

LAURA WALKER MCDONALD

BETTER TECHNOLOGY FOR A BETTER WORLD

EXPERTISE

- Career digital humanitarian and development tech leader
- Inclusive technology product, design and deployment
- Institutional strategy, governance and funding
- Evidence, evaluation and reflection for better practice
- Tech policy communications and influencing
- Workshop, process and training facilitation
- Principled, empathic leader of happy, healthy teams

EDUCATION

LL.M International Development Law & Human Rights
Warwick, UK, 2006
LL.B Law, French & German
UWE, UK, 2004

WORK

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
Senior Advisor, Technologies & Conflict

OCT 2021 - PRESENT

- Analysis, positioning and influencing on the humanitarian impacts of new technologies for regional delegation of major international organization
- Lead research, influencing and policy engagement on biotechnology, human augmentation, cyber support relationships, digital humanitarian protection and humanitarian data
- Dialogue with high-level interlocuteurs across regional governments, military, humanitarian sector, academia, think tanks and private sector
- Built DC networking and visibility on technology issues
- Strengthened strategic foresight and learning practices

BetterLab.io, Principal

JAN 2018 - PRESENT

- Support clients including the Aspen Institute, GIZ, Humanity United, the CDAC Network and The Engine Room, with strategy, product development, training, and policy research on communications with communities, accountability, responsible data, and tech design and implementation

Digital Impact Alliance (DIAL) at the UN Foundation
Senior Director, Insights & Outreach

MAR 2019 - SEPT 2021

- Lead policy and influencing, community management, communications and learning teams with $3m annual budget
- Lead DIAL's engagement with high level UN processes, and two long-running communities of practice, including the Principles for Digital Development and a private donor forum
- Responsible data technical backstop, developing risk/benefit assessment systems and program guidance
- Built a high-trust, high-velocity team, managing a broad workplan and budget in a complex environment

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VOLUNTARY

All Tech is Human
Mentor, 2023

Communicating with Disaster-Affected Communities (CDAC) Network
Board Member (Digital specialist), 2017-2020

Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF)
Funding Committee Member (Digital specialist), 2016-2020

Enhancing Learning and Research for Humanitarian Assistance (ELRHA)
Steering Group Member, 2010-2012 and 2009-2010

Warwickshire Domestic Violence Support Service (WDVSS)
Board Member & Chair, 2009-2012

LANGUAGES

English - native
German - intermediate
French - basic

WORK

Global Alliance for Humanitarian Innovation (GAHI)
Director of Innovation
JUN 2018 - MAR 2019

- System-level influencing on digital humanitarian innovation
- Staff specialist on technology and digital; lead projects on responsible innovation, data ethics, and distributed ledger technology for humanitarian aid

Social Impact Lab (SIMLab), CEO
SEPT 2014 - DEC 2017

- Lead a tiny non-profit think tank and consultancy to outsize impact and influence
- Developed knowledge products at all levels of digital ecosystem, from project and service development and design, to technical guidance and resource development, to thought leadership and influencing
- Developed standard-setting practice frameworks on context analysis and M&E for inclusive tech projects
- Built a high-trust, distributed team

FrontlineSMS, Co-CEO
MAR 2010 - SEP 2014

- First non-Founder Director for award-winning, pioneer open source platform for SMS conversations without internet.
- Lead software development, programs, operations and comms; built Kenya development team. Lead on v2 build from scratch, transitioning a desktop product to the cloud.
- Established FrontlineSMS as a thought leader on inclusive technology and built a personal profile as an industry expert writer, speaker, consultant and trainer.

British Red Cross, Policy & Learning Support Officer
NOV 2006 - MAR 2010

- Supported policy work on civil-military relations, cash transfer programming, communications with communities.
- Secretary to the NGO-Military Contact Group; organized key conference in 2009 in collaboration with UK Foreign Office
- Monitored innovations in technology and practice.
- Supported strategic planning and accountability systems, research and international program learning & innovation.

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VALUES

- Do better than do no harm
- Patient progress through principled process
- Empathic leadership

SKILLS

- Strategic planning
- Facilitation and training
- Nonprofit leadership
- Financial management and budgeting
- Research
- Program evaluation
- Business development
- Writing
- Podcast hosting
- Social Media
- Software Project Management and Agile
- Website tinkering
- Video editing in a pinch



SELECT PROJECTS

Writing and media

- Policy Brief: Communications in Conflict (2023, CDAC, forthcoming)
- Leadership Brief: Leaving No-One Behind in strategic digital investments (2021, DIAL)
- The Digital Principles through a lens: Responsible Data; Leaving No-One Behind; Accountability and Governance, and podcast series' on Leaving No-one Behind and Sustainability (2020-1, DIAL)
- Policy Brief on next steps for scaling the use of blockchain in humanitarian aid (2019, GAHI)
- Frameworks on monitoring and evaluation [with Linda Raftree] & context analysis [with Kelly Church and Margaret Scott] for technology in social change (2015 SIMLab)
- Whispering when everyone is listening: Low-Tech Communications Technology Implementations in High-Risk Contexts [with Keith Porcaro] (2014, SIMLab)
- SMS-based accountability to beneficiaries mechanisms in humanitarian aid and development. (2013, SIMLab)
- Guardian: Making tech work for development (2014, SIMLab)

Strategy and implementation

- Mentor, Technical Expert, Aspen Digital Accelerator (2022-3)
- The Engine Room (2018-21) - Support to GIZ Responsible Data Framework and TER Responsible Data retrospective
- DIAL (2018) - Baseline research project
- Development Gateway (2018) - data-driven agriculture project, Nepal and Cambodia
- UMCom (2018) - Review of UMConnect
- CDAC Network (2016-2018) - Strategy facilitation and drafted 2017 annual report
- Cloud to Street (2017) - participatory design workshops in Argentina for GIS-enabled flood mapping database.
- GroupeURD (2017) Evaluation of the Sigmah project
- World Vision (2014-16) Beneficiary feedback mechanisms project
- Global Disaster Preparedness Center, IFRC (2016), global First Aid application