# Matthew Haikin

## Responsible digital and AI strategy, grounded in research and systems thinking

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I work with senior leaders of NGOs, donors, UN agencies and Southern CSOs on **digital, AI**, and **innovation** decisions where stakes are high and trade-offs are real. Since 2012 I have brought external expert perspectives to these actors to help them make better choices before they commit political, financial, or reputational capital.

My focus is not on silver bullets or specific tools and technologies, but on the quality of technology-related choices that hold up when they meet reality.

I take a **collaborative, participatory approach** that challenges assumptions early, surfaces unintended risks and harms, and **strengthens digital and AI strategies** by addressing **accountability and power dynamics** before they become embedded.

Clients typically engage me to play one or more of the following roles:
- **Critical Friend** – strategic advice on digital and AI decisions
- **Applied Research** – grounded, participatory analysis and sense-making
- **Product and Tool Design** – translating research and strategy into practice through adaptive delivery
- **Systems Thinking** – ecosystem coordination, convening, and systems innovation

As an advisor who can also deliver, I translate between strategy, technology, and implementation, working systems-first and designing under uncertainty. I am risk-aware and power-literate, pragmatic about what is implementable, and sceptical of hype without being anti-innovation.   I focus on turning critique into something actionable that adds value.

I work calmly and without preconceptions, bringing curiosity, empathy and, when appropriate, humour to all my engagements.

## Skills
Applied in complex institutional environments across **development programming**, **locally led development**, **organisational change**, **digital citizen engagement**, and **digital social protection.**

- **Strategy design under constraint**
  Designing digital and technology strategies that hold up under real-world conditions, including weak data, limited capacity, fragmented governance, and misaligned incentives, with a focus on what is feasible and durable in delivery.

- **Applied research and sense-making**
  Designing and synthesising qualitative and quantitative research to inform decisions, combining evidence, practice, and practitioner or community perspectives into grounded analysis that supports clear choices rather than research for its own sake.

- **Facilitation and structured innovation**
  Designing and facilitating participatory workshops, multi-stakeholder processes, and structured innovation activities, drawing on systems innovation, design thinking, and participatory methods to work through complex trade-offs.

- **Knowledge product development**
  Translating research, principles, and strategy into practical guidance, toolkits, frameworks, and decision-support artefacts that can be used by policymakers, implementers, and practitioners.

- **Bridging tech and non-tech stakeholders**
  Translating between strategic intent and technical implementation, enabling effective engagement with engineers, vendors, and data specialists while maintaining focus on governance, risk, accountability, and organisational implications.

- **Rapid prototyping and AI experimentation**
  Using lightweight prototyping and exploratory use of digital and AI technologies to test assumptions, reduce uncertainty, and surface risks early, explicitly bounded to non-production use and in service of better strategic judgement.

# Selected strategic engagements
*(grouped by dominant mode of contribution, recognising that most engagements actually combine two or more)*

## Critical Friend

- **2023 | Organisation-wide sensemaking workshops on Digital Transformation of Programming** | *UNICEF*
  Ran workshops for 70+ staff to explore priorities, risks and trade-offs in digital programming; enabling leadership to align around digital priorities and a roadmap for UNICEF's digital work globally.

- **2017-2018 | ICT4D organisational readiness assessments |** *Practical Action, FHI 360, Chemonics*
  Brought in by senior leadership with fragmented ICT4D strategies; I synthesised internal / external views, challenged assumptions, to inform board decisions on opportunities, structure, and capabilities.

## Applied Research

- **2023-2024 | Landscape research to inform repositioning of role of global network |** *NetHope*
  NetHope needed evidence and clarity on where to focus its digital programming for its members. We led mixed-methods research across members, partners, and the wider ecosystem to surface needs, gaps and strategic options, informing a strategic repositioning around connectivity, localisation and AI for 2024-27.

- **2018 | Voices of the silicon savannah |** *Independent self-directed research (Kenya)*
  In-depth interviews with 40+ practitioners in Kenya's digital development ecosystem, synthesised to practitioner reflections on what was / wasn't working, and the shaping structural and power factors.

- **2016 | Impact of online technology on participatory budgeting |** *World Bank, for Aptivate (Brazil)*
  Primary, state-wide field-research in Rio Grande do Sul on how digital tools shape participatory budgeting, including a state-wide IVR survey, case studies, stakeholder interviews, and large-scale data analysis. The report was later published in an academic volume on digital participation and governance.

## Product and Tool Design

- **2025 |Rights-Based Digital Transformation in Social Protection Guidelines  |** *ILO*
  Collaborated on desk research, interviews and synthesis for ILO to produce a field-ready set of participatory, human-centred guidelines for policymakers and implementers.

- **2022 | Business Model Sustainability Toolkit |** *DIAL*
  Asked by DIAL to stay on as a consultant to co-design and project manage the Business Model Sustainability Toolkit for the Principles for Digital Development, translating "Build for Sustainability" into practical, usable guidance for digital teams (in use by many teams working on ICT4D products and DPGs).

- **2016 | Evaluating Digital Citizen Engagement: A practical guide |** *World Bank, for Aptivate*
  Wrote bid and won World Bank commission to develop a practical evaluation framework for digital citizen engagement; led multidisciplinary team to translate participation theory and comparative research into usable tools that strengthen participation, inclusion, and accountability.

## Systems Thinking

- **2025 | Rethinking the role of a global tech hub through a systems innovation lens |** *Frontier Tech Hub*
  Formative research and market analysis to help reposition Frontier Tech Hub within the global innovation support ecosystem.  Applied a systems-inovation lens to actors, incentives, power dynamics, and constraints, informing new portfolio design and changes to program investment priorities.

- **2023-24 | Stewarding system-level ICT4D dialogue at the ICT4D Conference |** *CRS (Ghana)*
  Commissioned by CRS to co-curate 1000s of submitted abstracts to the ICT4D Conference; subsequently asked to steward system-level dialogue through the co-design and facilitation of 20 "Big Discussion" sessions with senior practitioners and thought leaders.

- **2018-20 | Convening donors & practitioners across the digital development ecosystem |** *DIAL*
  Led key strands of DIAL's ecosystem convening and coordination work across donor, government, and practitioner networks, strengthening its role in UK and global digital policy and practice, including leading engagement with FCDO and UK government digital teams (contributing to £20m in funding); establishing a Digital Donors forum; and facilitating Digital Principles convenings for global and country-level actors.

## Employment summary

- 2023 - 2025 | **Strategic advisor, digital & emerging technologies |** *Independent consultant*
  Clients including *ResetOne Health, ILO, Frontier Tech Hub, UNICEF, NetHope, Save the Children, CRS*

- 2020 - 2023 | **Co-CEO and Director of Digital Development |** *On Our Radar*
  Executive leader of digital-first NGO, leading organisational change, product strategy, delivery of participatory digital platforms. Clients included *Fairtrade Foundation*, *Christian Aid, Comic Relief* and *Humanitarian Leadership Academy*.

- 2018 - 2020 | **Senior manager, Insights & Impact |** Interim Senior Director, Oct 2018 – Mar 2019 | *Digital Impact Alliance (DIAL) at the UN Foundation*
  Led key strands of DIAL's research synthesis, policy engagement and product strategy, strengthening our influence with UK government and donors through customer-centred evidence products and ecosystem convening; later retained as consultant to co-design DIAL's Business Model Sustainability Toolkit for digital public goods.

  2016 - 2018 | **ICT4D advisor, digital systems & participation |** *Independent consultant*
  Clients including *FHI 360, Chemonics, Practical Action, USAID (for One World UK), SAS2 Dialogue*

- 2012 - 2016 | **Agile product and project management |** *Aptivate*
  Led agile product development and programme delivery for ICT4D initiatives with partners including the *World Bank, Government of Nigeria* and *DFID*, grounding my participatory approach in a sociocratic organisational model.

- 2004 - 2009 | **Founder |** *Fuse Jobs*
  Launched UK's first jobsite for the long-term unemployed; established 500+ partners and 1,000+ daily visitors.

- 1998 - 2010 | **Private sector digital roles** *(technology, learning & social impact)*
  Business analysis, website production, e-learning & community management for *Cisco, Serco, Training for Life*.

- 1993 - 1996 | **Founder |** *The Zen Room*
  Startup developed **AI "artificial life"** system to produce unique organic art imagery & BIMA award-winning CD.

- 1991 - 1998 | **Software developer** *(video games & Web 1.0)*
  Games coding & web development for *Epic, Microsoft, Channel 4*, banks, government, local charities.


## Governance, advisory and convening roles

- **2021 → | Trustee and Chair, Digital and AI Working Group** | *Practical Action*
  Board-level oversight and independent challenge on digital and AI strategies, policies and guardrails; supporting transition towards locally-led delivery models and regionalised management structures.

- **2018–25** | **Technical reviewer, judge and panel member** (humanitarian innovation and AI funding)
  Expert review roles for initiatives including *Elrha*, *Women Connect Challenge* and the *Dutch Relief Alliance*, covering humanitarian innovation, AI shark tank, GBV, and scaling funds.

- **2016–19** | **Regional organiser and facilitator** (UK and Kenya)
  Convened *Tech Salons*, *ICT4D meetups* and digital development practitioner groups in London, Brighton and Nairobi. I maintain an independent practitioner community of practice (100+ members) focused on digital transformation and #ShiftThePower.

- **2018–20** | **Organising committee member |** *Global Digital Development Forum* & *ICT4D Conference*

- **2014–18 | Co-chair |** *Bond Technology for Development Group*
  Strategic leadership to a UK-wide community of practice spanning INGOs, civil society, donors, and practitioners working on technology and development.

- **2011-16 | Strategic advisor to civil society |** Fahamu (Kenya), Recode/CDI (Brazil), Otra Cosa (Peru)
  Advised leadership teams on ICT4D strategy, fundraising, digital communications, volunteer recruitment and support, and programme integration, reviewing technology use across programmes.

## Publications and knowledge products

- **Rights-Based Digital Transformation in Social Protection: Context, Principles and Guidelines** (forthcoming in 2026)**,** *International Labour Organisation*

- **Business Model Sustainability Toolkit** (2022), Digital Impact Alliance, UN Foundation

- **Voices of the Silicon Savannah: Key challenges facing Kenya's social-tech ecosystem** (2018), Independent report

- **Digital development: What is the role for international NGOs?** (2017), Oxfam GB

- **Impact of online voting on participatory budgeting in Brazil** (2017), chapter in *Civic tech in the global south: Assessing technology for the public good*, World Bank

- **Evaluating digital citizen engagement: A practical guide** (2015), World Bank

- **A framework to assess participation and empowerment impacts of ICT4D projects** (2013), Development Informatics Working Paper, University of Manchester

- **Practitioner reflections**: Selected writings on the opportunities, risks, and political economy of digital and AI-enabled development, with a focus on power, participation, and practical decision-making; available on ICT Works and on my website


## Education and professional development

- **2011 – 2012 | MSc ICTs for Development (Distinction)** | *University of Manchester, Global Development Institute*
  Focus on participatory methods, power, institutional change, and the limits of techno-solutionism in digital development practice. Dissertation published as a University of Manchester working paper.

- **1990 - 1993 | BSc (Eng) Computing Science** | *Imperial College London*

- **2011 → | Selected continuing professional development**
  - Research and design for social change | *Design for Social Impact*
  - Participatory action research, facilitation, and workshop design | *SAS2 Dialogue, Praxis India, ICA, Techniques for Change, Bond*
  - **AI**: self-directed professional learning (Responsible AI, social applications, expert user skills, prototyping)
  - Agile and adaptive delivery | Scrum Master and Product Owner training
  - Mandatory compliance training for UN environments (e.g. GDPR, safeguarding, bias, anti-bribery)

- **Languages**: English (native); Spanish (B2); Portuguese (A2)