

Irish Aid White Paper
Response from Evidence Aid

This response is submitted on behalf of Evidence Aid, a co-ordinated, international initiative to improve effective and timely access to systematic reviews on the effects of interventions and actions of relevance before, during and after natural disasters and other humanitarian emergencies, to improve health-related outcomes; working with those who need and use this evidence and those who produce it.

It has been prepared by Professor Mike Clarke, one of the founders of Evidence Aid, and its current director.

Response

Evidence Aid is seeking to improve access to reliable information on the effects of interventions and actions, in order to help people and organisations making decisions about disaster risk reduction, planning, response and recovery; with the ultimate aim of improving outcomes for people and communities affected by natural disasters and other humanitarian emergencies. In regard to Irish Aid and similar organisations around the world, the resources compiled and disseminated by Evidence Aid should help to improve the quality of decision making, leading to more good than harm for the people and communities with whom Irish Aid is working, and strengthening the accountability and transparency of Irish Aid's decision making.

On the island of Ireland, Evidence Aid represents an important, cross-border collaboration between the Centre for Global Health in Trinity College Dublin and the Centre for Public Health in Queen's University Belfast. It is in this context that this brief response has been prepared.

Evidence Aid suggests:

1. Irish Aid should build on existing work in the area of evidence-based humanitarian assistance, to show that its decision making is transparent and incorporates information from relevant research about the effects of interventions and actions. A reliable estimate of the likely effects (beneficial and harmful) of any intervention or action is a vital component in making a choice based on a desire to do more good than harm, and needs to be used together with other knowledge, such as local values and preferences, feasibility and "on the ground" expertise and experience.
2. Estimates of the effects of interventions and actions should be based on systematic reviews of the relevant questions, drawing on as much as possible of the information from relevant studies or other sources. This will avoid undue emphasis being placed on individual studies or individual sources of other kinds and will minimise the effects of chance and bias when preparing the estimates.

3. Where there is uncertainty about the effects of interventions or actions, Irish Aid should encourage the evaluation of those interventions or actions and, where there is substantial uncertainty, Irish Aid should consider requiring that any implementation of the intervention or action be done within the framework of a formal evaluation. This will help resolve uncertainty for future decisions and represents the fairest way to deliver interventions and actions when there is doubt about the relative benefits and harms.

4. Irish Aid should consider becoming a member of the Evidence Aid Alliance. In addition to the connection with Evidence Aid itself, this will provide an additional, focused avenue for Irish Aid to work with other partners to achieve the objective of improved decision making in humanitarian assistance, to show its commitment to the use of evidence in decision making, and to demonstrate the continuing commitment of Ireland and the Irish people to being “major players” in strengthening humanitarian assistance around the world.