

## Popular science summary:

### **Inclusion of Evidence-Based Approach to Humanitarian Needs Assessment in Flash Appeals**

The evidence-based approach is believed to increase the validity of the identification and prioritization of needs in humanitarian needs assessments and response activities. This research studied how the concept is currently applied in developing Flash Appeals.

According to the humanitarian principle of impartiality, decisions on what to fund in humanitarian crises should be based on a clear identification and prioritization of need. However, previous studies show that the donors funding the crises are sceptical about the quality of the analyses done by the international humanitarian agencies. Thus, they may not allocate their resources only according to the needs of highest priority, but also in compliance with pre-determined parameters that may contradict the needs. Flash Appeals, usually led by a UN-agency, are instruments for funding responses to sudden-onset emergencies. These appeals act as a window to an emergency by uncovering information about an emergency and describing the impacts and corresponding needs arising from a disruption. These documents are ideally pushed out 5-7 days after the onset of an emergency, which creates a pressure to compromise between the quality of information provided in the appeals and how quickly the documents are launched. As one of the results, time was found as a major constraint, when developing such appeals and building a strong evidence base.

Based on the findings, many scholars and humanitarian organisations define “evidence”. However, the broader concept of “evidence-based approach”, with its roots in the field of public health, has not been well-defined. Based on a comprehensive literature review focusing on the evidence-based approach and humanitarian needs assessments, a definition was established by combining the core elements of the two concepts: “The evidence-based approach in humanitarian action means the use of evidence, as of relevant, credible and transparent information, to identify and prioritize needs, and argument how the needs can be addressed and why the response works in a given context”. In essence, transparency can be seen as an inherent property of evidence. In practice, an evidence base within a Flash Appeal was in this thesis defined as the inclusion of seven interlinked components: context analysis, use of baseline data, transparent methodology, transparent sourcing and referencing, transparent terminology and definitions, data disaggregation and data triangulation. All the UN-led appeals from 2017, a total of six documents, were reviewed through a document analysis for inclusion of evidence. Using a specifically created set of evaluation criteria, utilizing the seven themes as a framework, the evidence base in Flash Appeals was found to be weak, however some pieces of evidence are provided.

The findings from literature review, document analysis and interview with an expert from UN OCHA indicate that by explicitly providing reasoning of how the conclusions of a needs assessment were drawn, what information was used and the limitations of the assessment, credibility of the assessments within the Flash Appeals could be increased. This in turn, entails developing capacities in preparedness among the agencies developing Flash Appeals by training how to apply the concept in practice and ultimately agreeing upon what the evidence-based approach means in the humanitarian context.