



# *Amplifying Local Expertise for Development:* **Supporting and Connecting Local Drone, Data, & AI Experts**

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Drone pilot certification led by Tanzania and Senegal Flying Labs in Nairobi, Kenya  
Photo credit: WeRobotics

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# CASE STUDY

*Amplifying Local Expertise for Development:*  
Supporting and Connecting Local Drone, Data, & AI Experts

## AT A GLANCE

<b>Company</b>	WeRobotics
<b>Social theme(s)</b>	Agriculture/Food Security/Rural Development; Education/ Children & Youth; Energy/Climate Change/Environment; Enterprise Development/Financial Inclusion; Health
<b>Geography</b>	Legal entities in USA and Switzerland; Flying Labs are located in Africa, Latin America, and Asia/Pacific, representing 40+ countries in these geographies
<b>Year founded</b>	2015
<b>Revenues</b>	€2-3 million
<b>Legal structure</b>	Nonprofit organisation
<b>Clients</b>	Local experts; International partners; Tech companies
<b>Business model</b>	Donations (25-60%); Consulting services (10-30%); In-kind donations of technology and services (30-40%)
<b>Product/services</b>	WeRobotics provides a platform for local drone, data, & AI experts to connect with global organizations and industries. Flying Labs implement programmes for climate action, disaster, agriculture, STEM/youth, entrepreneurship, and more
<b>Impact reach</b>	WeRobotics currently connects 41 Flying Labs with 56 global and 266 local partners and supporters, transferring 498 opportunities since 2019

## Background

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Governments, multilateral agencies, and local communities can make better decisions for policies and programmes when they have access to quality data and technology. Drones are a geospatial/Earth Observation (EO) acquisition tool and, when combined with data and AI technologies, can transform decision-making abilities in a wide variety of sectors.

Drones and associated technologies are highly regulated and require significant expertise and training. Local experts are best placed to deploy these technologies and inform regulations and policies, combining on-the-ground insights with decision-making. Yet, too often these local actors are disconnected from the international partners and tech firms that engage this expertise.

## About the Company

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WeRobotics began as a collaboration between the founders of two existing initiatives: **Sonja Betschart** and **Adam Klaptocz** of Drone Adventures and **Patrick Meier** and **Andrew Schroeder** of UAViator. The co-founders realised that when local experts are connected to drone, data, and AI technologies, they can become an integral part of the data production process, informing local and international development initiatives across sectors with on-the-ground knowledge and expertise. The two initiatives joined forces to launch a network of independent Flying Labs providing local expertise in 40+ countries throughout Africa, Latin America, and Asia/Pacific. Over time, WeRobotics transitioned from an engineering focus to instead focus on organisational innovations that support a fully locally-led and governed network.



Panama Flying Labs team looking at a drone controller during a project  
Photo credit: WeRobotics

## Sources of Impact

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### **Customers: Who is served?**

WeRobotics serves **local experts** through the Flying Labs Network and **international organisations and technology companies** through its eco-system. Flying Labs serve **governments, civil society, academia and research institutions**

### **Workforce: Who is employed?**

WeRobotics has **11 team members**, fully remote, in 9 countries. The network comprises 41 Flying Labs employing more than **300 professionals** in 40+ countries

### **Product/Service: What is delivered?**

WeRobotics connects FlyingLabs to partners and to each other. The Labs deliver **drone, data, and AI expertise** across numerous sectors

### **Eco-System: What relationships are developed?**

WeRobotics considers its network model and ecosystem approach as its core innovation, connecting **local independent experts with local & global clients, funders, tech companies, and other Labs**

## Innovation Activities

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WeRobotics engages in several activities that drive innovation, both in their network as well as the larger eco-system:

### INNOVATION ACTIVITIES



**Proposing and facilitating an alternate approach to localisation:** WeRobotics' activities focus on validating local expertise and facilitating a network that is fully driven by local agency, accountability and self-sustainability, with sharing and collaboration as its core values

**Building and facilitating an eco-system of local experts and partners to connect and collaborate:** WeRobotics develops tools and opportunities for local Flying Labs to connect and collaborate regionally and globally. Flying Labs members then access expertise across the network as needed and collaborate on joint projects

**Open sourcing the network model and organisational structure to amplify local expertise:** WeRobotics spends significant time and energy documenting, improving and sharing its model and structure so that other organisations can copy their locally-led approach

### Key Innovation Challenges & Learnings

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Although WeRobotics deploys innovative technologies through its network, it considers its network model and organisational structure to be its primary innovation. The journey from an engineering-led team to a network-led organisation has involved challenges and learnings:

- **Shifting the mindsets of local and global partners:** WeRobotics works to shift the mindsets of local and international decision-makers. Co-founder Sonja Betschart explains: *"The problem local experts face with local and international clients is not just access, but also the acceptance problem of being the experts. The mindset still prevails that the best expertise comes from the North. If you're part of a network and have been vetted, you gain access and visibility."*
- **Adapting emerging technologies in local settings:** Flying Labs owner Tiamiyou Radji from Senegal Flying Labs describes this process: *"A certain technology may be used all over the world, but we want to convince our local partners that it is useful. Technology can be good, but it might be too expensive for the particular thing that we want to do. We test it out, then fine tune or change the methodology. Because we are local, we know our countries and regions better than anyone and have access to the technology and knowledge through our network and partner, we can do this quickly and more sustainably than global experts."*

## Featured Flying Labs: Senegal Flying Labs (hosted by KRANTH SARL)

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Senegal Flying Labs is headed by **Tiamiyou Radji**, a data expert 20+ years' experience in international development. While working as head of IT for Millennium Promise's West Africa region, he witnessed first-hand the need for local expertise in data technologies. He decided to found his own data technology company to strengthen local data acquisition and use, policies, and training. His company became part of the Flying Labs network in 2018. Since then, they have performed over 20 projects, trained over 800 local experts, collaborated with government to develop frameworks and standards, and launched entrepreneurship and STEM programmes for youth and new graduates.



Senegal Flying Labs team collecting data using eBeeX on Mapping The Salt Lands Of Loul Sessene  
Photo credit: Senegal Flying Labs