Applying the Evidence Ecosystem concept as a tool to demonstrate the successful implementation of Evidence-Based Practice in international aid: the example of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

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Background
The Belgian Red Cross (BRC) is an aid organization with a wide range of activities, from blood collection and banking over first aid education to international disaster and development aid. Evidence-based decision-making is embedded in the long-term strategic vision of BRC for all its activities.

Objectives
1. To scientifically underpin BRC activities by implementing the principles of Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) in its international aid activities.
2. To demonstrate how we scientifically underpin the WASH activities of our International Cooperation Department via the Evidence Ecosystem. [1]

Methods
Since 2010, BRC invested in a Centre for Evidence-Based Practice (CEBaP) where 10 full-time researchers in EBP support the international aid activities by conducting
- Type A research (Monitoring and Evaluation),
- Type B research (systematic reviews and evidence-based guidelines),
- Type C research (impact evaluations such as randomized controlled trials)

BRC employees are being trained (blended learning, journal clubs, webinars, etc.) to implement EBP in the following ways:
- Translation of an operational question into a research question
- Contribution in the dissemination of the evidence conclusions
- Implementation of evidence conclusions in daily practice and programs
- Data collection to evaluate daily practice and programs
- Contribution in the operational aspects of field research

Results
Conducting a systematic review to show which promotional approaches are effective to change handwashing and sanitation behaviour in LMIC. [2] (Type B).

Disseminating systematic review results via:
- Face-to-face stakeholder meeting [3]
- Policy brief
- Online sources
  - Blog
  - Webinar [4]
- Websites [5]
- Social media
- Conference [6]
- Peer-reviewed publications [2], [7]

Target group: lay people, volunteers, other Red Cross societies or NGOs, academic institutions, funding or governmental bodies.

Conclusions
- The Evidence Ecosystem demonstrates that the EBP principles are successfully implemented in the International Cooperation Department of the BRC.
- A top-down managerial focus on EBP increased the awareness of all employees and volunteers and resulted in a positive attitude towards EBP.

This evidence-based approach further supports the quality of BRC research projects, will result in more (cost-)effective interventions, ultimately benefitting the beneficiaries of these projects/programs.

References:

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