

## **WASHing Away Doubt**

A Case Study on Evidence Use for WASH Services in the Kakuma Refugee  
Settlement

Henrike Jost (2525712 / 506613)

Warendorfer Straße 80

48145 Münster

+4915788712507

[h.jost@student.utwente.nl](mailto:h.jost@student.utwente.nl) / [hjost@uni-muenster.de](mailto:hjost@uni-muenster.de)

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Dr. Azadeh Akbari

Prof. Dr. Annette Zimmer

## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the utilization of evidence-based policymaking by humanitarian aid organizations active in the Kakuma refugee camp to deliver WASH services. It further analyzes how evidence is gathered, analyzed, and used in decision-making and identifies facilitators and inhibitors of evidence use. Data is collected through semi-structured interviews with personnel of humanitarian aid organizations active in delivering WASH programs in Kakuma and a content analysis of organizational documents to conduct the analysis. The results show that evidence-based policymaking's benefits - effectiveness and efficiency - are widely recognized among the organizations, with many having evidence use structures set in place, such as evaluation departments, as well as knowledge transfer and co-production relationships to generate context-specific evidence that works for the communities. However, evidence use is confronted with obstacles due to resource constraints - especially money -, external factors - such as political pressures and donor requirements -, and organizational aspects. With its findings, the thesis contributes to the existing scholarship by providing insights into the evidence-based practices of organizations in Kakuma and underlines the potential of evidence-based practices to ensure effective and rights-focused aid programs to fight the ongoing legitimacy crisis.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
CLTS	Community-led Total Sanitation
HSPA	Hygiene and Sanitation Promotion and Awareness
PDWP	Production and Distribution of WASH Products
SF	Sanitation Facilities
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WA	Water Access
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WM	Waste Management

## 1. Introduction

Deliverance rates of humanitarian aid have spiked since World War II and the Cold War ended, with increasing funds channeled into the sector and an expanding array of situations and actions encompassed (Buchanan-Smith, 2003; Sending et al., 2019). What started as a nationally focused practice aimed at safeguarding people's basic survival spilled over into the international sphere with a progressively more individualistic focus (Rose et al., 2013). Additionally, a move towards more coordinated and long-term focused aid approaches emerged due to the increasing occurrence of complex crises (Duffield, 1994; Rose et al., 2013).

The high demand enticed growing numbers of actors to deliver humanitarian aid (Rysaback-Smith, 2015). Unlike in other fields, where organizations have to vouch for their expertise, becoming active was not tied to specific qualifications besides accessing people in need (Sending et al., 2019). Without a unified knowledge base or a comprehensive legal framework on which organizations could base their work (Rose et al., 2013; Sending et al., 2019), an uncoordinated and unlevel playing field with disparately experienced actors utilizing different approaches emerged (Buchanan-Smith, 2003).

The Rwandan genocide in 1994 marked a caesura for the sector. Many were aghast at the humanitarian response's poor quality (Blanchet et al., 2017). Consequentially, the field initiated a rethinking, focused on more accountability, developed standards on which to base programs, and evaluated and measured humanitarian action for its effectiveness, which was previously unheard of as it was believed to be insensitive to reduce programs to their efficiency (Dijkzeul et al., 2013).

The legitimacy crisis that stirred up the humanitarian sector has still not blown over. While many humanitarian organizations offer high-quality services, the field continues to be plagued by inefficiencies and scandals (Turner et al., 2011). The mismanagement of donations in response to Typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan, which hit the Philippines in 2013 (Florano, 2021), and the mishandling of resources, fraudulent reports, and sexual misconduct in the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti in 2011 are still fresh memories haunting the sector and questioning its *modus operandi* (Landale, 2021; Yuhas, 2015).

Besides scandals, lacking transparency, flourishing corruption (BouChabke & Haddad, 2021), and persisting colonial mentalities fuel the legitimacy crisis (Thompson & Aaronson, 2023). As organizations' legitimacy depends on the public's perception of their work (Amagoh, 2015), they must rise to the challenge of solving the crisis to safeguard their role in the international system. This need intensifies in an increasingly complex global landscape, where the demand

for such services is likely to rise and where emerging issues such as pandemics, technological advancements, climate change, and a changing world order may redefine humanitarian aid (Thompson & Aaronson, 2023).

The ongoing crisis of legitimacy highlights the need for more evidence in the humanitarian sector (Blanchet et al., 2017; Sending et al., 2019), which has been recognized by humanitarian aid organizations, donors, and academics alike (Leresche et al., 2023). Evidence-based policymaking has evolved into a widely embraced phenomenon across disciplines. Gradually, it also found application in the humanitarian aid sector (Leresche et al., 2023) and is touted to offer solutions to the root causes of the current situation.

Firstly, it assures effective and efficient programs for the 235 million people who currently receive humanitarian aid (UNICEF, 2023), as only actions proven to work are used, which is especially crucial in a field chronically lacking resources (Banatvala & Zwi, 2000; Khalid et al., 2019b; Sending et al., 2019).

Secondly, evaluating programs gives organizations deeper insights into what works, what needs to be changed, and what risks are associated with specific actions (Bradt, 2012) while actively promoting innovative approaches (Sending et al., 2019). Because of the incredibly complex and fast-paced nature of humanitarian aid contexts and the high stakes, understanding these aspects is even more crucial to responding promptly (Khalid et al., 2019b). Thus, evidence-based policymaking could better equip the humanitarian system and tackle the newly arising challenges it has to face.

Moreover, evidence-based policymaking can garner public support and thereby bolster organizations' legitimacy, as objectives are more likely to be achieved. Furthermore, it promotes transparency and accountability, as it simplifies understanding the successes and failures of programs (Schomerus & Seckinelgin, 2015; Sending et al., 2019).

It can also help with resource allocation, as donors can track a program's effectiveness (Supplee & Metz, 2015) and acquire valuable insights into which services, people, and places need aid most urgently (Mazurana et al., 2013).

Lastly, evidence-based policymaking can reduce persisting colonial mentalities and work towards the localization of aid to ensure a departure from Western approaches, the inclusion of indigenous practices in programs, and that efforts are tailored to the needs of beneficiaries (Lokot & Wake, 2022; Rose et al., 2013; Thompson & Aaronson, 2023).



While employing evidence-based policymaking seems promising to lift the humanitarian aid sector out of its crisis, it might be more challenging in practice than in theory. As mentioned, complexity and urgency characterize the field, especially when vast and sudden inflows of refugees occur. Organizations must respond quickly by drawing up accommodations, food, and medical services (Khalid et al., 2019b). This is complicated when the host country faces conflict and poverty (Khalid et al., 2020). Additionally, resource constraints or organizational factors can hinder the utilization and collection of evidence (Khanpour et al., 2020; M. L. Oliver, 2008). While these are aspects to consider, even in precarious situations, accountable and human rights-focused humanitarian aid is crucial, which highlights the necessity of learning more about how organizations use evidence and what promotes or hinders evidence-based policymaking.

Evidence-based policymaking in the humanitarian aid sector has already received some scholarly attention; most of it focuses on health interventions, knowledge platforms, and disaster response (see Jillson et al., 2019; Kayabu, 2015; Khalid et al., 2019a; Khanpour et al., 2020). However, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programs, a service with tenuous evidence, have only been paid little attention (Blanchet et al., 2013, 2017).

The limited research on how humanitarian aid organizations use evidence for their WASH services persists in an inadequate understanding of how it shapes their decision-making. It is unclear if specific types of evidence are favored and what limits evidence use. Therefore, crucial knowledge remains unavailable, which might assist humanitarian aid organizations in improving their decision-making processes, accountability, and effectiveness and lift them out of the legitimacy crisis.

It is thus worth investigating whether evidence-based policymaking is used for WASH services in refugee settlements since 6.6 million people live in such camps and receive humanitarian aid (UNHCR, 2021). 210,799 live in the Kakuma refugee settlement in Kenya (UNHCR Kenya, 2024), one of the largest and longest existing camps worldwide (Oka, 2014). This makes Kakuma an interesting case, as it had quite some time to develop and solidify its humanitarian aid structures (Jansen, 2011).

Despite a variety of organizations being active and offering their services in the camp (UNHCR Kenya, n.d.), numerous inadequacies persist, especially concerning the prevention and treatment of diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV, due to the overcrowding of the camp, environmental factors, and lacking resources, all underlining the need to have a well-functioning WASH response (IsraAid, 2018; UNEP, 2018; UNHCR, 2022). In addition, the

humanitarian aid structures in the camp have also faced allegations of misconduct, especially regarding corruption and fraud (Hayden, 2019; UNHCR, 2017). Thus, it is vital to examine how evidence is used and what factors influence it. This discussion has led to the following research question:

*“How do humanitarian aid organizations utilize evidence-based policymaking to deliver WASH services to refugees in the refugee settlement Kakuma?”*

To structure the research, the following sub-questions were defined:

SQ1: *“What does the decision-making process look like within humanitarian aid organizations active in the Kakuma refugee settlement?”*

SQ2: *“What structures do humanitarian aid organizations have set in place to facilitate evidence use?”*

SQ3: *“To what extent do resource constraints influence the utilization of evidence in the decision-making process?”*

SQ4: *“To what extent do external factors influence the utilization of evidence in the decision-making process?”*

SQ5: *“To what extent do organizational factors influence the use of evidence in the decision-making process?”*

The research intends to provide empirical data on how humanitarian aid organizations utilize evidence in their WASH decision-making for refugee settlements. Further, factors that may promote or restrain evidence use are identified. Finally, this thesis aims to add to the other research on the topic and tries to build on it.

This thesis begins by establishing an analytical framework for evidence-based policymaking, accompanied by a historical account of the evolution of humanitarian action. Subsequently, it combines evidence-based policymaking with humanitarian aid, highlighting the challenges encountered by the concept within the humanitarian sector. Before the methodology is outlined, a short overview of the Kakuma refugee camp is provided. The analysis section commences with a presentation of the organizations’ activities, along with an examination of their decision-making and evidence utilization structures. Furthermore, constraints and facilitators of evidence use are analyzed. The thesis concludes with a summary of the results, which contextualizes them and identifies further research opportunities.

## **2. Analytical Framework & Background**

This chapter provides an overview of evidence-based policymaking and introduces the analytical framework. Moreover, it offers background information on the development of humanitarian aid, the role of evidence-based practices within the sector, and an examination of challenges the decision-making modus is confronted with.

### **2.1 Evidence-Based Policymaking**

To understand how humanitarian aid organizations use evidence-based policymaking, a look needs to be taken at the concept. The evidence-based policymaking movement is traced back to evidence-based medicine, which emerged in the 1970s (K. Oliver et al., 2014). Archie Cochrane, one of its founding fathers, set its foundation by criticizing biases persistent in health interventions and calling for more thoroughly tested medical practices (Shah & Chung, 2009). The term evidence-based medicine only arose in the 1990s (Masic et al., 2008) and encompasses the promotion of scientific, rigorous evidence to vouch for the effectiveness and efficiency of health interventions to eradicate biases (Cairney & Oliver, 2017).

Since then, evidence has become indispensable in the field. Cochrane's and his colleagues' seminal work on evidence-based medicine and the enthusiasm the concept received spilled over into other policy areas - reaching the humanitarian aid sector in the 1990s (Khalid et al., 2020) - as its added value began to be recognized (Parkhurst, 2016).

Its promised benefit of moving from ideological to rational decision-making (Baldwin-Edwards et al., 2019) is deemed helpful in addressing the legitimacy crisis within the humanitarian aid sector since evidence-based policymaking is used to criticize the practices of decision-makers, hold them to account, save resources, and pressure them into using 'what works' (Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014; Sending et al., 2019).

Evidence-based policymaking aims to create this shift by determining an issue, gathering evidence methodically, evaluating the resulting data, and implementing the gained insights to maximize a policy's effectiveness (Baron, 2018; Dijkzeul et al., 2013). While this is a widespread understanding of the concept, Cairney (2016) disagrees with this naïve grasp, declaring it an unattainable ideal form. Instead, he emphasizes the importance of acknowledging decision-makers constraining realities, which urge them to consider and weigh up various viewpoints, norms, and values against the available evidence.

Other scholars share this perspective, namely that decisions are not made in vacuums but are influenced by structures, norms, and values, besides evidence (Head, 2010; Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014; Sanderson, 2002). Therefore, they indicate the necessity of understanding the decision-making process, as well as its participants and institutions, to manage expectations for evidence-based policymaking (Cairney, 2016; Head, 2010; Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014; Marston & Watts, 2003; Sanderson, 2002).

Even if one could base decisions solely on evidence, biases may persist, as deciding which evidence to include and how to utilize it is inherently political and based on values, norms, and interests (Parkhurst, 2016; Schomerus & Seckinelgin, 2015).

Competing values and interests can express themselves through the hierarchization of evidence. Evidence hierarchies often see randomized controlled trials as the superlative source due to their methodological rigor (Head, 2010). Critics contend that using such hierarchies might lead to the employment of knowledge about effective strategies, however, it does not necessarily address the most pressing needs (Parkhurst, 2016). Furthermore, choosing evidence based on hierarchies often happens to the detriment of considering local specificities (Dijkzeul et al., 2013). Thus, most evidence-based policymaking scholars agree that the use of evidence hierarchies is outdated (Head, 2010; Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014; Marston & Watts, 2003; Nutley et al., 2003; Promsopha & Tucci, 2023).

Resources, personal experiences, and organizational structure may also interfere with the rational nature that evidence-based policymaking is lauded for (Baldwin-Edwards et al., 2019; Cairney, 2016; Parkhurst, 2016). Thus, even though evidence-based policymaking is depicted as freed from biases and ideology, scholars emphasize that the use of evidence can never be truly objective (Head, 2008, 2010; Jasanoff, 1998; Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014; Marston & Watts, 2003; Sanderson, 2002).

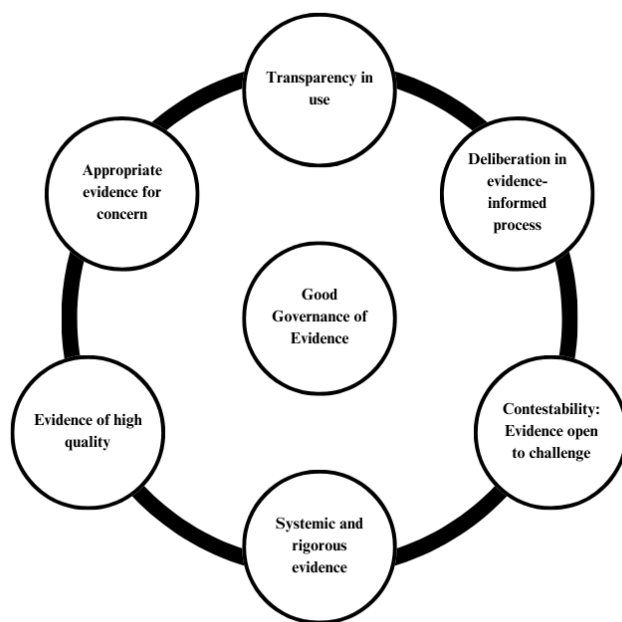
To counter scholars' critiques on evidence-based policymaking, Parkhurst (2016) calls for the good governance of evidence to reconcile the critics with the advocates. He views evidence-based policymaking through a differentiated lens and does not condemn it for its shortcomings, nor does he impulsively hail it without considering its Achilles heel. In addition, he offers insights into how the evidence-based policymaking process can be enhanced.

Rather than calling for more evidence, he puts forward a framework<sup>1</sup>, depicted in *Figure 1*, that looks at how biases within evidence-based policymaking can be reduced. While the process of knowledge transfer from researchers to decision-makers is an important part of evidence-based policymaking, it is crucial to keep in mind that calling for more transfers does not lead to more taken-up evidence nor the eradication of biases (Parkhurst, 2016). Cairney & Oliver (2017), Head (2010), and Nutley et al. (2003) agree that the call for more knowledge transfer will not lead to increased evidence use. It is of greater importance to establish productive relationships between scholars and decision-makers. This can be done by pointing out the needs of the other group to overcome cultural gaps (Cairney, 2016; Head, 2010). Furthermore, to promote evidence uptake, it is crucial to demonstrate the benefits of using it (Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014; Nutley et al., 2003).

To ensure effective evidence-based policymaking, only appropriate evidence should be considered informing decisions, according to Parkhurst (2016). What counts as evidence and

**Figure 1**

*Good governance of evidence framework, own illustration based on Parkhurst (2016)*



what is considered appropriate haunts the evidence-based policymaking scholarship (Promsopha & Tucci, 2019; Schomerus & Seckinelgin, 2015). While some speak about utilizing high-quality evidence without going into further detail (i.e., Head, 2010), others believe a common definition to be essential for every evidence-based policymaking framework (i.e., Nutley et al., 2003).

Parkhurst agrees with Cairney's (2016) and Dijkzeul et al.'s (2013) assessment that evidence is information obtained through well-established scientific methods and must be suitable for the given context. Beyond that, Parkhurst (2016) adds that evidence has to concern the issue at hand, cover contrasting approaches, and be relevant. This means humanitarian aid organizations need to use relevant, context-specific, high-quality, and

<sup>1</sup> Parkhurst's framework is slightly adjusted to fit the humanitarian aid context, as issues of political representativeness, necessitated in democratic political decision-making procedures, do not apply to the decision-making process of humanitarian aid organizations, leading to the exclusion of the principles of 'stewardship' and 'representation'

scientifically-based evidence that is not focused on a singular solution in their decision-making process to use evidence appropriately. Cairney (2016) would dispute that organizations can review all available evidence due to the nature of the decision-making process, which is constrained by time, resources, and the interests of stakeholders.

When evidence is utilized, it should be assessed for its quality (Parkhurst, 2016). This does not refer to ranking research methods as evidence hierarchies often do. One method is not better than others, rather the used method should be applied according to scientific standards (Parkhurst, 2016). As mentioned above, most scholars share this perspective and question the usefulness of evidence hierarchies, as randomized controlled trials are not necessarily the most useful type of evidence and might not even be feasible in humanitarian contexts (Dijkzeul et al., 2013; Head, 2010; Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014; Nutley et al., 2003).

Knox Clarke & Darcy (2014) present a more detailed six-step framework for assessing the quality of evidence in the humanitarian aid sector. First, the evidence needs to be an accurate reflection of the situation on the ground. Second, representativeness within the evidence needs to be assured, so that not only one group's needs are depicted. Third, used evidence needs to be relevant and attest to or refute the effectiveness of an intervention. Fourth, they argue that the quality of evidence is also characterized by its generalizability.

While the preceding steps are uncontroversial, this aspect can be seen critically. What works is dependent on the context (Head, 2010; Marston & Watts, 2003; Parkhurst, 2016). Generalizable evidence may be useful when global guidelines are drafted (Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014), but in most cases context-sensitive evidence that considers local specificities is of higher value for decision-makers, as Dijkzeul et al. (2013) and Parkhurst (2016) emphasize.

The fifth step is uncontroversial again. Knox Clarke & Darcy (2014) argue that the quality of evidence depends on analytical rigor to make sure that a causal relationship between the intervention and effect exists. Lastly, they posit that an assessment be made of who gathered the evidence, the methods employed, and the rationale behind the research to guarantee high-quality evidence.

Promsopha & Tucci (2019) build on this framework by looking at the internal and external quality of evidence. While many parts of their framework are similar to what Knox Clarke & Darcy (2014) propose, they add their emphasis by focusing on triangulation and the necessity of considering vulnerabilities. This is a crucial aspect that is shared by Mazurana et al. (2013),

who highlight the importance of collecting data broken down by age or gender to consider deviations caused by vulnerabilities and to increase effectiveness.

After this short excursion into understanding evidence assessment, the focus now lies on the challenge of selectively choosing evidence, or what Parkhurst (2016) calls *cherry picking*. To prevent biased evidence-based policymaking caused by selecting specific evidence, a rigorous review of available evidence is necessary (Parkhurst, 2016). This would mean that humanitarian aid organizations need to refrain from selecting parts of evidence, be it to sustain specific objectives or appease donors. As mentioned above, Cairney (2016), however, argues that it is not feasible under the workings of decision-making processes that decision-makers comprehensively gather and review all available evidence. Thus, selecting evidence is only realistic and can give us insights into how decision-makers prioritize certain evidence sources (Cairney, 2016). Nevertheless, it is important to ensure that evidence is not employed as a means of supporting particular objectives and to try to conduct a comprehensive review of the evidence base.

To ensure accountability, a transparent use of the decision-making modus is crucial. According to Parkhurst (2016), relevant stakeholders, as well as the public, should be able to retrace how decisions were made. This includes the entire process, from gathering evidence to choosing which information informs the decision in the end (Parkhurst, 2016). In general, Sanderson (2002) and Knox Clarke & Darcy (2014) share that transparency and accountability are part of evidence-based policymaking's main benefits, as they make it easier to assess whether decision-makers are working effectively. While what Parkhurst (2016) envisions is certainly beneficial for increasing accountability and transparency, it remains questionable whether it is realizable in the current turbulent state aid organizations are operating.

Often, clear-cut solutions to a problem are lacking, rather, various viewpoints exist that are shaped by norms and values on how an issue can be handled. To make evidence-based policymaking as unbiased as possible, Parkhurst (2016) argues that all existing viewpoints should be considered so that the competing norms and values are represented and the decision-making process is not co-opted. This perspective is shared by Knox Clarke & Darcy (2014), Lee (2016), and Marston & Watts (2003), who also point towards the norms and values that are influencing decision-making processes and that need to be reflected. Nutley et al. (2003) and Parkhurst (2016) share that this can occur through deliberations and including relevant stakeholders in the decision-making process. Humanitarian aid organizations could collaborate with affected populations, staff on the ground, donors, and scholars on how to deal with an issue

and what is most urgently needed (Cohen & Yaeger, 2021; S. Oliver et al., 2018), thereby also working towards the localization of aid.

In line with the last two aspects, evidence should be contestable if concerns about its usefulness persist to increase the accountability of evidence-based policymaking (Parkhurst, 2016). Parkhurst (2016) envisions accountability instruments in the form of appeals or feedback loops that report back when policies are not having their intended effects. The importance of deliberative and open processes is also highlighted within Parsons' (2001) and Cairney's (2016) frameworks. This ensures greater accountability by giving the individuals affected by a decision a voice in the decision-making process.

It is clear that most aspects depict ideal forms of how an evidence-based policymaking process should look instead of commanding decision-makers to follow the framework meticulously step-by-step. Nevertheless, the points can be used to assess how parts of the current decision-making process are faring and which aspects can be enhanced. However, it remains essential to acknowledge the real-world conditions of decision-making continuously and evaluate evidence-based policymaking practices in conjunction with these ideal types, as Cairney (2016) suggests.

To promote the good governance and use of evidence that the framework lays out, appropriate structures need to be established in the organizations to facilitate the process (Parkhurst, 2016). This does not only refer to literal structures but also to adopting the necessary principles and rules that allow a well-governed use of evidence. Parkhurst (2016) recognizes that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to establishing such structures as institutions, viewed through an institutionalist lens, are an accumulation of their history, values, and employees. Thus, changes are most likely to happen not overnight, but incrementally.

Marston & Watts (2003), Sanderson (2002), and Nutley et al. (2003) agree that organizational factors are necessary for promoting a less biased use of evidence. This means that relationships between decision-makers and researchers need to be improved to communicate their respective needs, but also that employees of organizations are equipped with data analysis skills (Nutley et al., 2003; Sanderson, 2002). For the former, knowledge disseminating platforms, such as EvidenceAid or the Cochrane Collaboration, can be used to link the two parties (Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014). Evidence use is also strengthened through the establishment of knowledge management systems, which is highlighted by Head (2008), Knox Clarke & Darcy (2014), and Marston & Watts (2003).



Knowledge management systems can help manage the highly complex and ever-evolving environments that humanitarian aid organizations are operating in, where information is often scarce, and the playing field for basing decisions on evidence is unlevel, as some organizations have the resources to collect information while others do not (Zhang et al., 2002). The systems help to collect, assess, and share knowledge (Gupta et al., 2000), processes crucial to ensure precise and swift evidence-based decision-making.

Knowledge systems can house gathered evidence in quickly accessible formats so that the decision-making process is not elongated (Zhang et al., 2002). The system must be well maintained so that irrelevant or outdated information does not clog it and slow decision-making (Lipianin-Zontek & Zontek, 2023; Zhang et al., 2002).

Furthermore, it is crucial to have a protection strategy for the knowledge management system from unwanted leaks of sensitive information (Zhang et al., 2002), which could harm aid beneficiaries (Mesmar et al., 2016).

Combined, these processes are instrumental for the organization of knowledge and for facilitating evidence-based policymaking, thereby effectively aiding humanitarian aid organizations in delivering effective programs, especially in the face of the ever-evolving field in which they are operating, where quick and efficient decision-making is essential.

## **2.2 Humanitarian Aid**

The idea of providing aid to those in need can be traced back centuries (Alted Vigil, 2019). During those early days, humanitarian efforts were mostly nationally driven by religious ambitions or a belief in common humanity (Paulmann, 2013). Its international aspect only followed after technological progress facilitated the formation of organizations specifically built to provide humanitarian aid across borders (Rysaback-Smith, 2015). This was first done through Henry Dunant's book 'A Memory of Solferino', which evoked the establishment of the International Red Cross Committee and the Geneva Conventions by outlining relief strategies that should be adopted during war (Barnett, 2013). The Geneva Conventions first stipulated fundamentals for delivering aid to affected populations and wounded soldiers, binding signatories to allow organizations to offer their services (Rysaback-Smith, 2015).

A high demand for the Red Cross' services was elicited through World War I, which resulted in a systematized effort to roll out aid to war victims through the establishment of the League of Nations to keep peace and aid people in need (Barnett, 2013; Rysaback-Smith, 2015). During

this time, the first hints of evidence-based policymaking can be detected as the League of Nations approached humanitarian issues scientifically and technically to prevent ideologies and political interests from poisoning their aid efforts as states started to become active in the matter (Paulmann, 2013).

What started in the aftermath of World War I, solidified itself after World War II. An increasing number of aid organizations got active, now offering their services beyond the European context as decolonization efforts began, which left spaces open that the organizations started to fill (Barnett, 2013; Paulmann, 2013; Rysaback-Smith, 2015). Aid organizations did not have to adhere to specific principles to be established, which only facilitated the vast increase of humanitarian actors (Sending et al., 2019). The ratification of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a huge milestone for the sector, as for the first time, fundamental rights of all humans were laid down, thereby creating a moral basis for organizations (Rysaback-Smith, 2015). However, a general legal framework for humanitarian aid was still missing, and organizations had different levels of expertise, resulting in an unlevel playing field and various uncoordinated approaches to delivering aid (Buchanan-Smith, 2003; Rose et al., 2013; Sending et al., 2019).

At the end of the Cold War, aid organizations started coordinating their actions closer with states as so-called complex emergencies arose (Barnett, 2013). This term recognizes that aid is not only needed when war breaks out between two states. It can also be vital in interstate conflicts or due to the actions of various actors (Paulmann, 2013). Examples of such complex emergency interventions are the Rwandan genocide and the Kosovo War. The poor quality of these humanitarian responses ignited the legitimacy crisis within the sector, which led to increased calls for more efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability (Dijkzeul et al., 2013).

During this turbulent time, the humanitarian principles and a definition of humanitarian aid were consolidated (Rysaback-Smith, 2015). At its most basic, humanitarian aid can be understood as offering a helping hand to those in need to alleviate their suffering (Alted Vigil, 2019). More specifically, it accounts for the response after a disaster (Paulmann, 2013). The principles that make up humanitarian aid are humanity, independence, neutrality, and impartiality. Broken down these refer to, providing aid to all those in need of it (humanity), without preferences, biases, or ideology (neutrality), purely because a need persists (impartiality), and without a hidden agenda (independence) (Rysaback-Smith, 2015).

Nowadays, aid aims at sustainably solving crises and establishing democratic structures (Barnett, 2013). With increasingly complex conflicts and new challenges caused by pandemics,

climate change, and the rise of technology, aid organizations have to conduct their work in highly intricate environments, which simultaneously serve as arenas for geopolitical battles (Rysaback-Smith, 2015; Thompson & Aaronson, 2023).

The rise of humanitarian aid organizations and increased crises has also led to a need for more professionalized and efficient humanitarian action (Paulmann, 2013). The system is characterized as bursting at its seams. With progressively intricate crises and a lack of resources, humanitarian aid organizations are struggling to fulfill their mandate while under pressure to implement well-working programs (Davey & Scriven, 2015). Added to this, the earlier mentioned crisis of legitimacy, persistent colonial mentalities, a general lack of transparency, and corruption plague the field (BouChabke & Haddad, 2021; Thompson & Aaronson, 2023).

In the face of these accusations and the new challenges that aid organizations have to confront, it is crucial that they can lift themselves out of this crisis and work towards more effective and human rights-focused action. Employing evidence-based policymaking has been hailed to remedy precisely this predicament.

### **2.3 Evidence in Humanitarian Aid**

Several initiatives have emerged since the end of the Cold War, focusing on evidence and standards in humanitarian action. One such example is the Sphere Handbook, which established guiding minimum standards for actors involved in humanitarian aid to ensure accountability and effectiveness (Gostelow, 1999; Rysaback-Smith, 2015). Even though many have put their hope in the Sphere Project, it is not exempt from criticism. While it does offer guidance, it is not a panacea for the aid sector. It does not, for example, account for issues regarding access, funding, and coordination, which pose challenges to effective program delivery (Gostelow, 1999). Additionally, while it offers advice on what works, it does not lay out a map to follow to achieve intended objectives (Gostelow, 1999). In a similar vein, Robertson et al. (2002) have criticized the inflexible nature of the indicators and the standards' lacking generalizability. However, to expect one guideline to provide a comprehensive roadmap on what to do to achieve specific targets is highly unrealistic, as what works and how to achieve it depends on contextual factors.

Further efforts to facilitate evidence use, accessibility, and distribution, have been undertaken by platforms, including the Humanitarian Data Exchange, Twine, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, EvidenceAid, and the Cochrane Collaboration (Blanchet

et al., 2017; Dijkzeul et al., 2013; Dobrow et al., 2006; Khalid et al., 2019a). They all aim to improve access to evidence by disseminating systemic reviews or publishing reports. Khalid et al. (2019a) found that humanitarian aid organizations use such websites and that they contribute to the utilization of evidence. Therefore, scholars have called for increased financial means to further such initiatives and access to strong evidence (Blanchet et al., 2017).

The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), offers, besides evaluations and overviews, guidelines on how humanitarian action should be monitored and evaluated and is joined in this mission by others, such as the Interagency Standing Committee. Through their work, they aim to decrease the fragmentation of available advice on evaluating programs and wish to contribute to more consistent monitoring (Christoplos et al., 2018; Interagency Standing Committee, 2018). Evaluations are not always conducted helpfully. They are often performed as simple tick-the-box approaches, mainly used to appease donors (Renzaho, 2007). Additionally, evaluators usually look at what happened during the program term, rather than taking into account why an aspect worked, leaving the results unhelpful to be used (Feinstein & Beck, 2006).

Organizations mostly follow the same procedure when they are evaluating their programs. The process begins with a review of relevant documents regarding the case and a meeting with stakeholders, followed by a visit to the country where the humanitarian action took place. There, meetings are scheduled with UN actors, the organization's local offices, and donors. A visit will also be paid to the site itself, where the humanitarian program was implemented, before a debrief happens (Feinstein & Beck, 2006). The evidence resulting from these evaluation procedures does sometimes find its way onto the desks of decision-makers, however, often, this does not happen systematically (M. L. Oliver, 2008).

Involving employees in program evaluation can facilitate a more systemized utilization in the decision-making process, an aspect that organization members themselves have raised (M. L. Oliver, 2008). It creates buy-in effects that make individuals notice evidence more likely and lead to them advocating for its heightened use (M. L. Oliver, 2008).

Besides evaluations, different information can be viewed as evidence informing the phases of humanitarian aid decision-making. What classifies as evidence and what is used in the end is dependent on actors' ideologies and principles (Onwujekwe et al., 2015), with many lacking a strategy for choosing and evaluating evidence (O'Donoghue Jenkins et al., 2016). As Parkhurst, (2016) and Head (2010) argue, the gathered evidence must be of high quality, but it is even more important that it is suitable for the needed context, an aspect that needs to be paid

more attention by organizations (Dobrow et al., 2006). To check for the context fit of evidence, Dobrow et al. (2006) argue that personnel on the ground and other local actors should be tasked with assessing these factors.

This is also highlighted by Kruke & Olsen (2012). They claim that employees' reflection on experiences is the best way to gather data and information on what works when formal research remains difficult. This is why they argue that centralized decision-making in the main offices of the organizations may lead to less evidence use due to a lack of trust in the people on the ground or as they may misinterpret evidence. Rather, it would be important to include on-site personnel in the decision-making process (Kruke & Olsen, 2012). However, the utilization of evidence is currently dependent upon the discretion of high-ranking personnel, with the potential for evidence to be dismissed based on its lack of resonance (M. L. Oliver, 2008). This continues the existing power asymmetry between on-site personnel and those in the headquarters (Knox Clarke & Campbell, 2020).

The inclusion of on-the-ground personnel in the evaluation and decision-making process could also work towards less biased evidence-based policymaking, as appropriate evidence, as well as, diverse viewpoints are considered, and the decision-making process' transparency and openness are increased.

To decide which evidence to use and how to use it, evidence needs to exist and be accessible. Therefore, knowledge transfer plays an important role in evidence-based policymaking (O'Donoghue Jenkins et al., 2016). Partnerships between academics and humanitarian aid decision-makers have been argued to contribute to better knowledge transfer relationships (Allen, McGrath, Hooton, & Marta, 2018). Additionally, many scholars have highlighted the benefits of co-production (Saulnier et al., 2019). Co-production describes the partnership between academics and other stakeholders to produce evidence (Lionis et al., 2018). This practice helps researchers to identify relevant issues, keep evidence up-to-date, and provide decision-makers with knowledge in needed areas (Turner et al., 2011).

Such partnerships are crucial for opening up spaces in which actors can come together, as humanitarian aid workers are often not trained in doing research (Leresche et al., 2023). Co-production also contributes to the cultural sensitivity of research, as members of the community are given a voice during the evidence uptake process. This aspect has been stressed as one of the most important factors that could boost the effectiveness of humanitarian aid programs (Cohen & Yaeger, 2021). Furthermore, these two processes can facilitate evidence-based policymaking, as suitable evidence is more easily identified and different viewpoints are

considered, which allows for evidence use that is more transparent, rigorous, and contestable. Lastly, co-production contributes to flattening power hierarchies in knowledge production and can work towards localizing aid (Lokot & Wake, 2022).

Positive experiences with co-production and evidence-based policymaking make them more likely to be integrated into the organizational culture (Al Hudib & Cousins, 2022). This is a crucial aspect since various humanitarian aid workers and scholars have indicated that a lack of a culture of accountability or learning within the organization is often the reason for not using evidence-based policymaking (M. L. Oliver, 2008). Saulnier et al. (2019) share that having an organizational structure that can accommodate the decision-making mode will facilitate its utilization. Thus, by having the right organizational structures and including other actors and employees in the procedures, evidence is more likely used in a less biased and more transparent way.

Lastly, technologies also offer opportunities for conducting research in such contexts. Technologies allow for a more orderly and secure storing of collected data, making it harder for hostile actors or environmental factors to destroy findings (Perakslis, 2018). They can also help in overcoming research hurdles, as videos and audio can resolve issues that arise regarding informed consent (Perakslis, 2018). Additionally, technologies, such as the internet, play a key role in establishing knowledge management systems, as they help to categorize, filter, acquire, and share evidence (Zhang et al., 2002). It is important that personnel are trained to use these kinds of technologies and that the necessary infrastructure exists (Perakslis, 2018). Furthermore, proper storage and environmental factors need to be taken into account so that tools are not destroyed by environmental factors (Perakslis, 2018).

However, one needs to keep in mind that technologies also bear considerable vulnerabilities. Increased use may lead to the abuse of data. For example, clouds in which the data is stored are always vulnerable to cyber attacks which could potentially harm refugees (Mesmar et al., 2016). Thus, the sensitive nature of the data necessitates establishing effective protection strategies to defend against unwanted intrusions (Zhang et al., 2002).

As outlined, several initiatives have been ignited to incorporate evidence-based decision-making into the humanitarian sector, however, often a systematized way of considering evidence is lacking. To promote and use evidence in decision-making processes, benefits of evidence use need to be highlighted, relationships formed, structures established, and technologies adopted, which allow for an easy collection and production. However, while

evidence is supposed to increase effectiveness and transparency of humanitarian aid programs, one needs to note the challenges of conducting research in such turbulent contexts.

## **2.4 Challenges of Evidence-Based Policymaking in Humanitarian Context**

Even though organizations may want to evaluate their programs and include external research in their decision-making, a plethora of challenges might hinder them.

One issue complicating evaluating programs is the unorganized and fragmented records of humanitarian aid organizations, which makes a systematic review of evidence difficult (Taithe & Borton, 2015). If they do manage to evaluate programs, their findings are often not made available for others to use and learn from (Colombo & Checchi, 2018). Adding to this is the heterogeneous use of indicators and styles of evaluations, which complicates summarizing findings and quickly filtering them for the needed information (Colombo & Checchi, 2018). Furthermore, external research can be difficult to locate for organizations as they often lack time to search for it and check it for its suitability, as evidence is widely dispersed (Allen, McGrath, Hooton, & Valdes Garcia, 2018; Colombo & Checchi, 2018).

The large number of organizations active in humanitarian contexts also adds a hurdle to conducting research. Various organizations provide the same service, which makes it difficult to identify which program caused which effects (Puri et al., 2017). Thus, studies need to be rigorously planned and observed to make sure that the results are not distorted. However, robust study designs are difficult to achieve in such turbulent environments in which circumstances continuously change (Kohrt et al., 2019). The fast-paced context also hinders organizations from having a holistic understanding of the situation (Knox Clarke & Campbell, 2020). Time pressures can then lead to decisions being made with an incomplete understanding and reliance on established methods, which may exclude innovative approaches (Knox Clarke & Campbell, 2020).

In addition, aid organizations are chronically underfunded. This evokes a moral dilemma: Should the money be invested in service provision, or should it be put into evidence uptake (Colombo & Checchi, 2018)? To ease this dilemma, some have argued that the sharing of information between organizations could lessen constraints and would lead to a better understanding of what works. However, many organizations oppose sharing findings with others due to the highly competitive field they are in (Shalash et al., 2022).

A further challenge is the lack of proper training to conduct research in humanitarian aid contexts. When evaluating programs or conducting research, the situation of participants has to be considered. For example, research should not be done during time slots in which essential services are distributed (Ford et al., 2009). Furthermore, many of the refugees are traumatized, therefore, when conducting studies, it is crucial to do so in a sensitive manner (Falb et al., 2019). However, many professionals working for humanitarian aid organizations are not even trained in conducting research in general (Ager et al., 2014). If trained, they are mostly so in technical aspects and therefore tend to neglect the social components, which results in an understanding of what parts of programs have worked but not why they worked (Feinstein & Beck, 2006).

Therefore, a need persists to equip aid workers with the necessary knowledge to conduct rigorous, sensitive, and ethically conform research, as well as to establish partnerships with researchers who can lend a helping hand to the organizations on the ground (Ford et al., 2009). Some organizations are already starting to build up such alliances, such as Médecins Sans Frontières or the International Rescue Committee (Kohrt et al., 2019). These partnerships can be used to enhance research abilities of the humanitarian aid organizations' staff (Kohrt et al., 2019). In addition to that, academic institutions, such as the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, have also started to design research-driven humanitarian aid programs that can be used by organizations (Kohrt et al., 2019).

The challenge of obtaining informed consent also needs to be considered. Never should it seem like receiving services from humanitarian aid organizations is conditional on participating in research (Colombo & Checchi, 2018). Furthermore, illiteracy or language barriers are obstacles to giving informed consent (Falb et al., 2019). To properly give informed consent, it is crucial that study participants understand what the research is about and what data is collected. Ford et al. (2009) also stress the ambiguity that surrounds the concept in crisis settings when a lack of trust in authorities persists. Moreover, a need for culturally sensitive approaches exists, which take into account cultural specificities (Ekmekci & Arda, 2017). One example is that female participants often have to ask their patriarch's permission to be part of the study. One viewpoint is that researchers need to deal with such cultural differences and adapt informed consent procedures so that they honor their ethical intent but also do not violate local cultures (Shaibu, 2007). This is contrasted by Bruno & Haar (2020), who argue that it is crucial to uphold research standards and consistently apply informed consent how it is provided for in international conventions. It is essential that informed consent is rigorously given, but one needs to consider the costs that lack of trust through violating local cultures brings.



Safeguarding that research fulfils ethical requirements can be difficult as crisis contexts are overwhelming and national organizations tasked with ethical oversight rarely possess the time to assess the ethical implications of studies rigorously (Blanchet et al., 2017) or might not even exist. Here, another ethical dilemma enters the scene as it is questionable whether the delay in providing services due to the long process of ethically reviewing the proposed research project is morally acceptable. However, compliance with ethical frameworks is also essential (Falb et al., 2019). What might be a useful tool to follow ethical standards effectively is having an expert deployed in crisis situations, especially in humanitarian contexts that have persisted for years. This might accelerate the process and makes sure that ethical standards are followed (Falb et al., 2019).

It is also essential to keep in mind that while the conducted research will hopefully lead to improvements, too much research can also overwhelm the inhabitants of camps and lead to research fatigue (Colombo & Checchi, 2018).

External factors, such as destroyed infrastructure or political conditions, may complicate research (Seifert et al., 2018). The political context might prevent organizations from publishing findings and could even lead to them losing their permission to operate in that country (Ford et al., 2009). Host governments, or actors controlling the country, might impose restrictions, which make it more difficult for organizations to offer their services, evaluate programs, or conduct research (Bolesta, 2002). Additionally, the situation on the ground can be too dangerous to conduct research (Kohrt et al., 2019; Lazreg et al., 2019).

Political constraints can also stem from donor governments, who provide the aid organizations with funding. For example, evidence-based policymaking can be hindered by a lack of political will to promote its use when actors have different opinions on how to design aid programs (Colombo & Checchi, 2018). Donors - be it governments or other actors - often have diverging priorities, which makes it difficult for aid organizations to rely on evidence (Griekspoor & Sondorp, 2001).

Organizational factors may also pose challenges to using evidence-based policymaking. In case there are no formalized processes, it is often difficult to understand who exactly is responsible for making sure that evidence is used (M. L. Oliver, 2008). Especially when organizations have a very fragmented and uncoordinated way of working and lack communication channels, evidence use is hindered (Knox Clarke & Campbell, 2020). Furthermore, in case the organization does not have a culture of learning and has a very different approach to program design than evidence-based policymaking, a move to adopt such a new decision-making modus

may be met with protests (Supplee & Metz, 2015). This highlights the role of organizational culture in facilitating or hindering evidence-based policymaking.

Of course, one also needs to consider the possibility of organizations not wanting to utilize evidence-based policymaking. They do, however, miss out on the benefits that this decision-making modus brings. As laid out before, it can work towards reducing colonialist mentalities and more localized aid, as well as increase accountability and transparency, thereby garnering public support to counter the legitimacy crisis and ensure that effective services are delivered in the Kakuma refugee camp.

## **2.5 Kakuma Refugee Camp**

As of April 2024, Kenya is home to 770.255 refugees, 210.799 of whom live in the Kakuma refugee camp (UNHCR Kenya, 2024). Established in the early 1990s, Kakuma was first designated for the *Lost Boys of Sudan* (UNHCR Kenya, n.d.) - a large group of children fleeing southern Sudan following the civil war (International Rescue Committee, 2014). The camp, one of the largest worldwide (Oka, 2014), lies in the northwest of Kenya in Turkana, one of Kenya's poorest counties (Pape & Beltramo, 2021). Besides Sudanese, other nationalities such as Congolese, Somali, Ethiopian, Ugandan, Burundian, Eritrean, and Rwandan are also represented in Kakuma (UNHCR Kenya, 2024). The main reasons for individuals fleeing their homes and ending up in Kakuma are conflict, the effects of climate change, persecution, and food insecurity (UNHCR Kenya, n.d.).

The camp, with its four areas - Kakuma 1, 2, 3, and 4 - is administered by the Kenyan government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (UNHCR Kenya, n.d.). They are joined by 46 actors in implementing programs and offering support in various areas, ranging from shelter to nutrition, health, and WASH (REACH Kenya, 2022)

While Kenya is home to many refugees, it has a very restrictive approach to inhabiting them. For example, the refugees are confined to the proximities of the camp and are prohibited from taking up formal work, leaving many dependent on aid services (MacPherson & Sterck, 2021). Refugees can be employed by the camps' organizations, but they cannot earn a proper salary (Horn, 2010). To minimize conflict between the host population and the camp's inhabitants, keeping livestock is also not permitted, as the local population is heavily dependent on it (Horn, 2010). While these regulations aim to keep tensions between the host and refugee population

to a minimum, conflicts still occur, also within the refugee population, due to the heterogeneous cultural backgrounds of those residing in the camp (UNHCR, 2022).

Additional persistent challenges in the camp are allegations of fraud and corruption (Hayden, 2019; UNHCR, 2017), as well as the ongoing drought in northern Kenya, including Kakuma (UNHCR, 2022), which exacerbates the camp's water scarcity (UNEP, 2018). Many structures within the camp are improvised, leading to an often unreliable infrastructure across sectors, such as education or health services (AREL, n.d.). The camp was planned to inhabit 70,000 refugees in total, this number has far been exceeded, which is one reason for the inadequate infrastructure and insufficient resources (UNEP, 2018). This is especially harmful as diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV are widely spread across the camp, leaving many inhabitants in need of a well-functioning health, sanitation, and hygiene response (IsraAid, 2018).

### **3. Methodology**

This chapter introduces the methodology applied to illuminate how humanitarian aid organizations use evidence-based policymaking for their WASH programs in the Kakuma refugee camp - an underresearched topic, resulting in an incomplete grasp. It begins by laying out the research design, then describes the data collection process, and concludes by outlining the strategy employed to analyze the gathered data.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

To answer the research question, a qualitative case study approach was followed. The Kakuma refugee camp was selected because it is one of the largest and longest existing camps in the world (Oka, 2014), which has also been subjected to allegations of inefficiency. Over time, more and more aid organizations have become active in Kakuma, solidifying their own and the camp's aid structures, likely enabling them to evaluate programs, conduct research, and employ evidence-based policymaking. Thus, it was expected that a wide variety of documents regarding WASH programs in Kakuma would be available, as well as a broader sample of organizations from which to select interviewees, to gain diverse and nuanced insights into their perspectives on the research topic.

WASH services, which refer to the provision of clean water, promoting hygiene, and providing sanitation facilities, are among the most crucial services for humanitarian aid organizations to

deliver. Despite its importance, WASH is one of the least researched services when it comes to evidence use in humanitarian settings (Blanchet et al., 2013, 2017). The understudiedness of WASH, combined with its importance, visualizes the need to understand how humanitarian aid organizations utilize evidence-based policymaking to deliver WASH services. The exploratory case study design allowed such an in-depth study (Blatter, 2008). In addition, it enabled the uncovering of various factors (Meyer, 2001), facilitating a thorough examination of the catalysts and inhibitors associated with evidence use in aid organizations.

Before conducting the case study, existing literature was reviewed to single out relevant theories, ideas, and concepts to guide the analysis (Yin, 2018). These are outlined in the analytical framework and background chapter. Most theories focus on decision-making within governmental structures, though some accounts of evidence-based decision-making within the humanitarian sector have been developed. However, there is room to delve deeper into how humanitarian aid organizations use evidence-based policymaking, especially regarding WASH services in refugee camps. This case study aimed to strengthen the understanding of these processes and dynamics in the Kakuma refugee camp, using the gained insights to test existing theories, fill knowledge gaps, and contribute to theory development (Fidel, 1984).

Case study research, especially single-case study research, harbors the limitation of lacking generalizability (Kohlbacher, 2006). However, this research design allows for an in-depth and nuanced examination of the chosen case that would not be possible in large-N studies. As most of the organizations deliver WASH services in other contexts as well, findings might be more generalizable than they might seem. This claim could be tested in large N-studies.

Given the topic involving vulnerable populations, the research was conducted sensitively and is adherent to ethical research standards. Ethical approval was obtained from the BMS Ethics Committee by developing a strategy for safeguarding standards throughout the research process. Informed participation of all research participants was ensured.

### **3.2 Data Collection**

Data stemmed from different sources, as is common for case study research (Kohlbacher, 2006). Primary data was collected through qualitative semi-structured interviews with employees of humanitarian aid organizations delivering WASH services in Kakuma.

Relevant organizations were identified through a stakeholder mapping using documents provided by the UNHCR and REACH. The organizations were filtered according to the services

they offer, as well as the type of organization. In total, 43 actors are offering programs in Kakuma. These actors range from international non-governmental organizations to national non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations, community-based organizations, United Nations organizations, national governments, and county governments (REACH Kenya, 2022). The latter two are excluded, since this research is focused on humanitarian aid organizations, which, for this thesis, are defined as non-profit non-governmental organizations assisting people in need while adhering to the humanitarian principles. This reduces the number from eleven to nine. Moreover, three organizations only deliver WASH programs to the host community, which also disqualifies them as this research intends to discover how humanitarian aid organizations use evidence-based policymaking for WASH programs in refugee camps, specifically the Kakuma refugee camp. The remaining six organizations active in delivering WASH services in Kakuma as of 2022 are listed in *Table 1*. Since then, two of the organizations no longer offer WASH interventions in the camp, according to the interviews and insider information. These organizations are still included in the analysis due to their long-term engagement in providing these programs.

**Table 1**

*Overview of Organizations offering WASH Services in Kakuma*

Agency Name	Type	Camp Area of Activity	Nationality	Employees
Action Africa Help International	International non-governmental organization	1, 2, 3, 4	Kenya	261
National Council of Churches of Kenya	Faith-based organization	1, 2, 3, 4, Host	Kenya	161
Norwegian Refugee Council	International non-governmental organization	1, 2, 3, 4, Host	Norway	5984
Peace Winds	International non-governmental organization	1, 2, 3, 4, Host	Japan/United States	170

Team & Team International	International non-governmental organization	1, 2, 3, 4, Host	South Korea	22
World Vision Kenya	International non-governmental organization	1, 2, 3, 4, Host	United States	696

The interviewees were selected according to their role within the organizations and their WASH expertise. The sampling was constrained by the willingness of employees to be part of the research, time, as well as external factors such as political unrest<sup>2</sup> and unstable internet connections, which hindered interviews from taking place or disrupted them mid-session. Thus, the sample could be described as a convenience sample. An overview of the interviewees can be found in *Table 2*.

**Table 2**

*Overview of Interviewees*

Interviewee	Role
1	WASH (not further specified)
2	Regional Livelihoods and Program Coordinator
3	WASH Coordinator
4	Base Director/Program Manager
5	WASH Coordinator

The semi-structured interviews allowed for a more open environment in which the interviewees could answer freely and outline their perspectives (Meyer, 2001) while the interviewer retained control over the contents (Ayres, 2008). Additionally, if interesting points emerged, follow-up questions could be asked (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). This made an in-depth understanding of the employees' perspectives possible.

The interviews shone a light on the WASH services implemented in Kakuma, the evaluation and decision-making processes of the organizations, as well as their evidence structures. Furthermore, they illuminated factors constraining and facilitating evidence use. Thus, the

<sup>2</sup> During the interview process, large demonstrations against a planned tax bill took place in Kenya, leading to nationwide internet disruptions (Ross et al., 2024)

interviews provided a holistic picture of how humanitarian aid organizations use evidence-based policymaking and contributed to answering the research and sub-questions. The complete interview guide can be found in Annex 2.

The online communication platform Microsoft Teams was used to conduct and record the interviews, provided prior consent was given. The recordings were used for transcription only and to focus on the interviewees' answers (Meyer, 2001). In case recording was not an option, notes were taken throughout the conversation to capture the information.

Reliability and validity are essential to consider, as, for example, intra-rater reliability or social desirability bias may skew the results. To ensure both, questions were asked in a clear-cut manner to avoid misunderstandings. When misunderstandings still arose, follow-up questions were asked. Lastly, the interviewees were anonymized to take precautions against the social desirability bias.

Additionally, secondary data in the form of organizational documents were consulted to provide further insights on, for example, implemented WASH programs or organizations' decision-making structures. The documents were obtained from the organizations' websites or from portals, such as *ReliefWeb*. In total, 85 documents were collected and analyzed. An overview of the documents can be found in *Table 3*.

**Table 3**

*Overview Analyzed Documents*

Organization	Total Amount of Documents	Document Type (incl. Amounts)
Action Africa Help	15	Annual Report (4) Constitution (1) Other (2) Profile (1) Strategic Plan (3) Website (4)
National Council of Churches Kenya	4	Constitution (1) Corporate Plan (1) Website/Blog Posts (2)

Norwegian Refugee Council	23	Annual Report (6) News and Press Releases (5) Other (3) Policies (2) Website (7)
Peace Winds	10	Annual Reports (5) Website (5)
Team & Team International	9	Annual Report (1) Newsletter (2) Website (6)
World Vision	25	Annual Report (8) Other (2) Policies (3) Strategy (1) Website (11)

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The data collection was performed as a cross-sectional case study.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed to gain a comprehensive grasp of their contents (Meyer, 2001) and to conduct the content analysis. To unveil connections between aspects and to structure the produced data (Benaquisto, 2008), the interviews were analyzed using a preliminary analytical matrix. In this matrix, categories and codes are listed, which were identified through the literature review. The inclusion of new categories and codes was possible when new findings emerged during the analysis process, as well as the deletion of irrelevant categories and codes. The preliminary analytical matrix can be found in Annex 1.

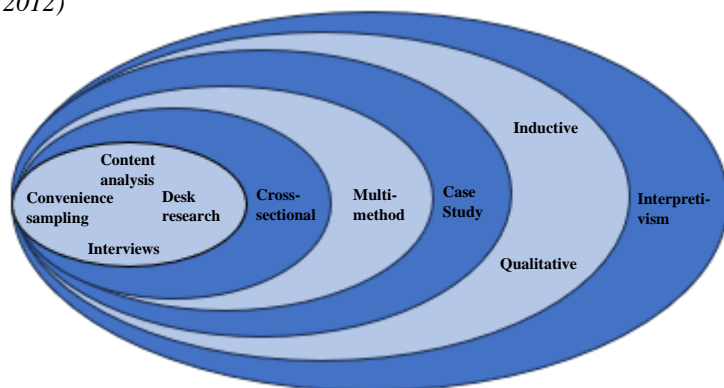
The data analysis software Atlas.ti was used for the content analysis to structure the analysis process, make it more transparent and reliable (Hwang, 2007), as well as to identify recurring themes (Kohlbacher, 2006). The interviews that were not recorded were also analyzed using the preliminary analytical matrix, but were done so manually. To ensure reliability and validity, close attention was paid during the process. The same procedure was applied to the



organizational documents. The results of the analysis were then reflected against the theory to

**Figure 2**

*Methodological approach, own illustration after Saunders & Tosey (2012)*



fill any gaps (Meyer, 2001).

To summarize, an explorative case study design was chosen for an in-depth analysis of how humanitarian aid organizations use evidence-based policymaking to deliver WASH services in Kakuma. Data was gathered through semi-structured

interviews with employees of aid organizations, along with organizational documents. The data was then analyzed using a content analysis, facilitated by Atlas.ti and the preliminary analytical matrix. An illustration of the methodological approach can be found in *Figure 2* in the form of Saunders & Tosey's (2012) research onion.

## 4. Analysis

This chapter begins by outlining the organizations' WASH activities, as well as their decision-making processes. It then analyzes evidence use and structures of the humanitarian actors and concludes with examining facilitators and inhibitors of evidence-based policymaking within the Kakuma refugee camp.

### 4.1 WASH Programs and Decision-Making

As of 2022, six organizations provided WASH programs within the camp (REACH Kenya, 2022). In the following, these organizations' activities, as well as their decision-making processes, are sketched out.

#### 4.1.1 Duration

Action Africa Help, the National Council of Churches, and the Norwegian Refugee Council - which was the UNHCR's leading WASH implementing partner until 2021/2023, as pointed out by interviewee 5 - have the longest track record of providing WASH services in the Kakuma camp. Action Africa Help started to deliver services in Kenya in 2005 and has since then scaled

up its programs (Action Africa Help International, n.d.-d). Two years later, the Norwegian Refugee Council got active in Kenya (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2023b), and became the lead WASH agency in 2013 (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2014b). The engagement of the National Council of Churches reaches back the longest. It started operations in the 1990s, shortly after the camp was erected (National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018). Though World Vision has been active in Kenya since the mid-1970s (World Vision Kenya, n.d.-b), it only started to provide services in Kakuma in 2013 (World Vision Kenya, 2015). According to interviewee 5, Peace Winds took over as lead implementing WASH partner from the Norwegian Refugee Council in 2021 regarding sanitation and hygiene aspects and received the title for water supply two years later in 2023. Beforehand, the organization had been active as a supporting actor since 2012 (Peace Winds America, n.d.-b). In 2014, Team & Team joined the other organizations in providing WASH services in the camp (Team & Team International, 2019).

#### ***4.1.2 WASH Programs***

Over the years, several WASH programs were implemented. These next sub-chapters look at the WASH services that the organizations are offering. They are grouped into water access (WA), hygiene and sanitation promotion and awareness (HSPA), community-led total sanitation (CLTS), sanitation facilities (SF), production and distribution of WASH products (PDWP), and waste management (WM).

##### **4.1.2.1 Water Access**

All organizations offer services regarding accessing clean water. Due to the camp's location in an arid region, water supply proves a big challenge (UN Habitat, 2021). Organization 3, the former lead implementing WASH organization, was mainly responsible for ensuring access to high-quality water within the camp, according to interviewee 3. However, the other organizations supported it in this quest (Action Africa Help International, n.d.-f; National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018; Peace Winds Japan, n.d.-b; Team & Team International, n.d.-c; World Vision Kenya, 2018).

Specific activities that ensure access to water include, according to interviewees 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, constructing boreholes and drinking points, as well as building pipelines and water pans. These activities also aim to counter conflicts between different societal groups, including the

refugee and host community (UN Habitat, 2021). Frictions are diminished twofold by including host communities as beneficiaries of water programs by organizations, as mentioned by interviewee 3, thus lessening the feeling of being excluded, and by, as interviewee 2 mentioned, “[...] [doing] a few boreholes and water pans for them to be able to not move very far away and cause conflict amongst each other [...]”.

Though the camp is located in an arid region, both droughts and floods are common occurrences (Norwegian Refugee Council, n.d.-a). Flooding impacts shelter and infrastructure within the camp (UN Habitat, 2021), while droughts pose threats to farming, food security, and water access (UN Habitat, 2021). Both phenomena pose great dangers to the livelihoods of camp inhabitants underlining the necessity of efforts undertaken by World Vision to work towards the mitigation of flooding and drought effects, by, for example, making latrines resistant to flood damages (World Vision Kenya, n.d.-a).

#### **4.1.2.2 Hygiene and Sanitation Promotion and Awareness**

Besides access to water, all organizations offer hygiene and sanitation awareness and promotion campaigns (Action Africa Help International, 2008; National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2014; Norwegian Refugee Council, 2014b; Peace Winds, 2022; Team & Team International, n.d.-c; World Vision Kenya, 2018). Awareness is mostly raised by the National Council of Churches on the spread of diseases, such as AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and cholera, and how an infection can be prevented (National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018), though interviewee 5 mentioned that “[...] Kakuma has not had any cholera outbreak for the last 4-5 years [...]”. However, the other diseases are still flourishing, with water-borne diseases and HIV/AIDS representing the main causes of death in Kenya (IFRC, 2024), necessitating the programs offered by the organizations to work effectively to reduce further infections.

Awareness programs revolving around menstrual hygiene management are also in the range of hygiene promotion services of World Vision and Peace Winds (Peace Winds, 2022; World Vision Kenya, 2018). It refers to the provision of menstrual materials, water, and soap, infrastructure to change materials in privacy, as well as the possibility to discard used materials hygienically (Sommer et al., 2016) to prevent infections, psychological issues, or girls from dropping out of school (Viscek, 2020).

Hygiene promotion often comes in the form of hygiene promoters. Hygiene promoters are individuals from the refugee community trained by organizations in hygienic practices to

distribute the information among the community (Peace Winds, 2022). Action Africa Help, organization 3 - according to interviewee 3 -, and Peace Winds all use such forms of hygiene promotion (Action Africa Help International, n.d.-e; Peace Winds, 2022). Issues discussed by hygiene promoters revolve around hand-washing practices, waste management, and proper toilet use to reduce open defecation (Peace Winds, 2022). Especially, the latter is an ongoing problem in Kakuma. 75 percent of the camp are now open-defecation-free, however, improvement is still needed to reduce the dangers that come with such unhygienic practices (Global Compact on Refugees, n.d.). Using community-level workers is hoped to improve the cultural acceptability of these campaigns and, subsequently, their support and success (Blum et al., 2019).

#### **4.1.2.3 Community-led Total Sanitation**

The mobilization of individuals through programs is not only limited to awareness campaigns, but is also used for other sanitation and hygiene activities through community-led total sanitation. CLTS guides community members through the process of discovering the dangers of their poor hygiene and sanitation practices and aims to improve them through participatory processes, erecting WASH infrastructure, and eradicating open defecation (Galvin, 2015). This also works towards employing culturally sensitive knowledge of the communities as they are actively involved in finding solutions, which increases the societal acceptance of the interventions (The Sanitation Learning Hub, n.d.).

CLTS was adopted by the Kenyan government as its WASH strategy to achieve ‘open defecation free’ status in 2011 (Ministry of Health Kenya, n.d.). Four organizations follow this approach, namely Action Africa Help - according to interviewee 2 -, Peace Winds, the National Council of Churches, and World Vision (National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018; Peace Winds Japan, n.d.-b; World Vision Kenya, 2018).

#### **4.1.2.4 Sanitation Facilities**

Almost all organizations, except the National Council of Churches, are constructing and maintaining latrines, toilets, menstrual facilities, and handwashing spots (Action Africa Help International, 2008; Norwegian Refugee Council, 2014b; Peace Winds Japan, n.d.-a; Team & Team International, n.d.-a; World Vision Kenya, n.d.-a). Some organizations, such as Peace Winds, recognize the importance of considering the privacy and security needs of women and

girls in the design of sanitation facilities and incorporate them in their construction plans (Peace Winds America, n.d.-a).

In addition, organizations, such as the Norwegian Refugee Council, are also providing refugees with cleaning kits and trainings on how to use, maintain, and clean the premises properly (Tado, 2013). Building and maintaining sanitation and hygiene facilities is crucial to prevent water-borne diseases (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2014a) which, as mentioned before, are among the leading causes of death (IFRC, 2024).

#### **4.1.2.5 Production and Distribution of WASH Products**

Apart from the National Council of Churches and Team & Team, all other organizations distribute WASH products to the refugee community. These range from dignity kits – as mentioned by interviewee 5 -, to water treatment chemicals, hygiene kits, soap, toilet paper, jerrycans, and emergency water bladders (Norwegian Refugee Council, n.d.-a, 2017; Tado, 2013; World Vision Kenya, 2015, 2023).

Some organizations move beyond handing out products and provide refugees with the possibility of producing them themselves. Peace Winds, for example, teaches refugees how to make soap. The soap is then distributed through SAFI shops, which “[...] stock sanitation products from soap to reusable pads, disposable pads, so people have options to pick from” according to interviewee 5.

#### **4.1.2.6 Waste Management**

Only Peace Winds and Team & Team have laid out waste management strategies. Peace Winds is “[...] trying to have a decentralized solid waste management system within the camps and the host communities”, shared interviewee 5. Proper handling of waste is important since burning trash or littering can lead to serious health problems (Bjerregaard & Meekings, 2008). To avoid such consequences of irresponsible waste handling, Peace Winds is laying focus on proper waste management through erecting recycling plants, as well as by creating awareness about the importance of recycling, according to interviewee 5. Peace Winds is joined in this effort by Team & Team, as can be seen in *Table 4*, which has built a waste disposal site within the camp (Team & Team International, n.d.-a).

**Table 4***Overview Starting Year and Services Offered*

Organization	Starting Year	WA	HSPA	CLTS	SF	PDWP	WM
Action Africa Help	2005	x	x	x	x	x	
National Council of Churches	1990s	x	x	x			
Norwegian Refugee Council	2007	x	x		x	x	
Peace Winds	2012	x	x	x	x	x	x
Team & Team	2014	x	x		x		x
World Vision	2013	x	x	x	x	x	

### **4.1.3 Decision-making**

To design such programs, well-functioning decision-making processes are essential to generate effective outputs.

#### **4.1.3.1 Evidence-Based Policymaking**

A way to ensure the effectiveness of programs is evidence-based policymaking. Almost all organizations, except for the National Council of Churches, have mentioned their reliance on evidence-based practices. The rationale for using this policymaking mode is to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of programs according to Action Africa Help, World Vision, Team & Team, and the Norwegian Refugee Council (Action Africa Help International, n.d.-h; Norwegian Refugee Council, 2014b; World Vision Kenya, 2014), benefits commonly associated with evidence-based policymaking (Baron, 2018; Dijkzeul et al., 2013).

World Vision has a long relationship with evidence-based policymaking, as it continuously appears as an objective in its annual reports since 2013 to increase organizational effectiveness (World Vision Kenya, 2014, 2022). Organization 3 similarly has grappled with evidence-based policymaking for years, as basing decisions on evidence was deeply engrained in its organizational structure, thereby allowing the organization to champion the policymaking mode, according to interviewee 3. This fits with Al Hudib & Cousins' (2022) and Saulnier et al.'s (2019) claims that positive experiences, as well as structures that can accommodate the decision-making modus, facilitate evidence use.

Interviewee 4 highlighted organization 4's commitment to prioritizing evidence when WASH decisions are being made. However, in its organizational documents, no mentions of evidence-

based policymaking can be found, merely the call for having minimum standards (Team & Team International, 2019). These minimum standards are argued for from a perspective of increasing effectiveness and avoiding harmful practices, two aspects for which evidence-based policymaking is also used (Dijkzeul et al., 2013; K. Oliver et al., 2014). However, Team & Team does not mention whether these standards should be scientifically based, an aspect that makes up evidence-based policymaking's defining character (Parkhurst, 2016).

#### 4.1.3.2 Decentralized vs. Centralized

Whether the decision-making process is organized in a centralized or decentralized manner can impact the likeliness that evidence-based policymaking is employed. Kruke & Olsen (2012), for example, argue that centralized decision-making within an organization's headquarters will lead to less evidence use and that reflection on experiences from personnel on the ground is one of the best evidence sources in turbulent environments. All organizations are taking a decentralized approach to decision-making, and continuously undertake efforts to decentralize the decision-making process even more (Action Africa Help International, 2008). Decisions are either made in the camp itself, as, for example, Team & Team (Team & Team International, n.d.-b), organization 1, organization 3, or Action Africa Help do, according to interviewees 1, 2, 3, and 5, or in regional offices, as is the case for the National Council of Churches (National Council of Churches of Kenya, n.d.).

The main argument used for decentralized decision-making is the *inclusion of context-specific voices*. World Vision, for example, motivates the usage of local offices by outlining how they contribute to the mobilization of other local agencies and stakeholders (World Vision, n.d.-b). Action Africa Help explains the decentralization based on the importance of including knowledge of local staff and their diverse skill sets, which allow for a more context-specific design of programs (Action Africa Help International, n.d.-g). Furthermore, local staff harbors a better grasp of the situation and is thus better equipped to respond to occurring situations (Action Africa Help International, 2008). This works towards Parkhurst's (2016) good governance of evidence, as the organizations use decentralized decision-making to base programs and interventions on context-specific knowledge, which is one characteristic of appropriate evidence, and a crucial aspect to increase effectiveness of policies highlighted by multiple evidence-based policymaking scholars (Dijkzeul et al., 2013; Dobrow et al., 2006; Head, 2010; Marston & Watts, 2003). Furthermore, more diverse viewpoints, another piece of Parkhurst's (2016) framework, are likely considered in decentralized decision-making as a

broader group of people are included, which minimizes the risk of the decision-making process being co-opted by one solution or specific norms and interests.

Despite the decentralized decision-making structures of organization 3 and Action Africa Help, *big-impact decisions* are still taken either completely by or in consultation with the headquarters, as was mentioned by interviewees 2 and 3. Interviewee 2, did, however, add that the decisions were never forced top-down but always happened in agreement with the local offices.

Further *constraints* of the National Council of Churches and World Vision's regional employees' decision-making power materialize through frameworks put forward by their international counterparts, as decisions may not clash with what is laid out by them (National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2020; World Vision Kenya, 2013). These findings clash to some extent with M. L. Oliver's (2008) and Knox Clarke & Campbell's (2020) findings: Utilization of evidence largely depends on high-ranking personnel and a steep asymmetry between headquarter personnel and local employees persists. While the National Council of Churches' and World Vision's local employees have to consider international and national frameworks when making decisions, a steep asymmetry is not visible. The same applies to Action Africa Help and organization 3. Even though big-impact decisions might be made by the headquarters, decisions are not pushed down on the local offices. Rather, participatory processes are used to find solutions with which the local offices and the headquarters can agree. Furthermore, the decentralized structures within all organizations, as well as the continuous effort to strive for more decentralization, prove the claim of high-ranking personnel solely influencing whether evidence gets used wrong.

#### **4.1.3.3 Inclusivity & Contestability**

Consultative and inclusive decision-making processes are not exclusive to Action Africa Help. All organizations have participatory processes for beneficiaries to get their voices heard to inform the decision-making process for programs and interventions, as was laid out in the respective interviews (National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018).

Organizations 1 and 3, and Action Africa Help design new interventions by first brainstorming ideas in the office, second, taking these plans to beneficiaries to get *feedback*, and third, incorporating their views into the design to ensure effectiveness and social acceptance, as was outlined by interviewee 1, 2, and 3.



Through these processes, decision-making becomes *inclusive* of a more diverse set of viewpoints, which is crucial, according to Parkhurst (2016) so that the outputs are not biased. Additionally, through the voices of refugees, evidence is more context-specific and suitable for their needs, which is a quality criterion for evidence-based policymaking (Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014; Parkhurst, 2016).

Moreover, specific *structures* are set in place to receive feedback. Peace Winds has, for example, used incentive workers from the refugee population to “[...] hear from them on what they think [Peace Winds] can do better and how [Peace Winds] can better improve [its] interventions within the communities they work for” as interviewee 5 has stated. Interviewee 1 outlined forums as consultation mechanisms that include beneficiaries in organization 1’s decision-making process. In addition, World Vision draws attention to the importance of including *vulnerable groups* in the consultation processes, such as focus groups or surveys, to not lose sight of vulnerabilities and aims to make groups aware of these mechanisms (World Vision, 2019). These mechanisms ensure that the evidence used in decision-making is representative of the population and does not only serve a specific group by including a wide range of refugees in the processes, which is a quality criterion for evidence-based policymaking (Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014). Furthermore, World Vision taking into account vulnerable groups’ needs is crucial, as pointed out by Mazurana et al. (2013) as only then evidence-based policymaking’s benefit of increasing effectiveness can be realized to the fullest potential.

Both the Norwegian Refugee Council and World Vision have established *complaint procedures*, including whistleblower processes, and show continuous efforts to safeguard well-functioning procedures for including beneficiaries in the decision-making process (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2015; World Vision, 2021). This ensures that evidence remains contestable, as is provided for in Parkhurst's (2016) framework.

These participatory and appeal procedures fulfill the evidence-based policymaking characteristic of ensuring deliberative processes, which are highlighted by Cairney, (2016), Nutley et al. (2003), Parkhurst (2016), and Parsons (2001) to include various viewpoints in the decision-making and increase accountability. These efforts are important, however, it is crucial that beneficiaries are made aware of these procedures and mechanisms, as World Vision aims to, and that they are accessible so that they can unfold their intended effects.

#### 4.3.1.4 Transparency

For beneficiaries to complain and hold decision-makers to account, organizations must be transparent in their actions. All organizations have *published information* online, in the form of annual reports, strategies, or newsletters. However, the extent to which documents are made available differs greatly. World Vision and the Norwegian Refugee Council have the largest number of documents available; Action Africa Help follows, then Peace Winds, Team & Team, and lastly, the National Council of Churches.

The published information does not only vary regarding quantity but also quality. While the Norwegian Refugee Council and World Vision both have made information readily available regarding accountability structures, response policies, program frameworks, and detailed accounts of financial and program evaluations, other organizations, such as Team & Team or Peace Winds, barely describe the programs they deliver. This presents major challenges for beneficiaries, donors, and other stakeholders to trace the effectiveness of the organization's actions, how they came to decisions, and to hold them accountable - all activities that are crucial to ensure unbiased evidence-based policymaking (Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014; Parkhurst, 2016; Sanderson, 2002). Only if organizations are transparent in their decision-making can others hold them to account.

Interestingly enough, all organizations, besides Team & Team and Peace Winds, mention the importance of transparency within documents (Action Africa Help International, 2008; National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018; Norwegian Refugee Council, 2024; World Vision, 2019). The National Council of Churches, for example, highlights the need to communicate the proceedings of the Council and document them well to ensure monitoring and learning lessons from programs (National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018).

Both World Vision and the Norwegian Refugee Council have set in place *policies* regarding the availability of information about their work so that stakeholders can access it, hold them to account, and ensure continued trust in the organizations (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2024; World Vision, 2019). This is especially crucial since humanitarian aid organizations are dependent on the publics' and donors' approval of their work to operate (Amagoh, 2015). Furthermore, the Norwegian Refugee Council and World Vision are members of *accountability networks* such as ALNAP, the Interagency Standing Committee, the Core Humanitarian Standard Alliance, and the International Aid Transparency Initiative to show their commitment to transparency and accountability (Norwegian Refugee Council, n.d.-b; World Vision Kenya, 2023).

Despite the efforts made by most organizations, it remains questionable whether beneficiaries can *access* the online documents, as not all refugees are likely to have phones, stable internet connections, speak the language in which the documents are published, or even know where to start the research.

As outlined, the organizations deliver various WASH services, ranging from water access to waste management. To design these programs and to answer sub-question 1: All except one organization mention the use of evidence-based policymaking to ensure effectiveness of programs, as is visualized in *Table 5*. Furthermore, decision-making is decentralized to benefit from the knowledge of local staff for context-specific programs. Context-specificity is also ensured through inclusive, deliberative, and contestable decision-making procedures present in all six organizations, which allow beneficiaries to get their voices heard. Lastly, all organizations publish documents to work towards the transparency of their operations, though the quality and quantity of documents vary greatly. While almost all organizations share these decision-making characteristics, it is visible that the two largest - World Vision and the Norwegian Refugee Council - have the most comprehensive strategies to ensure evidence-based and inclusive decision-making visualized through their whistleblower policies, accountability strategies, and consultation processes.

**Table 5**

*Overview Decision-Making Processes*

Mechanism	Rationale	Tools/Actions
Evidence-Based Policymaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effectiveness</li> <li>• Efficiency</li> <li>• Avoiding harmful practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basing decisions on evidence</li> </ul>
Decentralization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context-specificity</li> <li>• Diverse viewpoints</li> <li>• Local knowledge and stakeholders/agencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking decisions in camp or regional offices</li> <li>• Consultations with headquarters</li> </ul>
Inclusivity and Contestability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effectiveness</li> <li>• Social acceptance</li> <li>• Diverse viewpoints</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gathering feedback</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliberation</li> <li>• Accountability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Forums, incentive workers, focus groups, surveys</li> <li>• Whistleblower Processes</li> <li>• Complaint Procedures</li> </ul>
Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accountability</li> <li>• Monitoring</li> <li>• Learning lessons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publishing information</li> <li>• Transparency policies</li> <li>• Memberships accountability networks</li> </ul>

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## 4.2 Evidence Use and Structures

To enhance effective decisions for humanitarian aid programs, in addition to promoting transparency, contestability, and inclusivity, the existence of structures aiding evidence use is essential. Thus, this sub-chapter looks at the evidence use of the aid organizations and analyzes their evidence-based policymaking structures, including their evaluation processes.

### 4.2.1 Evaluations

All organizations evaluate programs, according to interviewees 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 (National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018). Parts of the evaluation schemes and results are published in annual reports, which, as mentioned above, vary greatly from organization to organization in their quantity and quality.

*Publishing knowledge* is crucial, as gained insights are not only useful for one organization but are of interest to others delivering the same WASH services and facilitates cooperations, according to interviewee 5. That way, already scarce resources can be saved and one of the biggest obstacles to evidence-based decision-making (Dijkzeul et al., 2013) can be overcome by addressing the issue of not sharing findings. Except for Team & Team, all organizations share the results of their evaluations under the belief that everyone should benefit from the found information (Action Africa Help International, 2008; National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018; Norwegian Refugee Council, 2024; World Vision Kenya, 2021a).

How findings are distributed differs. Organization 1, for example, shares its knowledge at conferences and presents it in forums, according to interviewee 1 (World Vision Kenya, 2021a).

Action Africa Help distributes its knowledge via its website and mentions an important aspect of its sharing strategy, namely that the knowledge is processed user-friendly. In doing so, a hurdle to using evidence is avoided, as information that is not well organized and not in a quickly accessible format inhibits the reliance on evidence (Blanchet et al., 2017; Taithe & Borton, 2015). Moreover, these findings oppose Colombo & Checchi's (2018) and Shalash et al.'s (2022) claim that organizations are reluctant to share gained knowledge.

To arrive at findings that can be published and to fulfil the organizations' common *objective of evaluations*, which is to reflect on programs and use lessons learned to inform adjustments to current services or for future strategies, as was claimed by interviewees 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 (National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018), evaluations can happen through different steps. One *approach* is the review of relevant documents, as, for example, Team & Team and the National Council of Churches rely on (National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018; Team & Team International, 2019). Furthermore, on-site visits are commonly used by all organizations, according to interviewees 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 (National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018), as well as meetings with beneficiaries to discuss programs, as is done by the National Council of Churches, the Norwegian Refugee Council, World Vision, Peace Winds, and Action Africa Help, as was outlined by interviewees 2 and 5 (National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018; Norwegian Refugee Council, 2013; World Vision, n.d.-a). Meetings with the local branch of the organization were also used during the evaluation process of the National Council of Churches. None of the interviewees mentioned that donors were visited during the evaluation processes.

Strong evaluations are crucial as *appropriate evidence* that can inform the decision-making process is generated. By default, the evidence resulting from evaluation processes is context-specific and concerns the issue at hand, quality characteristics put forward by Knox Clarke & Darcy (2014) and Parkhurst (2016). Through the deliberative processes used by the humanitarian aid organizations in their evaluation procedures, evidence also becomes contestable, and more diverse viewpoints are considered, which are crucial factors for an unbiased evidence-based policymaking process (Cairney, 2016; Parkhurst, 2016; Parsons, 2001).

A factor crucial to consider during evaluations is *vulnerabilities*. It is important to measure the effectiveness of intervention for men, women, children, individuals with disabilities, and other minority groups to gain a sophisticated analysis of the interventions' impacts (Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014; Mazurana et al., 2013). All organizations showcase awareness of the importance

of considering the needs of vulnerable groups (Action Africa Help International, n.d.-h; National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018; Peace Winds America, n.d.-a; World Vision Kenya, n.d.-a), however, only the Norwegian Refugee Council and World Vision have used evaluations that are specifically addressing these matters (UNHCR & UNICEF, 2014; World Vision, 2019).

Similar *tools* seem to be used to evaluate impacts of programs, as, for instance, organizations 3 and 4, as well as Peace Winds use baseline and endline surveys, according to interviewees 3, 4, and 5. Interviewee 4 explained that “[...] we conduct these surveys at the beginning and at the end of our projects to measure changes and impacts of how they are faring”. Specific evaluative practices are often mandated by big donors such as the UNHCR or the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Operations, according to interviewee 3, which explains the common assessment methods. This is shared by interviewee 5 as well, who pointed out that “[...] we would do different type surveys depending on the indicators of that particular donor”. The heterogeneous use of indicators, which was already highlighted by Colombo & Checchi (2018), as well as the lack of reliance on guidelines for evaluative action, such as the ones offered by ALNAP, complicate easy understanding of evaluations for the decision-makers and inhibits evidence use (Christoplos et al., 2018).

Besides using the required methods from donors, the organizations’ evaluation and monitoring departments, such as the Norwegian Refugee Council’s, Peace Winds’, or Action Africa Help’s, also develop tools by setting up benchmarks, quotas, or quality assessments, as mentioned by interviewee 5 (Action Africa Help International, 2008; Norwegian Refugee Council, 2024). These benchmarks are used to track progress and effectiveness of interventions. Nevertheless, they are designed as simple tick-the-box approaches, checking quantifiable outcomes. While these methods are useful to see progress and effectiveness of programs, they fail to carve out the knowledge about why or why not the intervention worked (Feinstein & Beck, 2006; Renzaho, 2007).

Almost all organizations also hire *external evaluators* to assess the impact of programs, as outlined by interviewees 3 and 5 (Action Africa Help International, n.d.-h; National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018, 2018; Team & Team International, 2019; World Vision Kenya, 2013). Using evaluation services outside of organizational structures is crucial to improve accountability and double-check the credibility of evaluations. Furthermore, including decision-making staff, as all organizations are doing, according to interviewees 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 (National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018), in the evaluation process can create buy-in

effects that make it more likely that the gathered evidence is used in the decision-making process (M. L. Oliver, 2008).

The organizations' commitment to evaluations and monitoring can also be seen in their emphasis on continuously *improving their processes*. All organizations aim to strengthen the procedures, as highlighted by interviewee 4 (Action Africa Help International, 2008; National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018; Norwegian Refugee Council, 2013; World Vision Kenya, 2021b).

Interestingly enough, none of the organizations are engaged in *solo-research activities* regarding WASH issues, besides evaluations of programs, as was stated by interviewees 1, 2, 3, and 5. This prevents an analysis of what role factors regarding informed consent, research skills of humanitarian staff, and ethical approval of projects play for evidence use.

#### **4.2.2 Evidence Use**

The findings resulting from the organizations' evaluation processes are one *type of evidence* that is utilized by all organizations to inform decisions, as mentioned by interviewees 1 and 5 (Action Africa Help International, n.d.-h; National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018; Norwegian Refugee Council, 2014b; Team & Team International, 2019). It is also the type that is used most heavily to inform programs. Beyond that, needs assessments and policy analysis are frequently used to inform decision-makers about what is most urgently needed by the beneficiaries, according to interviewees 4 and 5 (Glad & Solvang, 2022; National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018). Both also mention their organizations' reliance on surveys (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2013). Published research is also utilized by Peace Winds and Action Africa Help, according to interviewees 2 and 5.

Interviewee 5 emphasized the need to *contextualize research* as often the findings can not be copy pasted but have to be adapted to the context where the intervention is implemented. Reports were also mentioned as evidence used to influence programs by the National Council of Churches, Peace Winds, and organization 4, according to interviewees 4 and 5 (National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018). Action Africa Help also relies on focus group discussions and key informant interviews to inform their programs, according to interviewee 2. Further, the National Council of Churches relies on international frameworks, such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018), which is based on scientific findings and aims at reducing disaster risks (Carabine, 2015).

When asked about during which *phase* of the decision-making process evidence is used, interviewees 1, 2, 3, and 4 answered that it is used during all. Action Africa Help and the Norwegian Refugee Council also use evidence to *advocate* for the needs of vulnerable populations (Action Africa Help International, 2008; Norwegian Refugee Council, 2023a). Particularly, evidence is used to substantiate existing needs of refugee populations before governmental actors or to advocate for better infrastructure to reliably provide effective services. One example is the Norwegian Refugee Council's work to exclude humanitarian actors from United Nations asset freezes (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2023a).

A more common *use for evidence* among the organizations is to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of the designed programs, according to interviewees 1, 3, and 4 (Action Africa Help International, n.d.-b; National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018). Interviewee 2 emphasized that programs should not be implemented to shine a good light on the organization but to ensure that it does the community some good. Action Africa Help, Peace Winds, and organization 4 also use evidence to write proposals for programs to showcase that a need exists, as mentioned by interviewees 2, 4, and 5. This could explain why needs assessments also make up a large share of the kind of evidence that is used, as this describes existing needs which can then be useful to apply for funding.

Interestingly enough, no formal *assessment structures* for evidence exist in the organizations. The same applies to *prioritization schemes* for evidence. The outdatedness of evidence hierarchies is shared by scholars, as what works in one context does not necessarily work for another, especially in the humanitarian sector (Dijkzeul et al., 2013; Parkhurst, 2016).

What seemed to be important to organizations, according to interviewees 2 and 5, was that the gained evidence works for the community, so *context-specificity*, which is a crucial aspect of good evidence (Cairney, 2016; Dijkzeul et al., 2013; Parkhurst, 2016). Interviewee 2 set out that “if it doesn't make sense to the community, then we can use the evidence, yes, but we will not force that particular implementation on that community”. This is a crucial factor that facilitates the contestability and deliberation aspects emphasized by Cairney (2016), Parkhurst (2016), and Parsons (2001) to hold organizations to account and ensure effective programs.

Interviewee 5 added that they look at what works in other contexts and *contextualize the findings*. CLTS was provided as an example, as the approach was contextualized from the Indian context to fit the refugee camp setting. This also showcases Peace Winds' emphasis on context-specific and relevant evidence. Prioritization schemes are also not present in organization 1's operations, according to interviewee 1. Rather, evidence is used that will lead



to high-quality outcomes. However, it was not further specified what kinds of evidence safeguard high-quality interventions.

Organization 3 uses all kinds of evidence as long as it is available, as mentioned by interviewee 3. They<sup>3</sup> added that evidence is tried to be *triangulated* so that it can be ensured that interventions work. Triangulation is also mentioned as an evidence quality criterion by Promsopha & Tucci (2019). Organization 4 prioritizes the use of evidence, however, interviewee 4 did not specify which kinds of evidence are prioritized.

None of the interviewees mentioned whether they *holistically review the evidence base* nor whether they *assess evidence* for quality, scientific rigor, or the other aspects highlighted by Knox Clarke & Darcy (2014), Parkhurst (2016), and Promsopha & Tucci (2019). While interviewee 2 discussed the issue of the variety of existing evidence and emphasized the difficulty of combining all existing evidence into one idealistic strategy, diverse approaches are not actively considered for new programs, possibly leading to biased evidence-based policymaking and ineffective programs.

#### **4.2.3 Evidence Structures**

To facilitate evidence use, structures, such as knowledge management platforms or co-production relationships, can be set in place.

*Knowledge transfer relationships* are one example of such structures. Even though their mere existence and expansion will not automatically lead to more evidence use (Cairney & Oliver, 2017; Head, 2010; Nutley et al., 2003), they are still useful for gathering evidence. The National Council of Churches, the Norwegian Refugee Council, and World Vision do not mention any relationships. In contrast, Action Africa Help, Peace Winds, and organization 4 have partnered up with universities or other research institutions, according to interviewees 4 and 5, to gain new knowledge.

Besides research-based institutions and universities, non-profit organizations, governments, and global agencies are relied on to acquire knowledge, as highlighted by interviewee 2. As mentioned, these relationships are crucial, as they provide decision-makers with essential knowledge, however, they will not automatically lead to increased evidence use, as a better

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<sup>3</sup> This thesis uses the gender-neutral pronouns they/them to refer to the interviewees to safeguard their anonymity

understanding of the needs of both sides is necessary (Head, 2010). This can be achieved through co-production relationships.

Except for the National Council of Churches, all organizations have *co-production relationships*. Organization 3 has, for example, worked with social enterprises, which tested a chlorine monitor device in collaboration with the organization, as interviewee 3 explained. Unlike organizations 1 and 4, and Peace Winds, interviewee 3 mentioned that the Norwegian Refugee Council has not partnered with academic institutions. Organizations 1 and 4, as well as Peace Winds, have teamed up with various universities to study the impact of interventions or other WASH matters rigorously, as stated by interviewees 4 and 5.

It is noticeable from its organizational documents that Action Africa Help has the broadest portfolio of co-production relationships. Its academic relationships range from various research institutions to universities (Action Africa Help International, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). Action Africa Help also has co-production relationships with civil society networks, religious and development institutions, governments, private sector actors, and non-governmental organizations (Action Africa Help International, n.d.-h, n.d.-c). Through collaborative practices, it becomes easier to identify relevant and up-to-date evidence, and provide needed knowledge for specific contexts for decision-makers (Turner et al., 2011). Furthermore, it ensures that a variety of viewpoints are considered.

Participation in *networks* can also be used to gain new insights and broaden the organizations' evidence base. Both Action Africa Help and Peace Winds have mentioned them as sources of gathering new insights. These networks are, for example, the Rural Water Sanitation Network, and other technical working groups, according to interviewees 2 and 5.

To gather evidence, organizations do not necessarily have to form relationships or conduct research but could rely on *platforms* that bundle gained knowledge, such as EvidenceAid or the Cochrane Collaboration. However, none of the interviewees confirmed their use of such platforms.

To organize, share, and analyze the gathered evidence, especially in turbulent environments, *knowledge management platforms* can be useful (Zhang et al., 2002). Despite these benefits, interviewee 5 admitted, that Peace Winds does not have a knowledge management system and that their evidence use does not follow a structured process. The other organizations all mentioned the implementation, use, or strengthening of a knowledge management system to analyze, share, and gather information, according to interviewees 1 and 4 (Action Africa Help

International, n.d.-h; National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018; Norwegian Refugee Council, 2014b). The Norwegian Refugee Council also added how important it is that the knowledge base is well kept and updated frequently to inform implementations (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2014b), also highlighted by Zhang et al. (2002) so that decision-making is not unnecessarily slowed down. Action Africa Help further highlighted other important aspects of knowledge management systems, such as their use for categorizing information and their facilitation of sharing knowledge for effective decision-making (Action Africa Help International, 2008), aspects also highlighted by Zhang et al. (2002).

Interviewee 3 outlined how evidence and expertise got lost when the change of lead implementing partner of the UNHCR occurred. A proper use of knowledge management systems could provide a remedy here. If the knowledge management processes and the knowledge base are opened up for other humanitarian actors, information would not be lost and could be transferred more easily (Lipianin-Zontek & Zontek, 2023).

It is then essential that *protection strategies* are set in place, hindering unauthorized groups from accessing sensitive information (Mesmar et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2002). The National Council of Churches, Action Africa Help, the Norwegian Refugee Council, and World Vision have all recognized the necessity of implementing and strengthening data protection measures (Action Africa Help International, n.d.-h; National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018; Norwegian Refugee Council, 2023a; World Vision, 2024). These efforts include cyber security strategies that address issues such as data insecurity, data governance, and the protection of personal data (National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018; Norwegian Refugee Council, 2023a; World Vision, 2024).

To summarize and answer sub-question 2, aid organizations use various procedures to evaluate programs. The evaluations mainly aim to reflect on and improve programs, as can be seen in *Table 6*. Most organizations share their findings, except one organization. Vulnerabilities of specific groups are recognized by all organizations, though only the two largest organizations actively assess interventions based on them. Evaluations, as the mainly used evidence, contribute to context-specificity and enhance contestability. However, they are often conducted in tick-the-box approaches and unharmonized manners. Besides evaluations, needs assessments, policy analyses, surveys, and published research are used, mainly to ensure effective and efficient programs, but also for advocacy. Evidence is used during all the stages of decision-making. While co-production relationships are employed by all organizations, other evidence structures, such as knowledge transfer relationships, knowledge management systems,

or networks, are used to varying extents. These facilitate relevant and up-to-date information and the incorporation of diverse viewpoints. Formal assessment structures for the quality of gathered evidence or evidence hierarchies are lacking across all organizations. Understanding these structures lays the foundation for analyzing the facilitators and inhibitors of evidence.

**Table 6**

*Overview Evidence Use and Structures*

Mechanism	Rational	Tools/Actions
Evaluations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflect on programs</li> <li>• Learning lessons</li> <li>• Source for context-specific/relevant evidence</li> <li>• Contestability</li> <li>• Diverse viewpoints</li> <li>• Accountability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publishing knowledge</li> <li>• Approaches               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ On-site visits, meetings with beneficiaries, meetings with local branch</li> <li>➤ External evaluators</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Considering vulnerabilities</li> <li>• Tools               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Baseline/endline surveys, own benchmarks</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Evidence Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effectiveness</li> <li>• Efficiency</li> <li>• Context-specificity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Types of evidence               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Evaluations, needs assessments, policy analysis, published research, reports, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, international frameworks</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Types of use               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Advocacy, proposal writing, funding applications</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Phases               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Agenda setting, policy formulation, decision-making, implementation, evaluation</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Contextualize research</li> </ul>

Evidence Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gathering up-to-date/relevant evidence</li> <li>• Diverse viewpoints</li> <li>• Effective decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge transfer relationships</li> <li>• Co-production relationships</li> <li>• Memberships in networks</li> <li>• Knowledge management systems</li> </ul>
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### 4.3 Constraints and Facilitators of Evidence Use

Even though organizations might want to use evidence-based policymaking, certain factors may hinder them. In particular, resources, external aspects, and organizational factors have been identified as potentially influencing evidence use (Baldwin-Edwards et al., 2019; Parkhurst, 2016; Seifert et al., 2018). This sub-chapter looks at their impacts on evidence use of the humanitarian aid organizations in Kakuma.

#### 4.3.1 Resources

Having sufficient resources is associated with increased evidence use (Blanchet et al., 2017), as they can be used to improve the gathering, analysis, and utilization of evidence. Resources needed to ensure evidence use are, among others, sufficient time, financial funds, technology, and knowledgeable staff.

##### 4.3.1.1 Time

The organizations attach varying importance to the lack of time the humanitarian sector is often characterized by. Interviewee 5 declared that time is not an issue for Peace Winds when utilizing evidence-based policymaking. Interviewees 3 and 4 (Action Africa Help International, 2009), objected to this statement and highlighted that time is often too scarce to have in-depth conversations with beneficiaries and well-thought-out evidence-based decisions (Team & Team International, 2019). Due to the ad hoc nature of decision-making, evidence is not always used since consultancy and report writing, used to inform the decision-making process, *take too long* in these scenarios, according to interviewee 3. This has also been highlighted by Allen, McGrath, Hooton, & Valdes Garcia (2018), Colombo & Checchi (2018), and Knox Clarke & Campbell (2020). So even though a will to employ evidence-based policymaking exists, the turbulent environment hinders them from in-depth consultations with beneficiaries and *prevents the use of evidence* when decisions have to be taken quickly. Interviewee 2 added another layer by mentioning donors' lack of patience as they "[...] do not consider that behavior change takes

time. They would want a borehole immediately”. That way, interventions needing time to show impacts are prevented from being used even though the evidence would support their effectiveness.

#### **4.3.1.2 Financial Funds**

The humanitarian aid sector is chronically underfunded and resources are not adequately managed to *meet existing needs* (Colombo & Checchi, 2018). This concern is shared by all organizations. Due to lacking financial resources, not every need can be addressed, according to interviewee 1 (Action Africa Help International, 2009; National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018; Norwegian Refugee Council, 2023a; Peace Winds America, n.d.-b). While other factors also influence evidence use, interviewees 2, 3, 4, and 5 agreed that funding is the overarching influential factor. Interviewees 2 and 5 explained that other resources, such as technology or staff, will come with the money, which highlights why sufficient funds are of the utmost importance. Furthermore, lacking money also hinders *collecting or accessing evidence*, as mentioned by interviewees 3 and 4. Interviewee 4 added “[...] we struggle to implement comprehensive evaluation and also monitoring systems” due to lacking funds, which is especially incisive since evaluations are the most used evidence.

#### **4.3.1.3 Technology**

As Perakslis (2018) highlighted, technologies can facilitate *evidence use* for organizations, especially in turbulent environments. All organizations have recognized the need to digitalize their operations and the benefits that technologies can harbor. The National Council of Churches, the Norwegian Refugee Council, Action Africa Help, and World Vision are, for example, putting into place IT infrastructures, digital platforms, and other digital tools that work towards better accessibility of information, the streamlining of procedures, strengthening monitoring and evaluation, faster responses to emergencies, taking the strain of employees, and better protection mechanisms for sensitive data (Action Africa Help International, 2008; National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018; Norwegian Refugee Council, 2013, 2023a; World Vision, 2024).

An example of how technology can facilitate evidence use was given by interviewee 2 who mentioned WASH-Hub, a platform that showcases the sanitation status so that organizations know where action is needed and respond quickly. Another example is the use of smartphones to conduct questionnaires, registrations, and post-implementation follow-ups used by the

Norwegian Refugee Council. The collected data is stored in a cloud, which allows employees to access it easily and use it for decision-making (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2013).

To harvest these benefits, technology needs to be *available*. Interviewee 5 stated that “[...] once we have the financial muscle to actually do that, then it means that will come with the technology as well [...]”. In contrast, interviewee 4 outlined the obstacles they face when it comes to technology use. Issues include not-well functioning tools and lacking data storage solutions. Furthermore, infrastructure is often lacking, especially regarding internet access, hindering effective communication and evidence use.

The Norwegian Refugee Council highlighted the use of technologies to facilitate data gathering for *evaluative purposes* (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2013), an aspect also emphasized by Perakslis (2018). To unleash the full potential, he highlighted that staff needs to be adequately *trained* to use these technologies, an aspect that the Norwegian Refugee Council seems to be aware of, as it trains its staff accordingly (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2013). While technologies may aid evaluations, it is crucial to consider their *vulnerabilities* due to their susceptibility to cyber attacks (Mesmar et al., 2016). To counter the risks, the Norwegian Refugee Council has adopted a strategy to safeguard gathered data from potentially harmful practices (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2023a).

#### 4.3.1.4 Staff

Often not adequately trained staff is listed as a reason organizations do not use evidence (Ager et al., 2014). Since none of the organizations research on their own, this factor was not relevant to this thesis. The organizations that are active in research all work with *research organizations* so that they can benefit from their expertise in ethical research practices, just as Ford et al. (2009) highlighted. Nevertheless, *capable staff* is important for the smooth running of decision-making and the use of evidence. The National Council of Churches, Action Africa Help, and organization 3, all emphasized its importance, according to interviewees 2 and 3 (National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018). Especially for *monitoring and evaluating programs staff* is needed so that evidence can be produced. In contrast, interviewee 5 mentioned that capable staff comes with money, thereby showcasing that financial funds are essential for evidence use.

### 4.3.2 External Factors

Besides resources, external factors such as the political situation on-site, dangerous environments, lacking infrastructure, or donor requirements can affect evidence use (Griekspoor & Sondorp, 2001; Kohrt et al., 2019; Lazreg et al., 2019; Seifert et al., 2018).

#### 4.3.2.1 Political Pressure and Situation

The political situation, as well as political pressures, can hinder evidence use (Seifert et al., 2018). Kenya is categorized as a country with *high constraints* regarding humanitarian access by ACAPS in its ‘Humanitarian Access Overview’ (ACAPS, 2021). It ranks especially low in ‘denial of existence of humanitarian needs’ and ‘restriction of access to services and assistance’ (ACAPS, 2021). In addition, conflicts between the host and refugee community exacerbate the situation, not least due to the scarce water resources (Anomat Ali et al., 2017). Additional conflicts occur from the perception of neglect by the host community, resulting from the observation of services provided to refugee communities (Anomat Ali et al., 2017), as highlighted by interviewee 3. Consequently, organization 3 started to deliver its services to the host community as well to ease conflicts and balance political pressures.

The National Council of Churches also identified the *unstable political situation* as a threat to its strategy (National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018). In 2021 and 2022, the pre- and election-year violence rose (Raleigh, 2022). Spikes of violence and protests occurred again across the country in 2024, following a tax bill introduced by President Ruto (Ross et al., 2024).

Interviewee 5 mentioned the necessity of being ‘politically correct’ and *aligning the organization’s policies* with the Kenyan government, since they have to be approved by the ministries. If the ministries are not content with the used evidence, it can lead to them not being able to use it. Colombo & Checchi (2018) have also mentioned how the lack of prioritizing and promoting evidence-based policymaking from donor governments influences the use of evidence.

Interviewee 4 pointed towards the government’s “[...] selection of evidence that supports specific political goals rather than the necessary and most effective interventions”. This allows for biased decision-making, as evidence is *cherry-picked* by the government, an aspect that has been highly criticized by evidence-based policymaking scholars (Parkhurst, 2016). Furthermore, WASH does not seem to enjoy major *political attention*, as interviewee 2 mentioned that programs are neither receiving high budgets nor are they assigned a high priority. This constitutes a big obstacle to evidence use, as financial means are the most crucial



factor in increasing well-functioning evidence-based policymaking, according to interviewees 2 and 5. World Vision is the only organization that stated that they do not conform to political pressures.

#### 4.3.2.2 Dangerous Environment

The above-mentioned protests and violence can make it too dangerous for humanitarian aid employees to gather evidence (Kohrt et al., 2019; Lazreg et al., 2019). Both the Norwegian Refugee Council and Action Africa Help have outlined *security risks* that threaten the safety of their employees in their annual reports (Action Africa Help International, n.d.-h; Norwegian Refugee Council, 2014b). While dangerous environments are an aspect to consider, the situation in Kenya for humanitarian aid workers is comparably safe, as ‘only’ 62 incidents were reported over the last 20 years (AWSD, 2024).

#### 4.3.2.3 Donor Requirements

A higher impacting factor on evidence use of the aid organizations is donor requirements. All organizations have mentioned that donor requirements hamper their evidence use. Often what the organizations propose based on the evidence they have gathered *does not match* with what the donors envisioned, according to interviewees 2, 3, 4, and 5. Programs are then designed based on the donors’ visions and not the gathered evidence. This aspect has also been highlighted by Griekspoor & Sondorp (2001). The organizations *depend on financial resources* from donors. Without it, they could not operate, leaving them with little discretion in how they conduct their activities (Action Africa Help International, 2008).

Interviewee 2 explained that “[...] when getting the funding, they say they will do a borehole, but when you go to a particular area, that borehole probably is not a priority for the community”. Organizations have to *comply* with the conditions the donor set forth regarding the use of the funding provided. Another factor that donors often disregard is that some *interventions do not show immediate effects*, especially behavior change. It is a program that is going to take up time. In contrast, drilling boreholes can be done quickly and written up easily as a success in the next report (Action Africa Help International, 2009), according to interviewee 2.

#### 4.3.2.4 Infrastructure

Lacking infrastructure can be a hindrance to *gathering and using evidence* (Seifert et al., 2018). Only Team & Team and organization 3 have mentioned infrastructure as influencing evidence use. Interviewee 3 shared an experience of how built-up structures and infrastructure within the camp helped the organization to gather evidence. The organization ran into difficulties when it started to deliver WASH services to the host community as well, where such structures and infrastructure were missing and gathering evidence was complicated.

Interviewee 4 added that “[...] even with good evidence, sometimes poor infrastructure, can hinder the practical implementation of evidence-based solutions”. Furthermore, as stated in the technology sub-chapter, the organization lamented the *bad internet connection*, making it more difficult to gather, analyze, and store evidence.

#### 4.4.3 Organizational Culture

As pointed out, external factors and resources affect evidence use, but organizational culture also plays a role.

##### 4.4.3.1 Active Learning and Accountability Culture

One such factor is whether the organization *champions* an active learning and accountability culture. All organizations showcase ambitions of wanting to deliver high-quality programs, learn from their past interventions, and be accountable to beneficiaries and donors, according to interviewees 1 and 5 (Action Africa Help International, n.d.-h, n.d.-f; National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018; Norwegian Refugee Council, 2023a, 2024; World Vision, n.d.-a, 2024). These cultures can be detected in their reports or policies through the calls for increased learning and innovation and the listing of accountability mechanisms - such as whistleblower, anti-corruption, and anti-fraud policies (Action Africa Help International, n.d.-f, n.d.-a; National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018; Norwegian Refugee Council, 2015; World Vision, n.d.-a; World Vision Kenya, 2021a). These policies and mechanisms showcase that accountability and learning are engrained in the organizations’ cultures. The significance and influence of organizational culture on evidence use were shared by interviewees 3 and 5. More specifically, interviewee 3 stated that evidence-based policymaking is more likely used when the decision-making modus is championed throughout the organization. This aspect has also been mentioned by Supplee & Metz (2015), who have argued that lacking accountability and learning cultures will complicate the adoption of evidence-based policymaking.

#### 4.4.3.2 Fragmentation

A *fragmented organization* and fragmented practices within the camps when it comes to delivering WASH services also influences evidence use. The National Council of Churches has, for example, set itself the goal of becoming a more efficient organization by overcoming fragmentation (National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018). Interviewee 2 highlighted the *lack of coordination* among the organizations as a challenge. The actors are delivering their WASH programs through different approaches instead of bundling their strengths and resources to achieve synergetic effects facilitating evidence use and community-focused programs. Interviewee 5 emphasized the need to have harmonious approaches so that when changes in the camp's humanitarian landscape occur, actors can easily integrate or disintegrate without evidence being lost. Fragmentation and *lack of communication* were also highlighted as an obstacle to evidence use by Knox Clarke & Campbell (2020). This is especially grave in humanitarian aid where organizations depend on each other, as a single organization cannot handle all needs alone.

#### 4.4.3.3 Communication Channels

Especially when an organization is fragmented or fragmentation among actors active in the camp exists, well-functioning communication channels are essential to promote evidence use (Knox Clarke & Campbell, 2020). The importance of proper communication has been recognized by the National Council of Churches, which set itself the objective of improving *communication lines* to increase effective decision-making (National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2018). This objective is shared by Action Africa Help, which also points towards increased information sharing and the flow of knowledge across the organization (Action Africa Help International, n.d.-g, 2008). Communication is crucial, as was highlighted by interviewee 4, who mentioned that the “[...] poor technological infrastructure can hinder effective communications” and that “[...] it's not easy to access network or the Internet, so that does impact a lot on our decision-making processes”.

To summarize and answer sub-questions 3, 4, and 5, both resources and external aspects as well as organizational factors impact the use of evidence, as is visualized in *Table 7*. Financial resources are emphasized as having the biggest impact on evidence use. Competent staff, technology, and time also play a role, but money is the overarching concern. Political pressures hinder evidence use by influencing organizations' design processes, leading to biased decision-making. Dangerous environments do not play a factor in Kenya. Donor requirements are a

major constraint, forcing organizations to implement interventions based on donor preferences rather than gathered evidence, limiting the effectiveness of interventions. Additionally, inadequate infrastructure complicates gathering, analyzing, and utilizing evidence. Lastly, organizational factors such as harvesting a culture of accountability and learning and championing these aids evidence use. Fragmented practices within organizations and the camp prevent synergetic effects and can lead to evidence being lost. To overcome this, communication channels have been highlighted as a solution, however, lacking infrastructure poses challenges in this respect.

**Table 7**

*Constraints and Facilitators of Evidence Use*

	Constraints	Facilitators
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turbulent environments</li> <li>• Lacking financial funds</li> <li>• Lacking infrastructure for technology</li> <li>• Lacking staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capable staff</li> <li>• Technologies</li> </ul>
External Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Humanitarian access</li> <li>• Political situation</li> <li>• Aligning policies</li> <li>• Cherry-picking</li> <li>• Donor requirements</li> <li>• Lacking infrastructure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established structures and infrastructure</li> </ul>
Organizational Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fragmentation within and among organizations</li> <li>• Lacking infrastructure for communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active learning culture</li> <li>• Accountability culture</li> <li>• Championing evidence-based policymaking</li> <li>• Proper communication channels</li> </ul>

## 5. Conclusion

In the face of the ongoing legitimacy crisis plaguing the humanitarian sector, evidence-based policymaking has been touted to offer solutions to the crisis and prepare humanitarian aid organizations for the increasingly complex environment in which they have to operate since accountable and human rights-focused aid is of the utmost importance. Therefore, this master thesis examined how humanitarian aid organizations utilize evidence-based policymaking to design WASH programs in the Kakuma refugee camp. To answer this question semi-structured interviews with personnel from organizations active in delivering WASH services in Kakuma and a content analysis of 85 documents were conducted to look at the decision-making processes, evidence structures, and factors facilitating or constraining evidence-based policymaking to provide a better understanding of how evidence is used in the humanitarian context for WASH programs to improve the humanitarian response and fight the ongoing legitimacy crisis.

The methodological approach, which encompassed a mapping of relevant organizations, identifying related documents from the organizations' websites or portals such as *ReliefWeb*, developing a coding scheme and interview guide based on a comprehensive literature review to pinpoint important concepts, ideas, and theories for the analysis, as well as the coding of the interviews and gathered documents, uncovered that almost all organizations have recognized the benefits of evidence-based policymaking for designing WASH programs. The main rationale for using the decision-making modus was to ensure effective programs, a characteristic evidence-based policymaking is lauded for. To rely on evidence decentralized, inclusive, deliberative, transparent, and contestable decision-making was promoted by including knowledge of local staff and the viewpoints of beneficiaries, as well as publishing information on proceedings so that operations run smoothly. That way, more viewpoints are considered, and evidence is used in a less biased way working against the legitimacy crisis. Notably, larger organizations, such as the Norwegian Refugee Council or World Vision, had more elaborate inclusivity and publishing systems, while others, like Team & Team only sparsely described mechanisms and barely shared information. What remains crucial is that refugees are made aware of these mechanisms so that their full potential can be reached.

The results show that structures, such as evaluation departments, facilitate evidence use, especially as evaluations constitute the most used evidence source to reflect on and improve programs by providing context-specific evidence. Collected evidence was employed to inform all stages of the decision-making process, as well as for advocacy and fundraising to outline that a need exists. Structured processes for assessing the gathered evidence were lacking in all

organizations. Furthermore, evidence bases were not holistically reviewed, diverse approaches were not ensured, nor were evidence hierarchies employed. Rather, it was used what was available. This can lead to the employment of low-quality and biased evidence. However, the focus of organizations was on ensuring that interventions worked for beneficiaries, making other quality assessment criteria take a backseat. Other evidence structures are co-production and knowledge transfer relationships, knowledge management systems, as well as network memberships, which help gather relevant and up-to-date information and are used to varying extents. Interestingly, issues around lack of research skills, difficulty in obtaining informed consent, and compliance with ethical standards are avoided by relying on collaborative research practices instead of solo endeavors.

As Cairney (2016) pointed out, evidence use is exposed to factors influencing the decision-making process. This is also the case for the humanitarian aid sector. Turbulent environments - forcing ad hoc decision-making -, lacking resources and infrastructure, as well as the priorities of governments and donors limit evidence use of aid organizations. Missing financial means play the biggest role, as other factors, such as access to capable staff or technology, are safeguarded when funding is secured. This also explains why donors and governments can influence the design of interventions so extensively, as organizations are dependent on them to operate. Furthermore, championing an active learning and accountability culture as well as evidence-based policymaking by the organizations helps to strengthen evidence use. Thus, resources, external factors, and organizational culture do influence evidence-based practices of aid organizations.

The contribution of this thesis is threefold: The results supported or dismissed other scholars' findings and added new insights to the literature on evidence-based policymaking in humanitarian contexts. It aligns, for example, with the findings of previous research that have highlighted the role of decentralized decision-making for evidence use in humanitarian settings and how this structure helps to generate information in turbulent environments through the reflections of on-site staff thereby including more context-specific evidence. Additional claims that were supported in this research are the constraining characteristics of lacking resources and external factors, as well as the evidence use facilitation potential that championing an active learning and accountability culture can harbor.

Some results are in contrast to what other scholars have found. For instance, none of the organizations use evidence platforms. Evidence-based policymaking is also not solely dependent on high-ranking decision-making officials in headquarters, with a steep asymmetry

persisting between them and on-site employees. Rather, decisions are made in local offices by on-site personnel. In case of big-impact decisions, headquarters do get a say, but the process remains consultative so that local offices are then still included. Furthermore, organizations are willing to share the findings of their evaluations and co-produced research, which proves statements regarding their unwillingness to do so wrong. They recognize that sharing helps cooperation go smoothly, which is crucial in humanitarian contexts where collaboration is key.

This research also added new dimensions to the scholarship by illustrating the importance of collaborative practices in evidence use to overcome fragmented environments and prevent potential evidence loss. It further carved out how assessment structures are lacking in aid organizations as attention is mostly paid to whether interventions work for beneficiaries and not whether they fulfill certain quality criteria. Finally, it identified evaluations as the most used source of evidence, which is not surprising as they offer context-specific insights, an aspect most important to humanitarian decision-makers. Further evidence kinds that were used are needs assessments, surveys, published research as well as focus group discussions.

Since this research focused only on organizations in Kakuma and one specific service, the findings may not be generalizable due to the small sample size and the specific research setting. However, it allowed for a detailed analysis of the organizations' evidence use within the camp regarding WASH programs that would not have been possible in a large-N study.

Future research could test how the findings of this thesis fare when conducting similar projects on different humanitarian aid services or in different settings. Results can then be compared to explore differences or similarities. Furthermore, a longitudinal case study could offer deeper insights into the effects of evidence-based policymaking on the effectiveness and efficiency of aid programs. This thesis can then be used as a basis for such endeavors focusing on examining evidence use in humanitarian decision-making and how the delivery of WASH services can be improved to overcome the legitimacy crisis and deliver effective aid programs.

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## Annex

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### Annex 1: Preliminary Analytical Matrix

**WASH programs:** Categories describing implemented WASH programs in Kakuma

Category	When to use
Activities	Description of main activities of implemented WASH program
Duration	Description of duration of implemented WASH program

**Decision-making process:** Categories describing the decision-making process within organizations

Category	When to use
Decentralized	Decision-making power is dispersed across different individuals and offices
Centralized	Decision-making power is focused on few high-ranking and experienced individuals in headquarters
Inclusive	Personnel on the ground or stakeholders are included in the decision-making process
Transparency	Decision-making process employs tools to increase transparency
Contestability	Decision-making process allows contestability

**Evaluation process:** Categories describing the evaluation process within organizations

Category	When to use
Evaluative action	Evaluate own programs
Type of evaluation	Describes how programs are evaluated
Inclusive (decision-makers)	Employees are included in the evaluation process
Evaluation service	Evaluation done by another organization
Meeting (stakeholder)	Stakeholder are consulted during the evaluation process
Review documents	Documents are reviewed during the evaluation process
On-site visit	Humanitarian site is visited during the evaluation process
Meeting (local organization)	Local organization is visited during evaluation process
Meeting (donors)	Donors are visited during evaluation process

Publish findings Guidelines	Evaluation findings are published Evaluation Guidelines are followed
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**Evidence Use:** Categories describing the use of evidence within organizations

Category	When to use
Types of evidence	Describing the types of evidence used
Type of use	Describing for what evidence is used
Prioritization	Describing what kind of evidence is prioritized
Phase	Describing the phase of the policy cycle in which evidence is used
Diverse evidence	Describing whether contrasting approaches are represented within the gathered evidence
Assessment structures	Describing whether evidence is assessed
Holistic evidence review	Describing whether all evidence is holistically reviewed

**Assessing Evidence:** Codes describing how evidence is assessed

Codes	When to use
Context-specific	Evidence is assessed for its context fit
Scientific rigor	Evidence is assessed for its scientific soundness
Hierarchies	Evidence hierarchies are employed
Generalizability	Evidence is assessed for its generalizability
Relevance	Evidence is assessed whether it concerns issue at hand
Representative	Evidence is assessed for its representativeness of more than one group
Vulnerabilities	Evidence is assessed for representing vulnerable groups

**Structures for evidence use:** Codes describing structures employed to facilitate evidence use

Code	When to use
Knowledge platform	Knowledge platforms are used
Knowledge management system	Knowledge management system is used
Co-production	Co-production relationships exist with academia or other actors
Knowledge transfer relationships	Knowledge transfer relationships with academics
Research skills	Employees are equipped with research skills
Sharing	Gained insights are shared
Protection strategies	Protection strategies are set in place to protect sensitive knowledge

**Resources:** Codes describing resource factors influencing the use of evidence

Code	When to use
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Time	Availability of time influences the use of evidence
Money	Financial resources influence the use of evidence
Technology	Technology influences the use of evidence
Staff	Level of staff influences the use of evidence

**External factors:** Codes describing external factors influencing the use of evidence

Code	When to use
Political situation	Political situation influences the use of evidence
Political pressures	Political pressures influence the use of evidence
Lacking infrastructure	Lacking infrastructure influences the use of evidence
Donor requirements	Donor requirements influence the use of evidence
Dangerous environment	Dangerous environment influences the use of evidence

**Organizational culture:** Codes describing organizational factors influencing the use of evidence

Code	When to use
Active learning culture	Lack of active learning culture influences use of evidence
Accountability culture	Lack of accountability culture influences use of evidence
Communication channels	Lack of communication channels influences use of evidence
Fragmentation	Fragmented organizational culture influences use of evidence

**Research Challenges:** Codes describing challenges to evidence use

Code	When to use
Dispersed	Evidence is dispersed too widely
Unorganized	Own records are too unorganized
Format	Format of research often not helpful
Availability	Evidence not available
Bias	Research is more easily biased
Ethical research standards	Difficult to adhere to ethical research standards

## Annex 2: Interview Questions

1. Can you describe your role within the organization and your involvement in the decision-making processes related to WASH in the Kakuma refugee settlement?

2. Can you describe the WASH project that your organization was/is engaged in the Kakuma refugee camp?
  - Key activities
  - Duration
  
3. How would you describe the decision-making process within your organization regarding the delivery of WASH services in the Kakuma refugee settlement?
  
4. Does your organization evaluate programs or conduct research?
  - If so, what does the evaluation/research process look like, and does it follow guidelines?
  
5. Does your organization use evidence in its decision-making process regarding WASH services?
  - If so, what types of evidence are used?
  - During which phase of the decision-making process?
  
6. Does your organization prioritize specific types of evidence?
  - Appropriate, relevant, context-specific, high-quality, scientifically based, not focused on single solutions, RCTs, experiences from personnel on the ground?
  
7. Does your organization have specific structures in place to collect, analyze, prioritize and utilize evidence?
  - Co-production relationships with academia or other stakeholders?
  - Use of platforms such as EvidenceAid?
  - Knowledge Management System?
  
8. In your opinion, to what extent do resource constraints (i.e. time, money, technology) influence the utilization of evidence in the decision-making process?

9. In your opinion, to what extent do external factors, such as political situation or pressures, lacking infrastructure, or donor requirements, influence the utilization of evidence in the decision-making process?
  
10. In your opinion, what role do organizational factors like structure or culture play in utilizing research evidence in the decision-making process?
  
11. What strategies does your organization employ to continually improve its use of evidence-based policymaking for WASH services in the Kakuma refugee settlement?
  
12. Is there anything you want to add?

## Eigenständigkeitserklärung

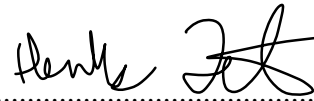
Hiermit versichere ich, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit des Titels

WASHing Away Doubt: A Case Study on Evidence Use for WASH  
Services in the Kakuma Refugee Settlement

selbständig verfasst und keine anderen als die angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmittel benutzt habe. Diejenigen Stellen der Arbeit, die anderen Werken – auch elektronischen Medien – dem Wortlaut oder Sinn nach entnommen wurden, habe ich in jedem Fall unter Angabe der Quelle als Zitat bzw. Entlehnung kenntlich gemacht. Ich versichere außerdem, diese Arbeit nicht bereits an anderer Stelle eingereicht zu haben.

Münster, 11.08.2024

(Ort, Datum)



(Unterschrift)