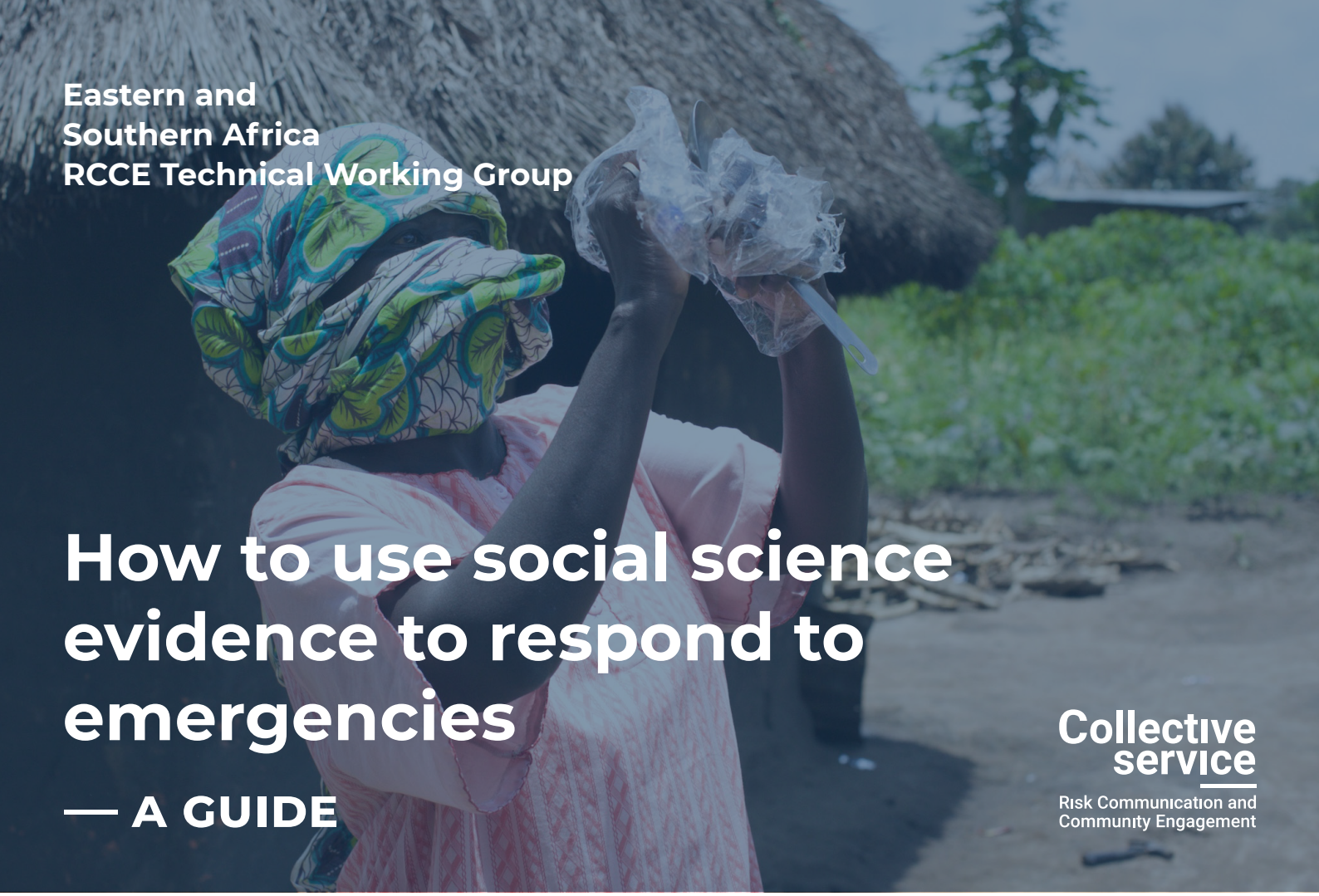


Eastern and
Southern Africa
RCCE Technical Working Group

How to use social science evidence to respond to emergencies

— A GUIDE

Collective service
Risk Communication and Community Engagement

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE?

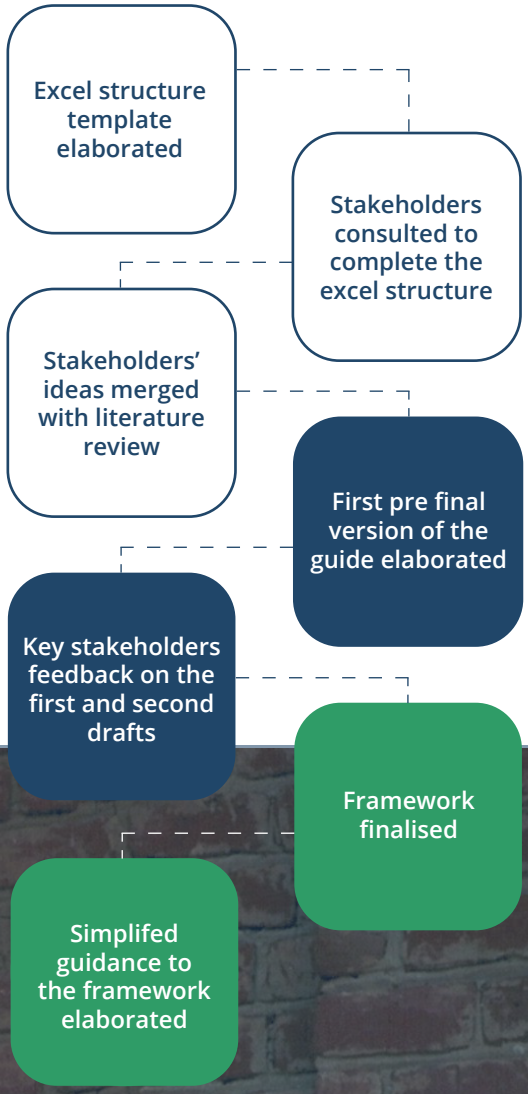
Recognition of the value of social science evidence and socio-cultural approaches in public health emergencies and humanitarian action is increasing (Stellmach et al., 2018). Integrating data from the social and medical sciences, epidemiology and the health system provide opportunities for a holistic and multidisciplinary understanding of disease outbreaks; used together, these data can help to identify and contextualise the needs, abilities, and strengths of specific populations and communities (Bardosh et al., 2020; Carter et al., 2020). Despite acknowledgement of the value of social science, there are still limitations to its effective integration and use in actions and programming during humanitarian emergencies.

This is a regional guide, designed by the Eastern and Southern Africa region (ESAR) RCCE Technical Working Group (TWG) with support from the RCCE Collective Service to guide responders through the steps taken to produce and use social science evidence which can inform humanitarian and public health emergency responses. The guide was developed in ESAR, but can be applied to other regions to solve social science needs. It provides a flowchart with a sequence of actions and steps to be considered to ensure effective application of social and behavioural evidence in response actions. The guide can be adapted and used by those involved in commissioning research, and in designing and implementing programmes.

The social science guide is part of a broad package of resources being developed on applying social science evidence. Further resources (adaptable to the region) can be found at ESAR Social Science Repository or sought through the RCCE Collective Service Social Science Support. Technical assistance and capacity development for applied social sciences is also available through The Social Science in Humanitarian Action Platform (SSHAP). A list of individuals and institutions with capacity to undertake social science activities in the region is available in the ESAR individual and institutional partner mapping.

HOW WAS THE GUIDE DEVELOPED?

The guide was developed following an assessment of social science needs conducted by the RCCE Collective Service in ESAR: emergency responders highlighted the need for guidance on when and how to apply social science evidence to improve the design and delivery of community engagement actions and strategies. Their needs were summarised and shared with expert social scientists and practitioners in the region, and globally, to provide feedback. A draft document was developed and then reviewed and discussed. Figure 1 show the process that led to the completion of a framework. That framework, available here forms the basis of this simplified guide.



IS SOCIAL SCIENCE NEEDED TO SUPPORT DECISIONS IN EMERGENCIES?

The Yes Scenario

		Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
1	**Conduct the social science primary research**	Design research protocols with objectives, methodology, ethical considerations and alligned with programmatic priorities	Design and test data collection tools from qualitative, quantitative or mixed-methods approaches	Collect and analyse data, and interpret findings	Disseminate outputs and track the use in programmatic actions.
2	**Develop social science data to evidence products**	Identify gaps in evidence where socio-behavioural analysis can contribute to activities	Identify the relevant data sources including data from other pillars and socio-behavioural research at local and global levels	Analyse or synthesise data, and organise findings thematically to produce outputs using triangulated social science data	Disseminate the analysis, tailor the communication and community engage-ment strategies to different audiences, and collect feedback.
3	**Translate evidence products into action**	Undertake a gap analysis to understand what implementers need in terms of evidence to inform their work, then agree on the scope, audience, and format of the document	Compile data that is crucial to respond to the subject, and pull-out different pieces of information to perform integrated analysis	Engage stakeholders to look at findings and recurring trends, draw actionable recommendations and outline the potential impact	Disseminate the document and collect feedback to inform further research.
4	**Enhance social science structures and activities**	Create an environment that places social science in the centre of the response	Advocate for social science funding at the donor or government levels	Encourage multidisciplinary approaches and coordination of social science with other structures	Improve capacities and competencies on how to operationalise social science in emergencies.

The No Scenario

5	**Identify and respond to capacity development needs**	Conduct technical needs assessment to identify gaps in capacities and competencies and develop concept note	Choose a capacity development strategy/format: online/offline trainings, workshops, mentorship, etc.	Develop and/or adapt capacity-building materials and content for target audience	Deliver capacity development initiatives, assess improvements in knowledge and other competencies, and document and share lessons learnt.

THE SOCIAL SCIENCE GUIDE EXPLAINED

To understand when and how to apply evidence from social and behavioural sciences in emergencies, response implementers and decisionmakers need to ask themselves the following question:
"Is there recognition that social science evidence is needed to support strategies and decisions?"
Yes or No.

THE YES SCENARIO

Where social science data has been identified as necessary to support local responders in their actions and decisions, five key steps can be followed:
1) Conduct the primary research,
2) Develop social science data to evidence products,
3) Transform data into action: knowledge translation,
4) Enhance social structures and science activities, and
5) Identify and respond to capacity development needs

1 Conduct the social science primary research

- step 1 Design research protocols with clear objectives, methodology, ethical considerations, and aligned with programmatic priorities
- step 2 Design and test data collection tools from qualitative, quantitative or mixed-methods approaches
- step 3 Collect and analyse data, and interpret findings
- step 4 Disseminate outputs and track the use in programmatic actions.

Initiate research activities by designing research protocol(s) that are aligned with emergency response programmatic priorities. A research protocol should describe the objectives, a methodology appropriate to the local context, ethical considerations, and a research dissemination strategy. To collect data, use existing tools or develop new tools from qualitative and quantitative approaches. For qualitative data collection you can consider key informant interviews, observations, focus group discussions, social network mapping, stakeholder mapping, community resource and risk mapping, and media and social media monitoring, and other participatory techniques. For quantitative data, you can consider rapid needs assessments, Knowledge, Attitude, Practice/Perception (KAP) surveys, or other surveys. After collecting the data it needs to be analysed and interpreted, and recommendations or proposals for actions developed. These should be documented, and the lessons shared.

Information and resources to support these processes are available as follows:

Relevant tools:
Survey tool and guidance
Key informant interviews
Focus group discussion guide
Remote Survey Toolkit
CASS Methodology Guide

2 Develop social science data to evidence products

- step 1 Identify gaps in evidence where socio-behavioural analysis can contribute to activities
- step 2 Identify the relevant data sources including data from other pillars and socio-behavioural research at local and global levels
- step 3 Analyse or synthesise data, and organise findings thematically to produce outputs using triangulated social science data
- step 4 Disseminate the analysis, tailor the communication strategies to different audiences, and collect feedback.

To produce synthesis or analysis of secondary research, begin by identifying existing knowledge gaps (in the response) where data syntheses can contribute, then agree on the scope, objectives, and the target audience. Ensure that all the relevant data are available and accessible for the analysis, for example: project/programme documents, published and unpublished literature, qualitative and quantitative research, working group evidence, social listening results, community feedback data. Then triangulate the different types of data, analyse and interpret the results, and make realistic recommendations.

Relevant tools:
Technical writing
SSHAP brief development process
Triangulating Your Data For A Rich Picture Of Safety

3 Translate evidence products into action

- step 1 Undertake a gap analysis to understand what implementers need in terms of evidence to inform their work, then agree on the scope, audience, and format of the document
- step 2 Compile data that is crucial to respond the knowledge gap, and pull-out different pieces of information to perform integrated analysis
- step 3 Engage stakeholders to look at findings and recurring trends, draw actionable recommendations and outline the potential impact
- step 4 Disseminate the document and collect feedback to inform research and action.

To turn existing data into action, conduct gap analyses to identify needs into operational recommendations and agree on the document's scope and format. Then compile data from joint reports, TWG reports, and data from other response pillars that are relevant to the issue and analyse the findings, always thinking about their implications and practical relevance. Structure information clearly, concisely and systematically, using illustratively designed formats.

Engage the target audience and other implementers and decision-makers to develop recommendations that are specific, realistic and achievable in the specific context and with the resources available. Disseminate the document, encourage and monitor uptake in programmes, and collect feedback to inform research.

Relevant tools:
Data4Action Report – ESACRED Demand TWG

4 Enhance social science structures and activities

- step 1 Create an environment that places social science in the centre of the response
- step 2 Advocate for social science funding at the donor or government levels
- step 3 Encourage multidisciplinary approaches and coordination of social science with other structures
- step 4 Improve capacities and competencies on how to operationalise social science in emergencies.

Create an enabling environment for social science networks and groups that can advocate and raise awareness on the value of social science and build partnerships which can set and align priorities for a coherent research agenda. These groups should be integrated into wider response mechanisms and linked to local institutions for maximum impact. Seek funding for social science research and enhance advocacy work with donors and government on the need to integrate social science to outbreak responses. Continuously mobilise resources for sustainable and longer-term funding, not only for social science research, but also for capacity building and coordination activities from the onset of an emergency.

Relevant tools:
Towards People-centred Epidemic Preparedness and Response: From Knowledge to Action

5 Identify and respond to capacity development needs

- step 1 Conduct technical needs assessment to identify gaps in capacities and competencies and develop concept note
- step 2 Choose a capacity development strategy/format: online/offline trainings, workshops, mentorship, etc.
- step 3 Develop and/or adapt capacity-building materials and content for target audience
- step 4 Deliver capacity development initiatives, assess improvements in knowledge and other competencies, and document and share lessons learnt.

In order to identify what training or coaching activities may be necessary for using social science evidence several steps can be followed. Begin with a technical needs assessment to identify and clarify gaps in capacities and competencies in social science-related subjects among the target audience. Develop a plan and delivery strategy for appropriate capacity building and training approaches for the target participants (e.g. training courses, webinars, mentoring, surge support, etc.). Design concept note, with clear description of background, justification, objectives and learning outcomes. Develop detailed session outline, identify speakers and facilitators, and deliver the capacity-building activity.

Relevant tools:
Social science capacity building package (draft)
How to improve outbreak response: a case study of integrated outbreak analytics from Ebola in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo

THE NO SCENARIO

Where there are hesitations if social science is necessary to inform response, and responders are not aware of the role of social science in emergency response, refer to the recommendation **5** above **"Identify and respond to capacity development needs"**.

CONCLUSIONS

This guide has drawn on the expertise of social scientists and practitioners across the region to explain the basic steps of how social sciences can be integrated into emergency response activities. It emphasises that actors and data from different disciplines are strongest and most effective when they are brought together in a holistic response effort. The principles that have guided its development are important in all public health emergencies, they are principles of partnership, capacity development, ethical practice and community-led action, so that the best possible data can be generated and triangulated to guide response activities.

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