



Humanity Link



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## Invisible Possibility--Why life changing tech goes unused.

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We're living in a moment where technology can fundamentally reshape how we assist people in crisis. From AI-driven information systems to digital ID, secure cash delivery, early-warning tools, and cloud-based communication platforms, the

capability exists—today—to move faster, reach further, and deliver aid with more accuracy than at any point in history.

But there's a problem.

A huge portion of the non-profit and humanitarian sector either **doesn't know these tools exist**, or **doesn't know how to use them**, or **doesn't have the technical capacity, funding structure, or internal culture** to adopt them even if they do understand them.

The result is something I've seen repeatedly in two decades of working in emergencies: **Communities are ready. The technology is ready. But the system isn't.**

And when those three pieces aren't aligned, people wait longer for the help they need.

This gap—the “capability-awareness” gap—may be one of the biggest preventable barriers in humanitarian action today.

### **Why This Gap Exists**

From my experience working with NGOs, UN agencies, and non-profits of all sizes, I see four consistent reasons:

#### **1. Non-profits aren't built to experiment.**

Humanitarian organizations prioritize risk reduction and compliance. That's good from a duty-of-care perspective, but it can unintentionally shut the door on new tools. A pilot that might transform service delivery gets treated with the same caution as an untested procurement process.

## **2. Technology feels overwhelming.**

Most NGOs don't have dedicated engineering teams. They don't have data scientists or solution architects sitting around thinking about how to stitch together communications, AI, payments, and data pipelines. Staff are stretched, often responding to five crises at once. New technology becomes "one more thing" they don't have capacity to explore.

## **3. Budgets reward the known, not the new.**

Donors often want to see predictable outcomes. That means NGOs default to familiar systems—even if those systems are slow, inefficient, or outdated—because they've already been approved.

## **4. The market doesn't speak the same language.**

Tech companies speak in APIs, models, and protocols. Humanitarian workers speak in dignity, accountability, and coordination. Both sides care deeply about impact, but the translation layer is missing. When tech is marketed in jargon, non-profits assume it's not for them.

None of these challenges are the fault of the organizations themselves. They're structural. But they're solvable.

## **What Happens When These Gaps Are Closed**

When NGOs truly understand the technology available to them, the impact is immediate.

*Communities receive information in minutes, not days. Cash can be delivered securely, directly, and at scale. Feedback loops become continuous, not quarterly. Misinformation during crises drops sharply. Field teams are informed before arriving, rather than after. Aid delivery becomes proactive, not just reactive.*

We've seen this firsthand in our work at Humanity Link, supporting operations in places like Libya, Venezuela, and Ukraine. When organizations realize they don't need a full engineering team to deploy advanced communication systems—when they see that platforms can be modular, automated, or integrated into existing workflows—something shifts. They start imagining what's possible again.

That's what we need more of across the sector: **imagination supported by accessible tools.**

## **How NGOs and Non-profits Can Overcome the Tech Awareness Gap**

Here are a few actionable ways organizations can navigate this landscape without getting overwhelmed:

### **1. Start with the problem, not the technology.**

Instead of asking, “What digital tools should we use?” ask:  
“*Where are we losing time?*” “*Where are we losing accuracy?*”  
“*Where are people waiting unnecessarily?*” “*Where do our teams feel the most friction?*”

Once the problem is clearly defined, the right technology becomes far easier to identify.

### **2. Appoint a small “innovation point person”—even if it’s part-time.**

You don’t need a Chief Technology Officer. You need someone with curiosity and bandwidth to explore, attend webinars, talk to vendors, and translate possibilities to the rest of the team.

This single step prevents countless missed opportunities.

### **3. Test through micro-pilots, not massive deployments.**

A pilot doesn’t need to be a six-month, multi-country rollout. It can be a *three-week test with one field team*. A *small chatbot for a single program*. A *short trial of a WhatsApp information flow*. A *proof-of-concept for AI-assisted triage on non-sensitive data*.

Small experiments de-risk innovation and build internal confidence.

#### **4. Partner with tech-focused organizations that understand the humanitarian context.**

There are groups—ours included—designed specifically to bridge the gap between technology and non-profit operations. The key is finding partners who understand both the tech and the realities of fieldwork, accountability, and donor reporting.

NGOs don't need to become tech companies. They need tech companies that speak NGO.

#### **5. Build internal culture around learning—not perfection.**

The truth is: no humanitarian technology deployment goes perfectly the first time. And that's okay. What matters is a culture that says: "Let's learn, adjust, and keep going."

When organizations shift from "fear of failure" to "commitment to learning," they move faster, serve better, and innovate responsibly.

#### **Closing the Gap Is a Responsibility**

The humanitarian sector can't afford to ignore tools that save time, strengthen accountability, and help people get the support they need. Communities deserve organizations that

are equipped—not just operationally, but technologically—to meet the reality of today’s crises.

The technology is here. The need is here. The opportunity is here.

Now we need to make sure non-profits actually know what’s possible—and have the support to use it well.

If we do that, the impact will be felt immediately, and by the people who need it most.