Title Brainstorm:
How human is your data infrastructure?
Advanced data ecosystems: Can they also sustain human life?
Why we need/we build human-centered data ecosystems
Even the social sector needs more human data systems
Human connections shape the best data solutions

The below version is 708 words. Nailed it, friends. Great work, Aaron. Just 2 final clarifications needed on this proofread, assuming you were OK with what was in the last draft. If not, let's discuss it.---Laura

TITLE
Contributed by Aaron Bean

Only six weeks in Issyk and already I'd been exposed to a shooting, a kidnapping, and a terrorist plot. It was a lot to process for a new volunteer.

While stationed in Kazakhstan for three years with the Peace Corps, I navigated a lot of unfamiliar terrain.

I fumbled through broken Russian and dined on boiled sheep's ear. I found my defense against the Siberian cold--as much the icy sting of culture shock as the weather--in the kindness of my Kazakh hosts.

The technologies I had relied on when working in a Fortune 500 technology company were nonexistent. I could not take solace in the steady predictability of daily standup meetings or project management processes. Far from the carpeted cubicles of corporate America, much of the work I was doing was establishing human connections. In Kazakhstan, I learned that to be effective in my capacity development role, I needed to become a part of the community.

Little did I know that this lesson in cross-cultural understanding would become the cornerstone on which I would build a team of experts trained to leverage technological disruption for social impact.

When I returned to the States a few years later, I found the world of technology had continued its rapid forward movement in my absence. Advanced algorithmic automation. Deep learning. Augmented Reality. The technology I came back to was fast and unfamiliar. Unprecedented. It felt disconnected and unhuman. Where was the heart in all of this?

In the job market, I found myself forced to reconcile the radical extremes of my professional experience: the profit-driven growth paradigm of a Fortune 500 company and the deeply humanitarian, richly human model of the Peace Corps. I wanted to be a part of a technology

organization that married philanthropic and financial goals rather than setting them at odds with each other. When I couldn't find that organization, I built Asemio.

From the start, I could see several emerging problems in the field of technology for social impact. The first was that in our collective attempts to discern truth, data had become ammunition for a multitude of contradictory arguments. Second, technologies were advancing at such a rapid pace that algorithmic automation was revealing new ethical problems: new systems and tools were moving beyond the scope of human understanding.

Despite its focus on human well-being, the application of technology for social impact is still subject to these potentially dehumanizing trends. Data has become a central component of almost every community-focused strategy, the linchpin of outcomes improvement work, systems-level change initiatives, pay-for-success projects, and social impact strategies. "The data" is applied like the snakeoil of the information age.

Deep levels of human trust and commitment must underpin any data-informed community strategy, so that we do not unwittingly embed our shortcomings into the algorithms we are designing to save us from ourselves.

It follows that the hard work of building community trust must precede investments in data infrastructure. Only once a community has aligned to a common vision, secured the trust of key partners, and gathered the resources needed to make that vision a reality can data systems infrastructure complement the community's own strategic vision.

As a team of specialists in the cultivation of community data ecosystems, Asemio takes the view that development does not begin with computer software. It begins with the work to implement appropriate community governance models, ethical and legal protections, and algorithms that advance community efforts while attempting to mitigate the reflection of systemic biases.

My time in the Peace Corps partnering with Kazakh counterparts seeded an insight into community development that informs my approach to data ecosystems: affecting community change is, above all, a matter of cultural transformation. No amount of programming or funding will help a community if its people don't believe the community is worth supporting.

This is the way we approach technology at Asemio. No data system or dashboard or algorithm is going to transform a community. Only humans can.