

## Daring to be Different

We are 'for profit' [social entrepreneurs](#)<sup>1</sup> prepared to risk our own resources - time, money and know-how - in order to develop a concept to the point when potential partners can see the opportunities and risks clearly enough to make an appropriate commitment. We then all work together to produce commercially sustainable products and services.

Our focus - replicable, sustainable, user driven, multi-stakeholder initiatives - that seek to address the needs of the poor and the vulnerable in systemic ways - both in the UK and in developing countries.

Often the deliverable is a pragmatic blend of social, technical, institutional and knowledge networks matched to local conditions (including public policy and regulatory environments).

Some of our activities have had long lead times - but we are used to that! From hard won experience, we know that time is needed to bring into focus an innovative idea, product or service - and - even longer to turn such concepts into concrete, bankable opportunities! In our experience, many organisations are time constrained; metaLAB makes the time!

We seek to combine the best of community/international development (human) with the best of ICT development (technical). Often this may involve dusting down old approaches and old technologies and blending them with the latest examples of technological leapfrog!

For metaLAB, a successful outcome is when an idea takes on a life of its own, is supported by a wide stakeholder community, who have handed day to day operations over to an inherently sustainable organisation, so that finally, it becomes embedded in the way things are done locally.

## Mission

We share with [NextBillion.net](#)<sup>2</sup> the view that; "While development aid and political reform are essential components in poverty eradication, equally important are business models that would engage low-income communities as producers and consumers in their own robust economies. Successful business models--inherently versatile, innovative, and driven by the profit motive--can sometimes tackle development challenges more quickly and effectively than government and aid mechanisms"

## Approach

Our team has many years of experience in all aspects of action orientated technical & policy related research, international development, programme co-ordination, project management, project assurance, and, commercial product and service development.

metaLAB is not a talking shop nor a think tank - although it does consider itself to be a reflective company.

At the heart of our work is the use of participative mechanisms that enable user-centric designs to emerge. We find this slower at the beginning; but less risky at the end!

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1. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_entrepreneur](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_entrepreneur)

2. <http://www.nextbillion.net/>

We provide our partners and clients in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors with services and solutions that cover the whole innovation lifecycle from inception and design through to final integration and diffusion.

metaLAB is committed to identifying and developing systemic and sustainable solutions that achieve both the outputs and outcomes required by funders and the return on capital required by investors. We always aim to ensure that around each big initiative there are opportunities for community based micro-economic employment and micro-business creation.

Whilst, metaLAB appreciates the importance of understanding the political and regulatory context, metaLAB looks first for near term solutions to today's needs. We will strive with partners to find 'quick wins' within the existing institutional structures.

Our aim is to leave our partners feeling in control of proven and sustainable ventures that they have come to own! We understand both the project financed world of 'outputs' and 'outcomes' AND the world of venture funding. We seek to balance that know-how with a social entrepreneurial approach that will ensure that something robust and worthwhile is left behind as a long-term service!

Operationalising such visions may require metaLAB to develop alliances, joint ventures, consortia & IPR strategies with our clients and partners. We are always looking for better ways of delivering our vision. This includes tracking relevant policy issues, technologies and ideas for economic empowerment (especially - these three '[Bottom of the Pyramid](#)'<sup>3</sup>, '[The LongTail](#)'<sup>4</sup>, and the '[Next Billion](#)'<sup>5</sup>.)

## Expertise

metaLAB Ltd is an established, ethically grounded, commercial R & D company with practical experience in all aspects of ICT related technical evaluation; development of corporate strategy and public policy; programme co-ordination; project management; project assurance; business development; product and service creation.

We provide our clients in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors with clear insights into the alternative futures that could be on their horizon - and how to choose between them. metaLAB is used to building and co-coordinating local partnerships that can take on the delivery and operation of such solutions.

We cover the whole development lifecycle: research, design, building and, operating - leading eventually to a formal transfer of the mature service.

Our skills include: **defining user requirements, stakeholder analysis, business planning, partnership building, institutional design, fund raising, financial modelling, technical evaluation, interactive demonstrators, prototyping, software development, procurement, PRINCE2 style project assurance, key staff recruitment, operational documentation, evaluation, commercialisation and replication.**

We have found from experience that formal project management - even when linked to agile programming techniques - is an essential part of ensuring that projects come in on time and on budget - with the minimum of hassles for partners and funders along the way. Wherever possible we favour solutions based on Open Source software and [Creative Commons](#)<sup>6</sup> licensed content.

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3. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bottom\\_of\\_the\\_Pyramid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bottom_of_the_Pyramid)

4. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Long\\_Tail](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Long_Tail)

5. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Next\\_Billion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Next_Billion)

6. <http://creativecommons.org/>

## Early Experience

Over the years the metaLAB team has accumulated practical experience of working with clients & supporting them in the design and delivery of large and complex communities of practice, collaborative work environments and content management systems. Below are some of the projects not mentioned elsewhere in which the metaLAB team has played a key role:

1] Global Trade Point Network (UNCTAD) <http://www.tradepoint.org/>

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)<sup>8</sup> launched the Trade Point Programme in 1992. Its main objective is to facilitate access for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to international markets, in particular using the most up-to-date technologies in electronic commerce. Through the electronically interconnected network of Trade Points in many countries of the world, SMEs can gain access to the latest information and telecommunication technologies and services, make their products known to potential customers and find business partners in other countries and from countries with economies in transition- in international trade.

2] ElecTra (DTI/SITPRO) <http://www.unedocs.org><sup>9</sup>

Michael Jenkins wrote for SITPRO<sup>10</sup> a feasibility study on desktop access to international trade by SMEs and also outlined the design requirements for an XML based approach. ElecTra was the early manifestation of such an XML service. It allowed UK traders to complete and verify their trading documentation on-line, and then have these official UN documents communicated without delay by computer (EDI or Internet), or by paper, to the appropriate authorities, notably Customs, across the world. This approach has now become the basis of the UN's eDOCs system. (UNeDocs UK is the national implementation of UNeDocs).

## Fields

Name	Value
category	AboutUs

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8. <http://www.unctad.org/Templates/StartPage.asp?intItemID=2068>

9. <http://www.unedocs.org/>

10. <http://www.sitpro.org.uk/>