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DEVEX CAREER ADVICE AND INSIGHTS

A GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONAL'S GUIDE TO AI

JULY 2025

INTRODUCTION

YOUR TOOLKIT FOR A REWIRED SECTOR

From how it's being used to how it may impact future work and everything in between — what a development professional needs to know about the sector's integration with artificial intelligence.

While the development sector continues adjusting to the fallout from the U.S. aid crisis, it's also undergoing significant change through the integration of artificial intelligence. As more organizations and professionals adapt their workflows to leverage the potential of this rapidly evolving technology, many key sector roles are already being reshaped.

From automating time-intensive tasks to enabling deeper insights from data, AI offers the promise of greater efficiency — and the potential to redefine the value that professionals bring to their organizations. However, AI also poses challenges, including ethical and environmental concerns, as well as potential impacts on future job security.

This is why we've created a comprehensive guide to AI for development professionals, which will help you understand how AI is being utilized, identify action items for adaptation, and explore the implications for the future of development work.



OVERVIEW

DEVELOPMENT'S AI EVOLUTION CONTINUES AT PACE



> *Across all of these roles, we're seeing a shift from execution to orchestration. From doing tasks to designing better systems, validating outputs, and curating the human judgment that matters most.*
>
> **— Anwulika Ngozi Okonjo, digital innovation specialist**

AI's impact on development work was already well established heading into 2025, from streamlining daily operations and simplifying data analysis to more advanced applications such as predictive analytics and health diagnostics.

But the widespread uncertainty resulting from the U.S. aid crisis has made it difficult to assess what the relationship between AI and development work might look like today had the U.S. Agency for International Development maintained its critical role in the sector.

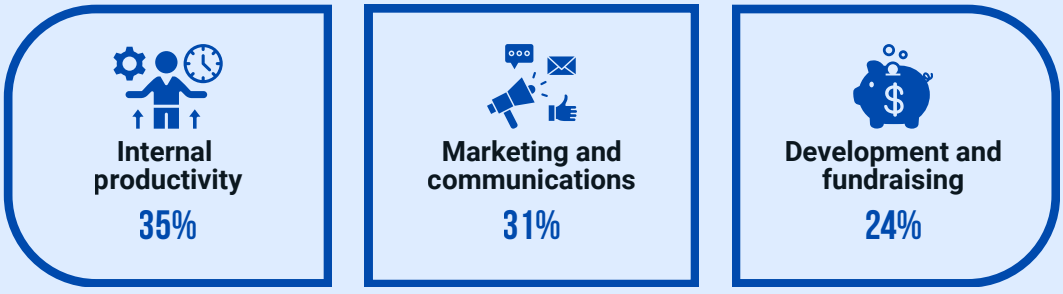
"With so many global development jobs now eliminated, it's hard to say how some roles would have evolved in a healthy, stable sector alongside AI integration," said Joel Levesque, a veteran development consultant and author of the "Job Search with AI" newsletter on Substack.

While there are currently fewer jobs in development, there appears to be no regression in AI's usage by sector professionals. According to a survey conducted by the Humanitarian Leadership Academy and Data Friendly Space in May and June, 70% of humanitarian workers are regularly using AI tools.

"There's widespread individual adoption of AI, or at least a strong interest in it," Levesque said, adding that in his assessment of the sector since the U.S. aid cuts, "business development is where the shift [to AI] is most visible, [but] AI is quietly transforming workflows across every role where it's allowed."

Meanwhile, the HLA/DFS survey also found that organizational adoption in the sector is lagging far behind individual adoption, with only 21.8% of

HOW NONPROFITS ARE USING AI AT WORK



Based on a survey of 234 U.S. nonprofits conducted in February 2024 by The Center for Effective Philanthropy.

DEVEX JOB POSTINGS SINCE USAID CRISIS

+11%
Job descriptions referencing AI. (292)

0.9%
Percentage of all jobs referencing AI.

-22%
All development sector jobs. (31,845)

Based on Devex job postings since Jan. 24, 2025, compared to the same period last year

of respondents stating that their organizations have formal AI policies in place.

While demand for AI skills has risen this year, based on an analysis of Devex job board data, it still represents only roughly 1% of all postings.

Since Jan. 24, when the U.S. aid freeze was first announced, there have been 292 postings referencing "artificial intelligence" in the job description, an 11% increase year-on-year. While seemingly small, it becomes more significant when considering that total job postings have decreased by 22%, or 8,802 fewer.

"I believe the sector will increasingly prioritize individuals who not only manage programs but also interpret, deploy, and critically assess AI-driven tools in an ethical, inclusive, and globally relevant way," Jack Jarrett, an international development HR adviser, said.

AI integration does pose risks and creates new challenges for development professionals, including ethical and environmental concerns, as well as the possibility that optimized productivity leads to lower headcounts in resource-strapped organizations.

However, there's also hope that AI's promise will extend far beyond the mere enhancement of productivity.

"Too many roles in global development are over-reliant on under-resourced, overburdened professionals. If we do this right, AI can help us build institutions that are more dignified and efficient," digital innovation specialist Anwulika Ngozi Okonjo said.

AI PLATFORMS USED BY HUMANITARIANS



Commercial genAI (e.g. ChatGPT)
69%



Translation and language tools
35%



Data analytics tools
18%

Based on a survey of 2,539 humanitarians conducted in June, 2025 (Humanitarian Leadership Academy).

AI IN ACTION

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT



> *AI tools can really accelerate the early stages of proposal development by extracting key funding trends and eligibility criteria from donor websites and RFPs.*
>
> **— Jack Jarrett, international HR adviser**

AI is enabling the rapid and efficient creation of compelling and compliant requests for proposals, or RFPs. Writers are already utilizing generative AI tools, including the Grant Assist platform, to draft early bids, draw on previous submissions, and synthesize technical language.

"I think AI, and particularly generative AI, is beginning to change the landscape of grant writing and business development in both NGOs and development consultancies," Jarrett said. He highlighted AI's ability to rephrase proposal sections to align with different donor tones, which should differ between humanitarian donors and private foundation donors.

According to Levesque, the fallout from the U.S. aid crisis has led to proposal teams utilizing AI even more.

"Organizations are under intense pressure to bring in new work, which means they're submitting more proposals than ever, and many of these proposals are for unfamiliar sectors, making existing boilerplate language less useful," Levesque said. "As a result, teams are scrambling to create more customized content on tight timelines."

Beyond writing, AI can play a strong role in supporting proposal writers and bid teams in developing theories of change, identifying assumptions, designing log frames, and crafting indicators, according to Maria Ghazzaoui, an independent consultant in proposal development.

AI IN DEMAND: BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Recent job postings on Devex:

"Experience with artificial intelligence will be an added advantage."
— ICRISAT, recruiting an associate grants manager

"We are expanding our use of artificial intelligence to further enhance the impact of our work."
— Flowminder Foundation, recruiting a business development consultant

30%

Of nonprofits using AI achieve boosted fundraising revenue.

— State of Nonprofit Digital Engagement Report

AI IN ACTION

MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING



> *Instead of spending hours coding transcripts, MEL professionals might spend more time refining prompts, validating findings, and interpreting insights.*
>
> **— Joel Levesque, AI expert and consultant**

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning roles have been at the forefront of AI adoption in the development space, with work evolving from early ChatGPT experimentations to more advanced applications.

"With AI tools now able to automate survey analysis, detect anomalies, and even write impact reports, the work becomes less about mechanics and more about uncovering and translating the story the data is telling," Okonjo said.

Jarett also anticipates that monitoring and evaluation roles will become more strategic. "M&E professionals will need to interpret insights, ensure data integrity, and address bias in these automated systems," he said.

For instance, a variety of AI-based hunger crisis prediction tools are currently under development by the International Food Policy Research Institute, or IFPRI; the World Food Programme; the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, or IGAD; and various universities.

IFPRI's model pulls in dozens of data points. These include food price data from the Food and Agriculture Organization and WFP, population statistics, soil pH levels, and satellite data on weather conditions and soil moisture levels. Critically, it also incorporates multiple indicators of conflict. The team uses data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data, or ACLED, project, including event counts for battles, explosions, and reported fatalities.

PRO TIP: YOUR AI OUTPUT IS ONLY AS GOOD AS YOUR INPUT



To really reap the benefits of AI, M&E experts need to develop strong prompting skills, which is essentially the process of giving instructions or input to an AI system to guide its output, which will rely heavily on the quality of those prompts.

— Jack Jarrett, international HR adviser

AI IN ACTION

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT



> *AI can now summarize team meetings, tag and organize documents, or even help draft internal strategies.*
>
> **— Joel Levesque, AI expert and consultant**

For those managing institutional knowledge and internal communications, AI is being used to summarize team meetings, organize internal documentation, tag content, and even suggest strategy language, Levesque said. "As long as people can navigate the privacy factors, it's a powerful tool," he added.

This is especially relevant for junior professionals or administrative staff, who are more likely to be responsible for internal knowledge workflows, as it can automate tasks such as data entry, research, and first-draft writing.

"I think it's going to leave space for junior staff to contribute more strategically and analytically," Jarrett said.

Some professionals are taking the initiative and and creating their own AI tools tailored to their own organizations. For example, Emad Karim, advocacy, campaigns, and innovation coordinator at UN Women, developed one in response to challenges he faced in the workplace.

"A lot of us are struggling with juggling different hats," he said of his work within the United Nations. "Regardless of our specialization, we all have to do different segments of work related to communication, knowledge management, managing staff, [and] admin work."

Since the U.N. has its own language, context, and sensitivities that are not captured by public AI tools, he developed "UN Style" GPT, which helps create materials that adhere to U.N. guidelines and aids job seekers applying for roles at the U.N.

AI IN DEMAND: INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Recent job postings on Devex:

Supports the integration of data analytics and artificial intelligence tools to enhance analytical outputs.
— UNOPS, recruiting an administrative assistant

"Advanced computer skills ... preferably with ... artificial intelligence applications."
— Asian Development Bank, recruiting a senior operations officer

53%

Of nonprofits use AI chatbots to check grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

— Nonprofit Communications Trends Report

AI IN ACTION

GLOBAL HEALTH



> *In the LMIC context with hard-to-reach areas, populations could benefit from AI driven-technologies to provide health care addressing access issues.*
>
> **— Uzma Alam, science policy engagement lead, Science for Africa Foundation**

In global health, AI has already been utilized to enhance access, diagnosis, and operational efficiency, from digitizing handwritten patient records to interpreting health data at scale and supporting community health workers.

Bart Édes, a professor of practice at McGill University, highlighted examples of innovative platforms, such as Hyfe.AI, a commercial product that can detect health issues like pneumonia, asthma, and tuberculosis. In India, Wadhwani AI "is using pattern recognition of cough sounds to diagnose TB patients in poor and rural areas," he said.

Other examples of AI in global health include Kimetrica's use of facial recognition to detect malnutrition in children under 5 within humanitarian emergencies and a chatbot developed by Girl Effect, called 'Big Sis,' which answers questions girls in South Africa have about sexual health.

AI also holds promise to alleviate some of the burdens health workers face, though persistent challenges of access, scale, and sustainability are barriers, particularly in remote areas.

MORE ON DEVEX

- Can AI help lighten the load for community health workers?
- How AI is transforming medical diagnosis in India's tribal regions

WISE WORDS ON GLOBAL HEALTH AI



AI does not replace human doctors; it serves as an assistive tool. The diagnostic process follows a structured sequence: patient history, clinical evaluation, diagnostic testing, and an index of suspicion, all of which can be supplemented by AI insights.

— Shibu Vijayan, chief medical officer for global health, Qure.ai

AI IN ACTION

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS



> *Communications and advocacy professionals are now experimenting with AI to generate localised content at speed.*
>
> **— Anwulika Ngozi Okonjo, digital innovation specialist**

Generative AI tools are helping communications professionals craft messaging strategies, frame advocacy narratives, and shape an organization's public voice. It can be especially useful in assisting multilingual communication, an area that is often underresourced, according to Jarrett.

"Professionals are now going to need to spend more time editing, fact-checking, and rewording outputs, rather than perhaps translating from scratch," Jarrett said. "Rather than replacing translators or communication professionals, I think these tools are reshaping their role, from being language converters to becoming quality controllers."

Okonjo agreed that what AI lacks in applying context to these tasks needs to be offset by a communication professional's ability to preserve nuance and authenticity.

"Across all of these roles, we're seeing a shift from execution to orchestration, from doing tasks to designing better systems, validating outputs, and curating the human judgment that matters most," she said.

According to a 2024 survey of U.S. nonprofits conducted by The Center for Effective Philanthropy, 31% of respondents said marketing and communications work was what they used AI for the most. Moving forward, many expect AI to continue reshaping communications work. Research by Google.org shows that 75% of nonprofits believe generative AI has the potential to transform their marketing efforts.

AI IN DEMAND: MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Recent job postings on Devex:

"Extensive understanding of AI and its applications in event organization and use of internal, corporate tools."
— ICF, recruiting an events manager

"Exploring new tools and techniques, including Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)."
— UNOPS, recruiting a sention communications officer

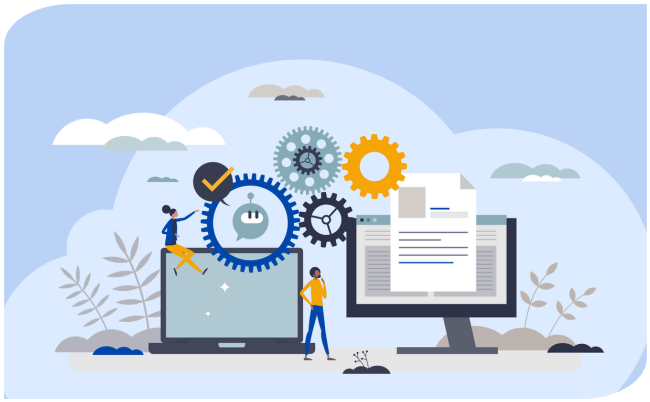
75%

Of nonprofits believe generative AI has the potential to transform their marketing efforts.

— Google.org

AI IN ACTION

RECRUITMENT AND HR



> *The best way to incorporate AI into the HR function is to include humans in the loop ... with a person dedicated to managing and reviewing the results.*
>
> **— Jessica Shatzel, head of talent management, the Orr Group**

AI is streamlining the development recruitment process, but experts are also quick to point out its drawbacks.

"Its rapid development has raised both opportunities and challenges, especially in hiring. The public accessibility of AI tools has, at times, made it harder to assess candidates fairly," a World Health Organization spokesperson told Devex.

The likes of AI programs such as ChatGPT, Lindy, and HireVue are being used to write job descriptions, screen resumes, source candidates, create assessments, and conduct interviews.

This is particularly helpful in the development sector, where many organizations are based in low-resource settings or face a scarcity of human resources. It can also be helpful when hiring needs to happen quickly, such as in an emergency context, to deploy staff effectively.

But while AI can streamline the administrative load of hiring, if overrelied upon, it can lead to poor hiring decisions that exacerbate biases and create a barrier to localization.

"Any NGO that utilizes AI extensively in its recruiting processes will have to double down on continuous monitoring of outcomes and metrics analysis to ensure no disparate impact occurs due to the utilization of AI in recruiting," says Bo Young Lee, an AI and workplace ethics expert.

Experts suggest that HR staff explore more programs beyond ChatGPT, including being up-to-date on privacy and data utilization concerns.

WISE WORDS RECRUITMENT AI



AI can't replace the human intuition needed to assess cultural fit, leadership potential, or the deeper motivations behind candidates' career choices.

— Dela Atubra, managing director, NGO Recruit

AI IN ACTION

AI'S IMPACT ACROSS ROLES



> *AI is quietly transforming workflows across every role where it's allowed.*
>
> **— Joel Levesque, AI expert and consultant**

PROJECT/PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

Some are demonstrating a more adaptive, data-driven approach to program and project management, using predictive analytics and other AI-based tools. These can anticipate project outcomes and identify risks, including conflict outbreaks.

RESEARCH

AI tools can scan hundreds of academic papers, synthesize findings, and even suggest research questions based on gaps in the literature. "The focus is shifting from collecting data to ... knowing how to question it and use it," Levesque said.

POLICY MANAGEMENT

Decision-makers are leveraging AI-enabled, data-driven support systems to simulate policy impacts, forecast risks, and inform resource allocation. Édes cited **Google's Flood Hub** as an example.

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

These pros "will need to work across systems to create learning that's culturally grounded and tied to outcomes. We'll need people who can blend AI's intelligence with human insight," Okonjo said.

WATCH: HOW AI IS TRANSFORMING DEVELOPMENT — AND HOW TO ADAPT

During a Devex digital careers event, experts offered guidance on how professionals can stay ahead of the curve as AI becomes increasingly relevant to development roles.
WATCH THE EVENT

AI 101

HOW AND WHERE TO LEARN



> *Technical skills and people skills are interdependent and greatly increase the prospects of succeeding in the development workforce. This will remain true as generative AI becomes more ubiquitous.*
>
> **— Bart Édes, professor of practice, McGill University**

With AI skills becoming more important for a growing number of development professionals, here's how to gain foundational experience.

FOUNDATIONAL COURSES

Open AI, Anthropic, and Google offer free courses on AI, from basic to advanced, Levesque said, adding that "Maven is a great spot for advanced technical instruction." There's also "a multitude of governance and AI professors out there who can talk about the privacy and ethics issues," on sites like Coursera.

ETHICS AND PRIVACY

"Understand the risks around misuse, surveillance, misinformation, and automation of harm—because AI isn't neutral," Leveque said. This is not only crucial for personal use, but "there is a desperate need for advocates to ensure AI is deployed fairly, and there are very few people who understand it enough."

EXPERIMENTATION

"Pick one workflow you already own, whether that's reporting, data analysis, grant writing, community listening, and test how AI could support it," Okonjo said. Just be mindful of its limitations, ethical considerations, or existing organizational policies before integrating AI learnings into live projects.

RECOMMENDED AI-LEARNING RESOURCES

TOOLS

- ChatGPT
- Claude.ai
- Sesame AI
- Midjourney
- Sora

FREE COURSES

- DeepLearning.AI's "AI for Everyone"
- Destination AI Training Initiative
- Google's Introduction to Generative AI
- Apolitical's AI Fundamentals for Public Servants

COURSE WEBSITES

- Open AI Academy
- MIT OpenCourseWare
- Udacity
- LinkedIn Learning
- Coursera

USING AI

AN AI-ASSISTED JOB SEARCH



> *If you're not great at job searching, [AI] can help because there are a lot of tools that can help expand your search and help you efficiently search and manage your time a lot better.*
>
> **— Stephanie Mansueto, social impact job hunting coach**

Social impact job-hunting coach Stephanie Mansueto offers advice on how AI can play a positive role for those seeking their next development gig.

A JUMPING-OFF POINT

You should never sacrifice your own voice for efficiency, but AI can provide some well-structured material to start with. "AI is great for a first draft of your application documents like your résumés and your cover letters, but it should not ever be the final product," Mansueto said.

EXPANDING YOUR SEARCH

Generative AI tools "are great for expanding your list of job titles that you want to search for because we know companies are using different job titles. They have different scopes of work. So you really need to have an adaptive and comprehensive approach," she said.

INTERVIEW PREP

AI can be "particularly helpful [in] giving you a tailored list of questions for you to prep based on the job description," she said. In ChatGPT, you can then use its mock interviewer tool to receive suggested answers to these same questions.

WATCH: THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF AN AI-ASSISTED JOB SEARCH

During a Devex digital careers event, social impact job-hunting coach Stephanie Mansueto demonstrated how generative AI tools can improve your job search.

WATCH THE EVENT

A LOOK AHEAD

THE PRICE OF PRODUCTIVITY

From privacy breaches to bias, job replacement, and increased cyber threats, the risks of artificial intelligence have been widely discussed. These pose threats across any industry, but experts say extra care must be taken in development.

BIASED ALGORITHMS

Since AI systems are typically built with data that can lack representation, they can exhibit bias, which can affect already marginalized communities. They can also lack empathy, context, and history, which can be damaging as organizations assess who needs what support.

DATA SECURITY

The use of AI raises concerns about data protection and privacy due to the potential misuse of data if it falls into the wrong hands. For example, in a conflict context, information about the location of displaced individuals could put them and the aid they're receiving at risk.

ENVIRONMENTAL

Large language models consume high amounts of energy during training and operation, leading to increased carbon emissions and water usage. For example, as low- and middle-income nations **rush to harness AI** through server farms and data centers, it is putting a strain on already stretched water resources.

JOB SECURITY

As resource-strapped organizations strive to do more with less, AI integration could ultimately lead to some roles becoming redundant. "AI is going to fundamentally shift our economy [and] force higher productivity from lower headcounts. Development is no exception," Levesque said.

WISE WORDS ON AI ETHICS



We need a world where skilled advocates can ensure that nations and vulnerable populations have a voice, and that AI gets integrated in fair and ethical ways. This is a tremendously challenging fight, where incentives are for rapid integration, regardless of the consequences.

— Joel Levesque, AI expert and consultant

A LOOK AHEAD

CAN AI BUILD A BETTER DEVELOPMENT SECTOR?

Digital innovation specialist Anwulika Ngozi Okonjo is optimistic that AI's legacy will go far beyond optimizing work-based tasks.

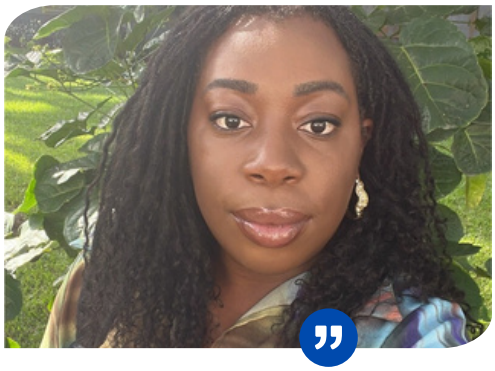
Ngozi Okonjo: AI's biggest impact won't be in replacing people. It will be in revealing how broken our systems have become, and offering us a chance to design better ones.

Too many roles in global development are over-reliant on under-resourced, overburdened professionals. If we do this right, AI can help us build institutions that are more dignified and efficient.

The challenge — and the opportunity — is to ensure that the benefits of AI don't just accrue to a few centralised actors, but are distributed in ways that enhance agency across frontline workers, local partners and marginalised communities. But that also depends on who designs these tools, and whether they reflect the realities and priorities of the people they serve.

This is an area I've been deeply immersed in, both through both my work designing AI education for public servants, and through Ijeruka, a company I founded focused on insight-driven talent development and capacity-building in Africa.

At the end of the day, the future of work in global development shouldn't just be about automation. It should be about activation.



One of the most exciting frontiers is the rise of a new kind of role: people who can bridge technical systems with local and organisational context. I like to call them context translators. They'll ensure ethical, appropriate and high-impact integration.

Anwulika Ngozi Okonjo
Digital innovation specialist

WISE WORDS ON THE FUTURE OF DEVELOPMENT AND AI



The development sector stands at a crossroads. Organizations that embrace AI strategically and responsibly will unlock unprecedented capacity to advance their missions. Those that hesitate risk being left behind as funding pressures intensify and donor expectations evolve.

— Jocelyn Cheng, founder, ImpactAgent



Are you a development job candidate looking to stand out to recruiters?

Our in-house recruitment specialists are currently compiling talent pools based on specific global development skill sets, including communications and food systems experts, and many more.

Candidates can update their Devex profiles to be considered, and employers can learn more here.

We hope you found this guide helpful. For more insights aimed toward global development professionals, visit our Career Center.

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