

**Complex Emergencies Database (CE-DAT)  
Third Technical Advisory Group  
Meeting Proceedings**

**London, UK, November 29, 2006**

Held at:

Department for International Development (DFID)  
1 Palace Street  
London  
SW1E 5HE  
UK

Hosted by:

The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters  
(CRED)

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# **MEETING PROCEEDINGS**

**Wednesday November 29th, 2006**

## **1.0 MORNING DISCUSSION**

### **1.1 WELCOMING REMARKS AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Joanna Macrae (DFID) opened the meeting with some welcoming remarks and then began the round table introductions (see Annex 1 for Participants List and Contacts).

Debarati Guha-Sapir, Director of the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) and Chair for the meeting, reiterated the welcome and began the day's discussions with an overview of the meeting agenda. The meeting was divided into morning and afternoon sessions. The morning session was dedicated to discussing inputs into CE-DAT on the part of NGO and UN partners, while the afternoon concentrated on outputs that would be useful to the greater humanitarian community.

Hoa Tran (State/PRM) made some brief comments about the inception of CE-DAT and the motivations behind the State Department funding the project.

### **1.2 CE-DAT UPDATE**

Elizabeth Tschoegl (CRED) then presented an overview of the Complex Emergencies Database (CE-DAT) for those unfamiliar with its objectives and overall format, along with an update on the progress to date.

The objective of CE-DAT is to collect key nutrition, health, and mortality indicators and present them in a standardized, searchable format made publicly accessible online. By improving the quantity and quality of information available, CE-DAT aims to provide evidence-based trend analysis and impact briefings to illustrate the effects of complex emergencies (including armed conflict, post-conflict and transition, and emergency situations) on mass populations.

CE-DAT collects mortality, nutrition, and health indicators (including vaccination coverage) along with supplementary methodological information such as:

- target population,
- legal status (refugee, IDP, resident),
- survey design and survey dates,
- mortality recall period,
- confidence intervals, and
- geographical information up to the smallest administrative level provided.

Data are derived mainly from primary sources (original survey reports provided by field agencies) as well as secondary online sources, such as the Nutrition in Crisis Situations (NICS) report and the Food Security Analysis Unit-Somalia (FSAU). CRED undertakes an internal quality control process and surveys are only available online once the results have been validated.

CE-DAT currently contains over 1300 surveys from 39 countries. In the past several months we have continued to enlarge the CE-DAT network and have begun collaborations with ACF, Save the Children, and Tearfund. Discussions are also currently taking place with GOAL, Concern, and the IRC and we hope to begin receiving their surveys in the upcoming months. The number of inquiries we currently respond to has also increased and we have begun work on a quarterly newsletter to update the community about CE-DAT's findings.

At the conclusion of the presentation the following issues were brought up to be addressed during the course of the meeting. The current challenges faced by CE-DAT are:

1. The process of obtaining, entering, formatting, and validating surveys is labor intensive and requires expert review. As data supply agreements are established, the process will become more systematic but will continue to require dedicated attention and time.
2. As requests for analysis continue to come in CE-DAT will be pushed to capacity to respond rapidly;
3. The partial nature of the database and the lack of information for neighboring countries to those in the database makes the analysis difficult if not incomplete;
4. The nature of funding in general makes long term planning and project development difficult.

### 1.3 CE-DAT QUESTION AND ANSWER

After the presentation, participants had the following questions about CE-DAT and its ability to develop its capacity:

1. Would it be possible to link EM-DAT and CE-DAT to provide users with more contextual information about a specific country?

It is not currently planned to merge EM-DAT and CE-DAT but the point raised was a valid one. EM-DAT is a strong database, having developed over a twenty year period, while CE-DAT is still struggling with growing pains. However CRED is looking into developing a link between the two, possibly on the Administrative 1 geographical level to better highlight potential contributing factors to complex emergencies.

2. Should there be a minimum criteria for terms used in the database such as “conflict systems”, “food insecurity”, and “complex emergency”?

Although this is an issue that CE-DAT struggles with we are not alone as the problem of definitions is one that perplexes the whole humanitarian community. Our experiences with EM-DAT forced us to develop a set of four criteria which, although sometimes critiqued, have kept us in good stead and allowed for robust development of that database.

The task of defining complex concepts like civil conflict will not be an easy one, but we recognize that its necessity. Suggestions were made about how to start framing the discussion of definitions, and it is clear that we will need to be focused about our “perspective”. The process of setting criteria should not be inclusive or exclusive but we must address the issues of “Who is the database for?” and “What is the database for?”.

3. Is it possible to provide trend analysis in the form of briefs as a way of highlighting emerging problems in “vulnerable” countries?

If we are to be efficient and globally responsive then there is a need for rapid response. CE-DAT today is dependent on existing survey data and cannot provide analysis for regions from which we do not receive data. However in our longer term strategic plan we will incorporate a facility to work with NGO partners to fill data gaps.

4. CE-DAT began by focusing on eight countries and has since expanded to thirty nine countries. Will CE-DAT look to expand further?

CE-DAT must aim for global coverage to respond to imminent crisis. Unless CE-DAT can confidently report on a country and the surrounding region it will not be able to fully provide responses to forgotten and high profile emergencies.

#### **1.4 UN FORUM**

Ties Boerma (EIP/WHO), Luca Alinovi (FAO), Karl Steinacker (UNHCR), Khassoum Diallo (UNHCR), Robin Nandy (UNICEF), Daniel Acuna Lopez (HAC/WHO)

The morning forum was not a formal panel discussion. Instead representatives from each of the UN agencies present was asked to speak briefly about the work they are currently doing within their own agency and how that might inform the work being done by CE-DAT. This was also an opportunity for the UN agencies to suggest areas that CE-DAT must continue to develop.

The UN agencies suggested that they could contribute in the following ways:

- UNICEF has committed itself to doing MICS every three years which could provide a great source of baseline and tracking information to CE-DAT.
- The World Health Surveys that the WHO hope to produce shortly could prove a useful data source. In addition the WHO has developed a health statistics framework which could allow for CRED to interface with Paris 21, HIC, WHO, Sphere, SMART, Clusters, and HMN.
- UNHCR is currently in 150 countries and has developed Health Information Systems (HIS) in all of their camps which is data that CE-DAT should look to utilize better. UNHCR can help to increase CE-DAT's visibility by providing access to partners. UNHCR also has a large network of staff specializing and can be a primary global source for mortality and morbidity indicators.
- FAO has developed the Integrated Food Security and Humanitarian Phase Classification (IPC) Framework which will provide regional food, water, security, and health indicators three times over one year. CE-DAT could be useful in providing the technical and analytical information needed for the health indicators, and in exchange FAO could help provide the contextual information on food insecurity, civil security, and livelihood which would increase the robustness of CE-DAT analysis.

The following recommendations were made by the UN partners:

- Collaborations of mutual interest and complementarity should be strengthened between CE-DAT and other databases (NICS, HNTS) and data systems (i.e. IPC).
- CE-DAT needs to develop a more standardized system for dealing with incomplete and inaccurate data, reconciling widely divergent statistics, and for addressing metadata challenges posed by variable data.
- CE-DAT should look to establish technical working groups with expertise in epidemiology, statistics, and demography to develop conventions for the CE-DAT Standard Operating Procedures.

#### **1.5 NGO FORUM**

Laura Byrne (GOAL), Shona MacPherson (Tearfund), Claire Demenezes (ACF), Tom Ellman (MSF), Frances Mason (Save the Children)

All of the NGO participants were asked to speak briefly about the work of their organization but more specifically about how CE-DAT could support their work in the field.

- NGOs recognize the inherent difficulty in providing trend analysis in countries where there is a lack of involvement but reiterated the need for this kind of data because NGOs often lack the ability or capacity to provide that type of information. Where

possible CE-DAT should look to provide information on areas of concern where NGOs are not involved to help aid NGOs in their decisions to enter a country.

- It was suggested that CE-DAT provide “e-alerts” when new surveys are received to inform actors on the ground.
- Any work CE-DAT could do to improve the quality of population data available or to assist NGOs in obtaining reliable figures would be useful.
- NGOs suggested that where possible CE-DAT could assist in analysis of surveys in which unexpectedly high results are seen and provide useful input as to how those results might have been obtained.
- CE-DAT would benefit from a multi-donor base rather than a single-donor base.
- CE-DAT potentially has an important role in providing metadata in an impartial way and communicating that data in ways that avoid misinterpretation or inappropriate usage of the data.
- Although the current strength of CE-DAT is its use of quantitative indicators, NGOs expressed concern that policy decisions based on quantitative indicators without qualitative information might be misguided. CE-DAT needs to look at ways of incorporating qualitative information into its analysis.

The issue of population figures is an important one to highlight as it is still practice to make assumptions based on outdated population statistics. There was a general feeling that this is an area in which the community as a whole is still doing a poor job. There are efforts underway looking at defining population density through high resolution satellites (i.e. as is happening at Oxford) for example but this is clearly an area that still requires improvement.

## **1.6 PRESENTATION OF THE HTNS**

Daniel Acuna Lopez (HAC/WHO)

At this time Daniel Acuna Lopez from the Recovery and Transitions Programme of the Health Action in Crisis agency of the World Health Organization gave a brief presentation describing the Health Tracking and Nutrition Service currently under development. Participants were eager to learn more about the HTNS but had the following concerns:

- As the HTNS is just beginning it is trying to remain narrow in scope and be complimentary to the activities of CE-DAT and other databases instead of duplication of their efforts.
- However there were concerns that the HTNS, like CE-DAT currently, relies on two types of indicators to drive responses and that there need to be more qualitative livelihood information for any sort of comprehensive situation analysis.
- The HTNS will work as a collective and reports will be put out with the seal of the WHO. Participants were optimistic about the potential for the WHO to bring different organizations together. However there remain concerns about the WHO’s ability to remain a physical presence in a country (which it needs to do) and maintain relations with the host government on occasion when a negative report is produced on a country.
- It was still not clear to how the WHO will produce reports rapidly as turnaround time is often very short for information requests.

## **2.0 AFTERNOON SESSION**

### **2.1 ACADEMIC FORUM**

Francesco Checchi (LSHTM), Gregg Greenough (HHI), Richard Garfield (Columbia University), Johan von Schreeb (Karolinska Institutet), Jon Pedersen (Fafu), Oleg Biluhka (CDC), Reinhard Kaiser (ECDC)

Francesco Checchi (LSHTM) gave a brief presentation about data quality and precision needs from an NGO/academic perspective. A differentiation was made between the data needs in an

acute phase emergency, where the focus should be on the sensitivity (ability to detect a crisis when one exists) of measurement, versus monitoring which may require more attention to specificity (ability to minimize false alarms). In the acute phase there is a need for more epidemiologists and nutritionist on the ground faster. In the monitoring phase, surveys can not and should not take the place of establishing surveillance systems. Concern was raised that mortality questionnaires are sometimes being approached from a nutrition perspective without a proper household census, thus leading to underestimation.

Academics and researchers had the following comments to make and suggestions to offer CRED:

- There have been significant improvements in the quality of surveys being undertaken by NGOs over the past twenty plus years. Technical support from CRED in the areas of household selection strategy and detail and quality of mortality questionnaires could help improve the data precision even further.
- Researchers suggested that they could and should support a network of academic experts to aid CE-DAT in vetting data and performing analysis, and work together to develop good ways of using poor quality data.
- While researchers may not have unique expertise, they have access to a diverse pool of resources including multidisciplinary academic links and highly skilled labor in the form of research students to aid in analysis. CE-DAT should look to using its academic partners more for analysis.
- CE-DAT could serve as a referral service for redirecting requests for technical assistance to the research network.
- However if CE-DAT wishes to create a help-desk function to increase capacity then we need to look for ways of linking CRED with coordinating policy bodies who can act on the information provided.
- CE-DAT should participate in the Health and Nutrition Clusters and discuss how to work together in meaningful ways.
- Better visual representation over time of country and regional trends would be a useful product of CE-DAT.

## **2.2 POLICY-MAKER FORUM**

Joanna Macrae (DFID), Barnaby Willitts-King (Irish Aid), Stephen Salewicz (CIDA), Michelle Lebrun (ECHO), Hoa Tran (State), Peter Morris (USAID)

The policy-makers were asked to approach the discussion from a slightly different perspective. They were asked to think of situations when they might have needed analysis and comment on whether they felt CE-DAT could have addressed those needs. Most of the policy-makers were there out of an interest in improving their allocations therefore used the time as a way of educating themselves as to the many dimensions involved in evidence-based humanitarian decision making from an epidemiological perspective. However the following comments were made:

- Policy-makers felt that CE-DAT should be kept “clean and clinical” and have a limited scope. It should not be an advocacy tool, but should be a tool to be used within the context of other information sources as a means of seeing a situation in a host of lights.
- Some issues were raised during the course of the meeting about the SMART methodology and policy-makers were eager to see the issues ironed out, as training on SMART seems an important step towards boosting capacity for all.
- Policy-makers would like to see more regular and transparent reporting from CE-DAT and again emergency profiles were highlighted as a product of interest despite the understood complexity of the task.

- Data provides for accountability in humanitarian action. Policy-makers feel that a better grasp of the standards, objectives, and needs in emergency situations would help level out the differences in donor funding.

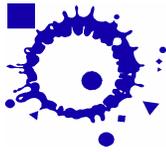
## 2.3 CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

As a result of the day's discussion, the following next steps became clear goals for the future from the perspective of improving CE-DAT:

- In the first five months of the CE-DAT annual work plan CE-DAT has established collaborative agreements with several NGO partners. CE-DAT will continue to work on solidifying its relationships with the partners from the meeting and colleagues in the field.
- An overarching theme in the meeting was wish for the creation of small expert working groups to set standards for data quality. CRED therefore proposes to host a retreat in the Spring in which a handful of invited advisors will help create a framework by which CE-DAT can address the following issues:
  - Develop a methodological checklist to inform users as to the basis behind data quality decisions,
  - Clarify our definitions of some key concepts such as “complex emergency” and “conflict” and create reasonable criteria, and
  - Develop ways of incorporating qualitative information into the database in a way that is useful to users (which would also include the linking of EM-DAT and CE-DAT).

The results of this meeting would then be brought to the next TAG Meeting for discussion and debate.

- Continue to respond to our donors' requests and state clearly the origin and reasoning behind analysis undertaken.
- Increase the number of country profiles available.
- Look to develop a system for producing “e-alerts” to make the community aware of new developments and discoveries in the field.
- Continue performing country-specific analysis but also look to create more routine, shorter briefs. This would take the form of shorter analytic pieces but also will be done through a quarterly newsletter format to inform the community about our findings.
- We have not been involved with the Health and Nutrition Clusters prior to this because it was believed that attendance was by invitation only. However as it has become clear that is not the case, we will look to work with those involved in the clusters to encourage collaboration and improve both of our outputs.



Centre for Research on  
the Epidemiology of  
Disasters (CRED)



Université Catholique  
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WHO  
Collaborating Centre

## Third CE-DAT TAG Meeting

**1 Palace Street London SW1 5HE  
November 29, 2006**

**9:00-10:00**

### **Opening Remarks**

Joanna Macrae (DFID), Hoa Tran (Department of State),  
Debarati Guha-Sapir (CRED)

### **CE-DAT Update**

Elizabeth Tschoegl (CRED)

Discussion of recent collaborative agreements with NGOs and discussion  
of current work plan ("areas of concern"briefs, discuss inclusion of  
methodology section on website)

### **Question & Answer Period on CE-DAT**

**10:00-10:15**

### **Coffee break**

**10:15-12:30**

### **Invited Comments from the Floor**

Chair: Debarati Guha-Sapir (CRED)

Discussions of the mutual benefits of partnerships with NGOs and UN  
agencies. Ways to get other NGOs on board? Are MoUs necessary? What  
data can donors provide? Linkages to existing relevant data systems such as  
MICS (UNICEF), FSAU (FAO), SIR (UNHCR).

### **UN Forum**

### **NGO Forum**

### **Presentation on HTNS**

Daniel Acuna Lopez (HAC/WHO)

**12:30-1:30**

### **Lunch and Informal Discussions**

**1:30-3:30**

### **CE-DAT and its partners: information outputs**

Chair: Debarati Guha-Sapir (CRED)

What outputs would policy-makers find useful from CE-DAT? Engagement  
of research institutions for report production and analysis. Channeling  
outputs to influence international action.

### **ACADEMIC FORUM**

### **POLICY-MAKERS FORUM**

**3:30-3:45 Coffee break**

**3:45-5:00 CE-DAT: Visions for the future**

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