



Schloss Dagstuhl:

AI for humanitarian work

Experts on artificial intelligence (AI) from Google and academia were meeting with international not-for-profit organizations (NGOs) at Schloss Dagstuhl in northern Saarland in Germany this week.

Together, they tried to find ways to employ the power of AI for humanitarian and development work.

Building on the successful first meeting in 2019, experts on artificial intelligence (AI) met for a second time with not-for-profit organisations for the *AI for the social good* seminar at Schloss Dagstuhl in northern Saarland in Germany this week. The objective was to establish partnerships and build trust, to iterate on concrete problems in a hands-on hackathon, and to demonstrate what is feasible today.

Since 1990, Schloss Dagstuhl has been hosting computer scientists in so called Dagstuhl Seminars. This week, the center opened its doors to representatives of a completely different sector: development and humanitarian organisations. These organisations included AirQo - Makerere University from Uganda, D-tree from Tanzania, Humanitarian OpenStreetMap, Laterite, Netherlands Red Cross, Oxfam Novib, Save the Children and TechnoServe. They came to challenge the AI experts from companies and various prestigious universities from around the world to help them with the global problems they are trying to solve.

Christoph Weigl from TechnoServe talked about the need for collaboration between the two fields, also to demystify AI: *“The exciting thing about this seminar is the opportunity for NGO practitioners and AI experts to test out where they have common interests, understand each other and share the motivation to collaborate. At the same time, it is a reality check for everybody to share ideas and see if and how artificial intelligence can be leveraged to address global challenges.”*

Equally enthusiastic was Nitusima Kataraiia from D-tree: *“What I like about this seminar is that I got a chance to exchange ideas with AI experts and receive their very insights. Their suggestions will influence the direction of our Jamii ni Afya project. This project aims at improving the health of mothers and infants in Zanzibar. On top of that, I appreciate all the connections we made that will hopefully produce more fruitful results soon.”*

Stijn Koster from Save the Children explained why he saw value in attending the seminar: *“NGOs produce massive amounts of data, but to make sense of it all and to also put it to the benefit for others in the sector still involves a lot of costly and time-consuming effort. Here at Dagstuhl, we can have meaningful interactions with academics that have know-how on AI’s current possibilities to help alleviate this challenge.”*

Richard Sserunjogi from AirQo - Makerere University stressed the importance of the seminar: *“The seminar provided an avenue for not-for-profit organisations to discuss some of the challenges they are currently facing with AI experts. These then helped us to provide concrete solutions and advice on how to use AI to maximise the impact of our data. Additionally, the seminar laid ground for further collaborations.”*

Experts in the AI field also see the benefit of teaming up. Nele Quast from the University of Oxford mentioned that *“the workshop has offered a refreshing way to apply practical machine learning to real-world problems and feel that we can have an impact. It’s been lovely meeting people with a wealth of experience with NGO and social impact work along with machine learning academics, and staying at Dagstuhl together means we could get to know each other and hang out outside of working too.”*

Mariella Goebel from TechnoServe concluded: *"The Dagstuhl AI for the Social Good seminar is hands-on! It brings together AI experts looking for use cases and NGOs in need of solutions. This is the most fertile ground for long-term collaborations. I leave with a clear plan of what the next step is, and I know that we're taking this step as a team."*

The *AI for the social good* Seminar at the Schloss Dagstuhl Leibniz Center for Informatics had 22 people from 7 countries on 3 continents convene for a week to work on forming collaborations. They braved the difficulties of travelling for work during this pandemic in order to live and work together on site at Schloss Dagstuhl for the week. The first two days focused on cracking each other's code. Discussions focused on the NGOs' most pressing challenges, and on what techniques of artificial intelligence are currently available to help solve them. On days three and four, the AI experts and the not-for-profit organisations held a hackathon to build concrete prototypes for AI applications for social good. The last day was used to plan for the future of the created collaborations.

The Dagstuhl Seminar is organized by:

- Claudia Clopath (Imperial College London, GB)
- Ruben De Winne (Oxfam Novib – The Hague, NL)
- Tom Schaul (Google DeepMind – London, GB)
- Rayid Ghani (Carnegie Mellon University, US)

More information about the seminar 22091 – "AI for the Social Good" can be found at www.dagstuhl.de/22091

Background:

During the whole year, Schloss Dagstuhl invites scientists from all over the world to come to northern Saarland in the south west of Germany to debate the newest scientific findings in informatics. More than 3,500 computer scientists from universities, research institutions and industry take part in various scientific events at Dagstuhl each year. Since 2005, Schloss Dagstuhl is a member of the Leibniz Association, which connects 97 leading non-university research institutes and scientific infrastructure facilities all over Germany. Because of their national importance, the federal government and the state governments jointly fund the institutes of the Leibniz Association.

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