

A blue Nokia mobile phone is lying on a bed of dry leaves and twigs. The phone is the central focus, with its screen and keypad visible. The background is a natural, outdoor setting with various types of dry vegetation.

“Tools that Travel”

**Mobile at the
Margins**

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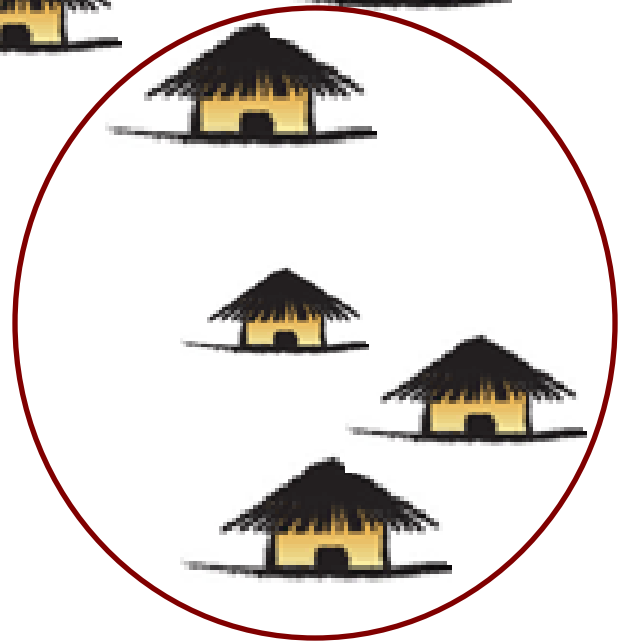
Bushbuckridge, South Africa, 2004



Centralised

vs.

Decentralised





Local NGOs working on the margins are generally small, extremely dedicated, run low-cost high-impact interventions, work on local issues with relatively modest numbers of local people, and are staffed by community members who have first-hand experience of the problems they're trying to solve

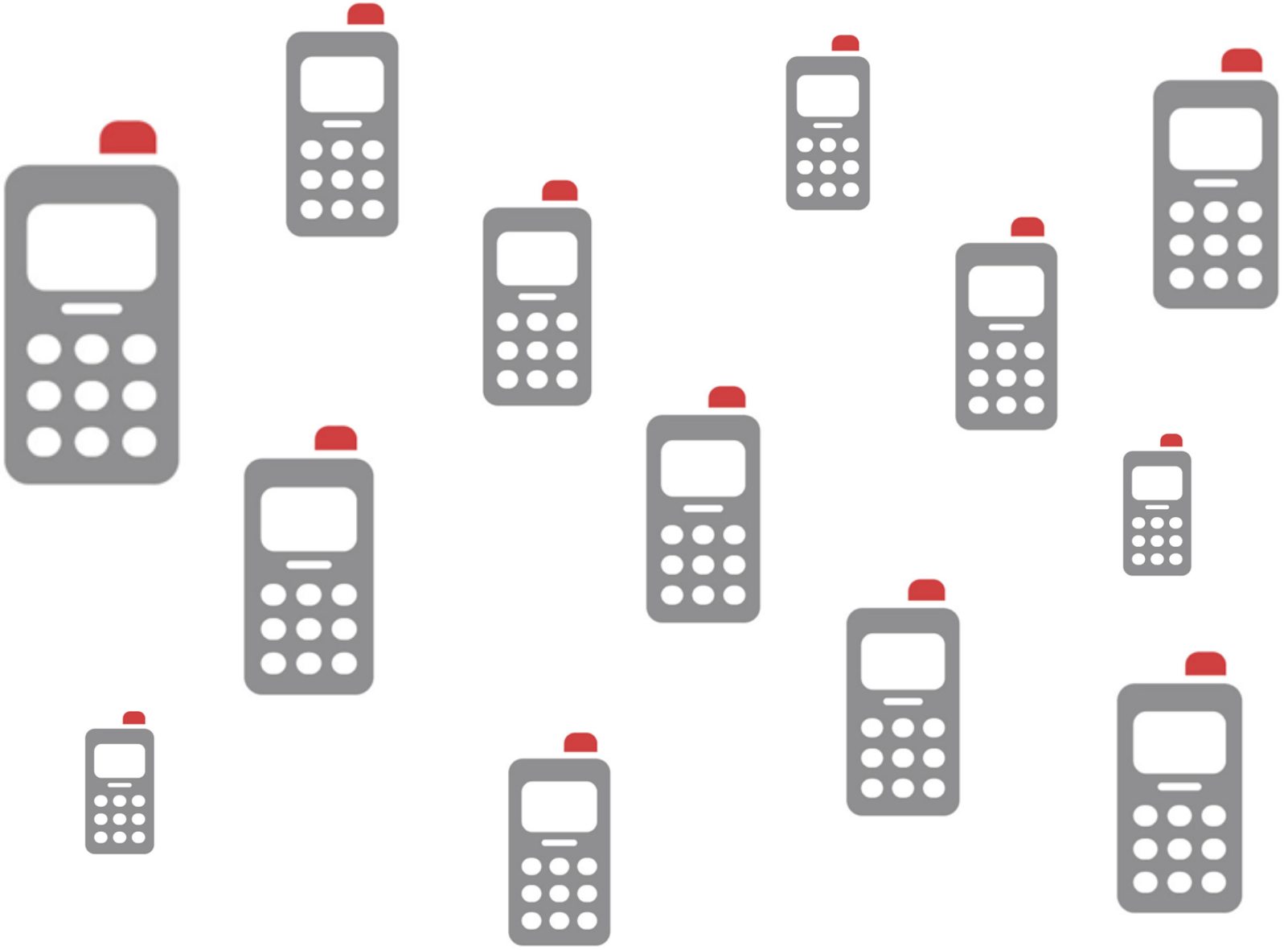
Tools that can **travel to
– and **work** with these
NGOs – on the
margins have the best
chance of success if...**



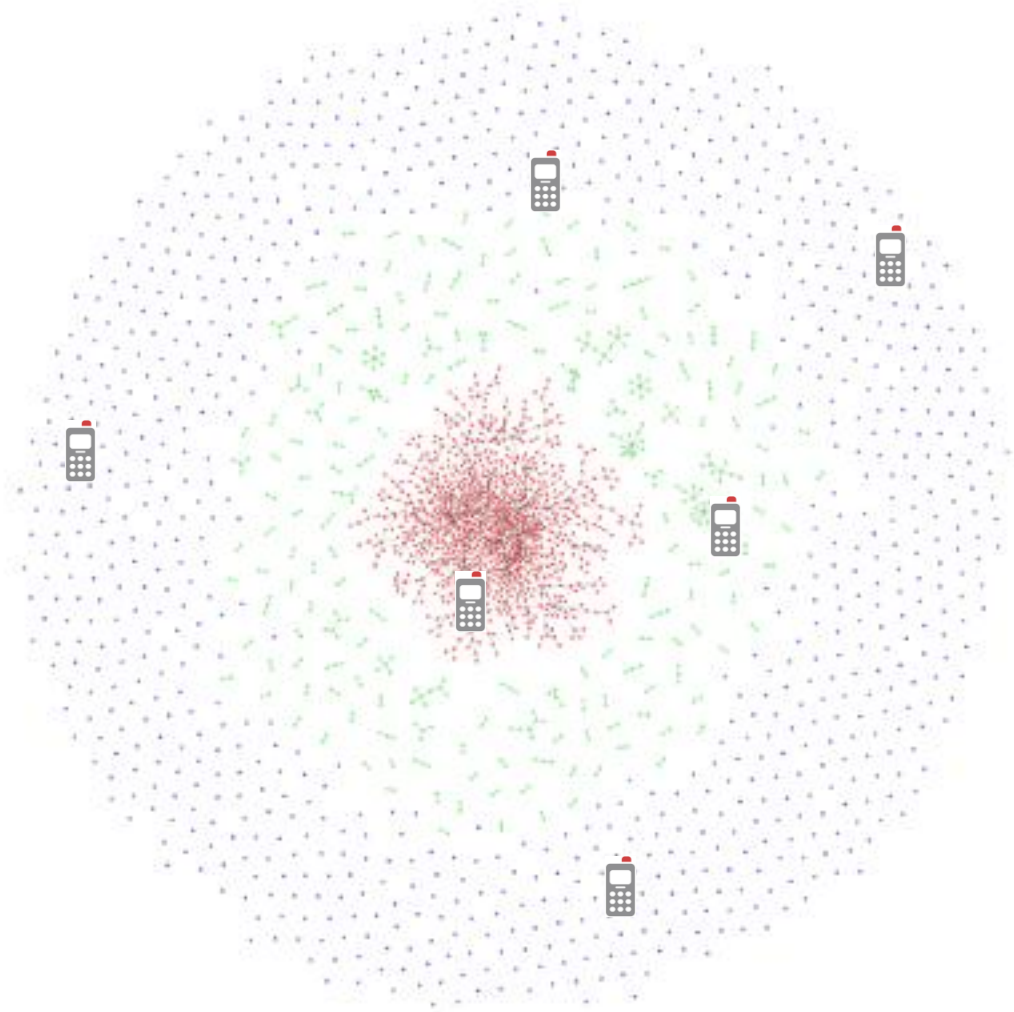


**Ready to assemble,
no tools needed**















FRONTLINE SMS

Firstly, think carefully if you're about to build a solution to a problem you don't fully understand.

Be flexible enough in your approach to allow for changing circumstances, ideas and feedback. Don't set out with too many fixed parameters if you can help it.

From the outset, try to build something that's easy enough to use without the need for user training or a complex manual, and something which new users can easily and effortlessly replicate once news of your application begins to spread.

Think about rapid prototyping. Don't spend too much time waiting to build the perfect solution, but instead get something out there quickly and let reality shape it. This is crucial if the application is to be *relevant*.

Don't be too controlling over the solution. Build an application which is flexible enough to allow users, whoever and wherever they may be, to plant their own personalities on it. No two rural hospitals work the same way, so don't build an application as if they did.

Ensure that the application can work on the most readily and widely available hardware and network infrastructure. Text messaging solutions aren't big in the social mobile space for nothing. And, for the time being, try to avoid building applications which require any kind of internet access, unless you want to restrict your target audience from the outset.

2. “Don’t bother if it doesn’t scale”

Just because a particular solution won’t ramp-up to run an international mobile campaign, or health care for an entire nation, does not make it irrelevant. Just as a long tail solution might likely never run a high-end project, expensive and technically complex solutions would likely fail to *downscale* enough to run a small rural communications network. Let’s not forget that a small deployment which helps just a dozen people is significant to those dozen people and their families.

4. “Big is beautiful”

Sadly there’s a general tendency to take a small-scale solution that works and then try to make a really big version of it. One large instance of a tool is not necessarily better than hundreds of smaller instances. If a small clinic finds a tool to help deliver health care more effectively to two hundred people, why not simply get the same tool into a thousand clinics? Scaling a tool changes its DNA, sometimes to such an extent that everything that was originally good about it is lost. Instead, *replication* is what’s needed.

7. “Appropriate technologies are poor people’s technologies”

A criticism often aimed more broadly at the appropriate technology movement, locally-powered, simple low-tech-based responses should not be regarded as second best to their fancier high-tech ‘Western’ cousins. A cheap, low-spec handset with five days standby time is far more appropriate than an iPhone if you don’t live anywhere near a mains outlet.





T H A N K Y O U



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