Executive Summary: The Open Humanitarian Initiative

People worldwide, in both rich and poor countries, are connecting through technology at an accelerating pace. In 2012, global mobile phone subscriptions topped 6 billion, including more than 1 billion smart phones, each with more computing power than the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) used to send a man to the moon. In sum, our planet has gone online, producing and sharing vast quantities of information.

> *"There is an urgent need to boost significantly capacity on the ground, to improve coordination, strategic planning and provision of aid".*
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> John Holmes, head of the UN OCHA on the Haiti response
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> *"The **difficulties** encountered in establishing an **appropriate system for collecting and analyzing data in order to provide decision-makers** with information in a timely manner were one of the main reasons of poor response"*
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> Real Time Evaluation Report on the Haiti disaster response
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> *"Information is a basic need."*
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> UN OCHA Report – Humanitarianism in the Network Age (2013)

Private corporations, governments and international humanitarian aid agencies are racing to understand how this will change the way we do business. Some see great opportunities; but many face uncertainty. NetHope has taken up a leadership role within the humanitarian community to explore new ways of interacting and bringing people in need closer to the resources and people who can help. Of particular importance is how NetHope is helping to change the needs and practices of communities, volunteers, and frontline responders within the disaster community.

Every year, natural disasters, conflicts, and crises affect approximately 350 million people and result in thousands of lives lost and hundreds of billions of dollars in damage. In a crisis, getting timely access to information is a matter of life and death. As more organizations become involved, the premium on establishing working information systems rises. But during periods of conflict or after a natural disaster, information gathering and analysis can become extremely difficult. Decisions are often made without a clear picture of the situation. Analyses of emergency response during the past five years reveal that poor information management has severely hampered effective action, costing many lives. Responders have been hamstrung by a lack of shared standards and information sharing. Despite efforts to improve, the flow of information among aid agencies and the people they help has consistently been overlooked.

In order to address this fundamental shift in how we will respond to natural disasters and crises in the future, NetHope, in collaboration with a number of other humanitarian response organizations, academic institutions and private sector entities has launched an ambitious five-year initiative entitled the Open Humanitarian Initiative (OHI). This initiative supports projects that focus on improving humanitarian response to be more impactful through effective use of information technology.

NetHope and its partners recently launched the Open Humanitarian Alliance, an alliance of organizations from various fields that want to work together towards more data driven, open, and beneficiary focused humanitarian response.

The initiative will drive immediate benefits, as humanitarian responders will be provided with the information they need, when they need it:

- Enhancing situational awareness, analysis, and decision-making.
- Reducing response time and making the response more effective
- Better outcomes and reduced costs through reduced duplications of effort.
- Enable affected communities to better plan their community-based response using openly available information.

The initiative will leverage already existing investments in technology and capacity building and will help scale-up already existing projects and solutions. **Interoperability with existing systems is also a key design principle within the initiative**.

Organizations interested in participating in this important initiative are welcome to join the Open Humanitarian Alliance.