At SIMLab, we know how to design sustainable, cost-effective and effective systems and services that work, and allow people and organizations to respond effectively to these complex environments. Working with us, our partners execute on ground-breaking projects to improve their own programmatic work and advocacy. We help communities hold institutions accountable, help advocacy organizations fight through bureaucracy to protect rights, and help individuals to participate in the systems critical to their livelihoods.

We are available for grant funding, including fundraising and proposal processes; tenders and RFPs; and one-off consulting to support specific aspects of the project cycle or strategic development processes. We offer subscription services for longer, repeating, or uncertain engagements. The services below are an idea of our competencies but most engagements are a combination of many of these - and our project management, facilitation, design, and technology expertise.

Context analysis: Understanding the communications context

Building on our Context Analysis methodology, we conduct rapid (1-week) assessments to provide a snapshot of the communications context and recommendations for appropriate technology and implementation requirements. For example: the ICT for Community Policing project.

Technology Specification and Design

SIMLab designs and manages technology solutions that work for everyone. We start with a workshop and design a solution together with partners, develop specifications to find tools that fit, solicit and manage software developers, and evaluate technology solutions. For example: The MApps project.

Monitoring & Evaluation for tech for social good projects

We can design and implement, or simply offer technical input on, a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation approach for your tech-enabled project, supported by our Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. We also offer evaluation as a service. For example, we developed an M&E Plan for DDG's MApps project (above), and are currently evaluating Groupe URD's SIGMah platform.

Designing and implementing feedback loops

We can help build tech-enabled systems for collecting and acting on feedback from clients, constituents, and users, no matter where they are. For example: feedbackmechanisms.org

Practical Ethics of Data for tech for social good

For work that involves sensitive data, SIMLab offers additional workshops and guides on managing information in this fraught area. Our context analysis frameworks help organizations identify hidden vulnerabilities in communities they serve, and find tools and procedures to minimize data-related risk for client communities.

Our capabilities

Technology has limitless potential to improve lives - but technological systems can be poorly designed for the most vulnerable, locking them out with the wrong technology or requiring skills not everyone has. Our work targets the hardest-to-reach, people who are often struggling with overlapping challenges, systems that don't work for them, and basic barriers to fulfilments of their rights and basic needs. **At SIMLab, we know how to design sustainable, cost-effective and effective systems and services** that work, and allow people and organizations to respond effectively to these complex environments. **Our approach here is unique**: we meet people where they are, and involve them in the design of systems and services, not only empowering the people and organizations we support, but making sure the solutions we develop are lasting and effective.

To do this, we foreground 'inclusive' technology, from radio to social media, from SMS to Whatsapp, from the mobile web to community noticeboards: tools that are accessible and easy to use; relatively inexpensive to run and access, and most importantly - actually used, trusted and acted upon. Putting information and access to services in people's hands using the devices and systems they already have in their pockets and homes can empower them to make their own decisions about their lives; give them access to lifesaving emergency information; give them the tools to hold institutions to account; and help them to make changes and get help so they can break out of cycles of disadvantage and become more resilient to shocks.

We began with a mission to lower barriers to social change through mobile technologies. We were originally the makers of FrontlineSMS, which is now a suite of products, including FrontlineCloud and FrontlineSync, that help organizations professionally manage text messages. FrontlineSMS has been downloaded over 250,000 times and is in use in more than 135 countries. Our impact was recognized with a 2013 Google Impact Award received jointly with Landesa, and the Curry Stone Design Prize, awarded in 2011. In 2013, the Global Journal named us the #1 Tech NGO in the world.

Our support to partners

SIMLab is a DC-based nonprofit. Our mission is to make inclusive, excellent use of technology the norm in social change work, not the exception. To do this we make and share guides and tools, and advocate for change, but also work directly with social change organizations and human service providers, helping them create the kinds of projects we think are possible.

Working with us, our partners execute on ground-breaking projects to improve their own programmatic work and advocacy. We help communities hold institutions accountable, help advocacy organizations fight through bureaucracy to protect rights, and help individuals to participate in the systems critical to their livelihoods. Our implementation work is critical to our learning and credibility, and gives us the opportunity to test and refine our thinking and frameworks, while supporting our partners to have an impact.

We work with partners in a number of ways: through grant funding, whether direct or as a sub-grantee; through multi-year tendered projects; and through one-off consulting projects designed to support specific aspects of the project cycle or strategic development processes. In many cases we fundraise together.

For clients who may need multiple, related engagements, or for engagements with uncertain scopes, we offer a subscription-based retainer service, which makes us part of your team and able to suggest technology and change management approaches, facilitate participatory workshops, help build projects, and get around organizational roadblocks.

Our core competencies

- Context analysis and participatory project design
- Technology specification and design
- Monitoring and evaluation for inclusive technology projects
- Designing and implementing feedback loops
- Practical ethics in tech for social good

Context analysis: Understanding the communications context

To design a good project you have to know how individuals and communities use and view different communications channels and technologies. You have to understand the capacity of the implementing organizations and how the mobile and internet markets work; be able to analysis and respond to the political landscape and the state of the available technology marketplace.

In 2016, we developed and shared our Context Analysis methodology under a Creative Commons license. This Framework lets you build on existing context assessment practice to provide a thorough list of themes and issues to cover in context analysis. SIMLab's context analysis approach has evolved from an Information and Communications Context Assessment Checklist originally developed with infoasaid in 2011, later adapted by the CDAC Network for their Analysis Guides. As such, it owes a lot to humanitarian needs assessments and is typically conducted relatively rapidly at the beginning of an engagement, given our involvement in contexts and projects during a relatively brief design stage or without lengthy experience there before embarking on a project. We use a mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches to ensure the best balance between data analysis and views from the ground.

> *Example: The ICT for Community Policing (ICT4COP) consortium project*
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> Lead by NMBU, the ICT4COP multi-year consortium will explore how technological innovation and creative communications can facilitate, strengthen, and accelerate positive COP efforts and

police-citizen interactions where trust levels are weak. The project spans 11 countries: Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. SIMLab leads on Technology Development; conducting regional and country level Context Assessments and Country Reports that incorporate field-based findings with desk research. Starting in 2017, learnings from the Context Assessments and implementation feasibility will inform the design and delivery of two pilots, one to be carried out in Kenya.

Technology Specification and Design

SIMLab designs and manages technology solutions that work for everyone. Our process relies on participatory workshops, where SIMLab facilitators help clients and partners identify and define the challenge, and create solutions to fit. True to SIMLab's principles, our workshops start with users: we draw on participants' knowledge to build personas of key user groups. From there, we map systems that users live and work in, uncovering a complete picture of how users communicate and receive information.

These two exercises form the foundation for our specification building exercises. Here, we help clients and partners design a solution, and express it as a description of what that solution should do—and why. Clients can then use these specifications to find tools that fit their needs, solicit and manage software developers, and evaluate technology solutions. (SIMLab can also help with each of these tasks, but we don't have to. Our specification design engagement is built for clients to take forward on their own.)

Example: Danish Demining Group MApps project
SIMLab supported DDG to go through a remote specification process, drafting user personas and a system map, and developing detailed user stories based on their information. Together we prioritised the user stories to create a specification that any developer could use to shape their engagement, and developed a working prototype to illustrate key workflows.

Monitoring & Evaluation for tech for social good projects

We can design and implement, or simply offer technical input on, a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation approach for your tech-enabled project that takes into account real-time learning and impact-focussed evaluation from the very start. We've developed an approach, building on the OECD-DAC Criteria for Development Evaluation, which takes a deeper look at the contribution technology makes to social impact. You can check out our Monitoring and Evaluation Framework on our website.

> *Example: Developing a Project Monitoring and Evaluation Plan for Danish Demining Group*
> SIMLab created a monitoring and evaluation plan for a Danish Demining Group project in Vietnam and Ukraine. The project used technology to educate people on how to avoid undetonated landmines, and helped government authorities coordinate proper disposal and clearing of mines. To build our plan, we reviewed project documents and worked with local staff and partners to build context-specific indicators, determine how data would be collected, and assign internal responsibilities for carrying out the plan.

Designing and implementing feedback loops

We also work with non-profits, governments, and other social change actors to build tech-enabled systems for collecting and acting on feedback from clients, constituents, and users, no matter where they are.

> *Example: Multichannel feedback for maternal health in Somaliland and Tanzania*
> In Somaliland and Tanzania, SIMLab worked with World Vision UK, INTRAC, and CDA to design beneficiary feedback mechanisms (BFMs) that connected women of childbearing age with maternal health clinics. In total the project targeted over 250,000 women between the two countries. SIMLab conducted local context assessments to inform the design of the BFM, and ensure that it matched a target area's technology use and proficiency, language literacy, and infrastructure (such as mobile network coverage). We also conducted trainings on FrontlineSMS, a software for managing and automating text messages.
>
> Here, to best fit a target population with uneven language literacy and mobile phone ownership, we supplemented an SMS-based BFM with more inclusive mechanisms, including an voicemail inbox that was free for users to call into, and physical suggestion boxes placed in communities. We designed these feedback systems to allow for unstructured and unsolicited feedback, enabling community members to report about what they felt was valuable, and hopefully increasing their ownership over the process. Read more about this project at the website we built to showcase our learning materials: feedbackmechanisms.org.

Practical Ethics of Data for tech for social good

For work that involves sensitive data, SIMLab offers additional workshops and guides on managing information in this fraught area. Our context analysis frameworks help organizations identify hidden vulnerabilities in communities they serve, and find tools and procedures to minimize data-related risk for client communities. We are part of the Good Data Collaborative, conducting research and developing new prototype tools this year for implementers managing data in their work.