



AI in the Developing World

Focus on Africa and Southeast
Asia

OVERVIEW

In this talk I will be demonstrating how the developing world is challenging mainstream narratives that it is merely just catching up in shaping ethical and community centric AI.

Focusing on, An AI of Our Own (AAOO)'s work, a Global South community-driven project, I will share how we envision a future where ethical, community-centered AI replaces extractive data models, advancing sustainable community stewardship of tools and data through advocacy, applied model development, and interdisciplinary research.

AI and the Developing World

Key Highlights

Cassava & Zindi Partner To Boost African AI Innovation

BY GUGU LOURIE | 2025-05-12 | UPDATED: 2025-05-14 | NO COMMENTS | 2 MINS READ

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Introducing An AI of Our Own

About AA00

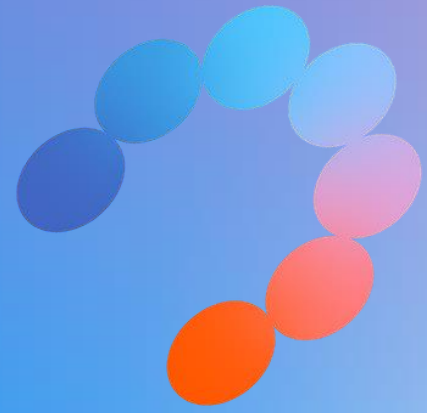
- An AI of Our Own (AA00) is an initiative of Living Arts International (LAI) that reimagines communities as equal partners rather than data sources in AI, adopting a Global South–centered, ethically grounded approach.
- AA00 co-creates practical AI tools for cultural preservation and transmission, grounding innovation in continuous, on-the-ground community involvement.
- We envision a future where ethical, community-centered AI replaces extractive research and data collection models, advancing sustainable community stewardship of tools and data through advocacy, applied model development, and interdisciplinary research.

**CENTERING THE GLOBAL SOUTH
IN THE DIGITAL FUTURE**

**ADDRESSING LACK OF
REPRESENTATION AND DATA
SOVEREIGNTY IN DIGITAL HERITAGE**

**RESOLVING BIAS OF
AI DATASETS AND EXPONENTIAL
TECHNOLOGICAL GROWTH**

**an AI
of our
own**



**an AI
of our
own**

Landscape Mapping and Research Report

Community Involvement

How deep does it go?

"Community-Focused" ≠ Community-Led

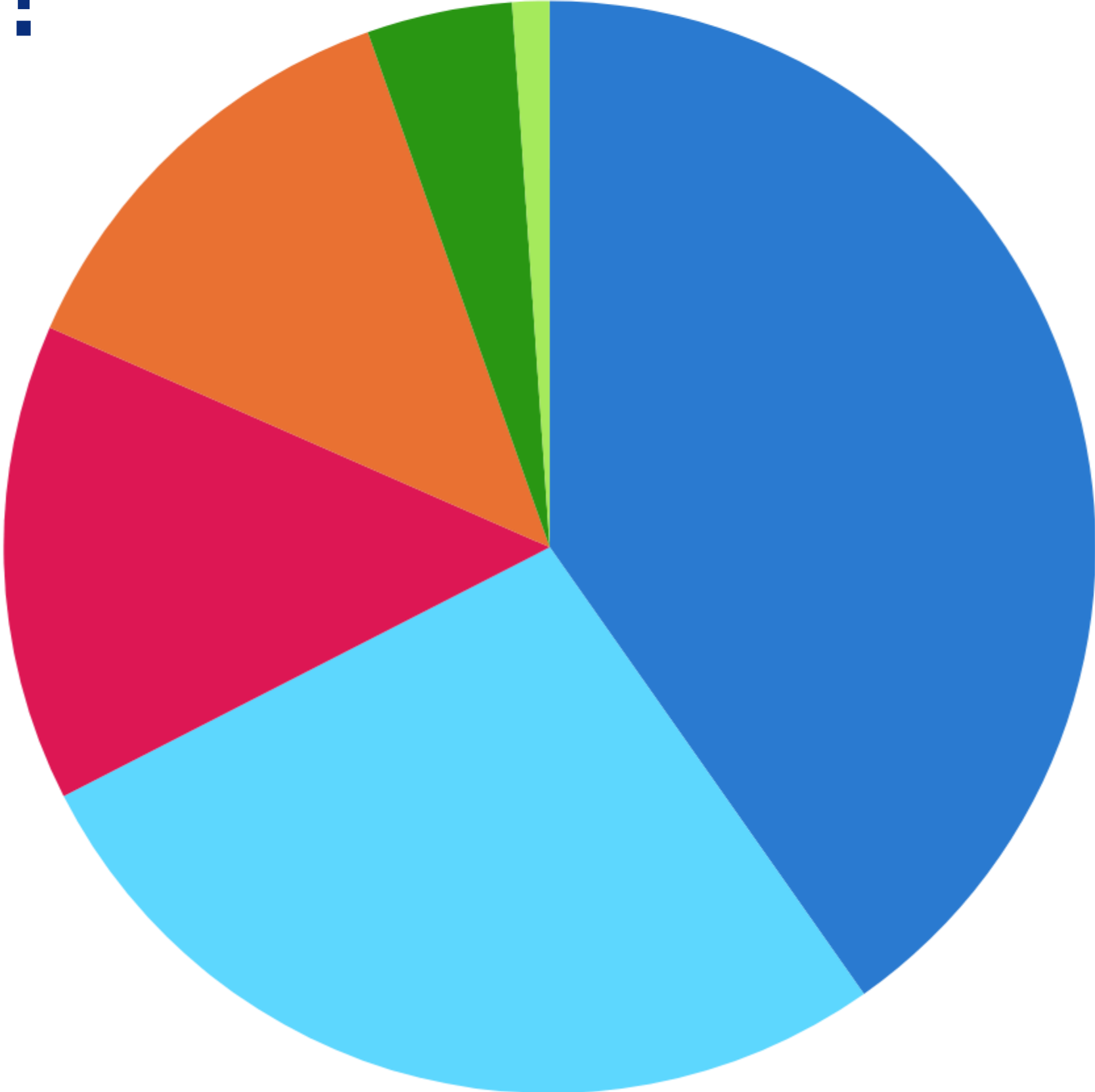
40% of projects provide public access to information — calling this community involvement. But this assumes digital access, digital literacy, and English fluency that many communities lack.

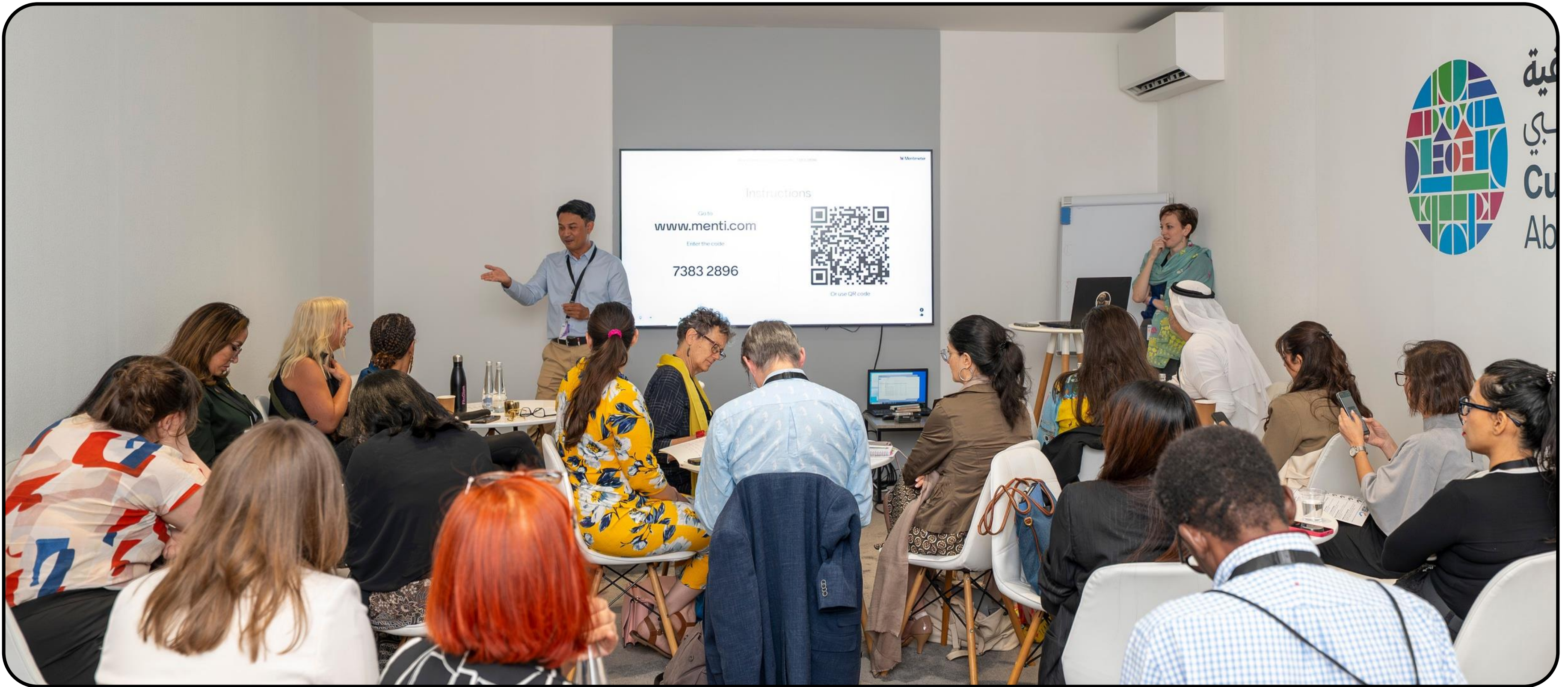
True Community Direction: Rare but Powerful

Only 14% had almost genuine community direction — projects initiated by communities, sourcing their own data, with outcomes that directly benefited them (e.g. Disanketnoi in Vietnam, Pusaka in Malaysia).

Key gap: community as input provider vs. community as decision-maker

- Information Access Only
- Input / Data Sourcing
- Overall Direction & Benefit
- Training Programs
- Ongoing Dialogue
- Network





Manifesto

LINGUISTIC BIAS & EXCLUSION

Over 3000 languages for Africa and 1000 for Southeast Asia. But they are sparsely represented – Furthers the digital divide. (Endangered – almost extinct).

END USE CASE

Most projects are static archives – data collection is the goal. The question of who uses it, for what, is absent.

DATA GOVERNANCE

Communities feel data is the latest resource taken without control. Data sovereignty requires context-specific, not universal solutions.

DIGITAL DIVIDE

Limited digital literacy, and connectivity.

SUSTAINABILTY

Digital archives can become obsolete quickly. AI systems are resource-heavy and risk deepening environmental harm in the Global South.

WESTERN FRAMEWORKS

AI models are built on text-dominant, western ways of knowing. Oral, experiential, and community-contextual knowledge has no comparable AI foundation.

TECH VS CULTURE

Tech actors move fast and solve problems; cultural actors build consensus slowly. Both approaches are needed but rarely converge.

Areas of Interest Objectives

- Understand what a high quality, culturally and ethically sourced datasets on diverse forms of cultural heritage within the Global South looks like.
- Understanding community perceptions on the use of AI in cultural heritage education and preservation.
- Co-design and develop an interactive and scalable prototype based on community data.

3 separate communities and cultural traditions

Traditional use of indigenous plants in South Africa

Smot Chanting in Cambodia

Traditional Ikat Weavers in Cambodia

AAOO Pilot : South Africa, Eastern Cape Data Collection



AAOO Pilot: Cambodia - Data Collection

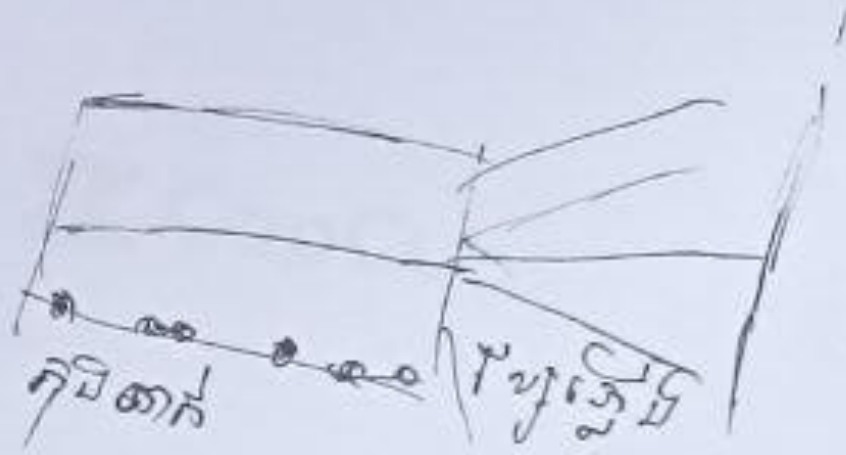




Ikat Weavers in Cambodia



உயர் - 1.5



சுவை
புடை



Analysis

Pilot case

Says

Accessibility is essential; I need tools that accommodate my feature phone and slow internet.

AI often mislabels our chanting and tones.

I need a platform that supports oral traditions, not just written text.

It's important that the platform shows the cultural and spiritual meaning behind Khmer chants.

I want control over who can access this Smot and how it is used.

We want to preserve chanting traditions, not let them be misinterpreted.

It is essential to have a tool that highlights nuances and does not dull them.

The tool must match our languages and digital skills, not assume Western tech habits.

Thinks

Will the AI misinterpret or mistranscribe the Smot?

Is this AI trained with our voices, our history, or just borrowed assumptions?

Can a tool that works in one community truly translate to another with different cultural context?

Can the platform recognize this as sacred content, not entertainment?

Will the interface be intuitive for me?

Will the creators of this tool truly take into account cultural values and norms?

If I upload this, who will have access? Will outsiders misuse our sacred chanting?

What is the AI output reinforces stereotypes and false images of our culture?

Khmer member who wants to preserve Smot

Does

Records chanting on a basic mobile device but struggles with

Participates in cultural preservation work for

Attempts to digitize cultural content but faces limited tools.

Discusses terms of specific data usage with team.

Feels

Motivated by the potential of ethical design to transform

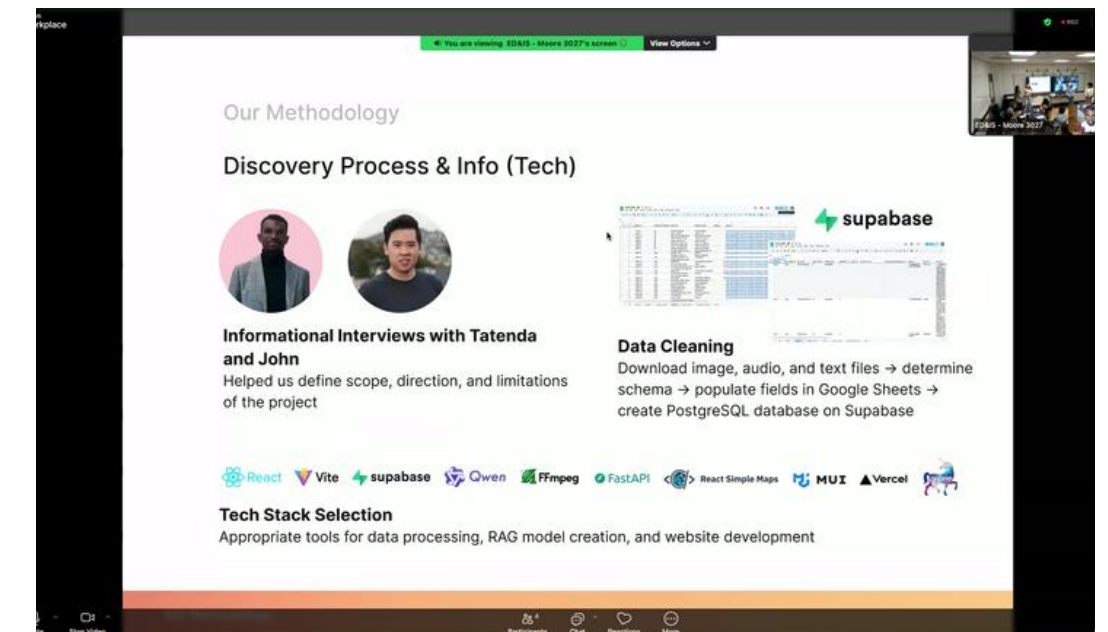
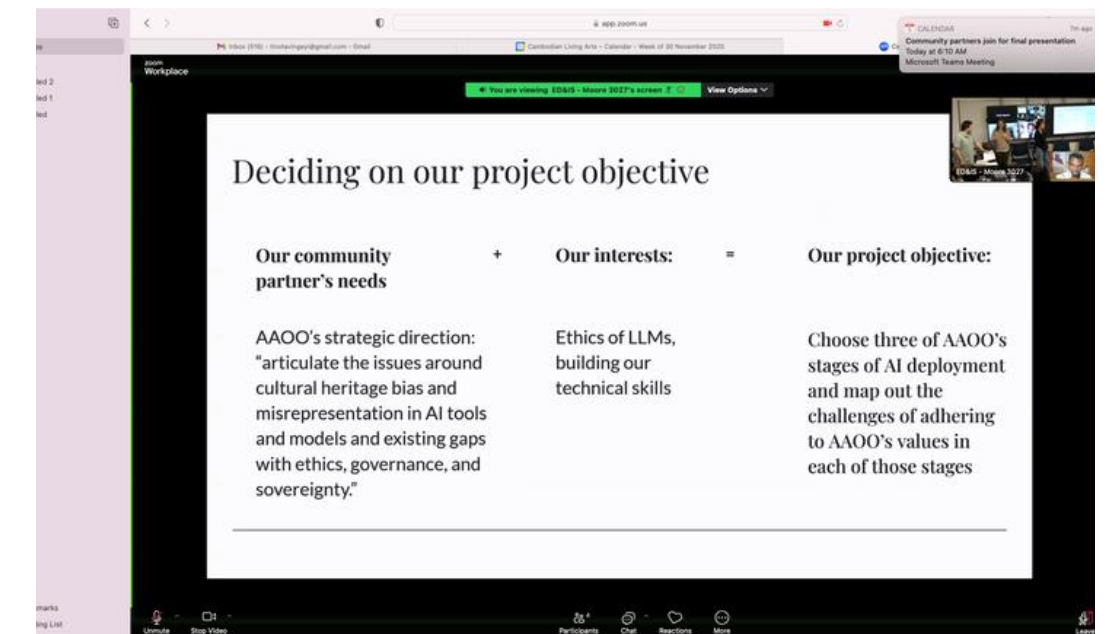
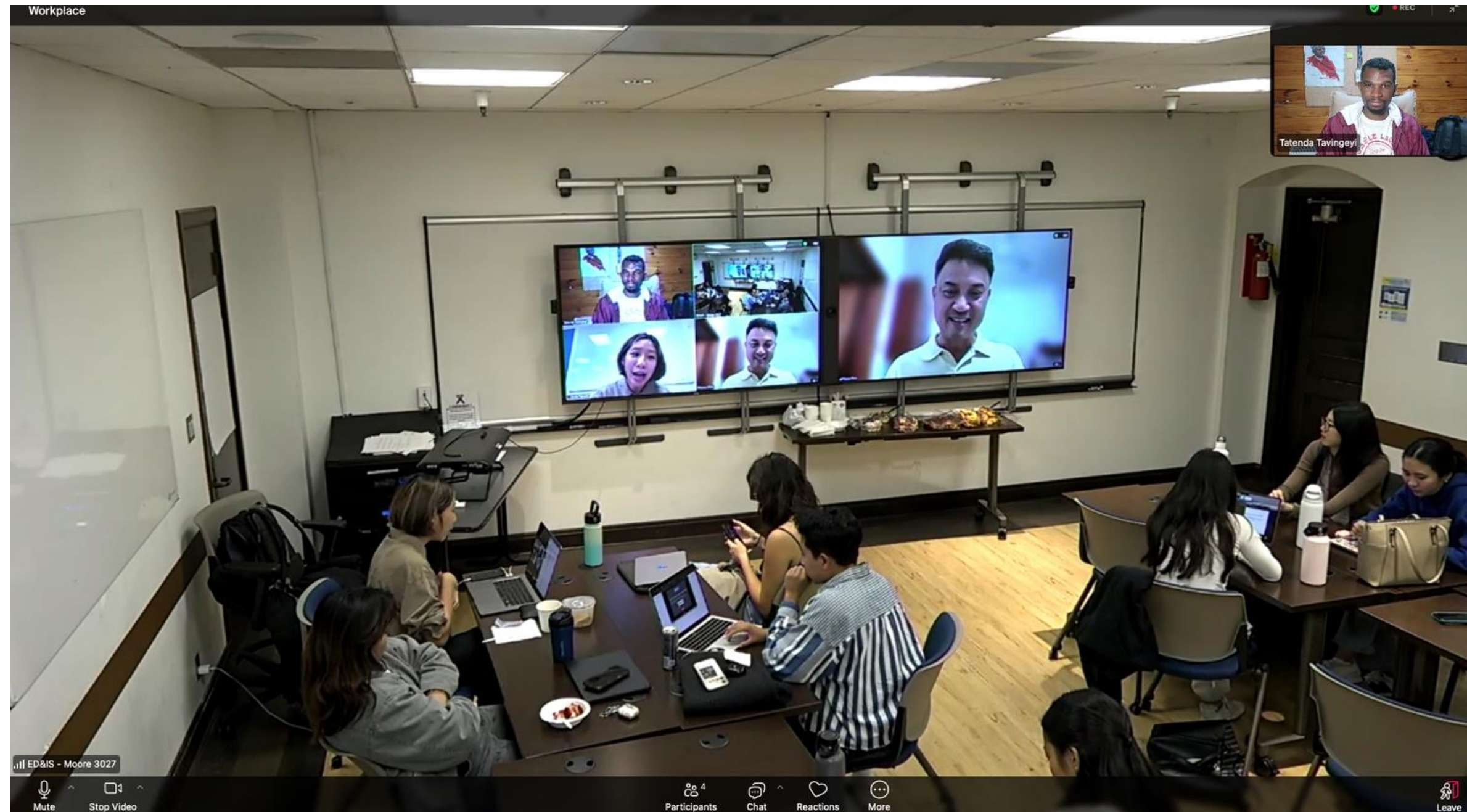
Protective of cultural heritage and wary of technological

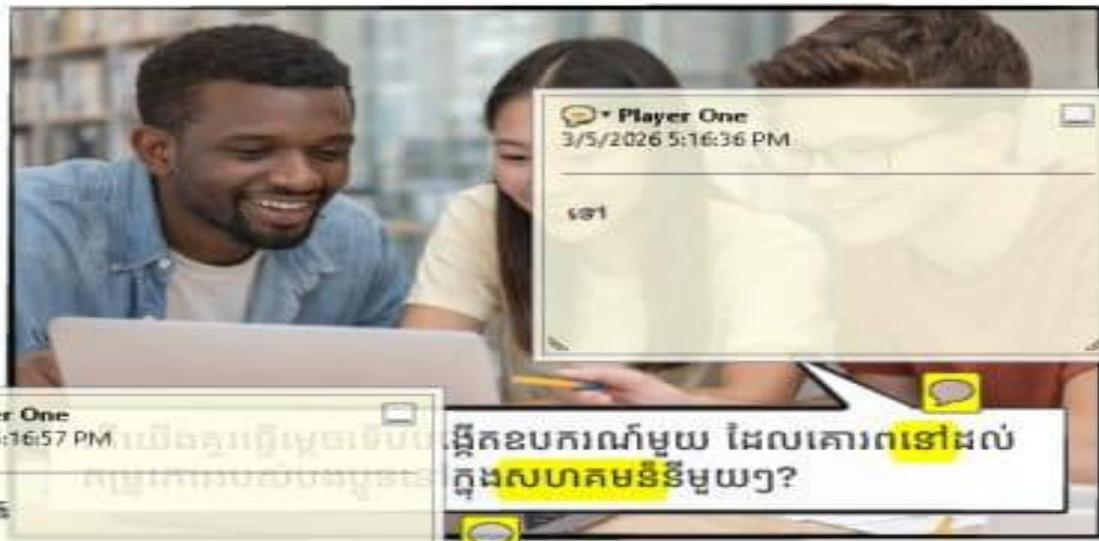
Proud to contribute to community heritage if the

Excluded by platforms that don't consider Khmer language

Student Labs: Connecting Communities with Students – Understanding the South to North Relationships

Pilot case





Keeping Communities Engaged



**Consent and Consent
design for who, From who?**

**Compensation design and
decision for who, from
who?**

Student Labs: South to South (DICHI Techpreneur 2.0) – Cambodia

Cambodia's Digital Skills Crisis

Thousands of young Cambodians graduate annually without the practical skills or entrepreneurial experience to thrive in the digital economy.

Full Stack Development and Data Science / AI remain the most critical gaps – threatening Cambodia's ability to compete in the regional tech landscape.

<10%

of ICT graduates are

Cambodia's workforce readiness gap is widening every year

70%+

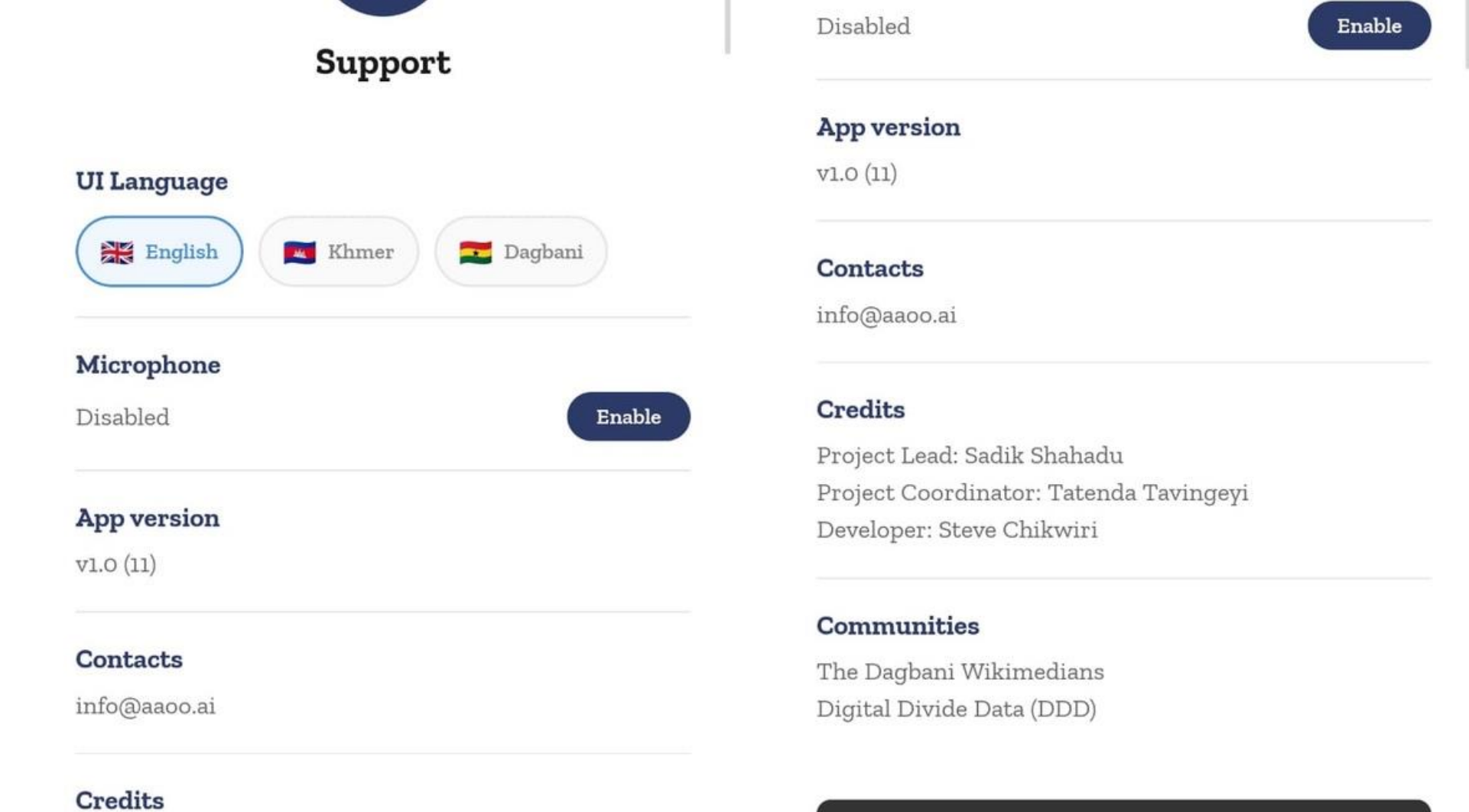
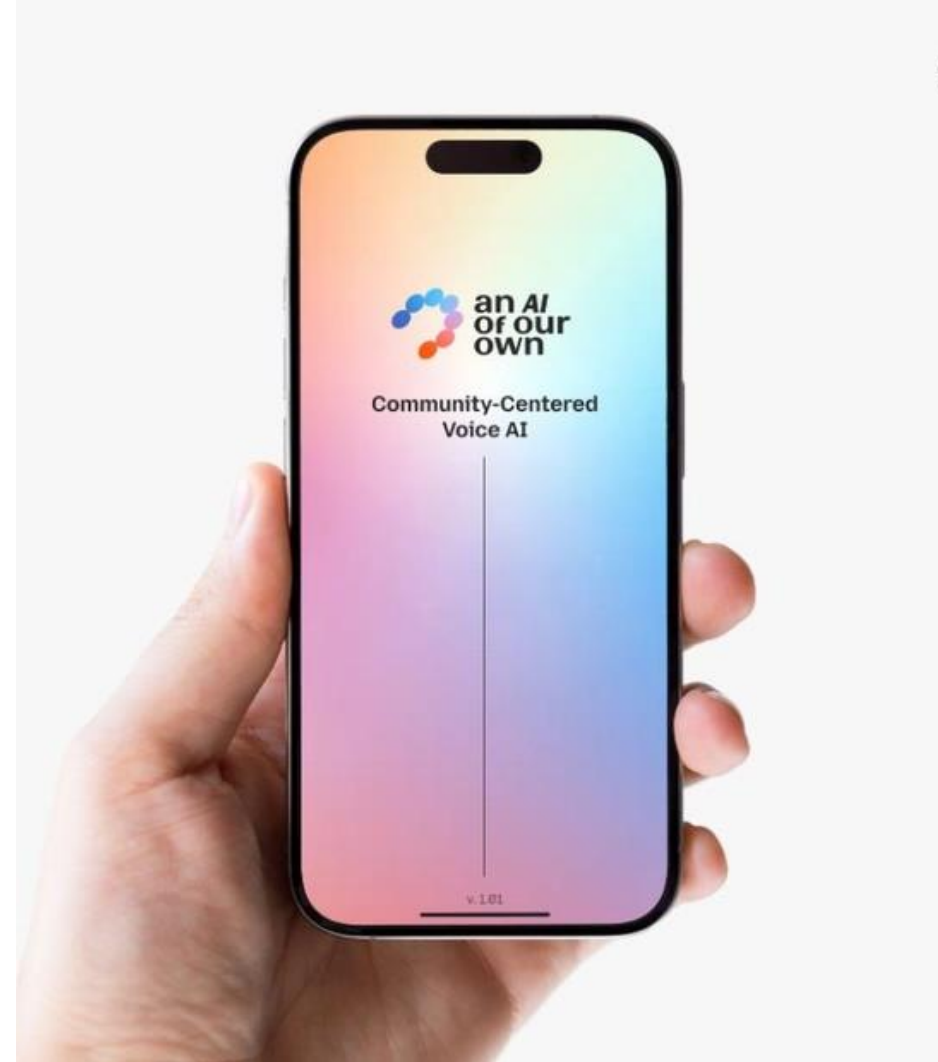
of employers can't fill technical roles

Talent demand far exceeds current graduate supply in tech sectors

~0%

qualified Data & AI specialists

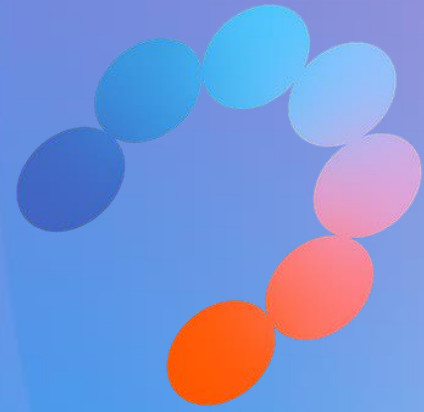
Critical shortage in the fastest-growing global job



AAOO and Community Centered Voice AI: Mozilla Common Voice – VOOO

Network of Our Own

- To address the digital divide AAOO through its N3O concept aims to connect indigenous households across remote areas and the first pilot will start with Jarai communities in Ratanakiri province, Cambodia.
- This will be done using a solar powered community owned IPv6 mesh network, which carries and preserves local cultural heritage on its permanent address.
- The network will run local ethical and community-led AI on Jarai speech recognition, allowing translation of Jarai - Khmer - English.

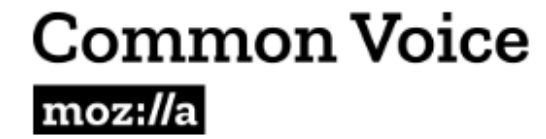


**an AI
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The Journey Continues

The question remains: As the race to build empires of AI continues, is slow-paced, community-led innovation possible, or is fast-paced innovation inevitable?

Our Supporters



Our Partners



Dr. Cindy Anh
Nguyễn (UCLA)