Humanitarian Evidence Synthesis and Communication **Programme**

Abridged Inception Report

6 February 2015

Oxfam GB
in partnership with
Feinstein International Center

Authors:
Eleanor Ott (eott1@oxfam.org.uk)
Roxani Christina Krystalli
Elizabeth Stites
Nigel Timmins
Vivien Walden
Emily Gillingham
Kristin Bushby

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

3ie	International Initiative for Impact Evaluation
DFID	UK Department for International Development
ECHO	The European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department in the European Union
FIC	Feinstein International Center at Tufts University
FTE	Full-time Equivalent
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IRC	International Rescue Committee
LR	Literature Review
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PAB	Programme Advisory Board
PMB	Programme Management Board
QA	Quality Assurance
SR	Systematic Review
TBA	To be announced
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

1 OVERVIEW

This inception report is structured based on the DFID guidance for reporting for the programme and to reflect the accomplishments and learning of the six-month inception period. This section covers an overview on the programme and purpose of the inception report.

Humanitarian actors and researchers have amassed evidence about the state of knowledge in the humanitarian sector, including assessments of what works and what does not work. Synthesising this information and making it readily available to policymakers and humanitarian practitioners remains challenging. The Humanitarian Evidence Synthesis and Communication Programme produces a series of reviews to distil humanitarian evidence and communicate it to key stakeholders in order to enable better decision-making and improve humanitarian policy and practice.

This initiative is a DFID-funded partnership between Oxfam GB, the lead agency, and Feinstein International Center (FIC) at Tufts University, the implementing partner. The programme is called the Humanitarian Evidence Programme for short.

Oxfam GB and FIC share DFID's ambition to increase the use of high quality evidence of 'what works' within the humanitarian sector. This partnership also recognises the challenges, in accessing and combining high quality evidence as well as in promoting its use within a difficult environment for uptake. By combining the skills and experience of Oxfam and FIC, this partnership will respond to the challenges. The partnership's approach to the programme is founded on the principle that commitment to high quality evidence, active management of the supply chain, and research uptake are all crucial to achieve value for money.

During the inception period from 26 June 2014 to 31 December 2014, the Humanitarian Evidence Programme successfully completed all deliverables and planned for the implementation period. The inception report covers major milestones, challenges and learning of the inception period, and plans for the implementation period and research uptake. In learning from other rigorous review programmes, there are challenges with the market capacity to carry out quality reviews as well as with quality assurance processes. This report presents an honest analysis of and offers mitigation strategies for these challenges.

The inception period also demonstrated the enthusiasm and promise of the programme. The launch of the web pages was well-received, and feedback from key informants and the Advisory Board expressed solid support for the overall mission and the potential of the programme.

This document has been modified and abridged from its original submission in order to protect confidentiality and make it publically available.

2 APPROACH

This section outlines the overall approach of the programme and the structure of the inception report.

The programme will only be successful through both producing high quality syntheses products and achieving research uptake. These two pieces are symbiotic. High-quality products are only possible if they are driven from the beginning to build off of existing research and needs in the field. Likewise, research uptake is more achievable with high quality products that reflect both standards of evidence for research synthesis design and the research in their topical areas. Through combining these pieces, we aim to deliver practical products for people who need make difficult decisions.

In order to achieve high quality reviews and research uptake, the inception period focused on creating strong management and governance structures, including active management of the supply chain; on mapping of the field to understand opportunities for research uptake, key thought leaders, and collaborations; on integrating technical knowledge to create a guidance note and research design; and, on developing a research uptake plan that reflected the mapping of the field and learning throughout these processes.

Thus, activities in the inception period fall into four broad categories:

1. Management and governance
2. Mapping of the field
3. Research design
4. Research uptake

The approach for the implementation period builds upon the work and learning form the inception period and remains dedicated to achieving high quality reviews, research uptake, and value for money. The implementation period focuses on continuing strong management and governance of the programme; producing research including commissioning the reviews and quality assurance processes; and, research uptake.

The inception report first covers progress in the four categories of activities for the inception period. Then, the report discusses additional activities to prepare for the implementation period, learning, and the revised work plan. Lastly, it discusses additional technical information including the plan for quality assurance processes, risk analysis, and approach to anti-fraud. The inception report is thus structured to reflect the inception period and cover matters according to DFID reporting guidelines. Additional annexes presented to DFID for funding reported specific outputs. The version of the report present here has been abridged and edited for clarity and confidentiality.

3 INCEPTION ACTIVITIES: PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

This section outlines major inceptions activities that were completed broadly under project management and governance.

The programme officially began with a launch meeting in July 2014. Programme management and governance was solidified with the terms of reference (ToR) for and staffing of the Programme Management Board, Programme Advisory Board, Review Commissioning Panel, and the Bidding Review Committee. The specific Bidding Review Committee and pool of peer reviewers for each review will depend on the content, but the Bidding Review Committee will draw upon the content and technical expertise of members of the Review Commissioning Panel.

3.1 Launch meeting

We held a successful two-day in-person inception workshop 14 – 15 July 2014. The workshop was attended by Dr. Peter Walker, Dr. Elizabeth Stites, and Roxanne Krystalli from FIC as well as Nigel Timmins, Eleanor Ott, Diane Rouxel (Finance), Claire Harvey (Communications), Robert Cornford (Communications), Ben Heaven-Taylor (UK Government Partnerships Manager), Sofeena Lalani (Partnerships Advisor), Dr. Martin Walsh (Global Research Advisor), and Claire Hutchings (Global Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Adviser) from Oxfam. The workshop included a phone meeting with Dr. Joanna Macrae and Tarah Friend from DFID.

During this meeting, we agreed upon strategic decisions, brainstormed review questions, made a detailed list of responsibilities, and reworked the timeline for the inception period.

3.2 Staffing and management

The Humanitarian Evidence Programme is managed by the Programme Management Board with high-level advice and feedback provided by the Programme Advisory Board.

3.2.1 Programme Management Board

The Programme Management Board consists of:

- Nigel Timmins, Deputy Humanitarian Director, Oxfam & Chair of the Programme Management Board
- Dr. Eleanor Ott, Humanitarian Evidence Programme and Communications Manager, Oxfam
- Dr. Elizabeth Stites, Research Director, FIC & Principal Investigator
- Roxani Christina (Roxanne) Krystalli, Program Manager, FIC

The Programme Management Board formally convenes on a monthly basis.

3.2.2 Programme Advisory Board

We sought to select a Programme Advisory Board that included thought leaders in the field with a mixture of practitioner, policy-maker, and researcher representation as well as review technique expertise and topical humanitarian expertise. Advisory Board members were contacted based on recommendations from DFID, the Programme Management Board, and colleagues.

The first official meeting of the Programme Advisory Board took place on November 10, 2014. Each member of the Advisory Board was individually briefed on the programme and consulted before the meeting. The first call served to introduce the board, finalise the Advisory Board Terms of Reference, discuss proposed review topics and questions, and discuss the quality assurance processes. Throughout the programme, individuals were also contacted for advice based on their expertise. After the call and additional rounds of feedback, a revised list of review questions was circulated for feedback from members of the Programme Advisory Board, and all board members responded.

The second formal meeting of the Programme Advisory Board met on January 22nd in person at Oxfam House for those in the area and via conference call for those who could not make it in person.

The Programme Advisory Board consists of:

- Claire Allen, Knowledge Manager, Evidence Aid
- Dr. Jeannie Annan, Director of Research, Evaluation, and Learning, the International Rescue Committee (IRC)
- Dr. Heng Aik Cheng, Deputy Director, Mercy Malaysia
- Dr. Phil Davies, Deputy Director for Systematic Reviews, the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)
- Tarah Friend, Research Uptake Manager, the UK Department for International Development (DFID)
- Paul Knox-Clarke, Head of Research and Communications, the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP)
- Dr. Joanna Macrae, Head of Humanitarian Innovation & Evidence Programme and head of the Humanitarian Policy Team, the UK Department for International Development (DFID)
- Dr. Peter Walker, Dean, Chatham University Falk School of Sustainability (formerly: Director of Feinstein International Center)

All individuals approached for the programme management board agreed to join, and we have worked to collaborate and schedule meetings with others who may be interested in the programme, such as humanitarian evaluators in Save the Children and academics working at the intersection of humanitarian topics and systematic reviews.

3.2.3 Review Commissioning Panel

FIC assembled a Review Commissioning Panel, consisting of **Erin Boyd**, **Roxanne Krystalli**, **Dr. Dan Maxwell**, **Dr. Eleanor Ott**, **Dr. Elizabeth Stites**, and **Dr. Patrick Webb**. The Review Commissioning Panel worked to assemble the pieces of the question development process to decide on which questions to put forward to commission, propose the wording of those questions, and plan for the briefing notes for each question. The Commissioning panel will put together these briefing notes.

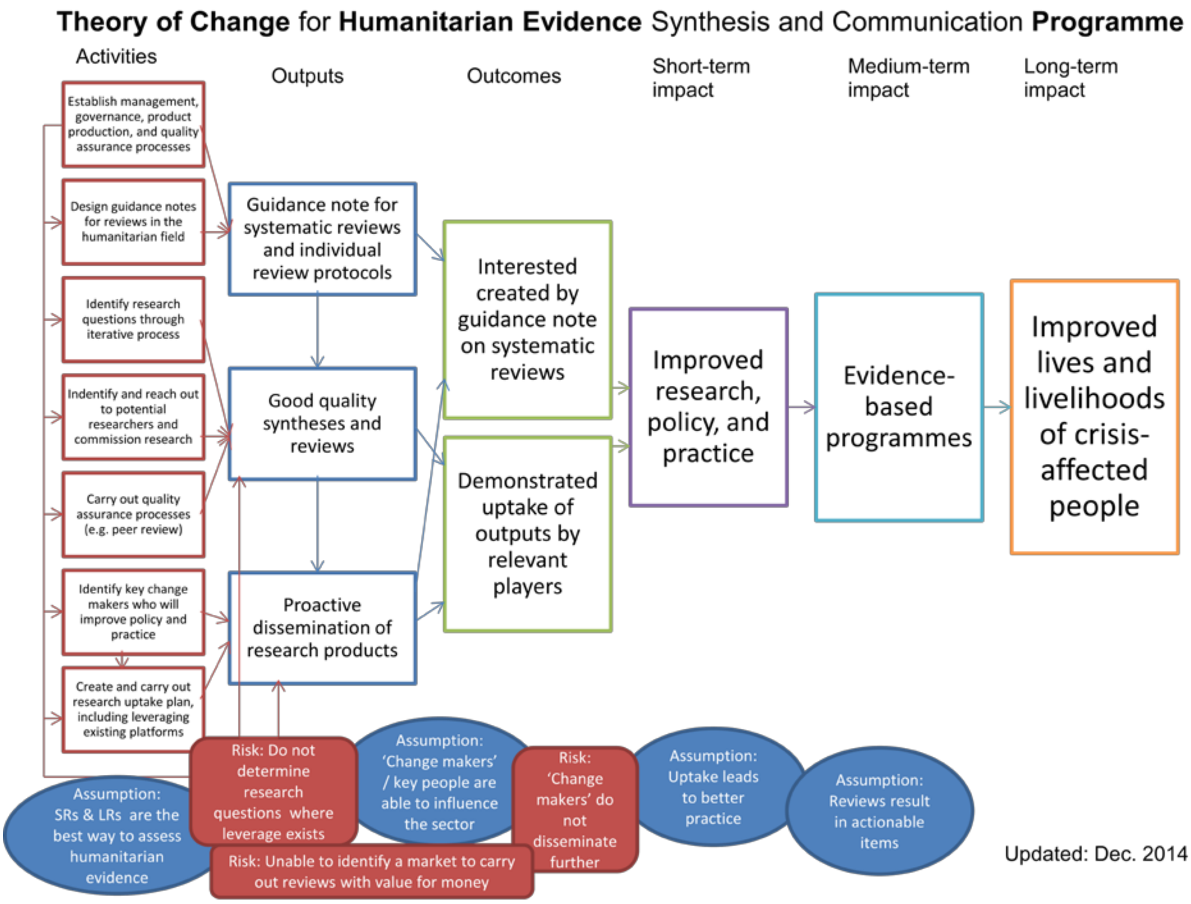
3.2.4 Pool of potential reviewers

A list of example reviewers was established and general outreach took place for reviewers. The formal pool of peer reviewers will be established after the review questions are set firm, and this pool is an ongoing process. The pool of potential reviews was submitted to DFID in an excel accompanying the inception report.

3.3 Theory of change

The theory of change was established early in the programme in a specific Oxfam-FIC meeting, led by Dr. Vivien Walden. It was revisited twice in the inception period, including in the inception workshop. The theory of change built off conversations in the inception workshop and continued to be discussed and refined after the meeting. We will formally revisit the theory of change in the implementation period.

Theories of change for interventions focused on research uptake are often complex, 'hidden' and dynamic throughout a programme's lifetime. It is therefore vital to unpack and understand change – what it is and how it happens – not just as a one off, but continuously throughout a programme's lifespan. As DFID's guidance on research uptake notes, at outcome level, there is a tendency in research uptake performance frameworks to focus on changes to written policies, with little recognition of other ways in which attitudes, behaviours, and practices may be influenced. In fast moving policy environments, it is also important that indicators are developed and refined along with the theory of change throughout the lifespan of the programme. For these reasons, we have built in review of theory of change and the monitoring framework at various points throughout this programme.



For the annual report, the programme presented and will continue to present outputs progress against the Humanitarian Innovation and Evidence Programme (HIEP) logframe. A monitoring plan was presented with the annual report and first reporting, and more detailed, revised indicators for research uptake are discussed in this report in that section.

3.4 Programme management manual

Oxfam GB led in putting together the Programme Management Manual, an extensive document submitted with the full Inception Report. The Programme Management Manual includes detailed finance, procurement, and administrative procedures and guidelines, including draft application materials for contracts and draft contracts. The terms of references for the governance boards and committees were submitted with the first reporting.

4 INCEPTION ACTIVITIES: SECTOR MAPPING, SURVEY, AND KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

This section details the sector mapping, survey, and key informant interviews.

4.1 Sector mapping

With the help of members of the Review Commissioning Panel and two FIC Research Assistants, the Programme team mapped the following parameters, a detailed spreadsheet of which was submitted to DFID in the Supplemental Excel Annex:

- **Networks for dissemination of completed reviews:** This refers to individuals or organisations that can help spread the word about the programme and share its outputs. Ideally, these individuals/organisations have wide reach within their respective sectors, are interested in the specific findings of our reviews, or both.
- **Networks/email lists:** These are spaces (whether e-lists/listservs or online forums) in which the programme team can post the link to the survey, Requests for Proposals, as well as completed outputs. This includes the 4,000-person FIC listserv, as well as Oxfam GB's country offices and regional networks. This also includes sub-lists for **researcher networks** to target with the Call for Proposals, **subject-specific networks** to target with the Call for Proposals (and subsequent products), and **francophone networks**/organisations.
- **Blogs/websites for guest posts:** This refers to websites, both within FIC/Oxfam GB and beyond, in which staff can guest post about the program, as part of the dissemination and research uptake strategy.
- **Key informants:** This refers to experts the programme team intended to interview as the programme took shape. The spreadsheet included experts in the methodologies of conducting evidence-based humanitarian research and practice, or in a specific subject.
- **Southern-based researchers:** The Research Assistants and select members of the Review Commissioning Panel conducted an extensive effort to map networks of Southern-based researchers, as well as name individual researchers who can serve as 'nodes' in the dissemination of Requests for Proposals and other programme outputs.
- **Events/conferences:** These are possible events on evidence-based research and/or humanitarian affairs for the Oxfam GB team to attend.

In addition to mapping networks, stakeholders, and events, the team mapped evidence synthesis products in the humanitarian sector, in order to avoid duplication of existing work with the Humanitarian Evidence Programme reviews. The Oxfam and FIC programme managers and a FIC Research Assistant helped to identify (a) completed literature, systematic, and practice reviews in the humanitarian field; (b) ongoing or recently-commissioned reviews that may not have a finished product; and (c) background documents that are not evidence synthesis outputs themselves, but provide relevant information on how to conduct an evidence synthesis in the international development and/or humanitarian fields. A later section of this report elaborates on how the Review Commissioning Panel has utilised this mapping exercise to select potential topics for the Humanitarian Evidence Programme reviews. Finally, the FIC

Program Manager is having an ongoing conversation with Jeannie Annan (IRC) and Phil Davies (3ie), both of whom are on the Programme Advisory Board, about comparing, sharing, and updating these results in the future, as well as reformatting them in a way that could be useful to others concerned with evidence synthesis in this sector.

In addition to the survey and sector mapping, key informant interviews/discussions took place. The Tufts Institutional Review Board is reviewed the interview script to ensure compliance with ethical requirements. Roxanne Krystalli and Ellie Ott interviewed 43 key informants.

4.2 Survey

In the first half of the inception period, FIC and Oxfam developed a **survey**, which launched on October 1, 2014 via a robust communication strategy. Prior to launching, the FIC team pilot tested the survey. The intended participants in the survey were researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in the humanitarian sector from a variety of different institutional perspectives. The survey aimed at soliciting input in topic areas in need of evidence synthesis in the humanitarian sector, invited suggestions of particular research questions within those areas, and collected data related to dissemination and research uptake that can inform programme strategy.

As of December 23, the survey had solicited 273 responses from individuals based in 55 different countries with an average of 15 years of experience. The 270 responses that had been registered by November 30, 2014 were included in the deliberations of the Review Commissioning Panel, and the survey will remain open to gather data in the future, even though this data will not directly feed into topic selection presently.

Strengths of the survey data include a relatively high response (273 participants), diverse participants across humanitarian research, practice, and policy (see Annex C), as well as geographic locations, and consistent triangulation of the survey data with the data obtained through key informant interviews. Potential weaknesses of the survey data include the fact that the stated terms and concepts of interest in the responses were often vague or broad. This was particularly the case with the articulated interest in transitions from relief to development, protection issues, questions surrounding resilience, and issues related to climate change and environmental management. Further, while respondents often identified areas for further research, those areas would not necessarily be conducive to an evidence synthesis in the form of a systematic review of existing literature. Finally, some of the areas identified in the survey as high priority (e.g. evidence synthesis on cash transfers versus vouchers versus aid-in-kind) have already been the subject of numerous recent literature and systematic reviews, likely highlighting the difficulty of disseminating these evidence synthesis products and of promoting research uptake.

4.3 Key informant interviews

Conversations with key informants complemented the survey as means of identifying potential topics for literature and systematic reviews, soliciting input on the Guidance Note and format of the reviews, and receiving suggestions for the research uptake strategy. A complete list of key informants was submitted in the full inception report, and an anonymised matrix of insights from key informant interviews is available upon request. Between October and December 2014, phone or in-person interviews were carried out with 43 key informants, and the programme managers often returned to the same informant multiple times. By design, not all key informants were able to comment on all aspects of the program, from potential topics for reviews to approaches to evidence synthesis, so the programme team aimed to draw on diverse perspectives and expertise, including the views of members of the Programme Advisory Board, humanitarian specialists, specialists in systematic reviews or other types of evidence synthesis, and communication experts. Key informant conversations were particularly useful for follow-up during the Review Commissioning Process, especially with staff at FIC and Oxfam GB, who helped the programme team understand the scope of potential questions and refine their phrasing throughout the commissioning process.

The combined data from the survey and key informant interviews formed the basis of consideration during the Review Commissioning Panel deliberations about topics for Humanitarian Evidence Programme systematic and rigorous literature reviews, as discussed below.

For the inception period, the survey, interviews, and stakeholder mapping informed the research uptake strategy, the determination of research questions, guidance note for the reviews, and quality assurance processes.

5 INCEPTION ACTIVITIES: RESEARCH DESIGN

Although this programme does not carry out primary research, commissioning research and being clear about quality requires a design of its own. This section covers the creation of the evidence synthesis guidance note, available in Annex B; the process for developing the systematic review questions; next steps; reflections on the review commissioning process; and, the proposed review questions.

5.1 Evidence synthesis guidance note

The purposes of the note are three-fold: First, given that the systematic review approach to evidence synthesis has been more commonly used in the natural sciences and recently in international development, the guidance note proposes a way to tailor systematic reviews to the types of data and qualities of evidence available in the humanitarian field. In this way, the team hopes that the guidance note can become part of an ongoing conversation about evidence-based research, policy, and practice in the humanitarian field. Second, the guidance note sets a standard for how to carry out these reviews as part of the Humanitarian Evidence Programme and can aid potential applicants in preparing stronger bids that meet programme team expectations. Finally, the successful bidders selected to carry out the reviews will be expected to consult the guidance note for important considerations during the protocol development stage and throughout their review.

The process for Guidance Note development was iterative and consultative, and it included the extensive reading of background literature on evidence synthesis outputs, both in the social sciences and beyond. The guidance note drew upon the systematic review expertise of the Oxfam Programme and Communications Manager and the FIC Program Manager's experience at an *Evidence Aid* workshop on carrying out systematic reviews in the humanitarian field. Further, conversations with key informants shed light on the format that would be most useful for these reviews, the considerations that a Guidance Note should include, and ways to overcome challenges in adapting this tool to the humanitarian sector. Finally, the FIC team, in collaboration with Oxfam GB, reviewed Guidance Note drafts in an iterative process to arrive at the current version.

Originally, the team developed two guidance notes: one on how to carry out a systematic review in the humanitarian field and one on how to carry out a rigorous literature review in the humanitarian field. The Programme Advisory Board provided feedback on these drafts before, and during the January 2015 meeting they proposed and a consensus emerged to present one note. The Guidance Note will be published in the Call for Proposals and on programme web pages.

The guidance note is available in the Annex beginning on page 38.

5.2 Proposed review questions

The below list represents the proposed questions for the evidence synthesis products the Humanitarian Evidence Programme will commission between January 2015 and

December 2016. The process by which the programme team arrived at the questions is discussed in the next section. In addition to the guidance note, a briefing paper will accompany each question. In the latter document, the programme team will explain its interest in the particular evidence synthesis and provide any guidance on the scope, interventions or outcomes of interest, in order to assist the review teams in defining the terms, setting the eligibility criteria for studies, and devising the review protocol. We anticipate some questions requiring more resources than others. Guidance from the Review Commissioning Panel and Programme Advisory Board on defining the scope of the question will be incorporated into the briefing notes for each question.

The programme team plans to commission the first three questions in the list below in February 2015. The remaining questions will be refined to incorporate both lessons from the commissioning process and additional feedback from the Review Commissioning Panel and key informants, as needed. Section 5.4 covers the next steps.

List of questions

Nutrition review (anticipated being more resource intensive): What is the evidence on the relationship between recovery and/or cure rates and relapse, default rates and/or repeated episodes in the treatment of acute malnutrition in humanitarian emergencies?

Shelter review: What is the evidence on the impacts of different shelter and settlement strategies in the immediate aftermath of and recovery period following humanitarian emergencies?

Markets review: What kinds of market support interventions have shown impacts on household food security in humanitarian crises?

WASH review (anticipated being more resource intensive): What is the impact of WASH interventions on prevalence of communicable diseases in flood emergencies?

Mental health review: What are the effects of mental health and psychosocial support interventions on affected populations in humanitarian emergencies?

Child protection review: What is the impact of protection interventions on unaccompanied minors and separated children in humanitarian emergencies?

Targeting assistance review: Given that food needs in humanitarian emergencies often dictate the nature of targeting, what is the evidence for the appropriateness and efficacy of using these targeting approaches for non-food assistance?

Partnerships review: What is the evidence on whether there is increased humanitarian effectiveness when international actors partner with local NGOs during emergency response?

Nutrition review (anticipated being more resource intensive): What is the impact of behaviour change communications on infant and young child feeding practices in humanitarian emergencies?

WASH review: What motivates people to adopt behavioural change or community action with regard to WASH?

Exploratory questions

The following questions are areas of interest that have emerged from the survey, key informant interviews, Review Commissioning Panel deliberations and Programme Advisory Board feedback. Prior to deciding whether to commission, the programme team will undertake further scoping assessments in order to assess the feasibility of an evidence synthesis and refine the scope of the question.

Identifying populations in need in urban settings review: What are the different practices to identify populations in need in humanitarian emergencies in urban settings?

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning review: What is the evidence of effects of monitoring and evaluation systems on humanitarian actions and outcomes?

Accountability review: Do programs that include specific mechanisms for accountability to beneficiaries deliver better humanitarian outcomes?

Remittances review: What is the impact of remittances on local populations in humanitarian crises or after natural disasters?

5.3 Developing the review questions

A list of review questions were submitted to DFID and the Programme Advisory Board in December 2014. A revised list of review questions is listed above, incorporating feedback from Programme Advisory Board members and DFID personnel. Additionally, a phone conversation took place between the Programme Management Board, Tarah Friend, and Joanna Macrae to discuss the review questions and DFID's comments.

The proposed questions were born out of an 8-step, iterative process of deliberation, depicted graphically in Annex A and described in detail below.

The initial data the Review Commissioning Panel considered consisted of the following:

- **Coded survey data:** Through a two-day mapping and coding process, the Program Manager at FIC organised the survey data into thematic categories for the Review Commissioning Panel to consider. Questions that were expressly not humanitarian in nature were eliminated from this pool. At this stage, questions were not formulated in a format conducive to a systematic review (i.e. phrased in terms of interventions, outcomes of interest, or both) because it was important for the Commissioning Panel to assess the raw data.
- **Matrix of key informant interview responses:** The Review Commissioning Panel received a matrix containing insight from key informants about potential

topics for evidence synthesis. Because some key informants' responses centred on advice pertaining to the format of evidence synthesis products or to research uptake, the matrix did not contain information related to proposed topics for evidence synthesis from every key informant.

- **Map of existing evidence syntheses in the humanitarian sector:** The Commissioning Panel received the spreadsheet discussed above in order to both assess the scope, format, and type of questions other systematic/literature reviews in this sector have attempted to answer and avoid duplication in the selection of Humanitarian Evidence Programme questions.
- **Results from the Evidence Aid priority-setting exercise for evidence synthesis:** In October 2013, the British NGO *Evidence Aid* sought to identify gaps in the evidence base of claims in the humanitarian sector through a survey. Although health-specific, some of the results from the *Evidence Aid* survey overlap with the themes that emerged from the Humanitarian Evidence Programme survey, and they were, therefore, included in the Review Commissioning Panel discussion.
- **Feedback from the Programme Advisory Board:** Feedback from the November 2014 meeting of the Programme Advisory Board was conveyed to the Review Commissioning Panel and factored into the prioritisation and articulation of proposed evidence synthesis questions.
- **Data from brief scoping assessments:** When the Review Commissioning Panel needed to assess the state of literature or receive additional information on the scope of potential review questions, Research Assistants carried brief scoping assessments. This was particularly useful for potential questions related to humanitarian partnerships, accountability mechanisms, and remittances.
- **Guidance on formulating systematic review questions and evidence synthesis products.** The Program Manager circulated a reading list on selecting questions for systematic and literature review questions, particularly in the field of international development from which much can be learned from humanitarian reviews. The reading list was accompanied by brief memos on the attributes of a strong question for systematic/synthesis reviews, as well as by insights from the *Evidence Aid* training on systematic reviews in the humanitarian sector.

Using the above data, members of the Review Commissioning Panel individually reformulated the existing questions to mirror the format of questions for evidence synthesis in the form of systematic and 'rigorous literature' reviews. ('Rigorous literature reviews' were later called systematic reviews/evidence syntheses as they are adhering to the same systematic review principles.) They also reacted, based on their own expertise, to the suitability of the proposed questions for evidence synthesis. The Program Manager collated and synthesised this data, and it formed the basis of subsequent Review Commissioning Panel discussions over email, Skype, phone, and in person. Between rounds of discussion, the FIC and Oxfam programme managers consulted with additional key informants as needed in order to identify specific research questions within broader topic areas of interest, or assess the state of literature in a particular field. In later rounds of deliberation, Review Commissioning Panel members were asked to rank their proposed questions in order of priority, as well as carefully select each word in the phrasing of questions to ensure it conveys the intended meaning to potential bidders.

After six rounds of feedback through the Review Commissioning Panel, the Programme Management Board finalised a memo to solicit the advice of the Advisory Board on the proposed questions. FIC and Oxfam staff collated Advisory Board feedback and information from a consultation with DFID, and the Programme Management Board convened anew to arrive at the latest list of proposed questions.

5.4 Next steps

The draft questions were submitted to DFID for feedback in the inception period, and the full inception report formally submitted the initial review questions to DFID. The Programme Management Board has identified the first three questions for commissioning in February 2015. Lessons from this first cycle of commissioning will be integrated in the process throughout 2015 and will inform subsequent question selection from the existing list. For some of the questions on the proposed list, the programme team wishes to undertake additional consultations to assess the feasibility and refine the scope. Such questions have been marked accordingly and these consultations are expected to take place in the first quarter of 2015.

Each Humanitarian Evidence Programme review question will be accompanied by a specific Terms of Reference and Briefing Paper, published in the Call for Proposals. The Terms of Reference explains the range of costs expected for each review and expectations for the reviewers. The Programme is piloting requiring question specific advisory boards for those reviews anticipated being more resource intensive. In the Briefing Note, the programme team explains its interest in the particular evidence synthesis and provide any guidance on the scope, interventions or outcomes of interest, in order to assist the review teams in defining the terms, setting the eligibility criteria for studies, and devising the review protocol. During the Review Commissioning Panel discussions, panel members proposed information that should be included in the Briefing Papers.

Based on consultations with the Advisory Board and DFID, all Briefing Papers will contain the following instructions, in addition to any subject-specific instructions that relate to the particular topic at hand:

1. Specify to which type of humanitarian crisis (natural disaster, conflict, other, etc.) the findings apply.
2. Distinguish between urban and rural settings.
3. If large regional/geographic variation exists (i.e. findings apply specifically to East Asia or West Africa), make a note of it in the review.
4. Distinguish between displaced populations and affected communities that are not displaced.
5. Disaggregate data by sex and age.
6. Each briefing paper should name specific interventions the programme team is interested in, as well as specific outcomes, where possible – even if reviewers will name more interventions and outcomes in their proposed protocols.
7. In questions looking at the effectiveness of interventions, add an additional sub-question on cataloguing approaches and separately assess the evidence – e.g.

"What are the different mental health support interventions used in protracted crises? What is the effectiveness evidence of the effects of different approaches/interventions?"

8. For questions where the data/method may not be conducive to answering queries about 'impact' or 'effects', reviewers should focus on 'influence' and 'contribution', as the literature may be observational (not experimental).
9. To the extent that information about the cost-effectiveness or value-for-money of different interventions is available in the studies synthesized, reviewers should include it in their analysis.
10. To the extent that information about why certain interventions work or do not work in particular settings or contexts is available in the studies synthesized, reviewers should include it in their analysis.

The Briefing Papers for the first three reviews the programme team will commission were written in consultation with the Review Commissioning Panel in January 2015.

5.5 Reflections on the process to decide on reviews

The programme team aimed to make the process of arriving at the proposed questions for evidence synthesis transparent, consultative, data-driven, and iterative. Strengths of the process included the ways in which large, diverse data from key informants, the survey, and the *Evidence Aid* priority-setting exercise informed the decisions of the Review Commissioning Panel. The lengthy and diverse experiences of panel members in the humanitarian sector, across the fields of research, policy, and practice, further contributed positively to the process. Similarly, the diverse expertise on the Programme Advisory Board and the timely and constructive feedback from board members aided in the selection of the questions for reviews. The iterative nature of the process, which allowed for subsequent consultations with key informants and subject-matter experts to refine the scope and phrasing of questions or assess the feasibility of evidence synthesis aided the panel's decision-making. Finally, insight from the *Evidence Aid* training, background reading on systematic and literature reviews, and methodological tips on systematic reviews from key informants deepened the panel's understanding of the suitability of particular questions to this type of evidence synthesis.

In the time frame to propose questions, it was not feasible to undertake lengthy, detailed scoping assessments for each question. As a result, reviewers will have to know the literature well or conduct these assessments during protocol development stage of their review process. While the challenge of not having this data for each question was partly mitigated by consulting the IRC and 3ie gap maps, as well as the brief scoping assessments by research assistants on specific questions, additional time and resources to conduct detailed scoping assessments during the Review Commissioning Panel deliberations would have aided the process. Logistically, the team would have benefited from having the Programme Advisory Board meeting, as well as the Review Commissioning Panel meetings, in person, rather than on the phone or Skype, but funds did not render this possible. Finally, there is inherently some bias in the process of selection of questions for evidence synthesis, though the programme team attempted to mitigate that by promoting a data-driven, consultative, iterative process and by seeking diverse feedback from specialists throughout the question selection cycle.

6 INCEPTION ACTIVITIES: RESEARCH UPTAKE STRATEGY

This section presents the research uptake strategy. More detail on the research from which it the strategy stems is available in Annex C. The more detailed uptake strategy is available upon request.

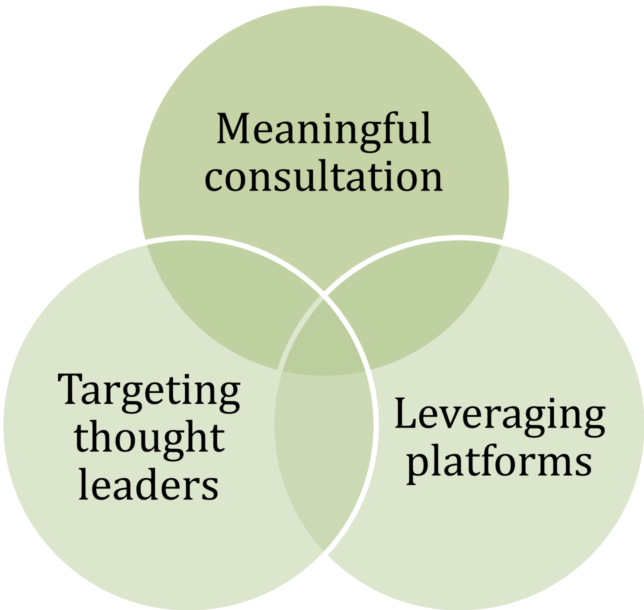
The research uptake strategy is integral to ensure the programme does more than create quality research about emergencies. The strategy facilitates the process of research into action. The tailoring of the uptake strategy will take place after individual research questions have been confirmed, but the core principles and approaches remain the same and are presented in this document.

The core principles in the research uptake strategy include:

- **Flexibility: adapting when approaches work or do not work and as the programme develops; and**
- **Value for money: ensuring the research uptake strategy is best using resources and existing platforms.**

The core approaches of the research uptake strategy are:

- **Meaningful consultation throughout the life process of the programme;**
- **Targeting of key thoughts leaders; and,**
- **Leveraging existing platforms and using a multi-channel communications strategy to increase reach.**



The strategy builds upon Oxfam's experience, the literature, key informant interviews, a survey with 273 respondents, and a mapping of strategic leaders in the humanitarian field. From experience and these sources, this strategy makes the assumptions that the programme needs to focus not only on promoting the research, but also on practices of knowledge production and the political atmosphere; research uptake should to focus on the Global North and Global South; and, uptake requires time. More background on the literature around research uptake can be found in Appendix C. This section is intended to discuss the core of the strategy.

This strategy is designed for the programme team. Reviewers are required to be willing to assist with research uptake and create a mapping of their networks, but reviewers will chosen primarily for their ability to deliver quality products with value for money. For those reviews targeted for increased intensity, review teams will be expected to develop their own Advisory Board for consultation while other reviewers will be expected to consult technical experts, included ones suggested by the programme management team. On balance, the programme is prioritising a review team's ability to produce quality research, and the programme team is focusing on leveraging the research uptake networks cultivated by Oxfam and FIC.

Meaningful consultation throughout the life process of the review

Meaningful consultation means not only involving key stakeholders before commissioning the reviews, during the reviews, and after the reviews, but also continuous learning and incorporating expert advice into the programme.

Before commissioning the reviews
From the inception to commissioning the reviews, the programme is shaped thorough:

- **Constructing the advisory board** with as key thought leaders with a balance of expertise in the humanitarian field. The advisory board offers high-level advice for the programme and helps champion the programme.
- **Developing the review questions, guidance note, and research uptake strategy through multi-stage iterative processes** including input from 273 respondents to a survey and 43 key informants, including DFID advisors.
- **Leveraging existing platforms** to advertise the Call for Proposals widely.

The process to determine and commission the questions allows for a 'quick win' – showing progress and that the involvement of the key informants has helped shape the programme and ensuring individuals are invested in the programme. This also encourages the dissemination of the Call for Proposals, a wider applicant pool, and hopefully higher-quality products.

Although this programme is not aiming to do capacity building, the programme is de facto doing so. Rigorous research syntheses methodologies are novel and not well-understood in the humanitarian field. As such, the programme management team has been having informal discussions about these concepts and expectations for the reviews. Additionally, a guidance note for undertaking a systematic review in the humanitarian field has been developed to help reviewers and other researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers to understand the rigorous evidence synthesis process.

During the review process
Short background pieces are being written for each review question, in consultation with the Review Commissioning Panel and technical experts, so that reviewers understand the basis for questions from the beginning. During the review process, we aim to ensure there is an initial targeted discussion to ensure this understanding, and to put researchers in touch with others from the field.

Key informants will also help to tailor the research uptake strategy during this process.

For uptake, the programme team plans to participate in relevant forums in order to garner interest in the programme and the review questions and submitted mapping of some such forums. This 'flags' the review for interest while the review is taking place. Also, for London-based researchers or those passing through London, we hope to present initial findings in an informal brownbag lunch or other forum at DFID.

After the review process
After a review is completed, a summary of findings and the full report will be targeted towards those indentified in the next section as key stakeholders and others identified throughout the process of the reviews. Personalised emails and calls will be sent out. Additionally, dissemination will take place through emailing all stakeholders mapped in the stakeholder mapping process. In addition to the dissemination by the programme team, we will encourage reviewers to give presentations and webinars and leverage existing events and forums. Per the feedback from the inception period, the written format of findings will be presented in research briefs and short infographics, and other communications outputs will be used as appropriate.

Identification and targeting of key thought leaders

From the beginning, the programme aimed to map relevant stakeholders; take into consideration their needs and how the research may be used; tailor products and communications channels that would help facilitate evidence-informed discussions and work; and incorporate these stakeholders into the meaningful consultation process previously discussed. This section goes over broad results from the iterative mapping of relevant stakeholders and deciding who to focus on with the limited resources of the programme. Identification of key thought leaders considered who had power and sway as well as the ability of the programme to access and influence organisations and individuals.

The key stakeholders mapped roughly into the three groups previously mentioned: policy makers and funders, practitioners, and researchers and research synthesisers. The primary ways in which individuals use information depends on the role they play:

- **Policy makers and funders** expressed interest in knowing and funding what works as well as an interest in a proof of concept for these reviews to fund and use them in the future. They expressed an interest in summaries, presentations, and an access to full-reports.
- **Practitioners** may use the findings to undertake and promote evidence-informed practice, to stop practices that are not working, and to communicate findings to partners and collaborators. Some practitioners expressed interest in using findings not only to strengthen their work, but also to become a thought leader and influence the broader humanitarian field. They expressed particular interest in policy and practice briefs.
- **Producers of research and research syntheses** expressed an interest in applying systematic review and rigorous review methodology to the humanitarian field and building off the research for their own research. In interviews, review methodologists were interested in learning from existing reviews and the application of review standards in a new context. Other

researchers were interested in the gaps identified both through the mapping and question development process as well as the gaps identified by the reviews. Although they wanted access to documents outlining standards, the protocols, and the full reviews, they also expressed an interest in short, easily-accessible summaries.

Organisations and individuals often occupy multiple roles or cut-across several categories. For example, training programmes are sometimes part of practitioner organisations or sometimes producers of research and research syntheses (e.g. universities); they will be targeted in categories as applicable. The next subsections highlight the groups or institutions in each of these categories which were picked for targeting.

Policy makers and funders
Although many individuals and organisations have policy-making capacity, we have decided to identify and target individuals at the following key institutions:

- **DFID**
- **USAID OFDA/PRM**
- **ECHO**
- The **UN System** based upon the topics chosen; UN agencies include, but are not limited to:
    - UNOCHA,
    - UNHCR,
    - UNICEF,
    - WFP, and
    - FAO.
- Global South policy makers, such as **ASEAN** and the **African Union**.

These institutions have leaders who focus on evidence as well as humanitarian funding, policy, and coordination, and we believe there is potential space for influence with these policy-making bodies. The programme team is maintaining an excel document with key individuals in many of these institutions.

Practitioners
The exact practitioners targeted will depend on the research questions and messages from the research. As with the policymakers and other categories, organisations often specialise in topical areas. Nonetheless, in general we are targeting the following practitioners and networks:

- The **Start Network of NGOs** including **Oxfam** and **International Rescue Committee (IRC)**
- **The International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)**
- **International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)**
- **Global South networks and practitioners**, potentially including, but not limited to:
    - Asian Disaster Reduction & Response Network (ADRRN),
    - Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC),
    - Aga Khan Development Network, particularly their Focus Humanitarian Assistance Agency (FOCUS), and

    - Those individuals mapped by the programme as Southern-based practitioners, often in FIC's wide network.

The organisations and networks listed draw upon practitioners who are current or potential thought leaders in evidence-based humanitarian research and policy. In particular, the International Rescue Committee is widely recognised as a strong leader in rigorous research and evaluation, and their Director of Research and Evaluation is on the Programme Advisory Board. The Humanitarian Evidence Programme also wants to specifically disseminate to Southern-based practitioners who are doing much of the humanitarian work. In Asia, the Advisory Board Member Dr. Heng Aik Cheng is on the Executive Committee of ADRRN. Additionally, Oxfam has a close relationship with ADPC. These practitioner organisations represent areas where we believe there will both be leverage and influence for the wider humanitarian field.

Producers of research and research syntheses

The third target audience is the producers of research and research synthesis products – the academics, NGOs evaluation specialists, consultants, think tanks, central repositories, and other involved in the research-synthesis process. In many ways, this audience is easier to communicate with because of the high levels of understanding around the methodology and natural engagement with research and research synthesis. However, 'researchers' offer their own challenges including differences in technical language, perceptions of competition, and low-levels of understanding of research contexts in the humanitarian field for non-humanitarian researchers. This means that there often needs to be catered messages and that there is inherent capacity building around understanding humanitarian contexts for communications with this community.

In mapping this sector, we decided to target:

- **ODI** and **ALNAP**;
- **Systematic review organisations**, including **3ie** and **Evidence Aid**; and,
- **Academic networks**, including the International Humanitarian Studies Association and Tufts network of researchers in the humanitarian field.

The Programme already has close relationships with producers of research and research and research syntheses, including Advisory Board Members from ALNAP/ODI, 3ie, and Evidence Aid. Targeting academic networks allows uptake by researchers who may be dispersed geographically.

In targeting researchers, we can build interest and capacity around the humanitarian context of research, ensure value for money through leveraging of existing research platforms, collaborate to map research gaps and to have research build off of review findings, and help build an evidence-based research movement.

Communications/media strategy: Leveraging existing platforms

The crux of the communications strategy is leveraging existing platforms in various ways, such as by posting results, communicating with the media, and using email lists. Despite the existence of various resources, findings often are not communicated or disseminated. The Humanitarian Evidence Programme adds value through the careful consideration of these resources and communications. Although it not possible to decide what message will be communicated, it is still useful to identify many of these major platforms for communications.

Approach 1: Leverage existing platforms to post outputs

We hope to leverage existing platforms to post findings; specifically,

- DFID's research for development (R4D), the primary repository for all products;
- Oxfam's Policy and Practice;
- FIC's Publications;
- Linkages to other repositories, such as:
    - 3ie's database of systematic reviews for interventions in low- and middle-income countries and
    - Evidence Aid's list of systematic reviews for reviews with health implications in humanitarian emergencies.
- Encourage authors to submit for external peer-review publications.

In the survey, we asked individuals to, 'Please name any blogs, websites, listservs or social media feeds you consult for humanitarian research and news.' Most often, individuals listed websites. We plan to target this list for a) requesting they put a bit of news or link to the findings on their website, b) asking to distribute the findings through listservs, and c) directly posting on those websites.

Approach 2: Use existing media including social media

Announcements of grant funding and reports will be released via Oxfam's Policy and Practice website (http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk), Twitter feed (@oxfamgbpolicy), on LinkedIn, and on Facebook. FIC will also use their media channels, and we will also ask DFID to share information via their media channels (e.g. via Twitter @DFID_Research and @DFID_Evidence). Additionally, during the implementation period, at least three blogs will be written highlighting the programme and report findings. As findings are release, appropriate press releases will accompany the programme. We have mapped existing communication channels and asked where individuals receive their news and research, including media sources such as IRIN and ReliefWeb. All of these actions serve to leverage existing media to have a wider reach and impact.

Approach 3: Use highly used email lists/digests

In the survey and discussion, email lists/listservs were named as a central source for information. Email lists and digests include, but are not limited to:

- ODI updates
- DAWNS Digest: Delivering News to the Aid, Development, and Humanitarian Community
- Oxfam Policy and Practice
- FIC mail list (4,000+ individuals)
- Evidence-Based Policy in Development Network (EBPDN)
- Global Network for Disaster Reduction (GNDR)
- Subject-specific lists, such as the D-list for Markets in Crises

Approach 4: Attend existing topical and technical forums
The inception period included a mapping of key events and conferences for members of the Programme. Additionally, the Oxfam Programme and Communications Manager attended multiple relevant events in the inception period, including presenting at a forum for global evidence-based projects in health and welfare. Further sectoral events will need to be targeted with the timing of different topics of reviews. Additionally, those carrying out the reviews are encouraged to attend and present findings, particularly works in progress at DFID when there is no additional cost.

Approach 5: Building relationships including targeted phone calls, emails, and meetings
A final approach to dissemination is through a more 'old fashioned' approach of building relationships. A main finding from the key informant interviews is that many of the senior management for humanitarian and donor organisations rely on informal relationships to filter what they read and change how they perceive and use that information. We aim to get the programme and advisory boards to 'champion' the programme and encourage their contacts to do the same. The stakeholder mapping has a line to mark down if anyone involved with the Humanitarian Evidence Programme personally knows someone. In the inception period, we leveraged these contacts and relationships for particular pieces of information or to obtain an interview. This allowed for further relationships to be built. When feasible without any additional cost, programme staff met in person with relevant key informants for clearer and more personal communication. Despite the prevalence of media, we believe that the depth and trust in relationships can build research uptake.

Monitoring and evaluation of research uptake

Our monitoring and evaluation incorporates:

- **Number of full-paper quality syntheses available on open access websites**
- **Evidence of dissemination**, including:
    - Number of downloads and hits from FIC and Oxfam websites;
    - Number of blog posts; and,
    - Social media shares, including tweets and re-tweets, Facebook likes, and Linked In shares.
- **Demonstrated uptake of outputs by relevant players**, including:
    - Number of networks, websites, and thought leaders disseminating results, highlighting targeted networks; and,
    - Evidence of informal discussion, such as contacts by email, discussions with programme staff, and discussions at conferences and events.

An excel file monitoring take up for the launch of the programme was used as a pilot to highlight uptake. This processed highlighted the difficulties and need to disaggregate by targeted individuals and organisations. In discussing the monitoring and evaluation, it may only be possible to capture the creation of an environment and 'buzz' for research uptake as the formal uptake can require years.

Summary

The literature highlighted that translating research is not only a technical matter but also one of understanding the politics and climate. As discussed in the programme framework, theories of change for interventions focused on research uptake are often complex, ‘hidden’ and dynamic throughout a programme’s lifetime. By having a purposeful research uptake strategy and revisiting this strategy, the programme can aim to see what is working and what is not and take advantage of emerging opportunities. Through meaningful consultation throughout the life process of the programme, targeting of key thought leaders, and leveraging existing communications platforms, the programme is ensuring flexibility and value for money.

7 ADDITIONAL ACTIONS IN PREPARATION FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

The programme used the inception period to explore changes to the programme and take advantage of different opportunities, including through more meaningful key informant interviews and additional planning for procurement.

Key informant interviews were envisioned to play a minor role in the programme in the initial planning. They were initially planned to confirm the survey's validity. After the inception workshop they became, and were used as, an integral resource to determine the research questions, provide expert advice for the research uptake plan, and plan for the implementation period, including programme management and quality assurance.

One important additional key informant discussion was the in-person meeting with Laura Koch of DFID Systematic Review Programme, Tarah Friend, and Eleanor Ott. An open and ongoing dialogue was then commenced, and Laura provided advice on other plans, including the quality assurance process.

From the key informant interviews and advice from Advisory Board members, the market of quality reviewers and their value for money was emphasised as an issue. This was presented in the risk table and has been discussed with DFID.

In addition to regular programme management business and monthly calls, two supplemental meetings were added. The first was a call solely about decisions points to recommend for the procurement process to ensure the programme could quickly commission the first set of reviews, and the second meeting was a special video workshop taken to revise the implementation plan.

Oxfam leveraged existing resources, including the expertise of individuals in the policy and practice communications team, finance, legal, and procurement divisions to ensure the programme was recommending the best practice for value for money, ethics, and feasibility. Given the relatively small community with social science systematic review expertise as well as the small communities of researchers around some humanitarian topic areas, some of these meetings planned for potential conflicts of interests from bids.

8 INCEPTION PHASE LEARNING

From the process of launching the programme and developing the review questions, the programme team was better able to gage interest and levels of knowledge around review methodology in the humanitarian sector. The sector showed great interest in reviews, but often proposed questions that would not make good systematic or literature reviews. Overall, the humanitarian field showed low levels of knowledge of rigorous review techniques, particularly the combination of both review methodology and subject-matter expertise.

The inception period also showed the value of practitioner involvement. Involvement helped gain buy-in from practitioners for the review questions and helped the programme team choose questions that were crucial for humanitarian work. The involvement of topical experts helped outline what had already been established and researched and where gaps existed. Through involvement, practitioners and topical experts were able to feel greater ownership in the programme. The involvement of these various actors also reaffirmed the importance of research uptake. There were low levels of knowledge from many managers and some others on completed and ongoing research about the questions which they were proposing for reviews. This demonstrated a lack of research uptake from previous work.

The researcher and donor communities also reaffirmed the value of the programme, and specifically practitioner involvement. After speaking at a forum for global evidence-based health and welfare -- with the Oxford Centre for Evidence-Based Social Intervention, Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine, Evidence Aid, HIFA 2015, International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, the EQUATOR Network, Students 4 Best Evidence, the Cochrane Collaboration, the UK Cochrane Centre, and the Global Health Network -- the Humanitarian Evidence Programme received the most comments and questions, with great excitement expressed over having a practitioner-based unit commission rigorous reviews. The launch of programme and web pages (www.oxfam.org.uk/hep and fic.tufts.edu/research-item/the-humanitarian-evidence-program/) was well received. In the first month, the Oxfam launch blog (http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/blog/2014/08/beyond-good-intentions), released in coordination with World Humanitarian Day, received over 500 visits, 127 Facebook likes, 51 tweets, and additional coverage. Additionally, Ruth Levine of the Hewlett Foundation reiterated in her blog the importance of this programme.[1]

Key informants shared their experience and issues with value for money, including finding a market in the field of technical review methodological expertise combined with content expertise. The probably was increased in our risk management plan. We proactively approached DFID and began a discussion on 4 December 2014 on how respond to this learning, with contingency plans depending on the response to the first call. Learning from others doing rigorous reviews also demonstrated that technical capabilities were sometimes low, particularly with systematic reviews, and quality control processes were important. Thus, the inception report presents the quality control process in Section 10 on page 31.

[1] http://www.hewlett.org/blog/posts/friday-note-international-relief-workers-are-doing-good-better. This blog post was written in response to Ellie Ott's Oxfam blog post.

9 UPDATE: IMPLEMENTATION PHASE WORK PLAN

Below is an updated implementation phase work plan.

The revised plan combines learning from throughout the inception phase. None of the outputs were changed, although some of the language and timing around the individual activities and outputs were changed.

Implementation Phase	2015				2016			
	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec
WORKSTREAM - MANAGEMENT & GOVERNANCE								
Hold programme management board meeting								
Solicit input from commissioning panel for review process								
Hold bidding review committee meetings								
Prepare quarterly narrative reports for DFID								
Output 1: Submission of quarterly narrative reports								
Prepare annual / final reports for DFID								
Prepare eight quarterly financial reports for DFID								
Output 2: Submission of eight quarterly financials								
Annual review and planning meeting (guidance notes, quality, programme theory of change)								
Output 3: Submission of annual reports to DFID								
WORKSTREAM - RESEARCH								
Design briefing papers for commission reviews								
Initial framing of the ToR for each review								
Solicit expert feedback from the Advisory Board on the guidance note for systematic reviews in humanitarian sector (external validation)								
Internal review of protocols								
Output 4: Three review protocols assured by external QA processes and signed off by DFID								
Assemble and launch Call for Proposals								
Appraisal of bids by bid committee using scoring criteria								
Output 5 (a): Terms of reference agreed with and contracts issued to reviewers								
Peer review (three protocols and all full reviews)								
On-going management of contracts with suppliers								
Output 5 (b): Draft review reports submitted to DFID for QA and sign off								
Output 6: Internal evaluation of guidance note including reflections and learning on use of evidence synthesis in the humanitarian sector								
WORKSTREAM - RESEARCH UPTAKE								
Summarisation / packaging of review products (briefs, summaries, blogs, etc)								
Participation in humanitarian sector events to disseminate reviews and promote uptake								

Rolling plan for dissemination/uptake with policy-makers, key informants etc								
Communications & dissemination events and activities to include publications online, media, social media, blogs etc.								
Summation of all reviews for e-book								
Outsource digital assets								
Output 7: range of knowledge outputs (papers, summaries, blogs)								
Output 8: e-book/summation of all reviews								
Output 9: Completed uptake strategy								

10 QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESS

The quality assurance process developed throughout the inception period, as we learned from DFID's systematic review experience, key informants, and the Advisory Board. The narrative below lays out the primary quality assurance processes before commissioning the reviews, during the bidding review process, as the reviews are underway, and after a full draft has been submitted.

Humanitarian Evidence Programme Quality Assurance Processes

I. Quality assurance prior to selection of those carrying out the reviews

- The creation of a Guidance Note on Evidence Synthesis in the Humanitarian Field provides detailed information on the components, methodology, and standards for Humanitarian Evidence Programme reviews. The guidance note also lays out existing resources that researchers carrying the reviews will be expected to consult throughout the process.
- A review template, based on DFID's existing review templates for evidence synthesis, will outline the desired sequencing of the components, thereby further ensuring uniformity in the format and standards across all review products.
- Detailed Call for Proposal and Terms of Reference (ToR) lay out expectations for the researchers carrying out the reviews, as well as set check-in points during which the Programme Team can assess the quality of the work as it is being carried out.

II. Quality assurance during the bidding review process

- The Bidding Review Committee, whose task is to select the researchers carrying out the evidence synthesis reviews, will ensure adherence to the standards laid out in the Call for Proposals, ToR, and the guidance note. Members of the Bidding Review Committee will receive a scoring matrix for bids and guidelines for the scoring process in order to ensure both rigor and transparency.
- If researchers have carried out literature or systematic reviews before, they will be asked to submit relevant references to the Bidding Review Committee.

III. Quality assurance while the reviews are underway

- The researchers carrying out the reviews will agree to a timeline of submissions and a check-in process with the programme team shortly after the bid is awarded. The contract will include break points if products are not being delivered up to expected standards.
- The systematic review protocol, detailing inclusion criteria, search strings and plans for combining data, will be a considerable deliverable for the researchers carrying out the reviews. In turn, this review protocol will be quality assured by the programme team. For selected 'more intensive' reviews, the protocol will be peer reviewed by outside subject-matter experts.

IV. Quality assurance after a full draft of the review has been submitted to the programme team

- The programme team will conduct an initial assessment to ensure that the review contains all necessary components up to reasonable standards, per the Guidance Note, Call for Proposals, template and protocol. If that is the case, the programme team will forward the full draft of the review to the identified peer reviewers. If that is not the case, the programme team will suggest edits to the researchers carrying out the review.
- **Development of peer review process and database**
    - The programme team has solicited expert opinion on peer review standards and processes through key informant interviews during inception.
    - During the inception period, the Feinstein International Center (FIC) team built a database of potential peer reviewers. This includes researchers and practitioners who have been involved in the humanitarian sector, many of whom have been engaged in a peer review process for acclaimed journals or 'grey literature' in the past, as well as researchers with systematic review expertise and methodological expertise. The database lists the areas of methodological, thematic, and geographical expertise for each potential peer reviewer, as well as their institutional affiliation and past experience with peer review processes.
    - Once the programme team confirms that the full draft of the review meets the standards laid out in the Guidance Note, Call for Proposals, template, and protocol, they will contact peer reviewers. Each peer reviewer will receive:
        - A brief explanation of the Humanitarian Evidence Programme;
        - Terms of Reference laying out the expectations for his/her involvement;
        - The Call for Proposals and ToR for the evidence synthesis that the peer reviewer will be quality assuring;
        - 'Guidelines for peer reviewers,' which the FIC team will develop during the Implementation Phase of the programme, based on similar, existing documents in peer organisations;
        - An invitation to participate in a call with the Programme Manager to receive further information.
    - Once a peer reviewer accepts the assignment, s/he will be expected to complete it in 4 to 6 weeks. Upon submission of detailed comments to the programme team in the format laid out in the ToR and in the guidelines for peer reviewers, the peer reviewer will receive an honorarium.
- The programme team will convey the peer reviewers' comments to the researchers who submitted the full draft of the literature/systematic reviews, and they will jointly agree on a timeline for incorporating the necessary edits.

11 RISK MANAGEMENT

The following reiterates and updates the risks and risk management for the programme.

Oxfam GB and FIC share DFID's assessment that this is overall a medium risk programme. Over the past few years, there has been rapid growth in the market for high quality evaluations, reviews, and other research products, and there is some evidence for increased demand for such products from within the humanitarian sector. However, demand is patchy and appears centred on stakeholders based in Western Europe and North America. One challenge is to translate enhanced supply of high quality research products into evidence-based changes in practice amongst front-line humanitarian workers. With the rapid growth in demand for humanitarian evidence products, there also is a danger of saturation in a limited market, and this represents a risk for delivery of high quality research outputs (both in terms of the capacity, numbers of potential suppliers, and the costs they demand). Because of the nature of humanitarian work and contexts in which it takes place, there is a greater risk than in other development fields that sufficient evidence is either not present or not accessible in the grey literature to enable researchers to draw firm conclusions.

The risks below are adjusted based on the points above, and the mitigation strategies are adjusted based on the final contract (e.g. leveraging existing platforms for research uptake and adjusted to the budget). Additionally, the inception period emphasised the limited market of high quality research providers and that the current review prices are below market rate; for this reason, the programme team and DFID have discussed ways forward and will manage the risk if it is realised.

We anticipate that the mitigation strategies can satisfactorily address the risks.

Risk	Probability	Impact	Management/Mitigation
Limited/no quality bids - Price is low compared market cost - Limited number/ limited capacity of high quality research providers	High	High	- Mapping exercise includes potential research providers - Outreach to support marketing/ dissemination of calls - Avoid commissioning large numbers of reviews at once - Offered additional mitigation strategies to DFID
Poor quality outputs	Medium	High	- ToR written with flexibility in ending the contract if quality is below expectations - Proposed increased review budget in line with the competitive market to ensure value (i.e. high-quality) - Set points to review quality of outputs - Use of paid peer reviewers - Tight ongoing management of reviews to ensure quality
- Evidence does not penetrate beyond a	Medium	Medium	- Involve practitioners (particularly southern humanitarians) at every

small cadre of thought leaders - Evidence generated is not seen as relevant by key target audiences			stage of the research cycle, from identification of questions, through collection of studies to communication strategy - Leverage existing wide-reaching platforms
Insufficient evidence can be found to satisfy criteria for systematic reviews	Medium	Medium	- Allow for longer research time periods (approx. 12 months). - To ensure VfM, use break clauses in supplier contracts to allow conversion to literature review where possible/desirable. - Careful process for determining the research questions - Involve practitioners at all stages in the research cycle to enable greater access to grey literature.
Duplication of work being undertaken by other agencies	Low	Medium	- DFID have established a coordination group on Systematic Reviews with other donors to reduce duplication. - The programme is using a strong, iterative consultative process to determine review questions - Detailed mapping process of ongoing and completed reviews, further reviewed by 3ie and IRC

12 APPROACH TO ANTI-CORRUPTION AND ANTI-FRAUD

In accordance with the reporting on anti-corruption, the next section covers how this programme will both adhere to DFID's approach and follow Oxfam's approach and policies.

The programme contract from DFID included Clause 17on 'Corruption, Commission, Discounts, and Fraud.' This main contract was attached to the subcontract to ensure the enshrining of DFID's anti-corruption and anti-fraud policies. Both Oxfam and FIC have also received a copy of DFID's Guidance on Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption,

Additionally, Oxfam GB takes fraud, theft, bribery, money-laundering, terrorist support and nepotism seriously and is committed to ensuring that its systems and practices reduce the risk of occurrences. Oxfam GB commits to reducing them to an absolute minimum. Suspected or actual cases will be vigorously and promptly investigated and appropriate action will be taken.

Oxfam GB's **Anti-Fraud and Theft Policy** sets out the responsibilities of all managers, staff and volunteers to deter, prevent, detect and respond to fraud. Oxfam GB has a **control framework** governing management, financial and logistical controls with both preventative and detective functions. These are set out in a number of clear documents including a mandatory procedures document, finance and logistics manuals and a suite of policies, including (for example) those relating to expenses, expenditure authorisation and the employment of relatives. The control framework includes a Code of Conduct that all staff members are required to sign upon employment. The control framework is reviewed and supported by an Internal Audit Department.

In additional to the **'overt' reporting regime** set by the Anti-Fraud & Theft Policy, a Disclosure of Malpractice in the Workplace policy creates a **'whistleblowing' line and e-mail** in Oxfam GB's five working languages, enabling anonymous reporting. These two mechanisms will be complemented by a **Detection Plan**, which will improve the effectiveness of the identification of 'fraud red flags' in financial and logistics data-flows through the organisation.

Oxfam GB's **Fraud and Theft Response Plan** sets out how we will manage a response to any suspected fraud, theft, bribery, nepotism or other financial abuse. Oxfam GB also has a separate **Anti-Bribery Policy and Terrorism Policy** (incorporating money-laundering) that ensure compliance with the UK Bribery Act 2010, the international sanctions regime and other relevant legislation.

Oxfam has a dedicated **Counter-Fraud Team** to advise and support operational management in their responsibility for the deterrence, prevention, detection, and response to all fraud.

13 ANNEXES

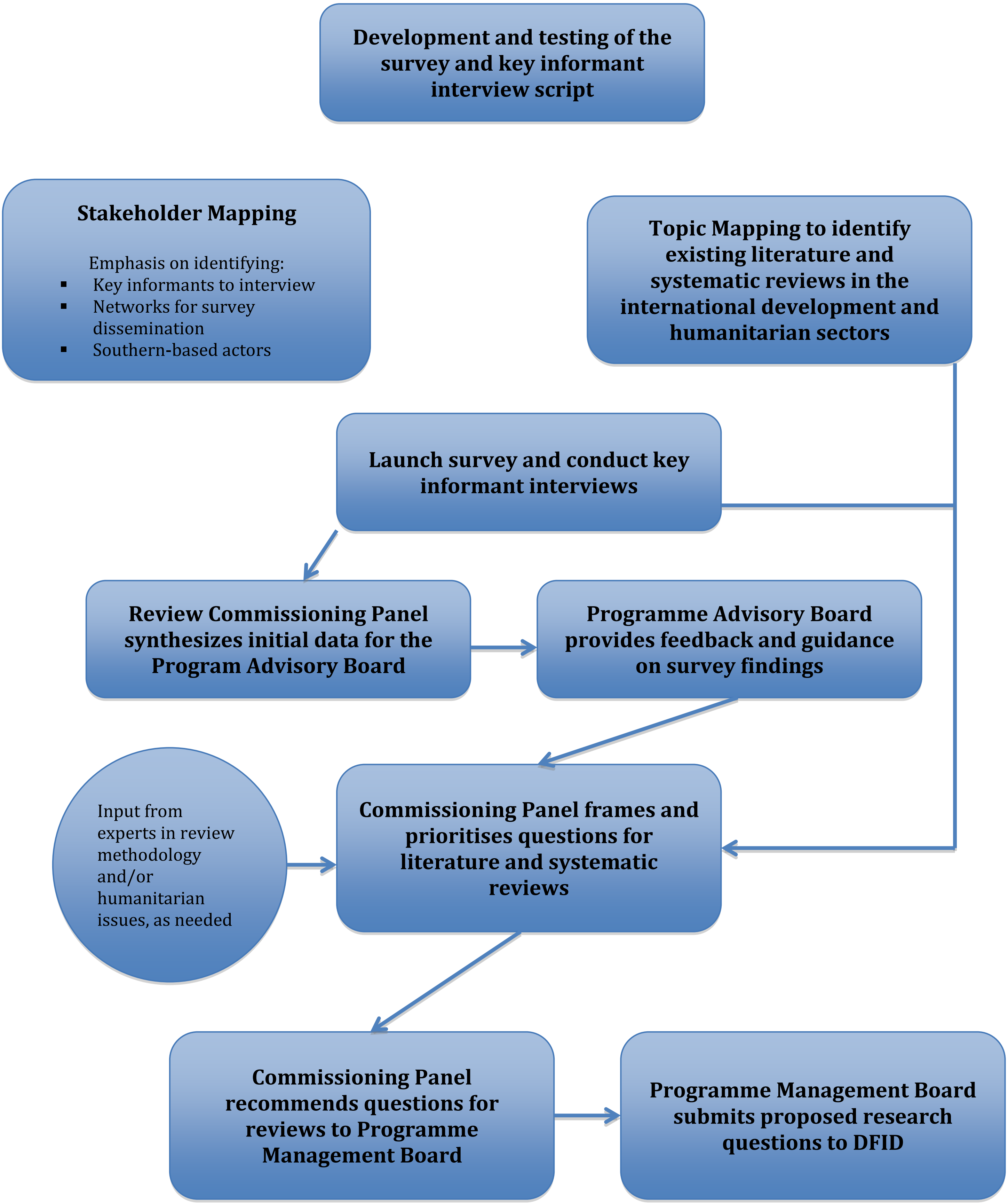
List of annexes

- Diagram for process of determining review questions
- Guidance note for evidence syntheses
- Additional context for the research uptake strategy

The full inception report also reported to DFID:

- List of key informants
- Finalised programme advisory board terms of reference, programme management manual, and CVs of changed personnel; and,
- Excel supplemental annexes including: potential peer reviewers, contacts for dissemination/ key thought leaders, southern researchers, networks/ websites, blog sites for guest posts, events and conferences, completed reviews, ongoing reviews, and other documents.

Annex A. Process for developing the research questions



Annex B. Guidance Note for Evidence Syntheses in the Humanitarian Evidence Programme

This Guidance Note discusses an approach to systematic evidence synthesis in the humanitarian field. Its recommendations apply to the evidence synthesis outputs commissioned by the Humanitarian Evidence Programme, a DFID-funded partnership between Oxfam GB and the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University (FIC). The Programme aims to synthesize research in the humanitarian sector and communicate the findings to policymakers, humanitarian practitioners, and researchers, with the ultimate goal of improving humanitarian policy and practice.

The Humanitarian Evidence Programme evidence syntheses will take the form of systematic reviews to synthesize evidence around what works and what does not work, as well as for whom and in which context. Reviews can also synthesize what we know and do not know around existing approaches, practices, and tools. Systematic reviewing is an "approach that consists of mapping out the available evidence, critically appraising the evidence and synthesizing the results."[2] All of our evidence synthesis outputs strive to be transparent about which evidence they synthesize, clear about gaps and limits in the literature, and systematic in their mode of analysis of existing research. In this way, Humanitarian Evidence Programme reviews can identify gaps in existing research and knowledge, form conclusions with greater confidence than with individual studies, showcase disagreement and diversity among the literature, and highlight opportunities for further research.

Section I of this document discusses the utility and limitations of evidence synthesis in the humanitarian field. Section II outlines the process of conducting an evidence synthesis for the Humanitarian Evidence Programme, while Section III discusses the nature and types of evidence that these reviews may synthesize. Section IV delves deeper into certain stages of the review process, including defining the eligibility criteria, naming the search strings, and accounting for heterogeneity within the findings. Given that this document is not an exhaustive guide to evidence synthesis processes, reviewers are strongly encouraged to familiarise themselves with the growing literature around this topic. A suggested reading list can be found in the concluding Section V.[3]

---

[2] "Systematic Reviews," Department for International Development, R4D, *available at* http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/SystematicReviews.aspx (last accessed January 5, 2015). In this document, the term 'reviewers' refers to the individuals or teams carrying out the evidence synthesis in the form of a systematic review. In this way, it is distinguishable from 'peer reviewers,' who are the subject-matter and methodological experts whose assistance the programme team will solicit to quality-assure the review at different stages of the process. The 'programme team' refers to the Oxfam GB-FIC staff who will manage the commissioning and oversight of the review process.

[3] **Acknowledgments:** The authors would like to thank Dr. Mike Clarke and Claire Allen of *Evidence Aid* for their guidance and insight. The *Evidence Aid* training on systematic reviews in the humanitarian sector was particularly helpful in illuminating many of the questions discussed herein. The Humanitarian Evidence Programme Review Commissioning Panel provided feedback on earlier versions of this document. The authors are also grateful for the guidance of the Humanitarian Evidence Programme Advisory Board, and the many individuals who provided feedback on the design of the evidence synthesis process as key informants.

I. Evidence Synthesis in the Humanitarian Sector: Opportunities and Challenges

Evidence synthesis in the form of systematic reviews emerged as a tool for assessing and synthesizing evidence out of the medical sector (White and Haddington, 2012), but systematic reviews have increasingly been used in the social sciences, including in international development. A push for assessing the evidence base of interventions and programs in international development, and for aligning funding and programming accordingly in the sector, has led to a spike of recent reviews on international development topics.[4] Although much can be learned from the international development field for reviews in humanitarian situations, important differences remain, particularly in terms of the types of data and evidence that are possible to collect, assess, and synthesize in these fields. Evidence syntheses for the humanitarian field thus often have to be adapted from medical standards.

The settings of data collection in the humanitarian sector – which often involve active armed conflict, natural disasters, or the immediate aftermath of conflict or disasters – render the collection of data difficult or impossible and limit the types of studies that can take place. When data collection is possible, the reliability, representativeness, and generalisability of the data may be limited by questions of access and numerous biases, including selection, recall, and reporting bias. Even in humanitarian settings that are not characterized by instability or insecurity, the types of studies – and therefore, the types of research methods that one can employ to generate and collect evidence – can be limited by the fragility of protracted crises, the sensitivity of the information in question, and issues related to identifying and accessing affected populations.

For these reasons, the challenges in conducting evidence syntheses in the humanitarian sector differ from those in the medical field, but share characteristics with the well-documented challenges in conducting systematic reviews and other types of evidence synthesis in the international development sector, as enumerated by Mallet *et al* 2012 and others. These challenges include the following:

a) Access to the databases and journals necessary to conduct a review may be difficult (particularly for non-academics or Southern-based researchers).
b) Defining key terms, including interventions and outcomes, may be more complex in ways that affect the scope of the question, the eligibility criteria and their interpretation, and the search strings.
c) The vast 'grey literature' (e.g., program documents, needs assessments, and internal reports) is difficult to search in a standardized, comprehensive way and may not be publically available.
d) There is subjectivity to interpreting inclusion and exclusion criteria for studies.
e) Data may be limited or of poor quality and methodologies are often not discussed explicitly, clearly, or at length in the various studies.
f) Sampling is often biased and comparison groups are weak or non-existent.

---

[4] For examples of recent reviews on topics of interest to the humanitarian and international development sectors, see DFID's R4D portal, which also contains links to reviews led by 3ie and AusAID. "Systematic Reviews," Department for International Development, R4D, *available at* http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/SystematicReviews.aspx#aSystematicReviewTop (last accessed January 5, 2015).

g) Meta-analysis is difficult, both because of the unavailability and the diversity of data (Mallett *et al* 2012, 448-449).

These limitations highlight that evidence synthesis may be challenging in the humanitarian field. There are, however, significant benefits to this rigorous, evidence-based approach to synthesis of research in the humanitarian sector. The evidence synthesis itself is valuable for policymakers and humanitarian practitioners who seek to understand 'what works' – and what does not work – as well as for whom and in which contexts. For example, past reviews have asked "what works to improve teacher attendance in developing countries?"[5] or "what impact does the provision of separate toilets for girls at schools have on their primary and secondary school enrolment, attendance and completion?"[6] Reviews can also synthesize what we know and do not know around existing approaches, interventions, and tools. Synthesis can result in conclusions beyond those of independent studies. Through statistical meta-analysis, there is increased statistical power to detect an effect, and greater thinking on heterogeneity, external validity, and publication bias. Likewise, qualitative synthesis can see patterns and themes that supersede the sum of individual studies. This analysis can help ensure that policymakers and practitioners invest in programs that work, shut down programs that cause harm, and do further research where there is not enough evidence.

Similarly, evidence syntheses can be useful for researchers by highlighting gaps in existing research and pointing to opportunities for future research. In that vein, by making a synthesis of existing evidence available, reviews can ensure research builds on existing efforts, particularly when reviews are disseminated in a way that focuses on promoting research uptake. Evidence synthesis outputs can also prompt future researchers to attempt to fill gaps where these reviews demonstrate that gaps exist. Furthermore, these reviews have the potential to broaden the thinking about how researchers collect data in the humanitarian field and may, therefore, inspire new thoughts about how to conduct research in order to generate better evidence in the future.

As a result, the humanitarian sector can benefit from the type of rigorous, evidence-based analysis that these reviews inspire. At the same time, evidence synthesis as as an approach will need to be customized in order to respond to the uniqueness, diversity, and limitations of data in this field. As Hagen-Zanker (2012) notes, a more flexible approach may be in order, whereby we "continue to comply with the core principles of [systematic review] methodology (rigour, transparency, replicability), while tailoring the protocol as and when required" in order to be applicable to the humanitarian field. Mallett *et al* (2012) echo, "we should be focusing on the utility that can be gained from a systematic review approach, rather than its rigid application" (453).

[5] Guerrero G, Leon J, Zapata M, Sugimaru C, Cueto S (2012). What works to improve teacher attendance in developing countries? A systematic review. London: EPPI- Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.
[6] Birdthistle I, Dickson K, Freeman M, Javidi L (2011). What impact does the provision of separate toilets for girls at schools have on their primary and secondary school enrolment, attendance and completion?: A systematic review of the evidence. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.

II. Review process in the Humanitarian Evidence Program

This process applies to reviewers selected to carry out an evidence synthesis as part of the Humanitarian Evidence Program. Note that a complete list of expectations and responsibilities can be found in the Call for Proposals and Terms of Reference, and the below should be read in conjunction with those documents. The steps below reflect the systematic review evidence synthesis process, and they may need to be modified or customized based on the extent of evidence available and the nature of the topic for review.

1. **Researchers develop review protocol.** The protocol further spells out the scope of the research question, names the search strings that will be used, elaborates on the inclusion and exclusion criteria for studies, discusses the types of meta-analyses that are applicable to the type of evidence the researchers will identify and synthesize, and specifies how the reviewers will account for heterogeneity in the results. During this step, researchers will typically disaggregate the research question along the 'PICO' parameters – therefore, along Population, Intervention/Approach, Comparator/Context, and Outcome. A more thorough discussion of the PICO approach and its applicability to evidence synthesis in the humanitarian field can be found in the next section.
2. **Discussion of the protocol with the program team.** Throughout the process of protocol development, researchers will be in contact with the Humanitarian Evidence Program team. If a refinement of the research question or adjustment of the scope is necessary, it will take place during this stage of the process.
3. **Review of the protocol.** To assure the quality of the protocol, and therefore of the review process, the program team will provide feedback before the full process of the review commences. Researchers will be expected to incorporate feedback prior to continuing with the review.
4. **Running the search terms.** Reviewers will apply the search strings to the search strategy to identify a breadth of possible studies. These search strings will be recorded and later reported in the methodology section of the review.
5. **Screening of abstracts and titles.** Reviewers will apply their inclusion and exclusion criteria, expressly stated in the reviewed protocol, to screen the abstracts and titles for potentially relevant studies.
6. **Assessment of full-text studies.** Reviewers will screen potentially includable full-text documents to assess whether their methods, quality of evidence, interventions, and outcomes are relevant to the scope of the review.
7. **Evaluation of the risk of bias in included studies.** The reviewers will assess included studies for their risk of bias.
8. **Evidence synthesis.** The reviewers will synthesize the findings in eligible studies using relevant forms of synthesis, including narrative and/or statistical meta-analysis. At this stage, the review team will also account for heterogeneity within the findings, paying particular attention to the factors for disaggregation named in the protocol.
9. **Discussion of the review with the program team.** Throughout the process, the program team will be available to discuss the review, as well as provide feedback on a complete draft of it prior to sending it off to peer review.

10. **Peer review of full evidence synthesis.** Subject-matter experts and methodology specialists, whom the program team will have identified in advance, will peer review the evidence synthesis.
11. **Revised review based on feedback.** Reviewers will incorporate the peer reviewers' feedback to finalize the review.
12. **Submission to DFID.**

III. Types of evidence for Humanitarian Evidence Programme reviews

A recurrent question in evidence synthesis processes is which types of study designs should be eligible for inclusion. This, in turn, encompasses questions related both to study design and to mode of publication. While these determinations are ones for the reviewers to make, this section provides some guidelines on evidentiary standards that may be relevant to this decision-making process. Given the complexities of data collection, assessment and interpretation in the humanitarian sector outlined earlier, the types of evidence discussed here may depart from other evidence synthesis processes in order to ensure that the final reviews synthesize a range of data that can be useful to humanitarian practitioners and policymakers.

For example, a review for the Humanitarian Evidence Programme looking at evidence of effectiveness of an intervention may decide to include studies with comparison groups that control for potential confounders, such as randomized control trails (RCTs) as well as quasi-experimental study designs (QEDs). It may decide to look at process evaluations and qualitative research to understand findings. The review may also decide a corollary question through looking at qualitative research. For instance, the reviewers and the field may be interested in what individuals were spending their money on from a cash intervention in emergencies, and whether or not the intervention was effective. A wide variety of evidence, such as focus groups, surveys, and observation, may be reviewed in answering this question. Some study designs may be better-suited to a particular review question compared with others. Reviewers should justify which types of study designs they will include in their review. Reviewers may also choose to do a mixed-methods review, which would entail synthesizing quantitative results and qualitative findings separately and/or using the qualitative data to contextualize the quantitative findings. These choices should be clearly stated and explained in the protocol.

In terms of locations for identifying potentially eligible evidence for inclusion in the reviews, reviewers should consult both databases of published journal articles and the 'grey literature.' There is a balance in the scope of search databases and search terms between specificity and sensitivity, between feasibility and rigor, which should be carefully considered. An illustrative list of grey literature sites and indices to consult when seeking to identify potential studies for inclusion can be found in the Annex. The review protocol should specify how the reviewers identified which websites to consult. A customization of the search strings to the type of literature (i.e. 'grey' versus journal databases) may be necessary, as discussed in the next section.

In addition to naming and justifying the eligible study designs and search locations, reviewers should also elaborate on their plans for quality assessing the identified studies and their findings. The program team will provide the reviewers with additional guidance for assessing the quality of the evidence in the Programme's systematic reviews. For further information, the EPPI-Centre's work on qualitative research methods for systematic reviews and Cochrane Collaboration's qualitative methods working group can provide helpful resources.

As this section has shown, the Humanitarian Evidence Programme seeks to adopt a broad approach to types of evidence that may be relevant to researchers, practitioners, and policymakers working in the humanitarian field. The nature of humanitarian work generally necessitates collecting data where a level of potential bias is recognized, while also acknowledging that there is knowledge in the field potentially conducive to synthesis. Too narrow a scope of evidence may limit the range and diversity of data that has academic value as well as relevance to decision-makers and practitioners. At the same time, too broad a scope may render comparison and synthesis difficult and draw conclusions based on highly biased and poorly executed research. The goal is, therefore, for the reviewers to identify the types of rigorous evidence that are relevant to the research question, process them using robust analytical methods, and arrive at an evidence synthesis that highlights what works, what does not work, and gaps in the knowledge.

IV. Factors for consideration in the protocol development stage of the review

During the protocol development stage, reviewers have the opportunity to make choices about the scope of the research question and types of evidence to be included in the review. This section discusses some factors to consider during this process, with the acknowledgment that no two reviews are alike and decisions depend on the nature of the review in question. Furthermore, the below guidance is not an exhaustive template or timeline of the review process nor does it substitute for the reviewers' familiarization with evidence synthesis standards and methodologies; rather, it flags key points for decision-making about evidence synthesis efforts in the humanitarian sector, with the understanding that other tasks are interspersed throughout the process. A timeline of review-related deliverables will be part of the reviewers' Terms of Reference.

a. Formulating the review question

Each review question listed in the Call for Proposals is accompanied by a Briefing Paper that details the program team's interest in that topic of evidence synthesis and provides any additional guidance to the review team. Review protocols should state what reviewers identify to be the primary and secondary research questions, including a potentially more narrow primary research question. Some sample factors by which to narrow the review may include by population, context, intervention/approach, geographic area, outcomes, or years of study publication. A justification should accompany each of these choices in the review protocol. The PICO parameters – population, intervention, comparison/context, and outcome – may be useful in this process. The Humanitarian Evidence Program encourages reviewers to interpret these parameters broadly, to the extent that they are useful: For example, there may be more than one population of interest; the 'I' in the acronym may refer to both a specific intervention and an issue more broadly; the 'C' may refer to context, not just comparators, and outcomes of interest may be numerous. The programme team welcomes alternative strategies for refining the scope of the research question and defining the relevant terms, provided that they are well-documented and suitable to the evidence synthesis in question.

Reviewers may want to do scoping work, including sample searches to better understand the topic and extent of the existing literature. The program team will be available for conversations with the reviewers in order to ensure that the choices in the protocol reflect the original interest in the topic area and will render a review that is useful to humanitarian practitioners, policymakers, and researchers.

b. Setting the eligibility criteria

Reviewers should clarify whether their eligibility criteria are illustrative or exhaustive, as well as be explicit about any types of studies that are NOT within the scope of the review in question. Eligibility criteria should be as specific as possible in order to minimise interpretation errors among different reviewers. For example, if a review discusses interventions aimed at children, the criteria should specify the age threshold that corresponds to childhood in this particular context. This may, in turn, require consultations both with the program team commissioning the review and with subject-matter experts who may shed light on possible interpretations of the terms in the research question.

In order to set the eligibility criteria, reviewers may need to focus on and disaggregate possible interventions and outcomes that relate to the review question. Specifically, they may need to consider how the various outcomes may be measured and what types of results these measurements may yield. For example, if a review is focused on interventions that improve nutritional status, the reviewers would have to name the indicators and outcomes related to nutritional status that would be relevant to the scope of the review. Reviewers may again wish to consult with a subject-matter specialist during this step of the process in order to ensure that they are accounting for all relevant interventions and outcomes.

c. Devising the search strings and conducting the search

The search strings name the terms that the review team will enter in their specified databases and sites with the ultimate goal of identifying potential studies for inclusion in the review. It is strongly encouraged that reviewers consult with an information specialist or librarian during this step of the review process. In devising search strings, review teams should be conscious of alternate spellings, synonyms, and acronyms (e.g. 'NGO' versus 'non-governmental organizations' versus 'non-governmental organisations,' versus 'nongovernmental organizations'). During the process of both identifying the search strings and setting the eligibility criteria, reviewers should be conscious of the fact that researchers may have used different names than the review commissioners or the reviewers themselves to describe the interventions and outcomes in which they are interested. This necessitates a broad and imaginative inquiry into the ways in which researchers may have described their own studies, named their interventions, outcomes, and results, titled their papers and presented their research.

Simply put, the task is to ensure that the search strings are sensitive enough to find relevant research.

As stated earlier, the protocol should specify not only which terms are entered in the various databases and search engines, but also which websites, indices and databases are consulted to identify studies. An illustrative list of 'grey literature' sites to consult can be found in the Annex.

d. Screening process for eligible studies

Reviewers should explain their plan for screening for eligible abstracts and titles and then full-text studies and specify who will be performing the screening. This will likely involve applying the eligibility criteria to the abstracts and full-text studies. For reviewers working in teams, double-reading is encouraged, whereby members of the team separately assess all eligible studies or a portion of potentially eligible studies and make independent determinations on whether a study should be included on the review based on the eligibility criteria.

e. Data extraction and recording information about each eligible study

The review protocol should specify the type of information reviewers will record for each study they deem eligible for the review in order to ensure that information collection is as comprehensive and standardized as possible. Such information will likely include but not be limited to the publication date and date of the experiment of the study in question, the type of study design, the populations to which the study findings apply (disaggregated by age and sex, where possible), any settings/geographic locations to which the study results are limited, and the specific iteration of the research question. Reviewers should agree on the complete list of factors to extract and record and their mode for recording this data prior to conducting the review in order to minimise error and variation.

f. Narrative synthesis and/or statistical meta-analysis

Reviewers will determine the types of evidence synthesis suitable to their review. Statistical meta-analysis is encouraged, where possible and applicable. However, a narrative synthesis of findings may be necessary or preferable with certain types of data, such as heterogeneous or qualitative data. Protocols should detail which types of meta-analysis will be employed and why those types of meta-analysis are well-suited to the type of evidence and data the review will synthesize. Reviewers may wish to engage a statistician in this step of the process.

In reviews that will entail statistical meta-analyses, review protocols should specify which statistical indicators reviewers will employ. These include, but are not limited to risk ratios, risk differences, odds ratios, and Numbers Needed to Treat (NNTs). Both in the protocol and in the review itself, reviewers should specify on which statistical analysis they are relying and why that type of analysis is most conducive to the research question.

g. Accounting for heterogeneity

The Briefing Paper accompanying the review question will provide an illustrative, though not exhaustive, list of the types of disaggregation of findings in which the review commissioning team is interested. While this type of disaggregation and accounting for heterogeneity will largely depend on the nature of the research question, reviewers will be expected to disaggregate findings based on sex and age whenever possible. Other types of heterogeneity in the data and effects of interventions may be due to geographic diversity or diversity in setting (i.e. urban versus rural), or intervention or population (i.e. migrants versus non-migrants; disaster-affected versus conflict-affected versus populations affected by neither conflict nor disaster) or data collection. The discussion of heterogeneity will be closely linked to a discussion of possible limitations in the existing evidence and its synthesis, the challenges to generalisability of the findings, and the existence of different types of bias. Reviewers should note what, if any, statistical tests they plan to do to measure heterogeneity.

Conclusion

The evidence synthesis approaches described in this Guidance Note present an opportunity to synthesize existing research in a humanitarian sector in a way that is honest about the possible biases and limitations, illustrative of opportunities for future research, and deliberate about the choices involved in any evidence synthesis effort. These evidence synthesis outputs can highlight existing knowledge about what works and does not work, in ways that have the potential to inform humanitarian policy and practice. This Guidance Note can serve as a starting point for bidders interested in carrying out a systematic review as part of the Humanitarian Evidence Programme. Additional information about the topics of the reviews can be found in the Call for Proposals, as well as in the Briefing Papers accompanying each research question of interest.

V. Resources for further research on evidence synthesis

Reviewers are expected to familiarize themselves with the broad literature on systematic reviews and the growing literature on the use of systematic reviews in the international development and humanitarian spheres. A sample reading list can be found below.

Clarke, M, Allen, C, Archer, F, Wong, D, Eriksson, A and Puri, J, 2014. What evidence is available and what is required, in humanitarian assistance? 3ie Scoping Paper 1.New Delhi: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)

Department for International Development (DFID), Research For Development (R4D), "Systematic Reviews." http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/SystematicReviews.aspx

Department for International Development (DFID), "How to Note: Assessing the Strength of Evidence." 2013, updated 2014. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-note-assessing-the-strength-of-evidence

EPPI-Centre, International Development Review Group. http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=3312

Gough, D., Thomas, J., and Oliver, S. "Clarifying differences between review designs and methods". *Systematic Reviews*, 1: 28 (2012). http://www.systematicreviewsjournal.com/content/1/1/28

Gough, D., Oliver, S., Thomas, J. "Learning from Research: Systematic Reviews for Informing Policy Decisions: A Quick Guide." A paper for the Alliance for Useful Evidence. London: Nesta, 2013. http://www.alliance4usefulevidence.org/publication/learning-from-research/

Chapter 1 of: Gough, D.**,** Oliver, S., Thomas, J. *Introduction to systematic reviews*. London: Sage, 2012. http://www.uk.sagepub.com/books/Book234152#tabview=samples

Hagen-Zanker, J., Duvendack, M., Mallett, R., and Slater, R. (Overseas Development Institute), with Carpenter, S., Tromme, M. "Making Systematic Reviews Work for International Development Research." Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC), Briefing Paper 1, January 2012. http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/PDF/Outputs/SLRC/SLRCBPJan2012.pdf

Hagen-Zanker, J. and Mallett, R. "How to do a rigorous, evidence-focused literature review in international development: A Guidance Note." ODI Working Paper, September 2013. http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8572.pdf

International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), Systematic Review Resources. http://3ieimpact.org/en/evaluation/resources/systematic-review-resources

Knox Clarke, P. and J. Darcy, "Insufficient Evidence? The quality and use of evidence in humanitarian action," ALNAP, February 2014.

Mallett, R., Hagen-Zanker, J., Slater, R., and Duvendack, M. "The benefits and challenges of using systematic reviews in international development research." *Journal of Development Effectiveness* 4. No. 3 (2012): 445-455. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19439342.2012.711342

Waddington, H., White, H., Snilstveit, B., Garcia Hombrados, J., Vojtkova, M., Davies, P., Bhavsar, A., Eyers, J., Perez Koehlmoos, T., Petticrew, M., Valentine, J., and Tugwell, P. "How to do a good systematic review of effects in international development: a tool kit." *Journal of Development Effectiveness* 4 No. 3 (2012): 359-387. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19439342.2012.711765

Walker, D., Bergh, G., Page, E. and Duvendack, M. "Adapting systematic reviews for social research in international development: a case study on child protection." ODI Background Note, June 2013. http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8427.pdf

White, H. and Waddington, H. "Why do we care about evidence synthesis? An introduction to the special issue on systematic reviews" *Journal of Development Effectiveness* 4. No. 3 (2012): 351-358. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19439342.2012.711343

Annex: Suggested sites to consult as part of 'grey literature' searches

Note that the below is an illustrative list and that researchers will name the customized, exhaustive list of sites into which to enter the search terms in the customized protocols for each review. The following list does NOT include academic sites and databases or specific journals and their webpages.

- DFID R4D
- International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)
- Overseas Development Institute (ODI), including the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) and Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN)
- EPPI Centre
- Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP)
- Emergency Nutrition Network (Field Exchange)
- Evidence Aid
- Feinstein International Center, Tufts University
- Enhanced Learning and Research for Humanitarian Assistance
- International Association of Professionals in Humanitarian Assistance and Protection
- Humanitarian Accountability Partnership
- The Network on Humanitarian Assistance
- The World Bank
- Harvard Humanitarian Initiative
- Humanitarian Social Network
- Humanitarian Innovation Project
- United Nations (and related sub-websites)
- European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department
- USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse (and related USAID sub-websites)
- ReliefWeb
- Oxfam Policy and Practice Websites
- OpenGrey
- UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service
- Eldis

Annex C. Background literature for the research uptake strategy.

This section covers the background to the imperfect science of research uptake that forms the basis for the strategy. The literature is imprecise about how to translate the research commissioned in this programme into meaningful policy and programmatic programming. Moreover, it spans domains from humanitarian communication to business marketing to political science. Despite the limitations of the literature, a clear message emerged: build upon experience, target key stakeholders, and disseminate widely.

We are building upon Oxfam's experience in humanitarian communications and translation of research and knowledge into policy and practice. Oxfam has a dedicated Learning & Knowledge Exchange Team including specialists in policy and research marketing and distribution, online promotion, website and knowledge management, publications design, project management, and social media.

Oxfam's experience confirms the research uptake literature that "... getting research into policy is not only a technical matter of knowledge translation and exchange, but also a political challenge" (Liverani, Hawkins, and Parkhurst, 2013, p. 1). Research suggests that rather than only focusing on promoting the use of research, the focus should also be on practices of knowledge production, policymaking, and implementation (Oliver, Lorenc, and Innvaer, 2014). And, it is important to understand the external environment, political context, and links as key factors beyond evidence (ODI, RAPID). In order to understand the dynamics at play and whom to target, the team for the Humanitarian Evidence Programme did a mapping of key thought leaders and organisations and considered who had power and sway, such as funding or running programmes that were well respected by the programme team or colleagues. This was an ongoing process, with key informants suggesting other organisations and programmes, and the programme team adding contacts to a spreadsheet throughout the inception period.

The mapping showed that the knowledge translation process involves individuals and organisations throughout the non-linear journey from research to practice in the humanitarian field. It involves thought leaders, researchers (including academics and consultants), platforms for communicating research, funders, governmental policy makers, international NGOs (including policy makers and practitioners within NGOs), and national and local actors (including policy makers and practitioners within local actors). Rather than being an ordinal process with discrete categories, individuals and organisations occupy multiple roles and influence one and another in a complex network. The targeted individuals and organisations in this strategy serve as thought leaders with the ability to change policy and practice in the humanitarian field and are roughly mapped onto three categories: 1) policy makers and funders, 2) practitioners, and 3) researchers and research synthesisers.

The literature recommends that these key stakeholders and thought leaders should be involved in the life process of the programme. Additionally, the literature suggests that leadership and management structures are crucial for evidence-based practice (Grimshaw et al., 2012; Sandstrom et al., 2011). Given the limited resources of the programme, it is targeting managers in organisations with or capable of thought leadership in their respective fields.

The involvement of key stakeholders supports the programme to be informed by the needs of stakeholders, and, in tandem, helps stakeholders' have a degree of ownership over the programme. Results are partially informed by them, which will hopefully help reflection and use of evidence in policy and practice. Decisions are made based on the known options available, the institutional framework and implicit values (ODI, Darcy, Stobauch, and Walker, 2013). By creating space and leverage from the beginning to think about the Humanitarian Evidence Programme and the values the programme promotes, stakeholders should be more receptive to findings.

Other funding and programmes focus more heavily on the 'demand' side, such as the Building Capacity to use Research Evidence (BCURE) project building a 'culture of evidence' as a norm amongst policy actors. The Humanitarian Evidence Programme has neither the funds nor the mandate to explicitly focus on the demand side and explicit capacity-building. However, the programme is implicitly promoting a demand through the various dialogues that result from the programme and through being part of a movement that values research and evidence-based policy and practice.

Although findings are targeted, the programme is also using a dissemination strategy and targeting multiple communications channels. The dissemination and communications strategy can: a) directly influence those targeted, b) influence those who are not directly targeted, c) participate in and help create a broader movement for change, and d) act as persuasion to influence the targeted stakeholders.

The standard practice is often passive diffusion of technical research materials to individuals in high-income countries. This needs to change. The development of research questions and mapping of existing research revealed that stakeholders often proposed rigorous reviews that had already been completed or underway. Influential key informants expressed in interviews that they do not read systematic reviews and long documents, and the top sources of information from the survey were briefing papers and conversations with colleagues. Key informants often mentioned reading a document if particular people suggested it; these were sometimes the same individuals who we believe are key 'nodes' for knowledge transfer. Similarly, a 2014 internal survey by Oxfam's Programme Learning Team had strong evidence to show that people gain the most information through short papers and informal conversations. We believe that targeted, clear summaries can help increase discussion and uptake.

Furthermore, although the humanitarian sector has been shifting towards increased formal involvement of national actors in low- and middle-income countries, key informant interviews and the literature expressed that capacity in these contexts is low. Access to databases and research as well as the translation and targeting for individuals in low- and middle-incomes are major concerns (Oliver, 2014). In order to be relevant, this programme needs to go beyond the 'usual players' to leverage existing networks in the Global South as well as strong networks in the Global North and actively disseminate results in an open-source and jargon-free manner so that they can be used to build policy, practice, and future research in both the Global North and South.

The research uptake strategy covers plans for meaningful consultation throughout the life process of the review, targeting key informants, and leveraging existing dissemination and communications channels to build reach change and the climate for research uptake.

Works cited

Darcy, J., Stobauch, H., Walker, P., & Maxwell, D. (2013). *The Use of Evidence in Humanitarian Decision Making.* Available from: http://fic.tufts.edu/publication-item/the-use-of-evidence-in-humanitarian-decision-making/.

Global Humanitarian Assistance. (2014). Country profiles and Statistics. Available from: http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/

Grimshaw, J., Eccles, M., Lavis, M., Hill, S., & Squires, J. (2012) Knowledge translation of research findings. *Implementation Science 7*(50).

Harvard University, Evidence for Policy Design at the Center for International Development. (n.d.). 'Building Capacity to use Research Evidence (BCURE)'. Available from: http://epod.cid.harvard.edu/bcure.

Liverani, M., Hawkins, B., & Parkhurst, J.O. (2013). Political and institutional influences on the use of evidence in public health policy. A systematic review. *PLoS One, 8* (10). e77404. ISSN 1932-6203.

Overseas Development Institute (ODI). (no date) RAPID's Outcome Mapping Approach (ROMA): a guide to policy engagement for development organisations. Available from: www.odi.org/programmes/rapid

Overseas Development Institute (ODI). (2014). Tools for bridging research and policy: the RAPID Context, Evidence, Links Framework. Available from: http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/events-documents/2764.pdf.

Oliver, S. (2014). 'Global Capacity for Systematic Reviews, by Professor Sandy Oliver' Youtube Video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzfLCRFp72k. Presented 17 June 2014. Posted October 3.

Oliver, K., Lorenc, T., & Innvaer, S. (2014). New directions in evidence-based policy research: a critical analysis of the literature. *Health Research Policy and Systems*, 12(34). doi: 10.1186/1478-4505-12-34.

Sandström, B., Borglin, G., Nilsson, R., & Willman, A. (2011), Promoting the Implementation of Evidence-Based Practice: A Literature Review Focusing on the Role of Nursing Leadership. *Worldviews on Evidence-Based Nursing, 8*: 212–223. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-6787.2011.00216.x

Background on survey results

Respondents: 273 individuals currently living in 55 countries with an average of 15 years of experience in the humanitarian field. Of the respondents, 61% identified as a humanitarian practitioner, 36% as scholars/researchers, 16% as policy makers, and 5% as other (1% as donors).