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Evidence Aid first round Policy Delphi – A brief report

I. Introduction

In order to elicit the knowledge, experience, and attitudes of individuals involved in disaster response with regard to evidence-based best practices in the field of disaster response, Evidence Aid and its institutional partners designed and initiated a policy Delphi study in 2015. The institutional partners which, and individuals who, contributed to the Policy Delphi design, implementation of this report are: Evidence Aid (Claire Allen, Mike Clarke and Jeroen Jansen), Georgetown University (Irene Jillson, Will Mumford, Keith McKay and Alex Trant), and the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (Steve Waller and Tracey Koehlmoos).

The purpose of the study is *to engage a wide range of key stakeholders in dialogue regarding disaster responses, including for example, evidence for best practices in disaster response, approaches to improving investments in disaster response with Cochrane-style (systematic review) analysis of evidence, identification of gaps in the evidence base for disaster response; and factors that impact on effective disaster response.* The broad research questions are:

1. To what extent is evidence for best practices in disaster response available to a wide range of stakeholders?
2. To what extent is Cochrane-style (systematic review) analysis used to assess evidence for best practices in disaster response?
3. What are the most effective approaches to improving the cost-effectiveness of investments in disaster response?
4. How can the ethical, legal and social issues related to disaster response decision-making be most effectively addressed?
5. What are the factors that impact on effective disaster response decision-making?

The study is using the policy Delphi study method, a series of iterative questionnaires, each one termed a 'round'. The first-round, semi-structured questionnaire comprised 24 questions in four categories: a) demographics; b) nature and quality of research-based evidence for disaster response; c) social returns of investments in disaster response; and d) effectiveness of current efforts in disaster response. The questionnaire was disseminated via SurveyMonkey to 135 individuals (referred to as 'panelists'), 36 of whom responded (27% response rate). This report presents a summary of the responses. The second and final round of the policy Delphi is based on these results. It will be disseminated to panelists through SurveyMonkey in August 2016, together with this report.

2. Respondent professional demographics

Most (37%) of respondents reported working for an institution other than those listed (e.g., international other than development, scientific research, diplomatic corps). Nearly one-third (31%) of respondents reported working primarily at an academic institution or university. The other respondents described their primary place of work as involved in international development (11%), private sector non-profit organizations, other than development assistance (11%), national government work generally (11%), government agencies involved in the provision of international aid or development projects (9%), or private sector non-profit development



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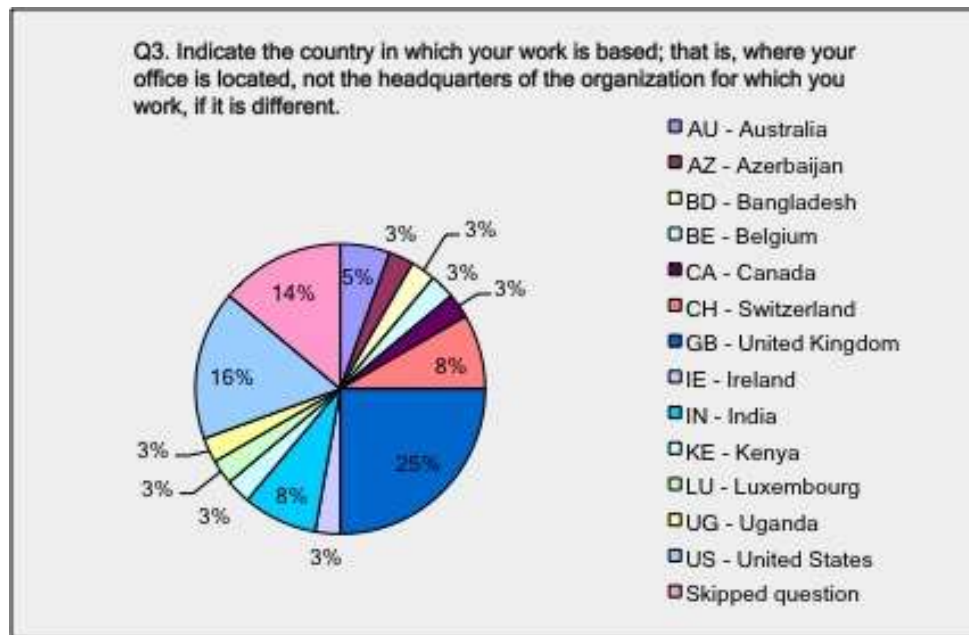


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assistance (9%). The categories mentioned by less than 9% (i.e., 3 respondents) but at least two were national government, health agency and national government other).

When asked to specify their role in the organization with which they worked, 35% of respondents described themselves as researchers, 29% as professors or teachers, 21% as consultants or advisors, 18% as being involved in either administration or management, and 12% as physicians. Of those respondents who selected the 'Other' option (18%), they self-identified as a program manager, technical specialist, director of research, public health program coordinator, science and technology adviser, and a diplomat respectively. Two participants did not respond to this item.

Regarding the geographic distribution of respondent activity, the greatest proportion of respondents reported being based in the United Kingdom (25%), the United States (17%), India (8%), and Switzerland (8%). (See Figure 1.)



3. Findings

The findings of the first round are presented by category of question: evidence for best practice in disaster response; practical use of evidence for best practice in disaster response; and factors that impact on effective disaster response decision-making. All of the scaled questions used a six-point scale, with 1 being "completely disagree" and 6 being "completely agree".

Participants agreed (mean: 4.0-4.5 out of maximum of 6) with the following statements:

- The nature of the evidence for disaster response is primarily best practice information rather than research-based evidence.



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- It is possible for national governments to achieve better social return on investment in disaster response by implementing actions or interventions that are based on research evidence. According to one respondent “this is necessary to ensure.” Another noted “even knowing what works, for whom, and why it works, is important.”
- It is possible for international and multinational organizations to better achieve social return on investment in disaster response.
- Cochrane-style systematic reviews should be used in a standardized way to synthesize evidence to inform contextually specific evidence of effectiveness in disaster response. As one respondent suggested, this should include qualitative information, which “should always be a great part of the disaster reviews”. Another stated that using standardized reviews would help: “regional governments to prioritize the focus of systematic review. I also believe that there is still a dearth of peer-reviewed evidence relating to disaster response [and] we need to be more open and find better ways of synthesizing grey literature”.

Individual participants mentioned increased research- and evidence-based case studies, more specific and thoroughly researched interventions, and universal access to this information as examples of how this could be accomplished.

3.1 Evidence for best practice in disaster response

Nature and quality of research-based evidence for disaster response

Survey participant responses related to the nature and quality of research-based evidence for disaster response suggest that the disaster response community may be divided regarding their perceptions of the soundness of research-based evidence as the basis for strategic planning by either national governments or international development agencies.

Of the 36 respondents who participated in round 1 of the study, 21 (58%) either completely or strongly agreed with the statement that “[t]he nature of disaster response is primarily ‘best practice’ information rather than research-based evidence”. The remaining somewhat agreed (six participants), somewhat disagreed (two participants), or completely disagreed (one participant) with the statement. Three participants did not provide a response. An overall mean rating of 5 suggests that best practices information rather than research comprises the basis of ‘evidence’ currently used in disaster response strategic efforts and planning.

Responses to a subsequent item asking participants to either agree or disagree with the statement that “[t]he research-based evidence for disaster response is sufficiently sound to warrant its use as the basis for strategic planning by national governments” yielded an average rating of 3, indicating that there is no consensus on this statement. One respondent stated, “Evidence on post-disaster vulnerability mitigation is available in some cases, but evidence on pre-disaster vulnerability and preparedness are not adequate.”

Responses to a similar statement regarding the sufficiency of research-based evidence for use by international development also yielded an average rating of 3. One respondent suggested that international agencies should use “evidence”, “only when it has been peer reviewed, published, and critiqued.”

Most respondents (27) suggested that improvements in co-operation/co-ordination among disaster relief agencies in the collection, analysis and dissemination of data and information regarding disaster response



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would improve disaster response. Fewer responded that improvements in disaster response would come from improvements in funding for research to yield evidence (20) or increased use of evidence in planning and implementing such responses (9).

3.2 Practical use of evidence for best practice in disaster response

Social return on disaster response

Nine questions elicited beliefs concerning social returns on investment in disaster response and the potential of evidence-based research to improve upon them for national governments, international and multinational organizations, and international non-profit organizations. One of these questions invited respondents to rate their agreement with the statement that it is possible for national governments to achieve better social return on investment in disaster response by implementing actions of interventions that are based on research evidence. The average rating was 5 on the six-point scale, indicating that respondents believe that research-based evidence could improve social returns on investments by national governments in disaster response efforts. When asked to provide up to three examples of how this could be accomplished by national governments, 11 respondents mentioned strengthening research related to evidence based practice in disaster responses, including for example, providing additional funding, training researchers, and conducting specific types of research (e.g., related to the DALY or QALY's of interventions)¹. Few respondents indicated that they believe that national governments could not improve return on investment by research-based interventions. The reasons provided were wide-ranging, including the belief that disaster responses are essentially 'common sense' and should not be 'academic', that the evidence is 'just not there' and that the decision-making process is inherently political. One respondent suggested that the full support of the UN is required.

Respondents similarly agreed that international non-profit organizations could improve social returns on investments through the use of research-based evidence for disaster response investments (mean rating: 4.71). With respect to the potential for non-profit organizations to improve evidence-based responses, of the 15 who provided responses, most (10) mentioned cooperation/coordination, followed by additional and/or improved evaluation and research related to NGO responses (8), followed by strengthened implementation of disaster responses (7), with suggestions including investments in disaster mitigation and in community-level actions.

A similar question addressed the potential for research-based evidence to produce greater social returns on investments in disaster response for international organizations. There was relatively strong agreement with this statement as well. Co-ordination and co-operation were also the primary ways that respondents suggested that international and multinational organizations can improve disaster response, suggested by 28 respondents, including, for example, 'strengthening partnerships between academicians, civil society and government bodies'. Eleven respondents suggested improvement in the use of evidence and in planning for disaster response; specific examples included flexibility in assistance such as unconditional cash transfers that allow for beneficiary choice. Evaluating and conducting research regarding disaster response in order to yield evidence regarding best practices was suggested by 10 respondents. Other suggestions included focusing on the needs of vulnerable populations. Only one respondent did not believe that it is possible for international

¹ DALY - disability-adjusted life year; QALY – quality-adjusted life year



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organizations to improve their disaster response, with the explanation that “agendas present within multiple multi-national organizations may hinder benefits to all social groups”.

When asked to describe up to three ways that knowledge and evidence derived from research could be used to inform decision-making in disaster response, of the 25 who responded to this question, most suggested improvements in evaluation/research related to disaster response, with respect to the quality of the studies, an improved focus on decision-linked, relevant questions/research, ensuring that the findings are accessible, or dissemination of the findings to decision-makers and engaging them in discourse regarding the findings. Nineteen respondents suggested improvements in the practical application of evidence, including for example, educating policy makers regarding evidence-based practices, ensuring visibility of the findings (e.g. conducting conferences and seminars among user groups), and linking domestic/national-level responses with international responses. Co-operation was mentioned by seven respondents specifically and was a theme through many of the other suggestions. One respondent commented that: “A survey that focuses on response is missing the point that most effective measures to reduce health consequences lie in prevention and building the capacity of countries, communities and the international community before an emergency and disaster”.

3.3 Factors that impact on effective disaster response decision-making

Respondents were asked to rank the top five factors of the 15 presented for consideration in terms of their impact on the effectiveness of disaster responses, with 1 being used for the most important factor, 2 for the next most important factor, and so on. The five factors that received the lowest mean ranking (that is, that were considered the most important, were:

- Political Influence of the government in which the disaster occurred
- Sociological trends in the country in which the disaster occurs
- Post-colonial linkages between donor countries and countries affected by disasters
- Global economic influences in the country in which the disaster occurs
- Economic influences of the country in which the disaster occurs

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they believed that each of the selected factors had a primarily positive, negative, or mixed impact on the effectiveness of disaster response. For 12 of the 15 factors, most respondents indicated that the factor had both positive and negative impact. For three of the factors, the respondents believed that there was primarily positive impact. These are: political influences of non-profit organizations of the country in which the disaster occurs, international legal factors, including for example laws and regulations regarding local NGOs, reconstruction and engagement; and ethical factors, including international guidelines regarding allocation of resources related to disaster relief.

Six respondents suggested a total of 10 other factors, that were not in the list of 15 presented for consideration. Three respondents suggested accountability or capacity (at the local and national levels) as critical factors. The nature/magnitude of the disaster was mentioned by two respondents. Other factors mentioned were the clear message that scientists could use to inform policy and practice, and the economic and health impacts within the country in which the disaster occurs and those that impact trans-boundary as well.



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Respondents were also asked to suggest ways that the factors they identified as the most important could most effectively be addressed in the context of disaster relief. The suggestions of the 13 who responded all centered on the need to improve policy-making and implementation of disaster response, including with respect to evidence-based approaches. However, within these parameters the suggestions were wide-ranging, with a focus on improving the coordination among and responses by the donors (international agencies and non-profit organizations), and taking into account political will when planning for and implementing disaster response. One respondent suggested, for example, “Ensure early (ideally pre-disaster planning phase) outreach to establish alignment of political influences with research based...best practices.” Referring to one aspect of the politics of disaster relief, one respondent specifically suggested that “...there is nothing ‘potential’ about competition for funding among international relief organizations. It’s real and potent.” Creating and sustaining dialogue and ensuring accountability among the key actors was mentioned by most of these respondents. Ten respondents specifically mentioned the need to strengthen the capacity of key stakeholders, from policy makers to direct emergency response personnel. One respondent specifically referred to the Sendai Framework for priorities.

4. Conclusions

There was agreement among the 36 respondents that international and multi-national organizations, as well as national governments and NGOs could strengthen their respective response to disasters by using available evidence, and that Cochrane-style systematic reviews should be used to synthesize evidence of disaster response effectiveness. Most believed, however that, although research-based evidence is preferable, for the most part it is “best practices” information that serves currently as “evidence” on which decision-makers and practitioners base disaster responses. Most respondents also believe that improvements in co-operation/co-ordination among disaster relief agencies in the collection, analysis and dissemination of data and information regarding disaster response would improve disaster response. Indeed, cooperation and coordination among all key stakeholders was a consistent theme through the responses, contributing to improving on social return on investments in disaster response, for example. Respondents believe that, although there are major impediments to effective and equitable disaster response that derive from both the country in which the disaster occurred (e.g., economic and political factors) and external factors (e.g., global economic influence and post-colonial linkages), these impediments can be addressed through the use of evidence-based policy-making and specific disaster-responses.

The second round of the policy Delphi will further explore the factors that impact on disaster responses and how evidence-based policies and practices can overcome these factors.



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Annex A: Round 1 of the Policy Delphi Survey

EVIDENCE AID: Improving the Science and Evidence Base of Disaster Response: A POLICY DELPHI ENGAGEMENT

Conducted by a consortia of organizations comprising: Evidence Aid, Georgetown University, and the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary at all times. You can choose not to participate at all, decline to answer any of the questions, or discontinue participation and not submit the online survey. Regardless of your decision, there will be no effect on your relationship with the researchers or any other negative consequences. There are no risks associated with participation in this study. While you will not experience any direct benefits from participation, the information we collect may benefit others in the future by expanding knowledge regarding responses to disasters.

Your responses are anonymous; no unique identifying information is collected. If you provide your name and give us permission to do so, you may be listed in a final report as one of the respondents, but there will be no links with any of your responses. Once you submit your completed survey, there will be no way to withdraw from the study because the survey contains no identifying information. Your completion of the survey and submission through SurveyMonkey implies your consent to participate in the study. A brief summary of the findings of the first questionnaire will be sent to all those invited to participate at the same time that the second questionnaire is disseminated. They will also receive the study's final report. We will send this to everyone who is invited to participate because we will not be able to identify those who have completed the survey and those who have not done so.

Permission to conduct the study has been obtained from the Institutional Review Board of Georgetown University prior to any data collection; the IRB number is 2015-1357.

If you have any questions regarding Evidence Aid, please contact Professor Mike Clarke (m.clarke@qub.ac.uk) or Claire Allen (callen@evidenceaid.org). If you have any questions regarding this first questionnaire or this research study in general, please contact Professor Irene Jillson (iaj@georgetown.edu or by phone at 001-202-687-1312).

Round 1: Exploring the Issues

Demographics

1. Please indicate the type of organization in which you currently work *primarily* (that is, 50% or more of your time).

Academic institution/university

National Government (if yes, select one below)

- National Government: Health Agency
- National Government: Military
- National Government: Aid/International Development

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- National Government: Other (please specify below)

International Development

Private sector (if yes, select one below)

- Private sector: Non Profit Development Assistance
- Private Sector: Non Profit Other (please specify below)
- Private Sector: Private (please specify below)

Other (please specify)

2. Please specify your role; that is, the one in which you currently work *primarily* (that is, 50% or more of your time).

Administration/Management

Consultant/Advisor

Clinician (if yes, select one below)

- Clinician: Physician
- Clinician: Nurse
- Clinician: Community Health Worker
- Clinician: Laboratory Technician
- Clinician: Other (please specify below)

3. Indicate the country in which your work is based; that is, where your office is located, not the headquarters of the organization for which you work, if it is different. (Drop-down menu)

Evidence for best practices in disaster response

4. On a scale of 1-6, with 6 being that you completely agree and 1 being that you completely disagree, indicate your view of the following statements and provide an explanation for your viewpoint. For each question item, if you believe that you do not have sufficient information to respond, select x (no answer) as your response.

The nature of the 'evidence' for disaster response is primarily 'best practice' information rather than research-based evidence. For purposes of this study, 'research-based evidence' is defined as that which is predicated on published research that has been independently reviewed and considered to be relevant, reliable and valid.

1 (Completely Disagree)	2	3	4	5	6 (Completely Agree)	N/A
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Explanation/Comment

5. Describe up to three ways in which research-based evidence regarding disaster response can be improved.



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6. The research-based evidence for disaster response is sufficiently sound to warrant its use as the basis for strategic planning by national governments.

1 (Completely Disagree)	2	3	4	5	6 (Completely Agree)	N/A
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Explanation/Comment

7. The research-based evidence for disaster response is sufficiently sound to warrant its use as the basis for strategic planning by international development agencies.

1 (Completely Disagree)	2	3	4	5	6 (Completely Agree)	N/A
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Explanation/Comment

Practical use of evidence for best practices in disaster response

7. On a scale of 1-6, with 6 = completely agree and 1 = completely disagree, indicate your view of the following statements and provide an explanation for your viewpoint.

8. Cochrane-style systematic reviews (for examples, see www.cochranelibrary.com) are used in a standardised way to synthesize evidence to inform contextually specific evidence of the effects of interventions, actions and strategies in disaster response.

1 (Completely Disagree)	2	3	4	5	6 (Completely Agree)	N/A
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Explanation/Comment

9. Cochrane-style systematic reviews (for examples, see www.cochranelibrary.com) **should be** used in a standardized way to synthesize evidence to inform contextually specific evidence of effectiveness in disaster response.

1 (Completely Disagree)	2	3	4	5	6 (Completely Agree)	N/A
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Explanation/Comment

10. It is possible for national governments to achieve better social return on investment in disaster response by implementing actions or interventions that are based on research evidence? For purposes of this study, 'social return' includes social, economic and health benefits to individuals, communities and the population of the affected country(ies).



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1 (Completely Disagree)	2	3	4	5	6 (Completely Agree)	N/A
<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Explanation/Comment

11. If you believe it is possible, provide up to three examples of how this can be accomplished.

12. If you do not believe this is possible, please explain why:

13. It is possible for international multinational organizations to achieve better social return on investment in disaster response.

1 (Completely Disagree)	2	3	4	5	6 (Completely Agree)	N/A
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Explanation/Comment

14. If you believe the above statement is possible, provide up to three examples of how this can be accomplished.

15. If you do not believe this is possible, please explain why:

16. It is possible for international non-profit organizations to achieve better social return on investment in disaster response.

1 (Completely Disagree)	2	3	4	5	6 (Completely Agree)	N/A
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Explanation/Comment

17. If you believe the above statement is possible, provide up to three examples of how this can be accomplished.

18. If you do not believe this is possible, please explain why:

19. Describe up to three ways that knowledge and evidence derived from research could be used to inform decision-making in disaster response.

Factors that impact on effective disaster response decision-making



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Various frameworks for consideration of healthcare decision-making and responsible science – including application of science and technology to addressing health problems such as disaster relief exist, each of which includes multiple factors. This section addresses these factors with respect to responses to disasters.

20. Rank the top five factors in the order that you believe they impact on the effectiveness of disaster response, including responses by the affected country, donors and international NGOs that provide or channel resources. Using the following list, assign the number that corresponds to your ranking of the item: 1 = the most important factor, 2 = the next most important factor, and so on, until you have selected your top five. You may also add up to two factors for inclusion in your top five if you believe they are important but are not included in this list.

- a. Political influences of the government in which the disaster occurs
- b. Political influence of governments from outside the country in which the disaster occurs
- c. Political influences of international multinational organizations in the disaster response
- d. Political influences of bilateral donor agencies in the disaster response
- e. Political influences of non-profit organizations of the country in which the disaster occurs
- f. Political influences of non-profit organizations from outside the country in which the disaster occurs, which are engaged in disaster response
- g. Influence of for-profit organisations of the country in which the disaster occurs
- h. Influence of for-profit organisations from outside the country in which the disaster occurs, which are engaged in disaster response
- i. Economic influences of the country in which the disaster occurs
- j. Global economic influences in the country in which the disaster occurs
- k. Sociological trends in the country in which the disaster occurs
- l. International legal factors, including international agreements and regulations in the country in which the disaster occurs
- m. National legal factors, including for example laws and regulations regarding local NGOs; reconstruction; engagement of foreign clinicians in medical services in the country in which the disaster occurs
- n. Ethical factors, including international guidelines regarding health research in the context of disaster relief; allocation of resources; end-of-life decisions in the country in which the disaster occurs
- o. Post-colonial linkages between donor countries and countries affected by disasters
- p. Other Factor (please specify below in Q21)
- q. Other Factor (please specify below in Q21)

21. If you selected 'Other Factor', please specify below:

22. Indicate whether you believe each of your selected five factors has primarily positive or negative impact on the effectiveness of disaster response. If you believe it has both, indicate that.

	Primarily positive impact	Primarily negative impact	Both	N/A
Political influences of the government in which the disaster occurs				
Political influence of governments from outside the country in which the disaster occurs				



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Political influences of international multinational organizations in the disaster response				
Political influences of bilateral donor agencies in the disaster response				
Political influences of non-profit organizations of the country in which the disaster occurs				
Political influences of non-profit organizations from outside the country in which the disaster occurs, which are engaged in disaster response				
Influence of for-profit organisations of the country in which the disaster occurs				
Influence of for-profit organisations from outside the country in which the disaster occurs, which are engaged in disaster response				
Economic influences of the country in which the disaster occurs				
Global economic influences in the country in which the disaster occurs				
Sociological trends in the country in which the disaster occurs				
International legal factors, including international agreements and regulations in the country in which the disaster occurs				
National legal factors, including for example laws and regulations regarding local NGOs; reconstruction; engagement of foreign clinicians in medical services in the country in which the disaster occurs				
Ethical factors, including international guidelines regarding health research in the context of disaster relief; allocation of resources; end-of-life decisions in the country in which the disaster occurs				
Post-colonial linkages between donor countries and countries affected by disasters				
Other Factor				
Other Factor				

23. We are interested in your ideas on how the top two factors you identified above might be most effectively addressed in the context of disaster relief. What can governments and disaster-relief agencies do to make the best use of the positive aspects of the factor and to ameliorate the negative aspects of the factor? For example, how can international regulations regarding research ethics in the context of disaster relief be most effectively utilized? How can the potential for competition for funding among international relief organizations be addressed? If you have evidence for how these approaches have worked, provide at least one citation or link.

Factor 1: (write in the letter to identify the top factor you have chosen)

Making effective use of positive aspects, if any:

Addressing negative aspects, if any:

Factor 2: (write in the letter to identify the top factor you have chosen)

Making effective use of positive aspects, if any:

Addressing negative aspects, if any:

Other comments:

Other



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Thank you for taking part in this study. If you would like more information about Evidence Aid, or would like to sign up for the Evidence Aid newsletter, go to <http://www.evidenceaid.org>, follow us on Twitter using @EvidenceAid, or join our Facebook Group or 'like' our Facebook page.

24. If you would like to suggest questions for inclusion in the second round of this policy Delphi study, add up to three here.