



PRESS RELEASE

EVIDENCE CAN SAVE LIVES SAY HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

July 18, 2012, New York, USA and Brussels, Belgium

The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), at the University of Louvain, Brussels, and the European Commission, Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid & Civil Protection (ECHO), will organize a side event – “Can evidence save lives? Perspectives from humanitarian actors” – on July 19th 2012, at the 2012 Substantive Session of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in New York City.

Humanitarian agencies and donors have decided that obtaining objective and reliable statistics on devastating events is a priority. If prevention, preparedness and early warning are to work, assessing the human impact of humanitarian crises in a globally coordinated manner is critical.

“Good quality data is not a luxury in humanitarian crises. People’s lives depend on it,” argues Professor Debarati Guha-Sapir, University of Louvain and Director of CRED.

Information from humanitarian crises can differ widely and confuse decision-making. Questions that must be answered with objective data include: How bad is the problem? How big is the problem? What are the needs of aid recipients?

Recent crises in Africa show that even when evidence of need is available, the links between the evidence and effective humanitarian responses need strengthening. There are many challenges, including robust and standardized data collection methods, rapid data capture in the field, and criteria to establish objective and reliable data.

Over the last two years, some 350,000 people have died and 460 million people have been affected by natural disasters. The burden of conflict-related insecurity may be even larger, but its extent remains unknown. An estimated 11 million people suffered from severe hunger and displacement in the Horn of Africa last year, but the humanitarian community has little knowledge of how many died and why.

Kristin Hedström, Humanitarian Policy Advisor, European Commission, DG ECHO, observes: “As donors, we are committed to fund humanitarian assistance for those who need it most. We are eager to see strengthening of needs assessment and the overall evidence base for humanitarian assistance decision-making.”

“The days of ad-hoc relief operations – just repeating what was done the last time around – are numbered,” says Professor Peter Walker, Tufts University and Senior Research Fellow, Department for International Development, UK. “Donor governments and governments of crisis-affected countries are starting to expect humanitarian programming to be driven by evidence. They want proof of what works, what works best, and assurance of the competence of aid agencies.”

Issues to be addressed at the event include:

- Are humanitarian operators overwhelmed by demands to provide hard evidence? Should it be their role? What are the realities of cross-agency and cluster data collection?
- Is there a case for better exploiting operational data from humanitarian actors? Can lack of data be an excuse for non-action?
- How can evidence be better connected to decision-making?

Speakers will include: **Kristin Hedström**, Humanitarian Policy Advisor at DG ECHO of the European Commission; Professor **Shannon Doocy** of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health; Dr **Emmanuel D'Harcourt**, Senior Health Director at the International Rescue Committee; **Ayaz Parvez**, Head of the Emergency Response and Central Results Team at the Global Facility for Disaster Risk Reduction and Recovery of the World Bank; Professor **Peter Walker** of Tufts University and Senior Research Fellow at the UK Department for International Development; and Professor **Debarati Guha-Sapir**.

As experts in evidence and data from disasters and conflict settings, these speakers will discuss existing gaps and how to best to address them. They will be available for interviews after the event.

“Can evidence save lives? Perspectives from humanitarian actors” will take place on July 19th, 2012 from 4:30 to 6:00 p.m. in Conference Room B, United Nations North Lawn Building in New York City. Delegates from concerned countries, NGOs and specialized agencies interested in data from humanitarian crises and aid-quality improvement are invited. Members of the accredited reporting media are also welcome.

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