

How realistic is open collaboration for development? Can it really work through the social web? CrisisCommons and OpenStreetMaps are good examples: volunteers worldwide combined forces for humanitarian relief.

## Communities for open source aid

Many initiatives seek open collaboration and build on the expertise of people in volunteering through the Internet. Some, such as the Extraordinaries, have used crowdsourcing, to [identify people through images after the Haiti earthquake](#). Others, such as CrisisCommons, have built networks of people to provide technological solutions for disaster relief.

“Founded in March 2009 through an impromptu Tweetup at Government 2.0 Camp, a small group of idealists and innovators gathered to discuss the idea of creating an online community through a mash-up of citizen volunteers, crisis response organisations, international humanitarian relief agencies, non-profits and the private sector”; [CrisisCommons](#) was born. One outcome of this initiative has been [CrisisCamps](#), where programmers, GIS specialists and people from various places around the world with all kinds of expertise come together to “cultivate innovation in the use of technology for mobility and efficiency during crisis.” One example is the [CrisisCamp held in London on 15 May](#) :

“The day will be dedicated to working on CrisisCommons projects, hoping to make life easier for people on the ground by doing what we can do from here. Common tasks are programming, working on maps, and helping to gather information from around the web into usable forms”. Between these camps the [coordination and collaboration takes place within various groups](#) .

{youtube}zCv8j\_RRW\_I{/youtube}

A related initiative [Crisismappers](#), a [community of mappers that tries to provide support during crises](#) using geospatial information: “Leveraging mobile platforms, computational linguistics, geospatial technologies, and visual analytics to power effective early warning for rapid response to complex humanitarian emergencies.”

## The case of Haiti

One of the biggest problems in the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake has been the lack of information about what was happening in different places and of accurate maps providing an overview of the scale and extent of the destruction. One volunteer working group known as the

“Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team”, attempted to compile a digital map of Port au Prince. In a concerted effort, mappers used satellite imagery to map over 30.000 locations. [This resulted, thanks to the contribution of different organisations and companies](#), in the most detailed map of Port Prince after the disaster. The video below provides an overview on how the map evolved throughout the crisis period.

{vimeo}9017980{/vimeo}

There were also [nine CrisisCamps](#) on three continents addressing the Haiti case . The outcomes were [different tools](#) and a widespread volunteer collaboration. CrisisCommons continues to work on [diverse initiatives](#) such as a [machine translation mechanism for English and Haitian Creole](#) or [Haitian Stories](#).

### **Implications for web2fordev**

The most striking facets in these examples are that such communities could coalesce with most people not knowing each other and that the voluntary efforts led to impressive results which are still ongoing, as in the case of the catastrophic [oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico](#) . These different initiatives show how the open source approach can be adapted to a range of situations across the Globe. This can be an inspiring example for development cooperation sector. Everybody is [free to join CrisisCommons](#).

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