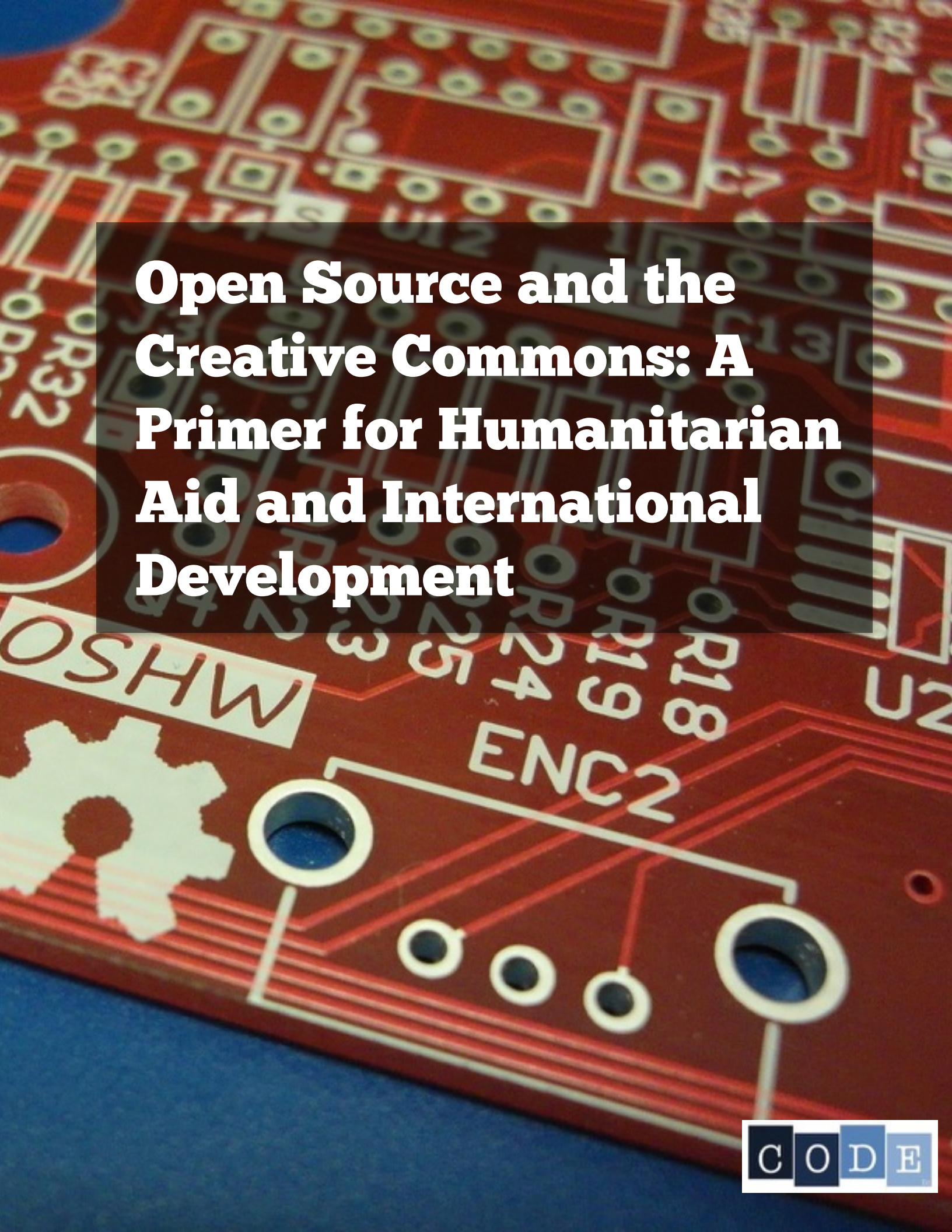


Open Source and the Creative Commons: A Primer for Humanitarian Aid and International Development

CODE

Our team of consultants advises international organizations, NGOs and non-profits on how to incorporate innovations into education and community building. We have over 30 years of combined work experience in Africa, the United States and the Middle East. Our office is based in Indonesia.

Code Innovation's projects include mobile applications in a variety of African languages addressing subjects as diverse as public health practices around the recent Ebola Outbreak, to the establishment and business education of small, financially self-sufficient groups of youth. Code also has expertise in web-based learning environments, online mentoring and the cultivation and training of young journalists and community leaders.

We advise private sector companies that wish to improve their impact programming, speak to executive audiences, and help to guide impact investing. To get in touch, email **info@codeinnovation.com**.

Introduction

As technology becomes a part of more and more aid and development programs, how and why we decide to incorporate new tools is increasingly important. Over the last few years, the ICT4D community has developed Principles for Digital Development that guide the ethics and process of our work. The sixth of these principles is, "Use open standards, open data, open source and open innovation."

Here, we're going to focus on just one aspect of this: open source – which includes the Creative Commons.

If you're never heard of open source or the Creative Commons, they can be confusing to navigate. That's why we've decided to create a short primer for humanitarian aid and international development workers to understand what these concepts mean and how to use them. We've found these ideas to be pivotal in our own work, and it's a pleasure to share what we've learned with you in the hopes that you – and your organization – will feel the same.

Open source and the Creative Commons are separate, but related, so we're going to explore them one by one, starting with open source.

What is Open Source?

The open source movement believes that software should be free and that code should be shared transparently with others in a development process that encourages collaboration. This helps people to avoid duplicating efforts and allows them to upcycle good code into new applications. But it also encourages developers to create better software not through competition, but collaboration.

This kind of sharing isn't new and in the 1990's, when the open source movement was starting to make its debut, it wasn't new to the computing industry either. In fact, in the early days of computing in the 1950's and 1960's, the source code for computer operating software was freely distributed with the software itself, allowing you to adapt, improve or fix whatever you needed to. Especially at universities, where knowledge sharing was the norm, a computer software culture developed that planted the seeds of the open source movement we have today.

In the 1990's, two pivotal things happened that crystallized these ideas about sharing. First, a Finnish university student named Linus Torvalds wrote his own computer operating system and shared it freely and openly with the world, inspiring a community of software developers to collaborate around the project, now called Linux. Then, the Internet browser Netscape released its source code, effectively making it open source. From there, the movement started gaining substantial ground with others who saw the value and potential of sharing as a feature of the new economy. If you're interested, you can read more about the history of open source at the Open Source Initiative here and the Wikipedia history of free software here.

"Open" refers specifically to free software that is released under a GNU General Public License. Whatever license you chose, you are agreeing that your product's source code can be freely used, modified and distributed by anyone, anywhere, from now on.

Now, for those of you out there in larger aid and development organizations, this doesn't mean that someone can take your logo and start using it freely – "open" refers only to the underlying code in your software, not to anything else.

can be a hard thing to explain – and for people to remember. We hope that this simple primer becomes a resource in this regard, and we'd love to hear from you about how we could improve the content.

How Can I Make my Work Open Source?

If you'd like to look into making your products open source, you can investigate the different licenses and types here. Just for encouragement, the page is titled, "Choosing an OSS license doesn't need to be scary." The most common license that we see in aid and development is a GNU General Public License, probably because it's the most common license and one of the easiest to understand and use.

To make your software open source, you simply upload your code to a site called GitHub, an online repository where others do the same. For more about GitHub, what it is and what it does, you can read a good TechCrunch article here.

To be honest, the hardest thing about making a product open source is getting the organizational sign-off to do so. When managers don't understand the basics of the movement towards free and open, it

How Do You Make Money from Open Source?

A common question that proponents of open source get a lot is, "That sounds nice, but how do you profit?" A common misconception about open source is that it's bad for business, because companies and organizations are used to licensing their works for income to create regular revenue streams. For those of us in aid and development, this might not be at the front of our minds, but the question is relevant nonetheless. Traditionally, organizations in our industries have relied on specialized knowledge and closed data sets to maintain a competitive edge and secure the funding we need to stay in business. However, we are increasingly seeing proprietary ecosystems displaced by the free and open ones – with many leading thinkers forecasting that this an evolution of the marketplace.

Open source developers still get paid for the work that they release as open

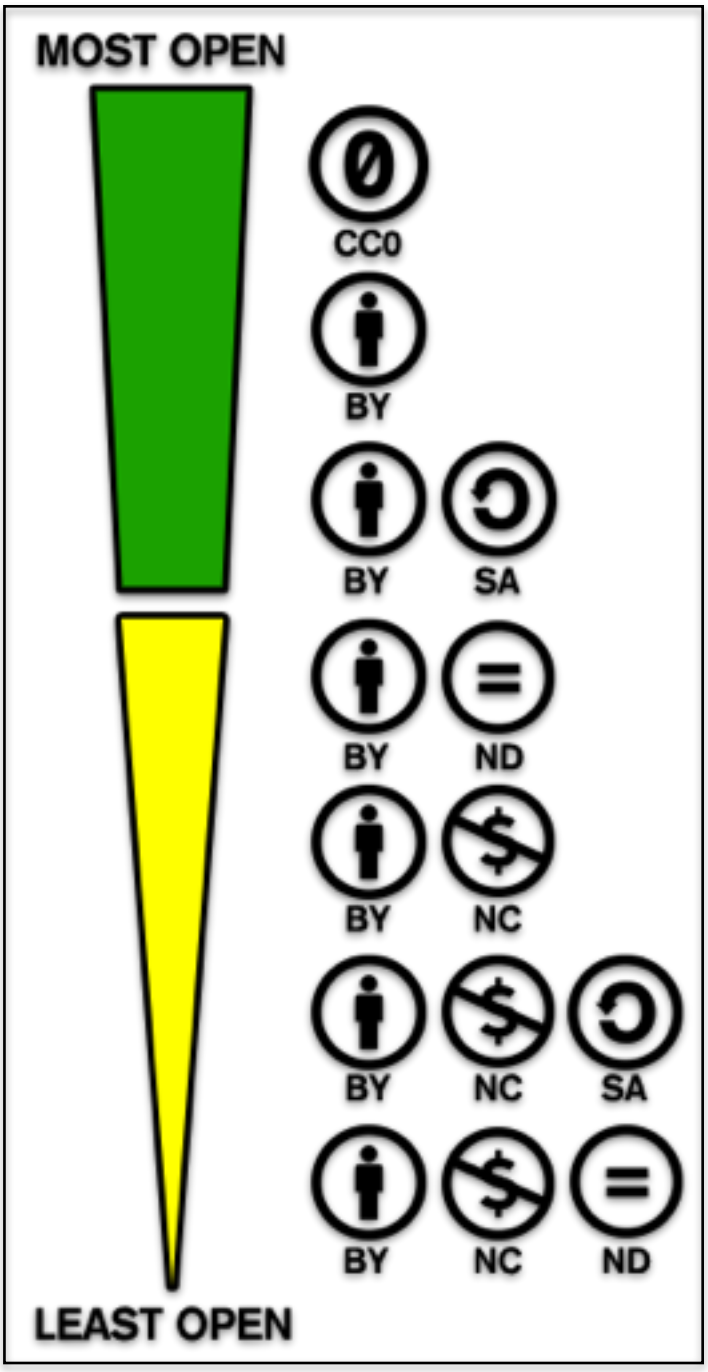
source. They are hired to create organization-specific customizations, and to create the product in the first place. In other words, you can sell services based on the code, but you cannot charge a fee to people who use the code itself. It is only the ongoing "royalty" revenue that open source eschews, not profit per se. Services can include warranties, tech support, customization, maintenance and more, and if you'd like to read more about successful business strategies built around free and open that might work for your organization, you can get started here.

Now that we've covered an introduction to open source, we're going to shift our attention from computer code to media content and examine the values and vision of the Creative Commons.

What is the Creative Commons?

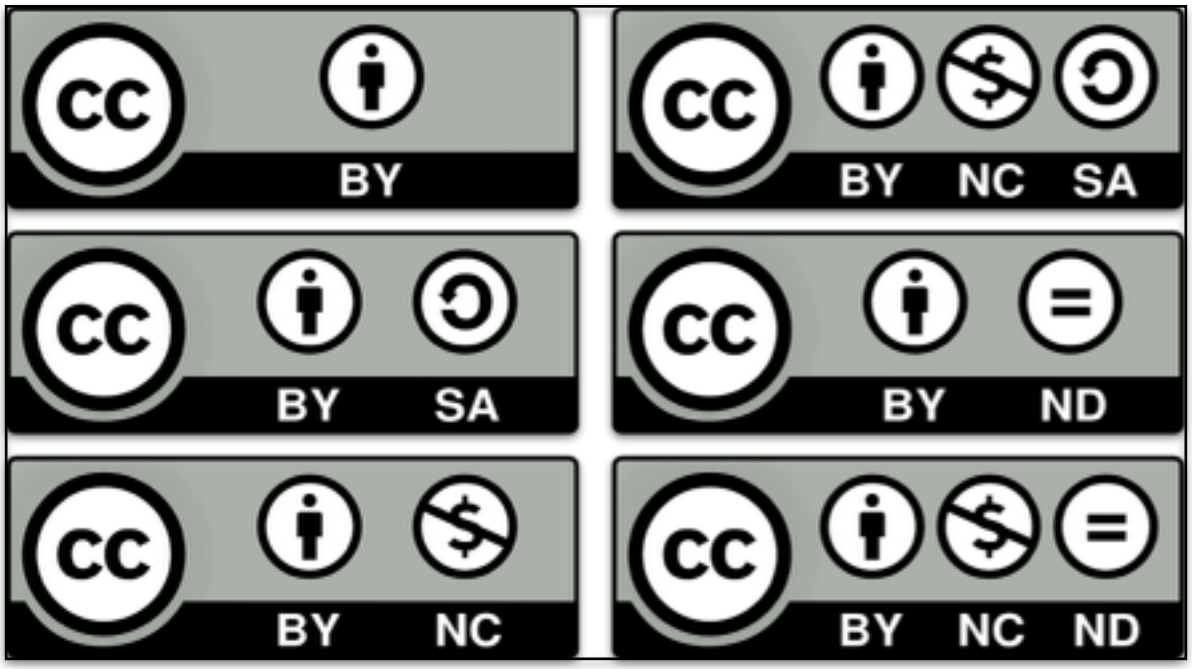
The Creative Commons is a set of licenses that allow you to freely access, modify, use and share creative works made by others. It's all about maximizing creativity, sharing and innovation and using the full potential of technology to drive a new era of development, growth and productivity. Established in 2001 as a US-based non-profit, in 2010 it reached a total number of over 400,000 licenses and counting.

Often, we hear partners who are eager to release their work copyright-free tell us their work is "in the creative commons," without specifying exactly what they mean.



While this is admirable and to be applauded, the Creative Commons in fact involves a series of licenses that specify whether and how a work can be used.

Here's a basic overview of the different areas covered by Creative Commons licenses.



Attribution (CC BY)

Just like it sounds, by selecting this option, anyone who uses the work must clearly attribute it to you. Especially in aid and development organizations, this is a great way to get credit and social capital from contributing to the commons and the community. It allows others to distribute, remix, modify and build upon what you've created, even commercially, and is a very permissive license. You'll notice that all the Creative Commons licenses that come after build upon the Attribution license ("BY").

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This license means that anything produced with the work under license must also be released within the same Creative Commons license. For example, under this license, if you use my curriculum to create a curriculum of your own, that curriculum must be released under the exact same Creative Commons license.

You can mix and match each of these provisions to suit your specific needs

with each work. Go here to explore and pick your license. And for those of you truly ready and able to embrace the principle of Creative Commons in your work, check out the "Free Culture" or "Public Domain" options here:

Free Culture/Public Domain

A Free Culture license means that you are sharing your work with no restrictions. Anyone can use it for any purpose, and they don't need to credit you if they don't want to. If you're interested in this, you need to be 100% sure that you own copyright in all countries over the work in question. Here is a more detailed discussion of the issues involved.

How Can I Use Creative Commons in my Work?

If you're ready to apply a creative commons license to your own work, you can visit the Creative Commons site to choose a license.

Whether you decide to release your material under a free culture license or with specific terms, you'll need to display your license along with a link to its terms, so that people who want to use the material know that they are free to do so. The link also serves the important function of helping to spread awareness about the Creative Commons movement and educating others about what it means.

How Do You Make Money from the Creative Commons?

When the creative commons first started to be used online, many artists and creators were resistant to the idea. They saw the ability to freely share cultural works with others as a breakdown of the gatekeeper system of culture, whereby each person who sought to enjoy something (be it a piece of music or a work of art in a museum) was charged a fee. They're not wrong.

As the Internet continues to revolutionize systems of centralized control and disrupt the traditional gatekeepers of culture and taste, the creators who have been rewarded the most are those who have freely shared their best works, often against the vocal advice of others in their communities. The humanitarian aid and international development communities have been no different.

While your organization may lose a small amount of money from licensing and royalty fees from your content, your scope of reach and scale of impact will more than make up for the difference. After all, we're here to reach people and help them change their lives – not to profit.

What Does "Open" Mean for the Future of Aid and Development?

"Open always wins," says Abundance author and futurist Peter Diamandis, and so far, he seems right. The push for more free and open societies and systems, for more and more of our human heritage to be held not just by a few, but in common, are some of the most relevant and powerful trends of our time. Those of us working for the public and global good, and taking public funds, have a responsibility to create solutions that feed free and open collaboration, rather than the profit of shareholders or the longevity of our organizations.

If you take away one idea from this primer, it's that the "open" movement is built upon the value of collaboration and the idea that working together yields better and more broadly distributed results than competition. If you feel that this is disruptive, you're right – sharing breaks down separation.

Whenever we decide to make software open source, or to release our content and works into the Creative Commons, we create a more equal and collaborative world. And isn't that why we're working in aid and development in the first place?

We hope that this short primer has been helpful in sharing what "open" means and if it's right for you and your work. To get in touch about how to use open (and Digital Principle #6, "Use open standards, open data, open source and open innovation") in your aid and development work, email info@codeinnovation.com.

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p. 2-5: wikipedia.org
p. 6-10: creativecommons.org