



## MEETING NOTES

### Expert Working Group Meeting on Human and Economic Disaster Impact Characterization

Meeting Room 2  
Environmental House # 1  
Chemin des Anémones, 11 – Chatelaine - Geneva

7 October 2011

---

#### Participants

CRED: Below R., Vos F.  
SWISSRE: Bevere L.  
MUNICHRE: Wirtz A.  
ISDR: Ponserre, S. Serje, J.  
IFRC: Zanetta F.  
UNDP/GRIP: Villacis C., Yan J.,  
WFP/HEWSweb: Blasilli M. , Sartori G.

#### Workshop Agenda

09:30	Opening Speech (Mr. Neil Buhne, Director of the UNDP-BCPR)
09:45	Scope and overview of the meeting (C. Villacis, R. Below)
10:00	Presentation of the draft working paper on applied disaster human and economic impact definitions (F. Vos)
10:15	Identification of differences, strengths and weaknesses: current status Open discussion
11:00	Input from the data suppliers (IFRC)
11:30	Discussion
12:30	<i>Lunch</i>
13:30	Possible application areas of disaster impact data and the requirements (C. Villacis)



- 14:30**                      **Primary selection of standard human and economic indicators and their definitions**
- 16:00**                      **Discussion of next steps**
- 17:00**                      **Close-up and end of the working group meeting**

## **Summary**

The day started with a welcome from the Director of the BCPR/UNDP Liaison Office in Geneva, Mr. Neil Buhne, followed by an introduction to the meeting by Ms. Regina Below (CRED) and Dr. Carlos Villacis (GRIP/UNDP).

After a round table to introduce the various meeting participants from UN agencies (UNDP, UNISDR, WFP), reinsurance companies (MunichRe, SwissRe), international organizations (IFRC) and research institute (CRED), Ms. Femke Vos gave a presentation summarizing the draft working paper on Disaster Loss Characterization: review of human and economic impact indicator definitions. The main conclusions which were outlined in the presentation were:

- Global disaster loss databases such as CRED’s EM-DAT, SwissRe’s Sigma, MunichRe’s NatCat, and UNDP/UNISDR/LA Red’s DesInventar have developed human and economic impact definitions, but these definitions vary among these databases and sometimes are not provided. This is one of the main discussion topics of the meeting.
- Several field agencies that collect disaster data and report at disaster sites have developed standardized needs assessment templates. However, no definitions were found for the indicators used in these templates. The situation reports developed by different field agencies contain in general the same main human impact indicators. Quantitative economic information is seldom included in both templates and reports.
- Frameworks and strategies (e.g. UNISDR) have developed definitions for disaster-related terms (e.g. hazard, risk, vulnerability), however not for human or economic impact indicators.
- Methodologies that focus on measuring social and economic impact of disasters (DaLA, PDNA) include economic impact definitions. The assessment reports that are based on these methodologies contain detailed information but are only available for major disasters and not for smaller scale disasters which are also compiled in databases.

The way forward for improving data quality in disaster occurrence and impact databases was outlined in the presentation as:

1. Agreeing on definitions among the disaster loss databases to increase interoperability;
2. Increasing knowledge on how data sources collect and report data in the field to improve data accuracy;
3. Building upon existing definitions, therefore collaboration between the different actors is needed.



After this presentation, a general discussion followed on the strategy for developing standardized human and economic impact indicator definitions. Whereas some argued that as a first step the final target public should first be defined, others thought that this would not be necessary per sé, as defining and clarifying even simple terms could already benefit involved actors. The importance of building on what already exists was highlighted, in order to facilitate the uptake by others. Furthermore, it was mentioned that showing people the benefits of this activity could also increase the uptake and use of standardized human and economic impact definitions.

*“We have to proof that there are advantages of changing. If people realize that the changes will help them to do better work, then they will accept and apply the changes. It is important to understand what the added value is and what will be the benefit: why the people should be doing all this work.”*

It was pointed out that the use of standards will lead to changes in the database and to take this into account for the databases that already exist. The importance of thinking in the long-term was noted: how standards will be implemented.

An example of a logical process would be to define, discuss and agree on definitions during several meetings, including adapting them, and then to start using it in own databases as well as in communications to the public in order to make them known.

Mr. Frederic Zanetta (IFRC) introduced the 4 types of alert reports used at IFRC for the Red Cross and Red Crescent Emergency Response 2004-2011 report, which are: Disaster Management Information System, Information bulletins, DREF operation reports and Emergency appeal reports. The main indicators in their database are: Displaced/Evacuated, Number of beneficiaries, Affected, Dead Injured and missing people. No economic impact.

A short discussion around the difference between ‘Affected’ and ‘Beneficiaries’ pointed out that the number of beneficiaries is generally preferred over the number of affected by field agencies. This is because they need to know how many people they need to support for a specific time period and to issue a funding demand for donors.

It was mentioned that impact figures for historical data are difficult to obtain. The inclusion of an uncertainty level for the data as well as a quality score could be useful. Meta-data could also be included to support this.



The afternoon was dedicated to a profound discussion around the exact selection, wording and recommended definitions of human impact indicators. In general it was recommended to keep the indicator definitions simple but also keep the door open for more detailed definitions. A first proposition of 4 main human impact indicator definitions is described below:

**1. Deaths:** *“Number of people who lost their life because the event happened.”*

The data included will correspond to the figure when the reporting is stable. It does not include the missing people. The terms ‘killed’, ‘victims’ and ‘fatalities’ are thus preferably not used. Sub-indicators for disaggregation, e.g. according to gender, age etc., can be optional for a database.

**2. Missing:** *“The number of people whose whereabouts since the disaster is unknown, and is presumed dead.”*

It includes people who are presumed dead, although there is no physical evidence. The data on number of deaths and number of missing are mutually exclusive. In the source reporting there should be a clear description in order to know the difference between missing and deaths. There is no time limit for the period that the person is missing (e.g. in certain countries a person is presumed dead after being missing one year; this is not taken into account).

**3. Injured:** *“People who need medical treatment.”*

This also includes sick people, so there is no distinction between injury and sickness. Epidemics are to be treated differently and the triggering event has to be taken into account. The inclusion of an injury severity degree can be optional for a database.

**4. Homeless:** *“People who need shelter.”*

Persons who need the provision of shelter.

A proposition of 2 optional human impact indicator definitions is described below. These are important operational definitions for reconstruction and figures are often easily available.

**5. Evacuated:** *“People who are mobilized as a preventive measure before and during the event.”*  
The term ‘displaced’ is thus preferably not used.

**6. Relocated:** *“People who have been moved permanently from their homes to new sites.”*

This term relates to the reconstruction process, and not to the impact phase of a disaster.

Other proposed indicators were: Rescued, Relief-provided.

It is important to note that ‘Evacuated’, ‘Homeless’ and ‘Relocated’ are not mutually exclusive, and they may involve double counting. For example, some of the evacuees may become later homeless (some return to their houses), and some of the homeless may be relocated (some may rebuild in the same place, or return after a period). These 3 indicators correspond to the 3 stages of the disaster cycle: before and during a disaster – Evacuated; immediate aftermath of a disaster – Homeless; and at the recovery and reconstruction stage – Relocated.

The term ‘Affected’ - widely used by different actors and in reports - is not included in the above list of human indicators. It was acknowledged that this indicator is often reported, although with different criteria and method, and it is widely used to convey the extent or severity of an event.



It was highlighted that Affected will always be a difficult indicator, often reported inaccurately. Therefore, it was proposed to use another indicator instead, such as a sum of different indicators or a new indicator. This could be for example 'people exposed', 'people in need' or 'people living in the affected area'. These ideas are particularly interesting since with new technologies these figures will become more and more available. On the other hand, as information on affected people often comes in from the field, it was proposed to keep this indicator but as an optional one. It was noted that a quality score could be attributed to inform on its possible use. It was brought up that it would be helpful to identify existing definitions for the term Affected and gather more information on how field agencies and data providers estimate the number of affected people. This could help to get more clear ideas on this indicator and on a possible adaptation or replacement.

The use of geocoding information and also quality scores for indicators (e.g. colours) were furthermore highlighted as future steps.

Recommendations and next steps:

- Circulate draft working paper and meeting notes; including feedback.
- Progress in generating standard definitions for impact indicators which are simple, consistent and can be clearly understood by producers, collectors and users of data, independent of their skills and education level. These definitions should be language independent.
- Explore in more detail the indicator 'Affected' and the possible use of new or additional indicators (e.g. exposed population/PAGER) and their feasibility.
- Elaborate a detailed working plan, including time schedule.
- Explore the possibilities for using the PreventionWeb Virtual Workspace to continue the activity online, including the sharing of document and posting of comments.
- Organize a second meeting focusing on economic impact indicators. Preferably, this meeting should have a duration of more than one day in order to have sufficient time for discussion and finalization.

End of Meeting