data or direct interaction with affected communities.**

Finally, the expert interviews reinforced the logic of scaling safeguards according to the level of access and agency given to an AI system. One expert explained that systems become simultaneously more useful and more hazardous as they gain access to organisational memory, connected tools, data and the ability to perform actions. They explained:

> "The more access an AI system has to organisational data, connected tools and the ability to take action, the more powerful and useful it becomes but also the riskier it is. Stronger safeguards and oversight are required.[43]

In summary, **safeguard measures should go beyond individual-level caution and become part of organisational culture. This means developing national-level and organisational-level AI policies, codes of conduct, staff training, short practical tutorials, donor orientation sessions, AI tools procurement guidance, clear rules on acceptable and unacceptable AI use and simple checklists for daily tasks**.

43 AI Expert KII 22



4. CONCLUSION

This research shows that AI has become an established component of routine official work among local humanitarian actors in Pakistan. AI is primarily being applied to support routine functions such as report writing, proposal development, professional communication, translation, presentations and social media content development tasks. Across these areas, respondents consistently identified improvements in efficiency, quality of written outputs and the ability to produce donor-facing materials within shorter timeframes. Rather than replacing human expertise, AI is predominantly being used as an assistive tool that enhances drafting, language, structure and analysis, while requiring human review to ensure contextual relevance, factual accuracy and alignment with operational realities.

The study also highlights that AI adoption among local actors largely involves freely available AI tools, reflecting both the accessibility of these technologies and the financial constraints under which many local organisations operate. While free AI tools have enabled widespread adoption, they introduce important governance challenges related to data privacy, confidentiality, ownership of information and unequal access to safer or more advanced AI systems. These risks are compounded by insufficient formal organisational guidance, low levels of staff training and the absence of documented AI policies in most surveyed organisations. Current safeguard measures remain largely informal and rely heavily on individual judgement, human review and cautious handling of sensitive information.

Overall, the findings suggest that AI is helping local humanitarian organisations surmount some of the practical barriers that have historically limited their participation in the humanitarian system. This has helped local actors engage more confidently with international partners, respond to funding opportunities, and participate in coordination, policy and learning forums. AI has also enabled organisations with few staff and financial resources to produce reports, presentations and visibility materials that may previously have required external support. These changes are strengthening organisational capacity and increasing the visibility of locally generated knowledge. However, these gains mainly improve how local actors participate, rather than changing the wider power structures that localisation seeks to change. Better communication, documentation and proposal writing do not necessarily lead to greater control over funding, partnerships, priorities or decisions. AI should therefore be seen as a tool that can support progress towards localisation, but not as a means of achieving its broader objectives.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

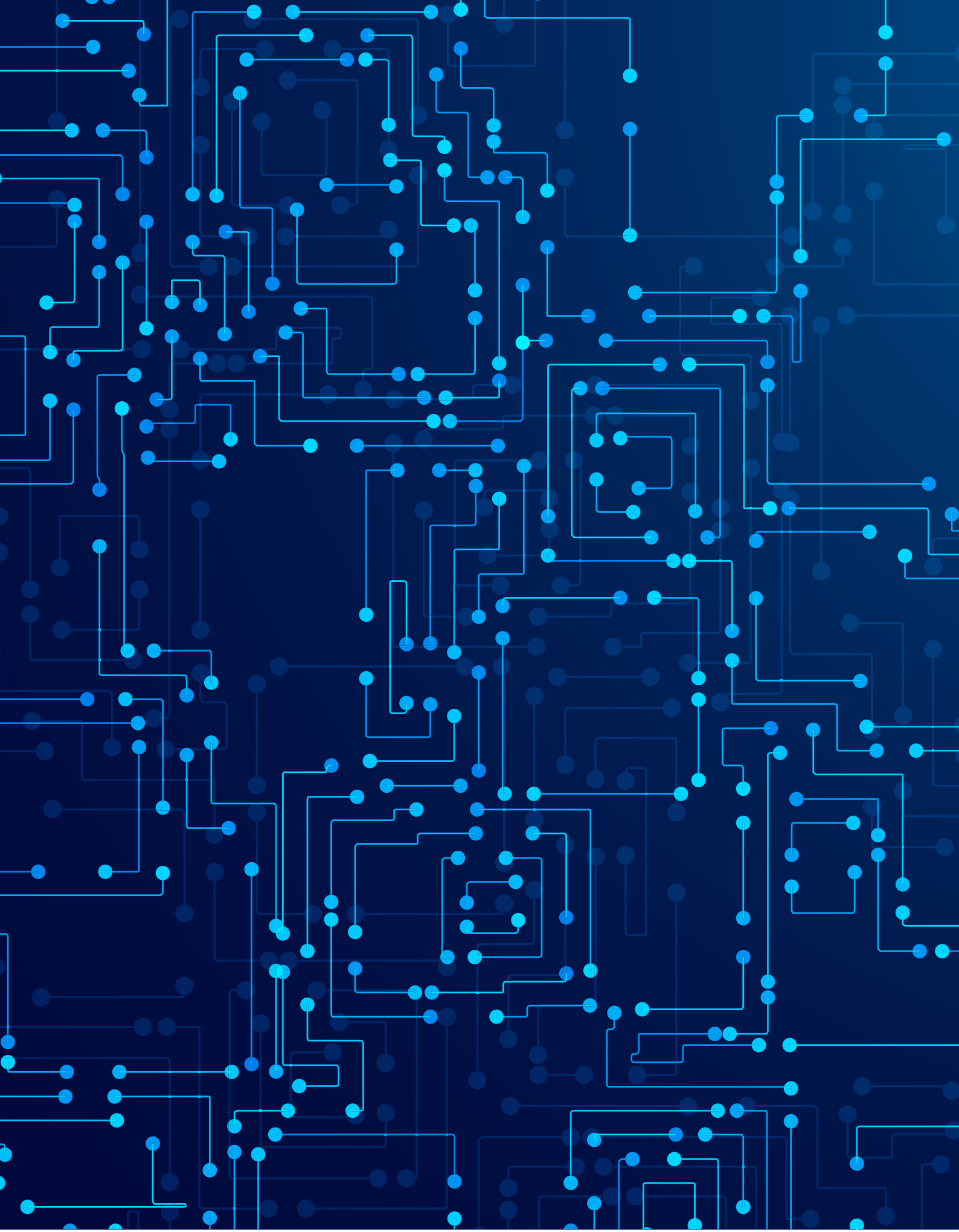
1. **AI guidance.** Humanitarian coordination bodies should develop AI guidance and minimum standards for humanitarian organisations covering governance, data protection, disclosure, acceptable use and human oversight to promote consistent and responsible AI practices across the sector. Individual organisations can use this guidance as a starting point to formulate, and regularly update, their own respective AI use policies. Together, these measures would help move AI use from largely informal adoption towards a more deliberate, risk-proportionate and institutionally supported approach.

2. **Provide practical and specialised/role-based trainings on use of AI.** Humanitarian organisations should provide mandatory training on the responsible use of AI. This training should cover aspects such as ethical AI use, effective prompt writing, verification of AI-generated outputs, and data protection. Priority should be given to programme, monitoring, evaluation M&E, communications, and proposal-development staff. Given the rapid evolution of AI technologies, organisations should also provide regular refresher training to mitigate emerging risks and expose staff to new tools and good practices.

3. **Donors and international partners should fund responsible AI access.** International actors, including donors, should provide dedicated budget lines for AI-related costs or allow these costs to be included in indirect cost recovery. This would enable local humanitarian partners to access paid versions of AI tools and cover related expenses, including staff training, technical support, and data-protection measures.

4. **AI use risk assessments.** Organisations should introduce mandatory procedures for assessing and classifying AI applications by risk level. These procedures should distinguish low-risk tasks, such as drafting non-sensitive content, from higher-risk uses involving personal data, safeguarding or access to assistance. Approval and oversight should be proportionate to the level of risk, with higher-risk uses requiring stronger safeguards and documented human review.

5. **Integrate AI into partnership processes.** AI guidance should be included in partner orientations, safeguarding discussions and capacity-strengthening plans. Partnership agreements should clarify expectations regarding acceptable AI use, data protection, disclosure, human oversight and responsibility for reviewing AI-generated outputs. Partners should also jointly identify training, technical support and resource needs, rather than placing compliance responsibilities solely on local organisations.



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