SIMLab Governance Project Overview:
2014–2015

Mission
The Governance Project aims to promote accessible and accountable governance through the use of inclusive technologies.

Background
The Governance Project focuses on responding to two main challenges:

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for civic dialogue, inclusion, and oversight are evolving quickly. Increasingly, they rely on digital platforms, excluding some populations by design. While civic technologies aimed at simplifying systems and bridging information divides are proliferating; the number of people represented by associated political decisions, governance objectives, and policy outcomes may be shrinking.

Additionally, in governance among other areas, accountability is often an assumed byproduct of transparency. Yet accountability refers to many things, from the buses running on time to ensuring that public officials are held to the same legal standards as lay people to knowing that municipal budgetary commitments have sufficient technical capacity to be met. Technological innovation and digital platforms are proliferating in support of citizen reporting and availability of open data. Fewer are emerging to connect the various people, processes, and questions that shorten the distance between information transparency and accountable behavior, decision-making, and service delivery.

The Role of the SIMLab Governance Project
In order to address these challenges, the Governance Project plans to broaden the space for engaged representation provided by civic technologies and accountable governance platforms. We will develop research, programming, and advocacy around the use of inclusive technologies for civic dialogue, improved service delivery, public integrity, data ethics, and transparency and accountability initiatives.

The Governance Project 2014–2016: Overview
1. Beyond Transparency, Toward Accountability
2. Cities: Public and Social Service Delivery
3. Governance Beyond Government: Environment, Vulnerable Migrants and Refugees, International Organizations
4. Data Ethics in Governance and Development

The Governance Project 2014-2015: In Focus

Beyond Transparency, Toward Accountability: The transparency and open data movements have grown quickly and effectively as state and national governments, multinational corporations, and international organizations alike make new commitments nearly every week (or so it seems!) to open their

books and decision-making practices. Beyond transparency, the leap to accountability happens in parts, and often, over long periods of time.

In 2014-2015, we'll be researching the entire process, and supporting the advocates, infomediaries, and technical service providers asking some of the same questions. We'll be thinking about services, partnerships, obstacles, ethics, and trends related to the space between information transparency and institutional and political accountability.

Cities: Public and Social Service Delivery: Overall, we'll be asking if and how different platforms and individual ICTs translate into offline, real-time, service delivery improvements and updates for populations with irregular or no access to the Internet.

In 2014-2015, SIMLab will be working with local government agencies that provide services directly, intermediary social service providers, public or non-government city innovation labs, media outlets, and individuals seeking access to those services. Project areas include city innovation labs, location-based wraparound services, and process improvement for individual agencies and organizations among others.

Governance Beyond Government: Governance of policies and resources often involves a range of decision-makers—multiple governments or governments as one of many partners—changing civic access to decision-makers and diluting efforts for dialogue, voicing grievances, and accountable decision-making.

In 2014-2015, SIMLab's Governance Project will undertake efforts in three cross-cutting areas: transparency and accountability work focused on international organizations, international development, and foreign assistance programs; supporting the use of inclusive technologies in community-based natural resource oversight and environmental stewardship, as well as; launching projects and partnerships that improve access to services and critical support for migrant workers, refugees, displaced and stateless populations.

Data Ethics in Governance and Development: Open data, big data, and data-driven policy-making are just three areas where data is often touted as leading to better decisions and outcomes in governance and international development initiatives. Decisions aside, the collection, use, and storage of data— whether seemingly innocuous or obviously sensitive—varies organization to organization and country to country.

In 2014-2015, SIMLab's Governance Project will launch a series of dialogues focused specifically on the ethics, debates, and risks of data collection, use, and storage practices in governance and development.

Interested in partnering or working with us? Contact Anna Levy, Governance Project Director at Anna@SIMLab.org or @SMSGovernance.