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## GAIN'S STRATEGY FOR HARNESSING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN PROGRAMMES

### **About this strategy**

This strategy is intended to demonstrate how the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) can harness the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) to accelerate impact across our programmes. It offers a practical high-level view for leaders and staff across the organisation to understand where and how AI can add value to our mission of ensuring healthy diets for all, especially the most vulnerable. By clarifying opportunities and limitations, the strategy provides a common framework for experimentation, learning, and responsible adoption of AI.

The document is written for a broad internal audience, including project managers, heads of programmes, research and thematic leads, country directors, and the Strategic Management Team. It is also intended to support the Board of Directors in providing strategic oversight and guidance. While the primary focus is on programmatic use of AI, the strategy also signals implications for operations, partnerships, and resource mobilisation of these programme-focused uses.

Ultimately, this strategy aims to equip GAIN with a shared vision and roadmap for applying AI responsibly and effectively. By embedding AI as a strategic enabler, we can innovate in designing programmes, reinvent existing approaches, and optimise delivery and scaling. In addition to supporting informed, aligned decisions about the role of AI in advancing our mission, this strategy positions GAIN to influence the wider sector through thought leadership and practical models for impact.

### Introduction

Billions of people worldwide are malnourished. Food systems transformation is essential to address this challenge, yet it is not happening fast enough. The cost of a healthy diet and food insecurity are instead heading in the wrong direction. Without significant intervention, billions of people will remain unable to access healthy diets and continue to be malnourished. GAIN is dedicated to improving this situation and experienced in designing and delivering high-quality programming, but we often run into challenges that limit our impact. For example, identifying promising areas or populations to target for maximum impact; making decisions with incomplete or low-quality data; localising interventions or content to different populations and contexts; understanding complex food supply chains; or verifying the compliance of partners with fortification standards or other guidelines.

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### How was this strategy developed?

The development of this strategy was led by a cross-team working group, with input from senior leadership and drawing on:

- Interviews with external experts and an expert workshop.
- A review of AI innovations that have been applied to food and nutrition.
- Interviews with our staff working on 12 different program areas, covering the challenges they face in delivering impact and how they think AI can help.

This document aligns with GAIN's internal AI governance framework.



At the same time, the development of artificial intelligence (AI) is accelerating rapidly, with major increases in global investment, innovation, and uptake of AI.<sup>4</sup> Organisational adoption of AI has moved from experimentation to mainstream deployment: 78% of companies now use AI in at least one business function, up sharply from 55% a year earlier.<sup>5</sup> AI is no longer a niche technology but a primary engine for innovation and optimisation.

Appropriate application of technologies in development in the past has enabled catalytic change—such as using mobile money and text messaging to make resources and information available to remote populations. All represents a novel, potentially powerful suite of tools that the sector can leverage to address challenges and unlock previously unavailable opportunities, and thus increase impact. By strategically and thoughtfully leveraging this rapidly advancing technology, we can help facilitate food systems transformation at scale. At the same time, we must remain cautious about risks associated with All use—and maintain a tempered understanding of where All can add real value and where it cannot.

This strategy sets out how we will integrate AI into our programmes to better achieve our mission: ensuring all people, especially the most vulnerable, have access to healthy diets. Our approach focuses on using AI to design more impactful programmes, deliver them more efficiently, and scale them more rapidly. We will integrate general AI

best practices across programmes while adopting specific tools and technologies where they add value. Our objective is to cultivate an organisational culture where AI is not a technological add-on but a strategic enabler of greater nutrition impact. We also see an opportunity to play a leading role in shaping how AI is applied in food and nutrition programming, contributing thought leadership and demonstrating models that others can adopt and adapt.

### This document outlines how we will do that:

GAIN's understanding (as of October 2025) of the state of AI use in food and nutrition policy and programming. 2

Our perspective on high-impact applications of Al to transform food systems.

Our role in this work—what we will and will not engage in.

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The steps we must take to deliver on that role and ambition.

### 1

GAIN'S UNDERSTANDING (AS OF OCTOBER 2025) OF THE STATE OF AI USE IN FOOD AND NUTRITION POLICY AND PROGRAMMING.



# The state of AI use in food and nutrition policy and programming

Our understanding of the current landscape draws on a structured assessment combining a literature review, key expert interviews, a validation workshop, and case study deep dives. The key findings are summarised below.

### **Current applications and adoption**

Al deployment in food and nutrition programming remains nascent but is accelerating rapidly, with most applications concentrated in pilot phases rather than scaled implementation. Leading adopters include multilateral organisations, technology-forward NGOs, and private sector actors.

### **Multilateral organisations**

Organisations are pioneering sophisticated applications. For example, WFP's HungerMap LIVE aggregates data streams using machine learning to forecast food security trends across 90+ countries, enabling proactive humanitarian response. Their Project MIMI uses predictive modelling to estimate micronutrient deficiency risks in data-scarce environments by combining household surveys with environmental indicators. IFAD leverages Azure AI for nutrition analytics. FAO integrates machine learning into climate modelling for food security predictions.

### NGOs and implementation partners

They are deploying AI primarily for service delivery and behaviour change. Digital Green's Farmer. Chat uses AI-powered chatbots to provide context-specific agricultural and nutrition advice in multiple languages, achieving 24% income increases for participating farmers. Jacaranda Health's PROMPTS platform in Kenya uses AI to provide personalised maternal and child health guidance to nearly 3 million mothers, triaging urgent cases for human follow-up. Amref Health Africa combines satellite imagery and weather data to predict malnutrition risk and optimise resource allocation.



### **Private-sector actors**

They demonstrate the most advanced technical implementations. FoodChain ID uses AI to automate regulatory compliance checking across 220 countries for 75% of the top 100 food and beverage manufacturers. AgNext employs computer vision for rapid quality assessment of agricultural products in less than 30 seconds. However, these solutions primarily serve commercial clients rather than public health objectives.

In general, government adoption remains limited, particularly in LMICs. While

countries like India invest in digital public infrastructure that could support Al applications, actual deployment for nutrition programming is minimal. Most government use focuses on administrative efficiency rather than service delivery innovation.



### **Enhanced targeting**

Predictive analytics enable precise identification of at-risk populations, moving beyond blanket interventions to personalised support.

### Real-time responsiveness:

Al enables near-instantaneous analysis of complex, multi-source data streams, critical for crisis response and market monitoring.

#### Scale achievement

Digital solutions can reach millions simultaneously—chatbots, for instance, can handle numerous queries that would overwhelm human capacity.

### **Critical gaps and opportunities**

Despite growing adoption, significant gaps constrain Al's potential in nutrition:

**Data infrastructure remains fragmented.** Nutrition data exists in silos across sectors—health, agriculture, education, commerce—with minimal interoperability. Most data are paper-based or in incompatible digital formats. Unlike sectors like finance or telecommunications, nutrition lacks foundational data models that could enable systematic AI deployment.

**Quality assurance and fortification compliance** represent massive unmet opportunities. While technologies exist for rapid micronutrient testing using computer vision and spectroscopy, no Al tools are deployed at scale for fortification monitoring, for example. Manual testing remains the norm, creating bottlenecks that undermine programme effectiveness.

**Behavioural insights and demand generation** are underexplored. Public-sector programmes focus on supply-side interventions while poorly understanding why people make specific food choices. Al could analyse purchasing patterns, social media sentiment, and consumption data to inform demand-side interventions, but privacy concerns and data access barriers limit progress.

**Personalisation at scale remains elusive.** While commercial platforms deliver personalised recommendations to millions, nutrition programmes still rely on population-level messaging. Al could enable tailored interventions based on individual dietary patterns, health status, and contextual factors, but requires investment in data systems and delivery channels.

**Scientific discovery and innovation** lag behind other sectors. While AI revolutionises drug discovery and materials science, nutrition science has yet to systematically adopt AI for bioactive compound identification, formulation optimisation, or bioavailability enhancement. The absence of open nutrition datasets and benchmarks—equivalent to those in genomics or climate science—constrains innovation.

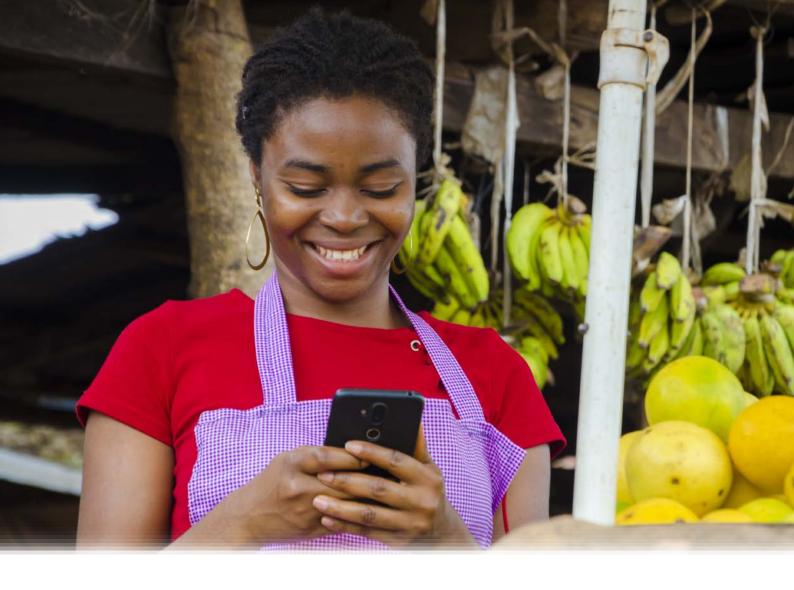
Local capacity and inclusion gaps risk exacerbating inequities. Most Al development occurs in high-income countries with limited representation from LMIC populations in training data. Low digital literacy, limited internet access, and lack of local language models create adoption barriers. Without intentional efforts to build inclusive AI, these tools may widen rather than narrow nutrition disparities.

The sector stands at an inflection point: foundational investments in data infrastructure, capacity building, and responsible AI governance made now will determine whether AI becomes a transformative force for nutrition equity or another technology that primarily benefits the already advantaged.

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OUR PERSPECTIVE ON HIGH-IMPACT APPLICATIONS OF AI TO TRANSFORM FOOD SYSTEMS.





### The role of AI in food systems programming

Our research shows that responsible, high-impact AI use in food systems must start with understanding what is needed (Design), ensure it can be done well (Delivery), and build towards reaching every person who could benefit (Scale).

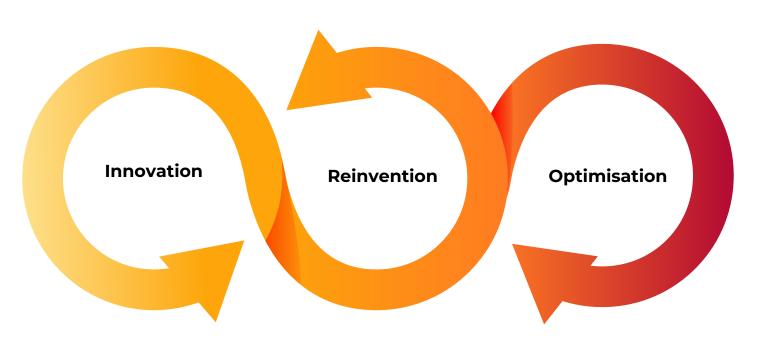
Al can improve programme design when known programmatic challenges can be overcome with Al-powered solutions. For example, data gaps that prevent accurate targeting of interventions could be overcome by Al-enabled information gathering, data integration, and analysis (e.g., of micronutrient deficiency hotspots). Al can improve programme delivery when operational challenges are met by Al-enabled solutions, such as speeding up the traditionally slow quality assurance process for iron-fortified flour, or better personalising often generic nutrition messaging.

Regarding scale, AI can help manage complexity as programmes grow, such as by automating the process of identifying high-potential areas for expansion. By sharing our learning and engaging with partners, we aim not only to strengthen our own programmes but to influence the wider field toward responsible and impactful AI use.

# Our strategic approach: innovate, reinvent, and optimise

We will explore how AI can improve design, delivery, and scale of our programmes (the three strategic objectives in GAIN's 2022–2027 strategy) through innovation, reinvention, and optimisation:

- Innovation refers to the creation of entirely new types of programmes, approaches or delivery models that were previously inconceivable or unattainable (new idea, new model). All enables this by uncovering patterns in data, analysing new information sources (e.g., images, text, audio), and generating ideas or interventions that go beyond traditional human capacity.
- Reinvention involves fundamentally redesigning or transforming existing programmes to improve effectiveness, relevance, or efficiency (same goal, new design). All can support reinvention by identifying misalignments, modelling alternative configurations, and revealing opportunities that were previously invisible to programme managers.
- Optimisation focuses on refining or streamlining current programmes without altering their core structure (same design, smarter execution). All enables this through automation, prediction, and personalisation. All can also facilitate more rapid learning from programmes (what is working and what isn't), so that we can more rapidly revise approaches to be more effective.



These approaches are not mutually exclusive; some programmes may integrate elements of innovation, reinvention, and optimisation simultaneously. Table 1 provides illustrative examples of such uses.

### Table 1. Illustrative examples of how to use AI to improve our programming.

	Design	Delivery	Scale
Innovation	Image analysis to identify likely food safety & hygiene issues in informal markets, enabling the development of new, targeted interventions	Image analysis to monitor school meal quality and food waste and create new meal plans accordingly	Social media sentiment tracker to surface emerging nutrition concerns and food choices, enabling creation of new communications to previously unreached populations
Reinvention	Business intelligence tool scans web, trade, legal, financial, and social media records to streamline MSME discovery and due diligence	Predictive modelling to track compliance with practices promoted in project messaging and send personalised reminders based on this	Analyse media and parliamentary records to track advocacy impact and influence on public and political discourse and scale up the types of advocacy that have the most impact
Optimisation	Automate the pre- screening of food system MSMEs for advisory support	Auto-translate and localise nutrition training materials across languages, contexts, and literacy levels	MSME business advisor for faster, personalised guidance at a low cost

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# OUR ROLE IN THIS WORK—WHAT WE WILL AND WILL NOT ENGAGE IN.



### **Programmatic opportunities for AI application**

This section outlines specific AI applications that align with our strategy, focusing on opportunities that require dedicated investment, have high potential for impact, and where we have a comparative advantage to fill an unmet need. We first cover applications that cut across multiple programme areas, followed by programme-specific opportunities, and then the use of existing tools to improve internal efficiency.

### **Cross-cutting programmatic applications**

A foundational opportunity is the use of chatbots to make information, advice, and training more accessible, understandable, and personalised—work that is currently time-consuming and resource-intensive across many of our programme areas. This general use case can be applied to various subjects, such as providing high-quality guidance on regulatory compliance to businesses in the fortification sector or delivering tailored nutrition advice to youth or workers in a company-specific context. To increase use and ensure accessibility, these chatbots can be integrated into platforms that audiences already use, such as WhatsApp. While each chatbot will require considerable customisation, they may be able to share training data and lessons learned across different applications.

Another cross-cutting application is the use of generative AI to improve formative research and insight generation, which currently entails lengthy and resource-intensive analysis, particularly for qualitative data. AI could support not only data analysis but also the more complex step of generating insights that inform intervention design.



As the need for such tools is not specific to nutrition, our role will be to carefully monitor the space of new AI-based research software and be ready to experiment with adopting them, rather than becoming an innovator in this area.

We will also explore predictive analytics applied to markets and supply chains, which can be complex to understand and often represent bottlenecks to programme scale. For example, within fortification programmes, this could be used to anticipate how supply disruptions might affect the availability of fortified commodities. This approach could also flag potential food safety hot spots, optimise school or workplace meal supply chains based on food prices, identify likely points of food loss and waste, and predict gaps in coverage. Such analytics could improve the resilience of food systems, a cross-cutting theme for GAIN, and could be expanded to conduct market simulations to see how shifting prices would impact product demand.

Finally, social listening and predictive analytics can be applied to consumer data to understand sentiment, trends, and practices in real time by scanning social media and aggregating purchase data—at much lower cost and faster than previously possible. This can extract deeper insights, such as what purchase 'bundling' reveals about consumer choice. This approach can also be integrated with crowd-sourcing, where an audience like youth are asked to share their own data, such as photos of school meals, for aggregation and analysis.

### **Programme-specific applications**

Within **Nutritious Foods Enterprises**, an immediate opportunity is integrating training on the responsible use of existing AI tools into our work with MSMEs. A more resource-intensive, longer-term opportunity would be developing a tool that uses AI to make compliance and regulatory data more accessible and understandable to businesses by extracting and synthesising key information from food regulatory documents. AI-powered data-mining tools could also be used to more systematically identify, classify, and conduct due diligence on businesses that meet specific criteria for investment or partnership.

For Large-Scale Food Fortification and Biofortification, Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) and compliance are top areas for applying AI, as testing is often an expensive process that can take days or even weeks. Regulatory capacity is often low, making efficiency gains especially important. These could include low-cost diagnostics for micronutrient content, using computer vision to analyse iron spot tests, real-time tracking of compliance at the point of fortification, and using predictive analytics to prioritise high-risk actors for sampling (i.e., 'risk-based monitoring'). A second high-potential area is using machine learning to identify the most viable and potentially novel vehicles for food fortification in each context.

In our **Policy Support** work, where a key challenge is digesting large amounts of information, there may be scope for sophisticated AI-based tools for extracting, cleaning, and analysing budget data related to food and nutrition policies.

For **Food Systems Data & Evidence**, a priority is using AI to improve the usability and uptake of the Food Systems Dashboard. This could involve using chatbots to make the tool easier for non-expert users to navigate or using machine learning to connect food systems performance to priority policies and actions. More broadly, we can address data scarcity by improving access to high-quality nutrition data through open datasets and partnerships with public and private actors. Where direct data are lacking, predictive modelling can help fill critical gaps.

### Improving internal efficiency with existing AI tools

Beyond developing bespoke applications, our staff can apply existing AI tools with limited resource requirements to improve efficiency. These tools can assist with content and document management by using adaptive templates to reduce repetitive writing or by customising training materials for different contexts. They can also support data analysis and monitoring through automated data synthesis, visualisation, and interpretation. For project design and administration, AI chatbots can be used for brainstorming and challenging assumptions, while other tools can automate logistical tasks like reminder emails.

Many of these tools also have benefits for internal operations, such as internal communications, representing an important area for cross-cutting capacity building. By leveraging such tools, we can achieve significant time and cost savings, freeing staff to focus more on strategic activities.

GAIN will develop a list of approved tools and a process for adding new tools to that list, as well as support for managed experimentation in applications and a process for approving major investment in bespoke tools.



### Strategic exclusions: not a current priority

While we see high potential in AI, we will not pursue opportunities where we lack a comparative advantage or sufficient alignment with our mission. For example, we will not develop AI apps for understanding meal composition, as this is a crowded space with clear commercial interest. Likewise, we will avoid the crowded AgTech space and integration with wearable devices, which is unlikely to benefit most people in LMICs.

In general, we will seek to only use AI where it is the right tool for the task, avoid developing custom approaches where off-the-shelf ones have adequate performance, and ensure our use of AI is founded in a diagnosis that suggests it can lower key barriers to the desired change. Whenever developing new solutions, we will consider sustainability, maintenance, and scale to avoid investments in one-off or unsustainable solutions.

While advances in computing, open-source models, mobile data collection, and language technologies have made AI increasingly accessible, affordable, and actionable in low-resource settings, there remain key data gaps and barriers to equitable use. We will remain cognisant of these, ensuring that we use AI where it is the right fit and not where it is not.



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# THE STEPS WE MUST TAKE TO DELIVER ON THAT ROLE AND AMBITION.



# Implementing the strategy: roles, responsibilities, and partnerships

To turn this strategy into impact, GAIN must strengthen internal capabilities, manage risks, and work closely with partners to support sector-wide outcomes.

To advance Al-driven nutrition programming, we require partnerships with governments, research institutions, private-sector technology companies, and multilateral organisations to unlock high-quality, contextually relevant datasets critical for robust Al models. Governments, including national statistics offices and health ministries, hold essential data on food consumption, micronutrient deficiencies, and supply chains, which are often fragmented or paper-based in LMICs.

Digitising and standardising data using interoperable formats, supported by initiatives like the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, will enable AI applications to leverage this data. Research institutions are vital for validating datasets, harmonising diverse sources, and developing ethical data governance frameworks to ensure privacy and equity, mitigating risks like algorithmic bias, misclassification, and misinformation. In the short term, priority partnerships may focus on unlocking and digitising existing datasets with a small set of committed partners, while in the longer term we can move towards sustained data-sharing agreements, joint AI initiatives, and large-scale implementation networks.

Technical infrastructure and capacity-building partnerships are essential to bridge cutting-edge Al capabilities with practical field applications. We will need to work with technology providers to access cloud infrastructure, pre-trained models, and expertise in machine learning, computer vision, and natural language processing. Open-source solutions are critical to avoid vendor lock-in and ensure sustainability. Private-sector organisations can also be partners for accessing training to build digital literacy among our staff and stakeholders, particularly in low-resource settings. Donors and philanthropic partners are crucial for funding high-risk innovations and supporting digital public goods.

End users of AI solutions, whether MSMEs, civil servants, or community groups, will always be key partners, with their input and engagement (and in some cases their data) key for developing user-centric tools. We will also seek to participate in regional alliances and cross-country collaboration to localise successful AI approaches and foster mutual learning. To these diverse partnerships, we can bring our extensive expertise in nutrition programming, understanding of local food systems, data resources and research expertise, and strong in-country capacity and stakeholder networks in the food and nutrition space. Through these collaborations, we will also seek to shape global discussions on responsible AI in nutrition programming, positioning GAIN as a thought leader and advancing sector-wide outcomes.

# What we will do to incorporate AI into programming

### **Develop organisational capacity for AI implementation**

To successfully integrate AI into our work, we must build organisational capacity. This applies across GAIN—whether supporting organisational efficiency or enhancing programmatic impact. For programme work, the focus extends beyond technology to transforming how we design, deliver, and scale our programmes. Our approach will be adaptive and guided by three principles: problem-driven (not technology-led), human-centred, and equitable.



We have already started cultivating AI readiness through foundational literacy training for staff, low-risk pilots to learn by doing, and an AI interest group to leverage existing staff enthusiasm. We will continue building capacity, focusing on training relevant staff on specific programme applications as these emerge. A cross-functional AI Working Group will initially oversee this phase, aligning efforts with programmatic needs, supporting programme managers in leveraging AI, and facilitating knowledge sharing.

As capabilities mature, we may adopt a 'Hub-and-Spoke' model to balance agility with oversight:

- A lean Hub (central, cross-functional team) will set standards, manage partnerships, and ensure ethical guardrails (e.g., mitigating bias, safeguarding data privacy).
- Embedded Spokes (AI champions in specific programme teams) will identify specific opportunities and drive implementation.

### **Build links with technical AI partners**

As noted above, we need partnerships, both new and existing, to accelerate AI adoption. One priority will be building two-way partnerships with technology partners to develop and scale high-impact applications (e.g., QA/QC diagnostics, MSME business intelligence) while ensuring solutions are rooted in nutrition challenges rather than technology trends. A second priority will be joining or creating data collaboratives to co-create open, high-quality, and interoperable nutrition datasets. To ensure we take

long-term benefits from these partnerships, we will aim to integrate structured learning: joint pilot design, focused problem-solving sessions, and ongoing knowledge sharing.

### Managing risks

Responsible AI deployment requires proactive risk management across ethical, operational, and technical dimensions. Our primary ethical concerns include lack of accountability and oversight of 'black box' AI models as well as algorithmic bias and data gaps that risk perpetuating inequities—particularly when AI models trained on data from high-income countries fail to serve vulnerable populations in LMICs effectively.



To address these risks, GAIN's Framework for AI and Guidelines for Staff set out clear governance processes to guide ethical use, strengthen staff capacity, and promote consistency across the organisation. Together with the programme strategy, they inform how we manage resources and make investment decisions in AI. These documents draw on global standards such as the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI<sup>6</sup> and WHO's guidance for AI in health alongside good practice advice on AI governance.<sup>7</sup>

In practice, this means following best practices and regulatory frameworks: requiring service providers to provide 'nutritional labels' for Al models that transparently document data sources, demographic representation, and potential biases; ensuring human review and prioritising more transparent Al approaches that allow human experts to understand and validate Al-driven recommendations, ensuring that automated systems enhance rather than replace human judgment in key decisions. Additionally, we will establish robust data governance to protect privacy, ensure informed consent, and maintain data sovereignty, particularly when working with sensitive information.

To support equity, we will carefully consider technology access among target populations before pursuing AI solutions, and where appropriate, leverage familiar platforms like WhatsApp to reduce adoption barriers. We will also ensure involvement of target end users in the development process. To prevent vendor lock-in and ensure long-term sustainability, we will prioritise modular, open-source solutions.

When determining whether to pursue Al-based solutions (and which types), we will also consider costs (e.g., financial costs including ongoing user fees, adjustment costs, environmental costs, and societal impacts, such as labour displacement) and ensure the benefits justify them.



### What does success look like

Our objective is to cultivate an organisational culture where AI is not a technological add-on but a strategic enabler of increased nutrition impact. This means ensuring that AI initiatives contribute meaningfully to our impact on projects and programmes, by ensuring that there is always a clear added value of using AI. This may involve establishing indicators of success that reflect tangible improvements in programme design, delivery, and reach. In the first year of the strategy's execution, we will develop a set of staged or phased metrics applicable to projects, programmes, and the organisation (by June 2027), that will be aggregated and shared with the Strategic Management Team (SMT) and the Programme Committee of the Board of Directors at regular intervals. Such Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) could include:

A target of Al integration across our programmatic portfolio, including for prototypes or pilot projects, with a focus on high-priority areas

Comparing operational expenditures before and after Al deployment in programming to determine whether there have been efficiency improvements.



Comparing our existing strategic metrics for programmes with and without Al integration (or before and after Al integration) to assess whether improvements have been made

Operationalising this will require screening of proposed AI uses in programmes, ensuring alignment with our core principles and priorities, and safeguarding against unintended risks and biases. This will likely require dedicated oversight, such as a centralised AI focal point to champion best practices, facilitate knowledge sharing, and monitor progress against established metrics.

### Resourcing this strategy

Realising this strategy will require dedicated funding. We will pursue strategic funding that matches AI investment types with optimal funding sources. For resource-intensive AI applications in the 'innovation' and 'reinvention' categories, like predictive malnutrition modelling, we will engage philanthropic innovators that fund AI innovations addressing global challenges, ensuring shared learning and open-source components that benefit the broader nutrition sector. For less resource-intensive 'optimisation' applications, we will increasingly embed AI components within programme proposals, demonstrating how AI tools enhance program effectiveness (e.g., through improved targeting or enhanced monitoring capabilities). Recognising the evolving development funding landscape, we will maintain a diversified approach that does not over-rely on any single funding stream. As we become recognised as a leader in AI for nutrition programming, we expect this will unlock new opportunities for non-traditional funding.



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