

# Why Social Science Matters for Humanitarian Action?

Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA)

Fact Sheets - August 2023

## What is Social Science?

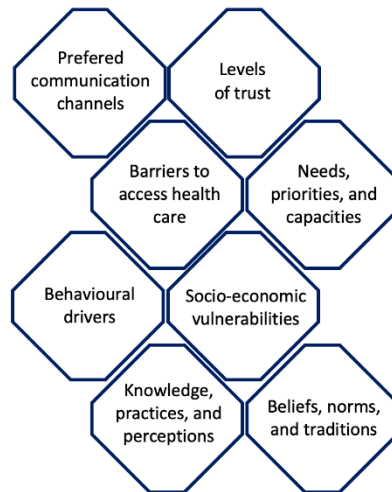
**Social science is not new to the humanitarian sector.**

Social science approaches and methods have been used to study people's perceptions, experiences, and behaviours and use it to adapt the response. These include **qualitative methods** (such as key informant interviews, focus group discussions, community feedback, social listening) and **quantitative methods** (such as perception surveys, needs assessment surveys, and KAP surveys).

### Scenario: Social Science in Earthquake Response

*Imagine a scenario in which the IFRC response team struggles to understand why the earthquake response is not effective. In this case, a social science study would be useful to understand not only people's immediate needs, but also their beliefs, behaviours, and factors that influence response. For example, if the data show that the affected population prefers the help of local religious organizations to international agencies, the IFRC team can use this knowledge to work with local religious groups to improve the effectiveness of aid to the affected people over time.*

**Information generated through social science research:**



Within **Community Engagement and Accountability**, social science data and evidence has been used to promote participation, foster trust, and align interventions with local priorities.



However, social science contributes to a number of areas, such as: Health and care ([Ebola and safe and dignified burials](#)), Climate change ([Locally-led adaptation](#)), Protection and inclusion ([Community perceptions of discrimination](#)), Migration and displacement ([Trust and service utilization](#)).

## Sahel case study – qualitative social science research - 2022

### Problem

In Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, sexual and reproductive health indicators for women and adolescents are of great concern. These countries have high total fertility rates, with contraceptive prevalence not exceeding 17%. Maternal mortality ratios are among the highest in the world, at over 300 deaths per 100,000 live births. Early marriage and clandestine induced abortion are significant public health issues. In addition to structural dysfunctions in the healthcare system, the access and utilization of services by women and adolescent girls are often influenced by gender and intergenerational social norms.

### Social science approach

The study was carried out in Mali, Mauritania and Niger, in coordination with National Societies from a collective project coordinated by French Red Cross (PROGRESS). A qualitative approach was employed using key informant interviews, focus groups, and targeted observations in health facilities and in the community, which were triangulated with case studies.

### Research data and findings

The research results demonstrate the influence of social norms governing fertility, pregnancy and the use of mother-and-child care.

In addition, it highlights the many forms of gender-based violence suffered within the family or in health facilities. These social norms compromise the principle of empowerment promoted by the projects. Conversely, the research also highlights the existence of endogenous strategies and dynamics, developed by the populations themselves, to improve the effectiveness of health and humanitarian actions.

### Data to action: uses of data

*Stakeholder Workshop:* The French Red Cross Foundation organized a workshop in 2023, with Niger Red Cross Society in order to better disseminate the results, and to collectively develop tailored activities.

*Community Engagement:* National Societies conducted community engagement activities to raise awareness among pregnant women and their families.

*Trainings:* Health workers are being trained by the National Societies to provide more respectful care for patients, and to combat gender-based violence.

For more information about this case study, contact [recherche@fondation-croix-rouge.fr](mailto:recherche@fondation-croix-rouge.fr)



## Haiti case study – quantitative social science research - 2022

### Problem

The Haiti Cholera Perception Survey was conducted by the Haiti Red Cross Society (HRCS) to understand the community knowledge, attitude, needs, and practices regarding cholera and Oral Cholera Vaccine (OCV), to inform and design of effective communication and engagement strategies.

### Social science approach

A quantitative survey was carried out in December 2022 by HRCS volunteers with the support of IFRC. A non-probability convenience sampling approach was applied to communities previously targeted by the HRCS into two departments: Grand Anse and Sud were. 190 data surveys were collected.

### Research data and findings

61.8% of respondents said they take measures to make the water safer. The use of *aquatabs* is the most important measure, followed by the addition of bleach or chlorine solution and boiling the water. 37.08% do not take any measures to improve water safety. Although 74.74% of respondents said they had heard of the cholera vaccine, only 19% said they had received it at some point in their lives. 80.28% have not received a dose of this vaccine and 42.11% of respondents said they would not get vaccinated even if they had access to it.



78.84% of respondent said they were not involved in community activities in November to December 2022.

### Data to action: uses of data

*Community engagement:* Ongoing mapping of vulnerable groups; engaging trusted actors to tackle cholera-related rumours.

*WASH:* Distribution of WASH kits (soap/*aquatabs* to make water safe) to communities by the Haitian Red Cross.

*Risk communication:* Radio awareness about cholera prevention and vaccination and broadcasting education programs.

*More:* Two workshops were organized in Grand Anse and Nippes with to share and discuss findings.

For more information about this case study, contact Roméo Nganha [romeo.nganha@ifrc.org](mailto:romeo.nganha@ifrc.org)

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**About the CEA series:** These CEA series are produced by the Community Engagement and Accountability Unit at IFRC Geneva. For more information, please contact Gefra Fulane [gefra.fulane@ifrc.org](mailto:gefra.fulane@ifrc.org).