

K4D Impact Stories #1

K4D evidence summaries informing global COVID-19 pandemic response

The global COVID-19 pandemic presented a context of rapidly changing and complex development challenges. Recognising an immediate need for timely support in making sense of a proliferation of pandemic-related resources, the team at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) (formerly the Department for International Development) commissioned the K4D Programme to provide regular summaries of the evidence being generated world-wide on the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a rapid response research service, K4D was able to capture and collate relevant evolving evidence across a range of themes on a weekly, then daily, basis. Evidence indicates these summaries have served as a key input in delivering an evidence-based response to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The opportunity

The initial stages of the pandemic saw a proliferation of COVID-19-related resources and evidence being generated around the world. Amidst this rapidly developing context, FCDO members quickly recognised a need to capture relevant and evolving evidence to inform decision-making.

"[Everything] was happening very fast, and was in many ways very new. It was very new to have a pandemic at that scale and directly affecting the United Kingdom. We really had no idea on what the conflict or security and governance implications would be. Lots of people guessing, lots of theories, but we were fairly blind."

The rapid nature of the K4D service and its flexibility meant it was able to bring together new and emerging evidence needed for the COVID-19 response very quickly. In March 2020, K4D received a request from FCDO's Health Cadre to produce first weekly, later daily, Health Evidence Summaries (HES) as a means to support evidence-informed decision-making. Following the success of the HES, FCDO commissioned evidence summaries centred on Demography, Conflict and

Governance, and Humanitarian Evidence and Discourse to be produced weekly. Of these four, the Humanitarian Evidence and Discourse Summaries are ongoing and continue to receive high levels of engagement.

K4D contribution

Throughout the pandemic, K4D Evidence Summaries were utilised to signpost UK government departments to the latest relevant discourse and evidence on COVID-19 that could inform and support response to the ongoing crisis. Evidence Summaries collated resources by type, theme and highlighted a level of quality assurance. They were then emailed to a core group of FCDO members, published on OpenDocs and tweeted. To date, K4D researchers have produced over 122 summaries in total covering a wide range of issues straddling each of the four core themes all of which are available to the public and accessible by date or theme via the [K4D COVID-19 Resource Hub](#). The [K4D COVID-19 Evidence Search](#) was also created with thousands of COVID-19 related resources. This search platform is designed to make it easy for users to search and explore COVID-19 resources from a range of different sources.

Overall, the service was recognised for its quality and cited as an important tool across FCDO teams. Produced amidst a dynamic period of complex development challenges, advisors expressed appreciation for K4D's timely and adaptive support in providing rapid analysis at a time when few alternative resources were available,

"It was really helpful, particularly in the early days when there was a lot of new information being published. It required a little shaping, but the person on the K4D end was very open to that shaping, very open to feedback on what we needed. Overall, particularly in that period where there was nobody else doing anything, it was invaluable."

Other advisors voiced an appreciation for the flexibility and openness of the K4D team in understanding their needs and described the service as a valuable time saver within a fast-paced environment,

"We don't have the capacity to consistently do a literature review every week. We are a very small team and have lots and lots of demands. We have the [Health Evidence Summaries] coming in every week and are able to focus on all the other priority asks from senior staff."

Impact

Informed Decision-makers

Interviews with FCDO senior leadership indicate that K4D Evidence Summaries played a key role in ensuring advisors were able to stay abreast of the latest scientific understanding of the pandemic and its impacts. Supporting this finding, a tailored survey shared with FCDO participants indicates engagement with K4D Evidence Summaries was generally rated as 'very good' in terms of their ability to effectively capture and summarise relevant information. Over 87% of respondents reported that evidence summaries have been beneficial to their work, especially as it relates to the COVID-19 response and programming. Specifically, advisors indicate that summaries proved to be particularly useful in the case of low and middle-income countries. Engagement with summaries here was seen as a key input in delivering an evidence-based response. A respondent reported that K4D updates during this time were particularly useful for including evidence on lower- middle-income countries (LMICs) that could build on each other, "[it was] essentially [like] having an additional member of the team, providing good science advice".

/// It was really helpful, particularly in the early days when there was a lot of new information being published. ///

Overall, the summaries were viewed as a valuable resource that served as a key input in wider learning efforts needed to inform decision-making processes. Advisors expressed appreciation for the support it lent as a tool for connecting evidence within a dynamic and uncertain context. They noted the value this had to the establishment of a holistic understanding of the situation. One advisor highlighted the functionality of this approach,

"A lot of what we do in terms of external commissioning ends up not actually meeting our needs. Evidence Summaries are brilliant because they don't try to understand FCDO and what levers and points of influence are available – they tell us what the key things are this week and we can interpret them in the context of FCDO."

Provision of public good

Beyond the provision of timely evidence to inform internal team members, the K4D Evidence Summaries were designed to provide a reliable evidence resource that could be depended upon by both other government departments (OGD) and the wider public. Here, one K4D team member highlighted that the summaries were, "... produced with an eye to the public good...aimed to inform decisions relevant to all, including those facing the pandemic in low and middle-income countries".

Often, Evidence Summaries were used as a key resource to develop other products available to both internal and external stakeholders. For example, one key function of the Health Evidence Summaries was their use as a key input informing weekly reports produced by the COVID-19 Scientific Advisor team, which were then shared internally across OGDs and externally across partners such as the World Bank. More broadly, an assessment of social analytics indicates Evidence Summaries actively contributed to the evidence-base drawn on by wider sectors. The publication of the summaries and tweeting contributed to a dramatic increase in public engagement. In Q2 of 2020, total Twitter impressions had increased by 228% and engagements by 112%. Since the launch of the K4D COVID-19 Evidence Search platform, there have been over 2,500 page views.

FURTHER READING

All Evidence Summaries are now publicly available to all in one database.

- > On the [K4D COVID-19 Resource Hub](#), one can access K4D COVID-19 Evidence summaries across each of the four topics alongside access to other key resources produced by the team throughout the pandemic
- > The [K4D COVID-19 Evidence Search](#) is a searchable interface for evidence and discourse on COVID-19. Searching by theme or free text one can explore the full range of COVID-19 resources produced by the K4D team.
- > [Report highlights devastating social impacts of COVID-19 in low and middle-income countries](#)
Brigitte Rohwerder
14 September 2020
- > [How to improve safe access to water during and after COVID-19](#)
Rachel Cooper
11 June 2020
- > [Strengthening water security for pandemic preparedness](#)
Rachel Cooper
7 May 2020
- > [4 lessons from evaluations of the education response to Ebola](#)
Joe Hallgarten
20th April 2020
- > [COVID-19, Governance, and Conflict: Emerging Impacts and Future Evidence Needs](#)
Siân Herbert
March 2021
- > In addition to COVID-19 Evidence Summaries, other K4D products such as Emerging Issue Reports (EIR) were praised for their usefulness in highlighting COVID-19 impacts on various topics. One key example here is the EIR report on [Impacts of COVID-19 on Governance and Conflict in Developing Countries](#) which was shared on Duncan Green's 'From Poverty to Power' blog series and widely shared on Twitter by the FCDO Governance, Conflict, Social Development Research and other development partners.

CREDITS

Author

Danielle Freed, ITAD (Consultant)

Copyeditor

Erin Lewis

Design

Lance Bellers

Acknowledgments

This case study was made possible through the contribution of the K4D Programme team, staff at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and others who engaged with the resources and K4D Programme.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Freed, D. (2022) *K4D Evidence Summaries Informing Global Covid-19 Pandemic Response*, K4D, Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.
DOI: [10.19088/K4D.2022.158](https://doi.org/10.19088/K4D.2022.158)

CONTACT

Website

k4d.ids.ac.uk

Twitter

[@K4D_info](https://twitter.com/K4D_info)

Email

info@k4d.info

COPYRIGHT

This case study was prepared for the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and its partners in support of pro-poor programmes. Except where otherwise stated, it is licensed for non-commercial purposes under the terms of the [Open Government Licence v3.0](#). K4D cannot be held responsible for errors or any consequences arising from the use of information contained in this report. Any views and opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of FCDO, K4D or any other contributing organisation.

© Crown copyright 2022.



K4D

Knowledge, evidence
and learning for
development