

Humanitarian evidence systems mapping in East Africa

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In November 2014, Development Initiatives was commissioned by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) to conduct a mapping and political economy study on the production and utilisation of humanitarian evidence in Kenya, Uganda and within relevant East African institutions.

Development Initiatives works to end extreme poverty by 2030 by making data and information on poverty and resource flows transparent, accessible and useable. We help decision-makers use information to increase their impact for the poorest people in the most sustainable way. We work at every level: supporting local partners in East Africa and Nepal to use data; informing national and regional decision-making through analysis and presentation of information; providing technical and political support that can help improve international systems.

The analysis presented and views expressed in the report are the responsibility of Development Initiatives.

Executive summary¹

About the study

In November 2014, Development Initiatives was commissioned by DFID to conduct a mapping and political economy study on the production and utilisation of humanitarian evidence in Kenya, Uganda and within relevant East African institutions. The study describes the humanitarian research landscape and which factors affect the production and uptake of research outputs. It makes recommendations for linkages that can be strengthened and for interventions that would strengthen national and regional research capacity on both the user and producer side.

Research and evaluation (R&E) appears to have a limited strategic function and value within the humanitarian landscape in the East Africa region. The R&E system tends to operate independently of host governments and local actors at all levels and is driven by donors. However, there are signs that this is changing and that responsibilities for delivering long-term humanitarian response may be shifting towards regional and national governments and local actors.

The limited extent to which national and local policy makers and practitioners value and can engage with R&E outputs and are willing and able to act on their findings, as well as the limited linkages between research and policy and practice communities, are significant impediments to the use of evidence by decision makers in the East Africa region. The lack of a common and shared research agenda for humanitarian R&E in the region, combined with little shared analysis of data/evidence collected over the long term on cyclical causes and responses to repeated humanitarian crises, limits the potential for a strategic and future-focused body of R&E work in this region.

Going forward, there is a need for a locally owned, more strategically coherent research agenda which is broader than the current focus on resilience and which links vulnerability to issues such as energy, water, transport infrastructure, digital communications, climate change adaptation and human security.² This will more likely gain the attention of governments and prove useful in the longer term for tackling humanitarian crises.

Key Findings

1. In practice the governance and coordination of research and evaluation in the humanitarian sector in East Africa is almost non-existent, with multiple, ad hoc, small, short-term initiatives performed by multiple actors. These do not seem to be contributing to a widely recognised body of learning or innovation which is owned or led within the region. Innovations such as the satellite-supported livestock insurance and cash transfers developed in this region five years ago came from donors, research institutions and business.
2. The dominant factors determining how the R&E environment operates in the humanitarian sector in East Africa are the needs to i) describe and ii) provide some evidence for outcomes and impact, within relatively short timeframes, of specific interventions, as required by head offices of donor governments, UN or INGOs – in order to secure further funding, which in turn perpetuates continued humanitarian action or research activities. These requirements lead to intensive internal monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities conducted alongside programmes which account for 72% of reported evidence output from humanitarian actors, much of which is not publicly available, and to which 0.26% (totalling US\$5 million) of humanitarian financial flows³ is allocated.
3. Alongside these are a few longer term R&E activities, usually funded by centrally held, specific research budgets of donors. This amounted to US\$62 million for all research

¹ Full report available on <http://devinit.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Humanitarian-evidence-systems-mapping-in-East-Africa.pdf>

² Regional Integration Strategy Paper 2011 – 2015, African Development Bank September 2011; and personal observation by Ben Ramalingam of ODI, KII 11 March 2015.

³ Data from 2012 and 2013 obtained from the OECD Creditor Reporting Systems database for Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia. This is funding to research and evaluation for: Development food aid, Emergency response, Disaster prevention, Conflict peace & security and Reconstruction relief & rehabilitation sectors. Proportion comparison to the total humanitarian funding to these countries in 2013-obtained from the GHA 2015 report.

activities in Kenya and Uganda in 2013 (of which US\$28 million was for malaria research).⁴ United States and European research producers, based outside the region, tend to dominate the longer-term humanitarian R&E, generally producing better- quality outputs, albeit in isolation from the humanitarian implementing community in East Africa.

4. There is limited coordination between donors on R&E activities in the region, in some cases leading to duplication and questionable value added. In addition, donor procedures and funding cycle practices present a number of constraints to improving the quality and transparency of R&E processes.
5. There is no widespread application of ethical or technical protocols/research standards in use, neither are there common standards for research and evaluation, reliable and quality longitudinal datasets, or common indicators for resilience. This prevents comparisons across R&E outputs and aggregation of findings, limits enquiry and thus limits learning to improve humanitarian action.
6. Three-quarters of all respondents (and 61% of regional respondents) said that they thought the quality of humanitarian R&E in the region was poor. Only about one-eighth of all (research for development (R4D)) studies on East Africa were peer-reviewed, compared with one quarter of all East Asian studies. Much is self-published, based on small samples and short timeframes, with limited methodological diversity or rigour. Choice of methodology was only explained in half of studies and limitations were pointed out in one-third of studies sampled. Less than half of sampled studies included some kind of social inclusion, vulnerability or gender analysis. This study found no highly critical evaluations.
7. There is very limited involvement of local actors in R&E activities beyond enumeration functions and less than 10% of research grants seem to go direct to local institutions. This is a source of considerable frustration for NGOs and local researchers. Poorly performing local research institutions including universities and weak analytical skills among researchers were seen by donors and research institutions as key barriers to joint R&E activities. While local actors acknowledged the need to build analytical skills, they valued acquired practical experience over training programmes or qualifications as a way of improving their skills. They also wanted research syntheses, including systematic reviews, research tools and standards.
8. More is written than read in the region. The majority of respondents (51% online, 68% of key informant interviews (KIIs)) based in East Africa described themselves as both producing and consuming evidence. Host government respondents tended to describe themselves as consumers only. One-third of regional KII respondents and 63% of regional online responses reported that demand for evidence came equally from two sources: from within their own organisations and from donors. This was most likely centred on situation updates and evidence of effectiveness. Responding to this, two-thirds of respondents consequently wanted data and data-gathering tools, and examples of successful programme approaches and impact. One-third expressed varied, deeper and broader interests in understanding the root causes of humanitarian crises and in issues such as conflict, corruption, climate change and urbanisation.
9. Lack of time, information being too scattered and lack of summaries were the main reasons for not reading R&E studies. The second biggest reason was lack of trust in the quality and credibility of the research. Barriers to research uptake exist at two levels; 1) around the ability of decision makers to both value and understand research outputs (and the consequent responsibility imposed on producers to better target and package their outputs); 2) the limited engagement and trust between humanitarian researchers and government policy makers to date.
10. Aside from GIS and satellite data gathering/mapping and a few mobile text response mechanisms, the study found remarkably little evidence of digital data in communications driving change in humanitarian response.⁵ The study found relatively few political economy studies or longitudinal/retrospective analyses of crises and patterns of humanitarian response and few cost-effectiveness studies.

⁴ Data from the OECD Creditor Reporting System for 2013 research in Kenya and Uganda, all sectors

⁵ Srinivasan, S., 'The 2025 communicator; the future of digital communications and humanitarian response' Available at <http://www.politicsinspires.org>

Recommendations

Improve the coordination and build host government ownership of humanitarian R&E

Support the establishment of an R&E coordination hub and clearing house at country level (include humanitarian and resilience, and broader development-related research), within existing coordination mechanisms within government e.g. the Ending Drought Emergencies (EDE) secretariat within the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) in Kenya. This should be supported with an R&E online search engine and mapping facility (such as data.hdx.rwlab.org). Donors could introduce incentives to check with the clearing house before planning R&E activities.

Support government investment in upgrading and making use of longitudinal datasets.

Conduct outreach with local media on coverage of humanitarian programmes, encouraging local journalists to draw on and include humanitarian stories and evidence as regular features.

Commission studies by East African institutions on the political economy of how research is done and the impacts of research processes and outputs on accountability between governments and citizens; and cost-effectiveness studies on the scaling-up of appropriate humanitarian interventions.

Improve research quality

Encourage a process whereby government and non-government actors professionalise the management of R&E. This could be done by developing a basic, voluntary protocol for the conduct and management of humanitarian R&E drawing on ethical social science research principles⁶ and including requirements to co-fund, involve local researchers, privacy and data protection requirements for beneficiaries, requirements for review and post publication requirements for the end-user to respond to findings.

Suggest that the Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG) and experienced humanitarian actors develop a basic R&E methodological protocol or checklist, based on existing research standards and guidelines, to improve the quality of R&E, with a roll-out plan with implementing agencies.

Encourage academics, donors and governments to agree and use an initial basic set of common indicators for assessing outcomes in resilience which can be revised after a period of time.

Mandate requirements for all evaluations, including those which are critical, to be published in the national or regional clearing house (starting with NDMA clearing house) and to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI). This would make evaluations more meaningful and consequential exercises and would mean evaluation reports would be more likely to be read and acted upon by decision makers.

Incentivise local content in research activities

Establish an accreditation scheme for local researchers to get early career experience and recognition, and encourage key actors such as government, UN and IAWG member agencies to support it.

Build a requirement into all R&E tenders which stipulates that providers should include local researchers during the design and analysis stages of the work, and allow sufficient funding within tenders for local partner organisation capacity and skill development.

⁶ Drawing on, for example, the 'ESRC Framework for Research Ethics' (2006)

Improve research uptake and strengthen R&E culture and understanding at local level

Encourage a consensus-building exercise on common barriers to research uptake, building on the findings of this study and others.⁷ Support this with the application of tools to evaluate willingness and capacity to access, understand and use research evidence, amongst a variety of humanitarian actors including government.

Establish commissioning and financing procedures which require R&E plans to include evidence of the links between producer and end-user demand, and an understanding of the system which evidence should inform. Complement this with training on communication strategies for research aimed at better targeting of end-users and complementary social media strategies.

Incentivise 'crowd sourcing' mechanisms to collect local opinions on what research is needed. Share findings with media and the local tech entrepreneur communities in Nairobi and Kampala. Identify local funders to support areas of research that meet clearly identified needs.

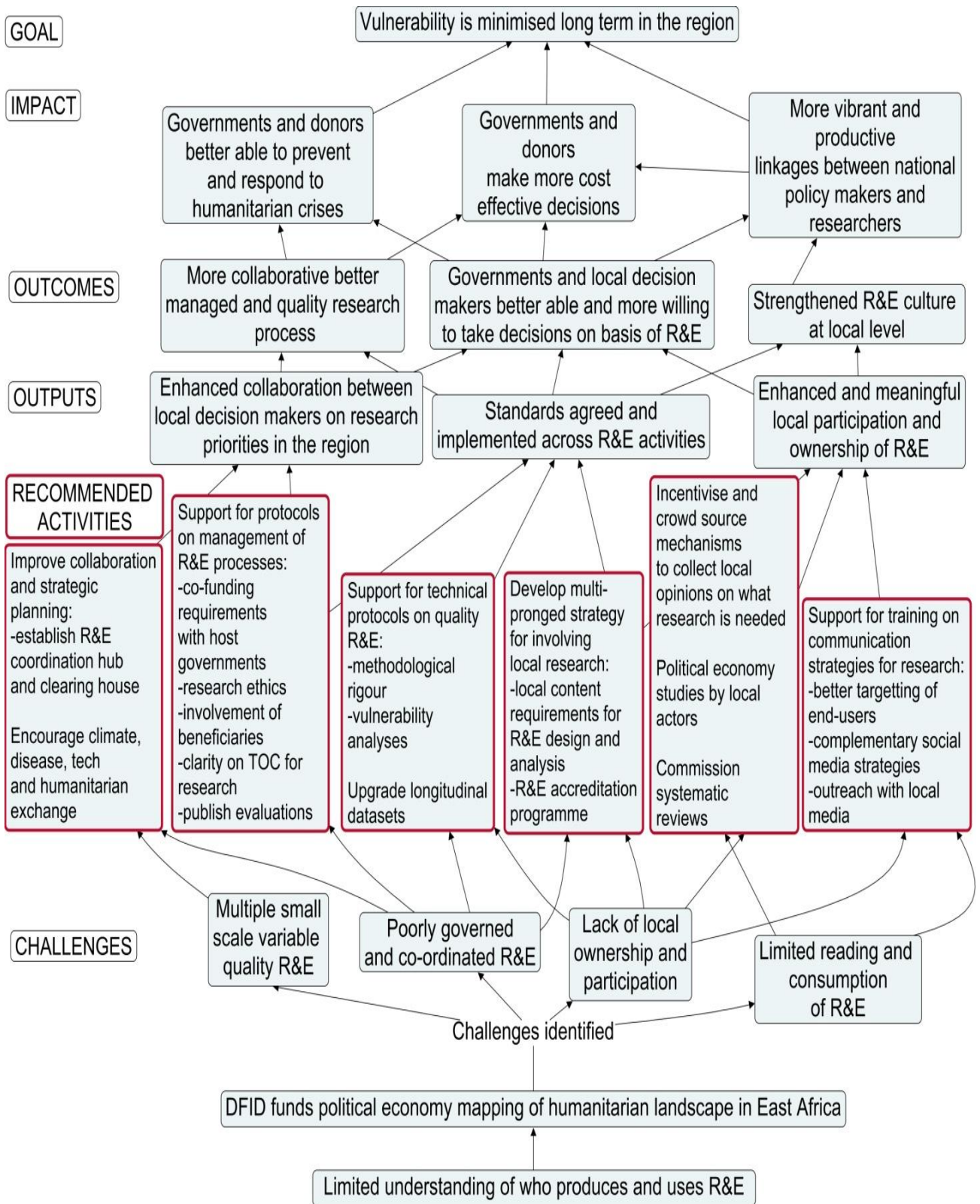
Commission systematic reviews of topics of regional interest such as corruption, climate change, urbanisation and mental health.

Support more online discussion forums and live learning at short, hospitable after-work forums where practitioners from different organisations can and share experience and learn about useful programming tools and success stories. Offer live streaming and live radio coverage of these events.

Establish information exchange and research presentations between humanitarian actors (such as the IAWG) and climate change scientists, medical-veterinary epidemiologists and tech entrepreneurs to enrich the quality and relevance of humanitarian R&E.

⁷ For example the SECURE programme which is working on evidence based health policy; DRUSSA which is looking at higher education policy; experts in the region such as Professor Nelson Ssengankambo in Uganda.

Figure 1: Theory of change – how the study’s proposed recommendations could lead to more vibrant and productive linkages between national policy makers and researchers and thus minimise vulnerability in the region



Theory of Change developed by Fiona Napier